

What Destroys Dignity

Dignity can be eroded by both external forces and internal dynamics. These threats fall into four broad categories:

1. Social and Relational Violations

Undermined through interpersonal treatment or societal exclusion:

- **Humiliation** – Being made to feel small or worthless.
 - **Stigmatisation** – Being reduced to a single trait or identity.
 - **Exclusion** – Being left out of communities or opportunities.
 - **Disregard** – Being ignored or made invisible.
 - **Instrumentalisation** – Being treated as a means to an end.
 - **Co-optation** – Being used for someone else's agenda without consent.
 - **Unequal recognition** – Only certain identities or contributions being valued.
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2. Structural and Systemic Indignity

Institutional, economic, or technological forces that dehumanize:

- **Commodification** – Being treated as a product or resource.
 - **Reduction to data** – Being seen only as a metric or statistic.
 - **Over-surveillance / algorithmic control** – Being tracked or judged impersonally.
 - **Meaningless work** – Roles that are alienating or disconnected from value.
 - **Insecurity and precarity** – Living under chronic instability or disposability.
 - **Bureaucratic erosion** – Systems that make people feel powerless or replaceable.
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3. Internalised and Self-Directed Indignity

Arising from internal pressures, cultural expectations, or self-perception:

- **Shame** – Feeling flawed or unworthy.
- **Self-stigmatisation** – Internalising negative societal messages (e.g., about illness or identity).
- **Unmet internal expectations** – Feeling undignified due to personal standards (e.g., “I should be a professor, but I’m only a teacher”).
- **Loss of role or function** – Feeling unneeded after losing a valued identity (e.g., “I once had hard-earned skills, now I’m just on benefits”).
- **Status anxiety** – Constantly measuring self-worth against others.

- **Identity dissonance** – A gap between one's authentic self and societal roles.
- **Chronic self-criticism** – Persistent feelings of failure or inadequacy.
- **Loss of moral agency** – Feeling unable to act with integrity or autonomy.
- **Violation of others' dignity** – Denying others their humanity (moral disengagement) can erode one's own self-worth.

4. Cultural and Narrative Harm

Beliefs, ideologies, or social scripts that deny empathy or complexity:

- **Stereotyping** – Reducing people to simplistic or negative roles.
- **Blame culture** – Scapegoating individuals or groups rather than addressing root causes.
- **Winner-takes-all narratives** – Equating worth with wealth, status, or dominance.
- **Dehumanising language** – Words that strip away individuality or empathy.