

Racism in Education

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Growing Awareness of Racism in Canada

Results of a 2019 national survey conducted by Environics Institute for Survey Research and the Canadian Race Relations Foundation, revealed the scope and magnitude of racism in Canada and its impact on Canadian racialized population. Although the majority of Canadians still believe that race relations in society and within their own community is good, there is a growing pessimism among racialized Canadians. For example, only 49% of Black Canadians felt this way while 51% Indigenous Canadians reported race relations in Canada as good (Canadian Race Relations Foundation, 2021).

Over the past two years, we are seeing more and more physical and verbal attacks targeting Blacks, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC). The death of George Floyd in May 2020 ushered a global racial reckoning and launched the Black Lives Matter movement. In Canada, the shocking discovery of 215 unmarked graves of Indigenous children at the Kamloops Indian Residential School sparked anger and renewed fight for Indigenous justice.

The anti-Asian rising sentiment is felt by South-East Asian as those are the ones who look the most like Chinese – who are blamed for the virus. Of significance, 59% of Canadians recognize that the pandemic has led to surging discrimination against Chinese people (Canadian Race Relations Foundation, 2021).

Islamophobia is also a growing concern. Last May, a man ran down and killed four members of the Afzaal family in London, ON., leaving the youngest son an orphan. Several Muslim women were physically assaulted at an Edmonton mall and a couple of Muslim teenage girls were attacked at a Calgary park.



Changing Socio-demographic

Canada is a culturally and racially diverse country. According to the 2016 Census, 7.5 million new immigrants arrive in Canada, with one in seven speaking a native language other than English or French and 20-60% of students K-12 needing English language instruction (Statistics Canada, 2016).

Interpersonal Racism

Hate Incidents/Crimes

A significant number of Canadians experiences discrimination because of their race or ethnic background. The Canadian Race Relations Foundation (CRRF) survey in 2021 shows one in five Canadians reported racism regularly or from time to time. Those who are Black (57%) or First Nations (45%) are more likely to report racism than those who are South Asian (48%), Chinese (40%), East or Southeast Asian (40%), Métis (36%), or those with other racialized backgrounds (35%) (Canadian Race Relations Foundation, 2021).

Statistic Canada recorded an 80% spike in police-reported hate crime between 2019-2020. Ontario (+321 incidents targeting race or ethnicity), British Columbia (+196 incidents) and Alberta (+105 incidents) reported the largest increases. The surge in hate crime was mainly against the Black population (+318 incidents or +92%), the East or Southeast Asian population (+202 incidents or +301%), the Indigenous population (+44 incidents or +152%), and the South Asian population (+38 incidents or +47%).

The Globe and Mail examined the performance of the country's 13 largest municipal and regional forces and found that only six per cent to 28 per cent hate crimes were solved. In general, forces that devoted more resources, such as full-time investigators and community liaison officers (ie. Montreal), which had an overall rate of 27 per cent through The Globe's data period – tended to lay charges more often (The Globe & Mail, 2022). In Edmonton, the hate-crimes unit has one sergeant and two constables while Calgary's force only has one coordinator. Low charge rate may indicate a lack of training or that hate crime is considered a low priority, a lack of funding and the absence of standardized approach to policing hate crime.

Sadly, Statistics Canada estimated that less than one percent of perceived hate crimes were reported to police in 2019 (Statistics Canada, 2021). Often times, incidents of racism go unreported. Fear of reprisal, shame, lack of time, strong belief that nothing will be done and lack of knowledge of reporting procedures are some of the main reasons for under reporting. Survivors of racism internalize the pain and suffered in silence.

In 2021 the author reviewed and analyzed reports from the ACT2endracism online reporting line and they showed that many Asian-Canadians have been shunned, subjected to racial slurs/jokes, physically assaulted, threatened physical harm, barred from



establishments and spat on while working, shopping at supermarket, playing at the park, walking on the street, attending school and using public transit. Women are the primary targets of microaggressions and hate incidents/crimes.

While working at the Calgary Board of Education, the author witnessed discrimination against students with physical disability, students with neurodiversity (dyslexia, ADHD, LD, autism) and LGBTQ2IA+ students. These vulnerable student populations are often targets of derogatory putdowns, jokes and regularly shunned by mainstream students. As a result, they feel inferior, unwelcomed, lonely, anxious, unaccepted and not valued.

Online Hate

Results from CRRF survey revealed that 78% of Canadians are concerned about the pervasive spread of hate speech/content online (Canadian Race Relations Foundation, 2021).

Racialized Canadians are almost **three time more likely** to experience racist, sexist or homophobic comments/content on social media (14% vs. 5% among non-racialized Canadian). As frequent users of social media, younger Canadians (aged 18-29) are at higher risk of experiencing hateful comments/contents online than other age groups (Canadian Race Relations Foundation, 2021).

