

1. What are the main aspects of disadvantage that should be investigated in this inquiry?

Aspects of disadvantage investigated in this inquiry should include the effects of oppressive practices such as colonisation, racism, ableism and ways in which our institutions are run that leads to disadvantage - such as in education, justice and healthcare systems.

As a disabled, queer, person of colour who struggles with mental wellness, I am undoubtedly biased; I feel like the lived experiences of people like me matter. I know I face multiple disadvantages, I know that the intersection of my identities may result in marginalisation and disadvantage. I feel unable to cope in the world we live in; it feels like no matter how hard I try, I can't find a way out of my situation. When I left home at 18, I did not expect to be living back at home with my parents at 30, but I cannot afford rent. I was part of the mental health system for a while, but I felt that my experience was not seen in context of racism and housing/financial instability. I didn't realise I had a learning disability until struggling through 6 years of undergraduate; i'm grateful for what I know now but I wish I knew sooner, that I had support throughout my life instead of thinking I was stupid.

I also think the fact i'm an adult matters - so often we focus on children but the natural supports I had as a child were protective factors in my life; as an adult, I constantly feel like a failure because i'm unable to secure for myself what others my age can (such as housing and a job), I no longer have the support I had earlier in my life. I am not sharing these vignettes from my life to elicit sympathy; I genuinely believe they illustrate how disability and mental distress limit my chances in life.

2. Where should the Commission focus its research effort?

The Commission should focus research efforts on how to stop regressive policy-making! There are many examples of this - accommodation supplement, paid parental leave policy, the covid-19 wage subsidy are some I could think of off the top of my head. This should also include the way Ministries contract out services/put out a tender for service provision - this often results in doing what has been done already instead of thinking about equitable and just solutions to social problems.

I would appreciate if supposed "solutions" that may actually enable further disadvantage is investigated in this inquiry too. I'm thinking about charities such as Eat My Lunch with their buy one, give one model; providing children with kai is undoubtedly a good thing but it saddens me to think the families of these children may face deprivation that means they are unable to feed themselves. Another example is Orange Sky - they are a "non-profit organisation providing free laundry, warm showers and genuine conversation to the 41000 New Zealanders experiencing homelessness"; while this is valuable and needed, I would much rather resources be distributed to ensure everyone has a home. These are just two charities I could think of but there are many other charities/social enterprises that provide solutions to symptoms and not causes of disadvantage. I believe that breaking the cycle of disadvantage must include looking into what is maintaining the problem as broadly as possible.

The Commission's research efforts should be focused as widely as possible too. I believe productivity is so much more than paid work - unpaid labour such as household responsibilities, community connections/engagement/participation and other things such as getting enough sleep, spending time with friends/loved ones and doing activities one finds enjoyable and meaningful should count as time spent productively.

Continuing on this line of thinking, I believe the Commission should focus on discovering what time spent unproductively looks like for different people. For me, time spent commuting in my car is unproductive but walking to the train station then reading on the train is productive. Sometimes I feel unable to manage activities of daily living and this leads to me being unproductive. I believe it would be important to understand what people consider time spent unproductively.

Another important point is zooming out and understanding productivity in terms of whānau, groups and communities; often, collective efforts lead to productivity that may not be captured currently. In my locality, there are groups I can think of that I'd like to highlight as examples of productivity that may not be captured. Friends of Owhiro Stream are kaitiaki of our local stream and Vogelmorn Community Group run a hub with activities and events for our community. There is also groups like Predator Free

Brooklyn; all of these groups contribute collectively to productivity in valuable ways and I believe this must be captured.

3. Where should government focus its effort on finding solutions?

Finding ways to transition away from growth models and towards things like Doughnut Economics and the capabilities approach! It is increasingly evident that neoliberal and third way approaches to organising society have failed people - for as long as the focus is on supposedly equal opportunities, we will continue to have unequal outcomes. Solutions must focus on how to achieve equal outcomes/equity for all; human rights must be guaranteed for all in Aotearoa; I believe the solutions must take climate justice, disability justice and social justice into consideration and focus on social cohesion. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are essential when looking for solutions.

I often think of this when thinking about my own life:

"Recovery can take place when a person with a diagnosis of mental illness has the personal resources, services, supports, opportunities and rights to achieve the lives they choose. Services using a recovery approach therefore, need to emphasize hope, self-determination, a broad choice of services and equal participation in society. "

From <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.3109/09540261.2011.651447>

I believe this is important not just for those with a diagnosed mental illness but for all; I think we should all be able to live a life worth living as determined by ourselves! For me, this looks like moving my body, connecting with friends, sleeping at least 8 hours every night, having time to cook delicious kai and doing activities I enjoy and being paid a fair wage for work I find meaningful (but no more than 4 days a week!); being able to do all of these without worried about housing or income would make a massive difference in my own life.

Redistribution of resources must be an important aspect of government policy in order to tackle disadvantage. A capital gains tax is a must, and there should be caps on the number of housing any individual/family can own. Wealth in trusts (family or other types) must also be taxed and

regulated! I am strongly in favour of measures such as a guaranteed minimum income, rent control and rent-to-buy schemes (built and then administered/overseen by the government and not contracted out).

4. Is there anything else that you would like to see covered in this inquiry?

It is important to find ways of changing narratives to move away from individualistic, personal responsibility-type discourse and instead finding ways to communicate that reveal the systems that we live with and how we can all contribute to creating systems in which we can all thrive. Finding frames that encourages kindness and compassion towards fellow humans rather than shaming and blaming, finding ways to communicate that encourage equity, inclusivity, hope, justice and sustainability. In 1969, Normal Kirk said people have to have somewhere to live, food to eat, clothing to wear and something to hope for (paraphrased). All of these must be guaranteed for all citizens as well as universal services that meet the needs of those using them. I also believe having both meaningful opportunities no matter one's capability, engagement and participation within one's community, and a sense of belonging is essential for wellbeing.