



Global Impacts of Climate Change: Environmental Racism

SWIPE TO READ



While climate change will come to affect everyone all around the world, climate impacts are not equitable. Many of the heightened risks that both individuals and groups can face are due to structural determinants that influence all aspects of their lives. Structural determinants of health influence climate impacts and often intersect with racism and colonialism (Patnaik, Son, Feng, & Ade, 2020).





The term environmental racism is used to explain the unequal impacts of environmental hazards (Patnaik, Son, Feng, & Ade, 2020). This term is used to bring attention to how racialized peoples disproportionately live in communities where they are affected by pollution, contamination, and the impacts of climate change, due to discriminatory policies that are a result of both historic and ongoing racism and colonialism (Patnaik, Son, Feng, & Ade, 2020). Policies can affect housing, education, employment, and healthcare which all play a role in creating systemic inequalities.

Epidemiological studies increasingly link diseases like cancer, skin conditions and reproductive health in Indigenous, Black, and other racialized communities to this disproportionate exposure to pollutants, contaminants, and climate hazards (Salas, 2021).





Racialized groups' lack of power and representation in political and economic institutions limits the ability for marginalized communities to resist placement of polluters nearby, to create climate resilient infrastructure or to prepare and respond to extreme events that occur due to climate change. One example of this was noted in a recent analysis of FEMA's buyout program. The buyout program, for homes at high risk of flooding, was found to be mostly used in wealthier neighbourhoods, as they have the local government resources to implement such a program while many marginalized communities do not (Smith, 2021). The lack of this essential resource means that managed retreat may be available only to more privileged communities and leaves low-income and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color) communities in danger (Smith, 2021).



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Another study done on long term impacts of natural hazards on wealth inequality in the U.S. noted that white people who lived in counties with only \$100,000 in damage from 1999 to 2013 gained an average of approximately \$26,000 in wealth (Rice University, 2018). Those who lived in counties with at least \$10 billion in damage during the same time period gained nearly \$126,000, the paper said. Among racialized communities the results were the opposite (Rice University, 2018). Black people who lived in counties with \$100,000 in damage gained around \$19,000 in wealth on average, while those living in counties with at least \$10 billion in damage lost approximately \$27,000 (Rice University, 2018). Inequalities were found even after the researchers controlled for factors such as age, education, homeownership, family status, residential mobility, neighbourhood status and county population (Rice University, 2021).



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In 1967 in Boat Harbour, Nova Scotia, near the Indigenous community of Pictou County First Nation, Northern Pulp mill and opened an effluent treatment facility which expelled pulp and paper mill biproducts into Boat Harbour (Baxter, 2017). The pollution made the harbour completely unusable while the airborne pollution severely affected all communities near the mill (Baxter, 2017). Boat Harbour now has the third-highest cancer rates per capita of all health districts in Canada. Studies have also concluded that there is a strong link between the mill and high rates of respiratory disease in the area (Waldron, 2021). It was essential for the Indigenous community to approve the project before it began, so Northern Pulp was untruthful, stating that the harbour would not become toxic, and paid them just \$60,000 as compensation for access to the harbour (Baxter, 2017).





Nova Scotia has a long history of environmental racism towards Black communities as well.

Beginning in the 1800s, the city of Halifax placed a number of facilities in Africville, such as slaughterhouses, an infectious disease hospital, and human waste disposal pits (Waldron, 2021).

The African Nova Scotian communities of Shelburne, Lincolnville, and the Prestons attribute high rates of cancer, liver and kidney disorders, diabetes, heart disease, respiratory illnesses, skin rashes, and psychological stress to a multitude of environmental hazards that have been placed in these communities since their establishment (Waldron, 2021). This kind of discrimination predisposes BIPOC communities to chronic health issues, and places them on the front lines of the climate crisis, as they are the first to experience the effects of pollutants (Patnaik, Son, Feng, Ade, & 2020).





These stories are all examples of how racialized communities are subjected to discriminatory policies and practices which put them in physical danger. Instances like these, which occurred in Canada and the U.S., happen all around the world with many different groups of peoples. Polluting industries and environmental degradation have already harmed the health of communities and ecosystems (Waldron, 2021). If governments continue to fail to understand and address the ways that marginalized communities will be uniquely affected, climate change will continue to further the unequal impacts (Waldron, 2021). When looking at climate issues, use an intersectional lens and uplift the voices of those who often go unheard (Waldron, 2021).



In Canada and the United States, the influence of Indigenous activism and Indigenous environmental stewardship is becoming increasingly valued in the climate conversation. Indigenous activism has played an essential role in suspending or stopping the development of pipelines, as well as bringing attention to other environmental issues like a lack of clean water in many communities (CTV, 2019). Indigenous activism also played a large part in halting fracking in New Brunswick (Schwartz & Gollom, 2013). Indigenous communities around the world. In Australia, Indigenous activists are pushing the government to speed up their net zero goals (Lewis, 2021). We will have the most success in limiting climate impacts by listening to the concerns of groups who are already being more severely impacted by climate change, like Indigenous and other marginalized peoples.



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