Systemic Racism

Changing Attitudes

Historically, racism is viewed as an individual issue and perpetrators are either "racist or bad". However, in the past two years there has been a significant shift in attitudes and perspectives. According to the Race Relations in Canada in 2021 survey, a greater number of Canadians are now realizing racial problems stem from systemic inequities from in the country's laws and institutions. Notably, there is a growing belief – among both racialized and non-racialized Canadians, that people of colour are treated inequitably by the police, at the workplace, in the courts, in stores, at hospital and at schools (Canadian Race Relations Foundation, 2021).

Police

The police's conduct and treatment of BIPOC has become a highly contentious issue. The public is divided - with 40% believing the police need to do a better job while 32% of those who are First Nations, Black or South Asian strongly advocate for a fundamental change in how they operate. Only one-third of those who are Black (26%) or First Nations (33%) truly believe the police is doing a good job, compared to non-racialized Canadians (73%) (Canadian Race Relations Foundation, 2021).

According to Mohamed and Da Costa, the Edmonton police school resource criminally charged 2,068 people, 679 students were expelled, and 5,228 students were suspended between September 2011 and December 2021. The data also shows 20,963 students were labelled as "offenders" between 2011-2017. Research results on the extent of expulsions and suspensions are deeply concerning. Findings show school discipline targets racialized children disproportionately and confirmed many parents' belief that the school resource officer program is filled with bias, stereotypes and prejudice and that it is a "pipeline" to prison. Data from September 2018 to December 2021 was unavailable (Edmonton Journal, 2022)

Education System

Our education system is also fraught with discrimination and racism. When the 2021 Alberta K-6 social studies curriculum draft was released, there was a major public outrage, which led many Albertans immediately rejecting the draft. It was heavily criticized for being too Eurocentric, focusing too much on memorizing random facts, and paying too little respect for Canada's Indigenous and Francophone history. Parents questioned whether it would adequately prepare their children for their future. Fifty-six out of 61 school boards refused to pilot the draft curriculum.

Health Care

Joyce Echaquan's tragic death in Sep. 2020 was a prime example of systemic racism in Canadian health care system. The Atikamekw mother of seven died in a Quebec hospital shortly after filming a staff ridiculing and insulting her. Many Indigenous people face discrimination, bias and stereotypes while accessing health care services in Canada.



Similarly in 2008, Brian Sinclair, a 45-year-old Indigenous man died of sepsis after sitting in a Winnipeg hospital in his wheelchair for 34 hours. Hospital staff assumed he was homeless or drunk. Hundreds of Indigenous women are suing the Alberta, Saskatchewan, and British Columbia government for subjecting them to sterilization. Such cruel procedures are still happening today, leaving these women feeling helpless, scare and angry (CTV News, 2020).

Law: Bill 21

Quebec's Bill 21, also known as Quebec's Laicity Act, became law in June 2019. It banned some civil servants, including teachers, police officers and government prosecutors, from wearing religious symbols at work within the province. On Dec. 9, 2021 teacher, Fatemeh Anvari, lost her job for wearing a hijab (CTV News Montreal, 2021). Under Bill 21, she was prohibited to hold a "position of power" while wearing this religious symbol. Her removal led to a public outrage, especially after Pascal Bérubé, the Parti Québécois's critic on secularism, accused her of making a statement about wearing a hijab.

On Mar. 22, 2022, CBC news reported that university students in Quebec feel despair and are worried for their future, due to Bill 21. Results from this study conducted by two Montreal universities identified about 28% respondents wear a form of religious symbol. Over 34 per cent of respondents — including those who did not wear a religious symbol — reported experiencing discrimination since the law was passed. That number jumps to 56.5 per cent for those who do wear religious symbols (CBC News Montreal, 2022).

Racism In Education & The Impacts On Students

Racism in education system was the focus of the Coalition for Equal Access to Education research in 2020. This study painfully illustrated how prejudice, bias and stereotypes negatively impacted the lives of racialized students in Alberta's public school (Coalition for Equal Access to Education, 2020). To learn more: [hyperlink](#)

Anti-Black Racism

Anti-Black racism in the forms of stereotypes and racial profiling is a major problem that both students and parents faced within the school system.

As a result, this discrimination often leads to assumptions and generalizations that lead to conflicts and false accusations.

Black kids became targets for the teachers and the principal because they assume that we are doing bad things and we really weren't, we were all good kids.

Inequitable Punishment

Black students reported that they experienced more unjust punishment in school compared to non-racialized students.

