

# Racial Trauma

## I. Race and racism as determinants of health and health care

Race and racism are important determinants of health and health care<sup>1</sup>, as they affect the social, economic, and political conditions that shape the well-being of individuals and communities. Overall, immigrants are found to be healthier upon their arrival to Canada than the Canadian-born population. However, this initial health advantage seems to disappear over time, partly because of stress and other integration challenges.<sup>2</sup>

There is plethora of literature that highlights the significant impact of racism to health, justice systems, education, income and employment, women, children, and youth, among others. An example includes two large-scale meta-analyses established significant negative impacts of discrimination on mental health.<sup>3,4</sup> Additional analyses focused specifically on racism found significant associations with mental health, self-esteem and psychological distress, and similar results for life satisfaction, anxiety, and depression.

## II. Strong relationship between racism, mental health, and social isolation.

ActionDignity's community-based participatory action research titled, "Deep in our Minds," showed a link between racism, mental health, and social isolation.<sup>5</sup> This impacts access to services.

## III. Racial Trauma

Racial trauma is the psychological and emotional impact of experiencing racism, discrimination, or oppression. It can affect people of any racial or ethnic background, but it is especially common among marginalized groups, such as Black, Indigenous, and people of colour (BIPOC) in Canada<sup>6 7</sup>.

Racial discrimination is the primary risk factor for racial trauma. Frequency of racial discrimination was positively associated with dissociative symptoms.<sup>8</sup>

Some causes of racial trauma in Canada are<sup>9</sup>:

- Historical and intergenerational trauma, such as the legacy of colonialism, slavery, and residential schools.
- Systemic and institutional racism, such as the overrepresentation of BIPOC in prisons, poverty, and poor health outcomes.
- Interpersonal and everyday racism, such as microaggressions, hate crimes, and police brutality.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/health-promotion/population-health/what-determines-health.html>

<sup>2</sup> Ng E, Wilkins R, Gendron F, Berthelot J-M. Dynamics of immigrants' health in Canada: Evidence from the National Population Health Survey. Healthy Today, Healthy Tomorrow? Findings from the National Population Health Survey (Catalogue 82618M) Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2005

<sup>3</sup> Pascoe EA, Richman LS. Perceived Discrimination and Health: A Meta-Analytic Review. Psychological Bulletin. 2009; 135(4):531–54. doi: 10.1037/a0016059 PMID: 19586161

<sup>4</sup> Schmitt MT, Branscombe NR, Postmes T, Garcia A. The Consequences of Perceived Discrimination for Psychological Well-Being: A Meta-Analytic Review. Psychological Bulletin. 2014; 140(4):921–48. doi: 10.1037/a0035754 PMID: 24547896

<sup>5</sup> [https://actiondignity.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/CB\\_PAR-Findings-English.pdf](https://actiondignity.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/CB_PAR-Findings-English.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/racial-trauma>

<sup>7</sup> <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s40719-022-00225-5>

<sup>8</sup> Polanco-Roman, et. Al., Racial discrimination as race-based trauma, coping strategies and dissociative symptoms among emerging adults. Psychol Trauma. 2016 Sep; 8(5): 609–617.

<sup>9</sup> Williams et. al., The Traumatizing Impact of Racism in Canadians of Colour, 2022

Despite the serious and detrimental impact of racial trauma on BIPOC community, current causes of trauma definition or guides do not include racial trauma.<sup>10 11 12</sup>

#### IV. Addressing Racism and Racial Trauma

To address racism as a determinant of health and health care, it is important to adopt a social accountability strategy that recognizes and challenges the structural and systemic factors that create and maintain racial inequities. This strategy should involve reforms at multiple levels of society, such as:<sup>13 14</sup>

- Developing antiracism standards of care that promote equity, diversity, inclusion, and cultural competence among health care providers and organizations.
- Implementing policies and practices that monitor and address racial disparities in health outcomes and quality of care.
- Engaging with racialized communities to understand their needs, preferences, values, and perspectives on health and health care.
- Supporting research and education that explore the effects of racism on health and health care and identify effective interventions to reduce its impact.

#### V. Definition of Terms

##### Race

- is a "social construct." This means that society forms ideas of race based on geographic, historical, political, economic, social, and cultural factors, as well as physical traits, even though none of these can legitimately be used to classify groups of people.<sup>15</sup>

##### Racism

- is any individual action, or institutional practice which treats people differently because of their color or ethnicity. This distinction is often used to justify discrimination.<sup>16</sup>
- Racism can operate at different levels of society, such as interpersonal, institutional, and societal, and can have negative impacts on the health outcomes and quality of care for racialized people.
- A collection of racist policies that lead to racial inequity that are substantiated by racist ideas” (Ibram X. Kendi)

##### Racial Trauma

- Racial trauma is the psychological and emotional impact of experiencing racism, discrimination, or oppression. It can affect people of any racial or ethnic background, but it is especially common among marginalized groups, such as Black, Indigenous, and people of colour (BIPOC) in Canada<sup>17 18</sup>.

---

<sup>10</sup> [Trauma in Children and Youth : Canada : eMentalHealth.ca](#)

<sup>11</sup> [Trauma | CAMH](#)

<sup>12</sup> [2013 TIP-Guide.pdf \(cewh.ca\)](#)

<sup>13</sup> Ramsoondar et. al., Racism as a determinant of health and health care, Canadian Family Physician September 2023.

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/health-promotion/population-health/what-determines-health/social-determinants-inequities-black-canadians-snapshot.html>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/policy-and-guidelines-racism-and-racial-discrimination/part-2-policy-framework>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/policy-and-guidelines-racism-and-racial-discrimination/part-1-%E2%80%93-setting-context-understanding-race-racism-and-racial-discrimination>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/racial-trauma>

<sup>18</sup> <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s40719-022-00225-5>

