

## #45 – Inequality kills. The unparalleled action needed to combat unprecedented inequality in the wake of COVID-19

### Short description

**Type of object:** Report (by Nabil Ahmed, Anna Marriott, Nafkote Dabi, Megan Lowthers, Max Lawson, Leah Mugehera. 2022)

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**Geographical coverage:** Global coverage

**Link:** <https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/inequality-kills>

See also the methodological note:

<https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/621341/tb-inequality-kills-methodology-note-170122-en.pdf>

### Note/Interpretations

The wealth of the world’s 10 richest men has doubled since the pandemic began. The incomes of 99% of humanity are worse off because of COVID-19. Widening economic, gender, and racial inequalities—as well as the inequality that exists between countries—are tearing our world apart.

This is not by chance, but choice: “economic violence” is perpetrated when structural policy choices are made for the richest and most powerful people. This causes direct harm to us all, and to the poorest people, women and girls, and racialized groups most. Inequality contributes to the death of at least one person every four seconds.

That people in poverty, women and girls, and racialized groups are so often disproportionately killed or harmed, more than those who are rich and privileged, is not an accidental error in today’s dominant form of capitalism, but a core part of it. The authors estimate that inequality is now contributing to the deaths of at least 21,300 people each day—or one person every four seconds. This is a highly conservative estimate for deaths resulting from hunger in a world of plenty, the denial of access to quality healthcare in poor countries, and gender-based violence faced by women and rooted in patriarchy. We also provide estimates for the deaths resulting from climate breakdown in poor countries.

An estimated 5.6 million people die every year for lack of access to healthcare in poor countries. Healthcare of good quality is a human right, but too often treated as a luxury for rich people. Having more money in your pocket not only buys you access to healthcare; it also buys you a longer and healthier life. For example, in São Paulo, Brazil, people in the richest areas can expect to live 14 years longer than those who live in the poorest areas.

At a minimum, 67,000 women die each year due to female genital mutilation, or murder at the hands of a former or current partner— gender-based violence rooted in patriarchy and sexist economic systems. In addition to this, it is estimated that 143 million women are missing worldwide due to a combination of excess female mortality and sex-selective abortions (son preference): in 2020, there were an estimated 1.7 million excess female deaths and 1.5 million sex-selective abortions.

In a world of plenty, hunger kills over 2.1 million people each year at a minimum. This is one of the ways in which poverty kills, and it is faced by billions of ordinary people all over the world each day. In every country, the poorest people live shorter lives and face earlier deaths than those who are not poor.

At a conservative estimate, 231,000 people each year could be killed by the climate crisis in poor countries by 2030. Millions could die in the second half of this century. One study estimates that the greenhouse gases emitted by 273 Americans in 2020 will kill one person during the rest of this century through heat waves alone. Meanwhile, the emissions of the richest people are driving this crisis, with the CO2 emissions of 20 of the richest billionaires estimated on average to be 8,000 times that of the billion poorest people.

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