I brought a butter knife to school to cut my apple. I didn't have time to go and put it back in my locker and the knife was on my table. I got reported, sent to the principal's office and they made a whole big deal out of it. They called my parents and I was suspended for a week. A couple of weeks later, this other girl (white) brings in same type of knife to cut her apple and they didn't say anything.



Race-based Bullying

Race-based bullying exists in various forms such as physical attacks, frequent use of N-word, racial slurs, name-calling, racially driven harassment and graffiti.

My daughter was called a piece of poop because she is brown. She was even exempted from some activities because of her skin colour.

Microaggressions

Some of the research participants reported cases of microaggressions in the form of micro insults.

In an institution that is built on education and striving for improvement and growth and you needed to be told to go back or that you don't belong here is very unsettling, very uncomfortable.

Racism In Education & The Impacts On Students

Incorrect ESL Placement

Youths and parents reported that racialized students born in Canada were automatically placed into ESL classes without necessarily assessing them for the need.

They claimed that they realized this was done to keep governments' ESL funding in place.

I grew up in Canada and I went to kindergarten here. I learned English and never had any other languages. My teacher placed me in ESL classes and I was stuck here all my junior year because my teacher assumed that I couldn't learn and that I was new to Canada.

Lack of Staff Diversity

Racialized students and parents do not see themselves represented in the teaching and administrative staff of the school, nor on the school council.

Youth participants reported seeing very few teachers of racialized groups all through their schooling years.

All through my year of school here, I had only one racialized teacher. He was there for a year and just gone.

Eurocentric Curriculum

Participants expressed their concerns and the desire to have a truly inclusive curriculum that is representative of the diversity in the classrooms today.

Participants also deemed some kinds of literature to be unfit for use in a diversified classroom.

In social studies, we just learnt about all these white people.



Teacher's Low Expectations

Youth participants reported that they experienced biases from teachers in such a way that they are prejudged with low expectations in their academic journey because of their racial background.

We did English Test (Dash 1) and I had the highest score and my teacher told the other non-Black kids - you let her beat you guys.

Racism In Education & The Impacts On Students

Downplaying Acts of Racism

Participants reported that incidences of racism in the school are often dismissed or not taken seriously.

Racialized youths who have experienced racism in the school expressed some lack of trust with school staff. They reported that in most cases after reporting acts of racism, the situation becomes worse.

In grade 6, there was this girl who was singing a song and had the N-word in it. I was really offended and I was the only Black person there. So, I went to go tell my teacher and my teacher told me that it wasn't that serious.

Inadequate Support

The accounts of our participants showed that racialized students and parents do not receive adequate support within the school system after incidents of racism.

I missed a lot of school at some point and obviously they knew something was wrong but they didn't follow up with me

Impacts of Racism

The impacts of racism on the lives of racialized youth and parents were quite serious. They included psychological, emotional, social and mental impacts. Specifically, they unfolded in the forms of emotional toll, self-denial, suicidal attempts, anger, insecurity, low self-esteem, questioned identity, frustration, inferiority complex, poor academic performance and social dysfunction.



I was at a point where I didn't want to live just because I was born in a different country. It was very bad. They did put me into a depression hole. A hole that was almost impossible to get out of. I was like at the end where a couple of times I gave up but I got rushed to the hospital and I got help.

It really did impact my self-esteem when people were discriminating me based on my colour because then I wanted to be lighter and wanted coloured eyes.

I felt like I had to watch out and I couldn't really trust people.

My daughter was devastated by her teacher and did not want to go school. You know, it's devastating for a teacher to make disparaging statement to a child – to bully a child literally.

Anti-Racism Strategies For Change

To combat systemic racism within our education system, we recommend the following anti-racism strategies for change:

Anti-racism education must be mandatory, ongoing and systemic across all levels of organization

Address biased treatment against Black students

Review all policies & Code of Ethics through the lens of equity, diversity and inclusion & address gaps

Develop inclusive curriculum

Acknowledge, investigate and deal with racist incidents swiftly

Develop more inclusive practices for students with disabilities, neurodiversity & LGBTQ2IA+ students

Offer opportunities for open dialogues with underrepresented students & staff

Celebrate the contributions & achievements of BIPOC, women, people with disabilities & LGBTQ2IA+

Establish team of diversity champions in every school

Increase diversity of staff at all levels

Embrace Truth & Reconciliation, Indigenous knowledge, culture and abilities

Develop clear procedures for reporting racist incidents

Include racialized community members in assessing policies & making reforms within the education system

Ensure follow-through from policy to action

Create an Anti-racism Task Force in every school

Provide mental health counseling for students/staff who have experienced/witness racism

Rename places & spaces with a history of racism

Collect demographic data to ensure teaching body is reflective of student body





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