

# RACISM IMPACTS MENTAL HEALTH

racism = race-based prejudice + power<sup>1</sup>

Indigenous, Black, and People of Colour in Canada experience racism that:

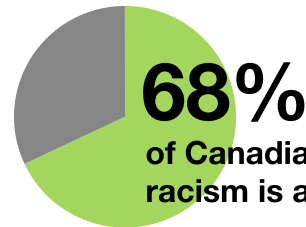
- Increases the risk and severity of mental health problems compared to white people.
- Negatively impacts the treatment received when seeking help.

"We are living in a racism pandemic."

American Psychological Association, 2020



**1 in 5** Canadians identify as a member of a racialized group<sup>2</sup>



of Canadians believe that racism is a problem in Canada<sup>3</sup>

“There are **persistent and pervasive inequities in society** that result in members of the dominant group receiving daily benefits while others are **disqualified, silenced, and attacked or else rendered invisible.**”

Canadian Psychiatric Association, 2020

## Racism takes many forms.

### Systemic racism

Racist policies and practices (no individual intent is necessary)

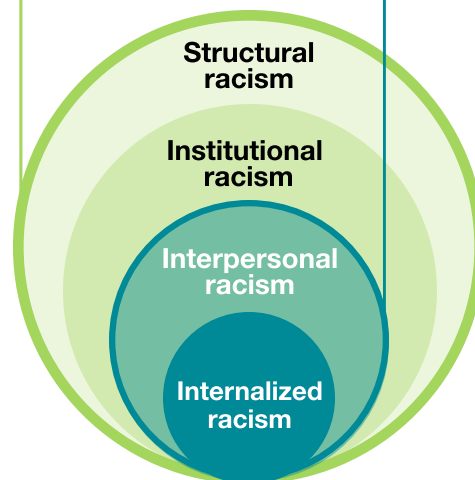
#### ► Structural racism<sup>4,5</sup>

Normalized and legitimized racial bias across society that include the compounding effects of:

- Ignored and minimized history and culture
- Institutional poverty (Indigenous, Black, and People of Colour in Canada experience higher rates of unemployment, poverty, low education, low wage jobs, and homelessness)
- Discrimination
- Racial profiling
- Mass incarceration

#### ► Institutional racism<sup>6</sup>

Unfair and discriminatory policies and practices at institutions such as schools and workplaces that routinely benefit white people, and exclude or discriminate against others.



### Individual racism

Personal racist beliefs and behaviours (supported and reinforced by systemic racism)

#### ► Interpersonal racism<sup>7</sup>

May be overt (such as racial and ethnic slurs or physical attacks) or more subtle "microaggressions" like:

- Foreigner in own land: "Where were you born?"
- Assumptions of intelligence: "You are so articulate."
- Colour blindness: "There is only one race, the human race."
- Myth of meritocracy: "Everyone can succeed in Canada if they work hard enough."
- Assumption of criminality: Being followed in a store while shopping.

#### ► Internalized racism<sup>8</sup>

As a result of being victimized by racism, Indigenous, Black, and People of Colour may develop ideas, beliefs, actions and behaviours that align with racism. This is often a result of historic and intergenerational trauma.

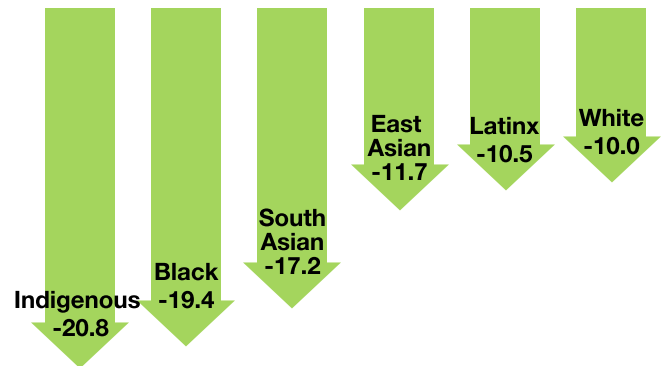
# Racism harms mental health.

Regardless of race, Canadians' mental health scores decreased in 2020 compared to pre-2020 averages.

The mental health scores of Indigenous and Black respondents decreased twice as much in 2020

compared to white respondents.<sup>9</sup>

Canadians' mental health scores decreased in August 2020 compared to pre-2020 averages



## Racism increases the risk of:<sup>1,10,11</sup>

- Depression and suicide
- Anxiety
- Chronic stress-related illnesses
- Post-traumatic stress disorder
- Obsessive-compulsive symptoms
- Substance use problems
- Postpartum depression

## Racism can lead to:<sup>12</sup>

- Internalized racism and low self-esteem
- "Racial Battle Fatigue" from daily struggles with racist behaviours and hostile environments
- Feeling helpless or worthless
- Avoiding places and services where racism has occurred, including work, schools, and healthcare facilities

“ Racism causes trauma, and **trauma paints a direct line to mental illnesses.**

Importantly, this doesn't have to be one major isolated event, but rather it can result from an accumulation of experiences like

**daily subtle acts of discrimination or microaggressions.**”

Mental Health America

# There is racism in mental health services.

Racist assumptions and stereotyping leads to **unequal treatment** in mental health care:<sup>1,5,11,13</sup>

- ▶ Assessment and treatment without considering culture and language
- ▶ Poor referral relationships with community agencies
- ▶ Black clients are more likely to be:
  - Overdiagnosed with schizophrenia
  - Underdiagnosed with mood disorders and postpartum depression
  - Involuntarily admitted to psychiatric care

Indigenous, Black, and People of Colour **avoid mental health services** due to:<sup>10,13</sup>

- ▶ Poor experiences with health services, including discriminatory and racist attitudes
- ▶ Barriers to access, such as language and lack of culturally competent service providers
- ▶ Negative perceptions of mental health services and professionals

# What we can do.

“The opposite of 'racist' isn't 'not racist.'  
**It is 'antiracist.'**”

Ibram X. Kendi,  
*How to Be an Antiracist*

## Canadian Psychiatric Association's commitment:<sup>14</sup>

- 1 The mental health professions train and sustain a **workforce that fully reflects the diversity of society**.
- 2 Our **educational and clinical environments are inclusive, responsive, empowering and safe** for people of colour and anyone facing discrimination.
- 3 We actively **question, challenge and counter the biases and assumptions** built into mental health theory and practice.
- 4 Beyond the clinical realm, we actively engage with public health approaches to address the social suffering caused by inequities and **resist the pathologization of the distress stemming from injustices** and human rights violations.
- 5 We **support the larger social forces of change set in motion by people of colour** and others committed to social justice to transform our institutions of education, health, policing, government and commerce.



Photo by Mike Von

# Learning more.

**"Mental health professionals must first be open-minded and then be trained."**

Jude Mary Cénat, *The Lancet Psychiatry*

## Providing care

[The case for diversity: Building the case to improve mental health services for immigrant, refugee, ethno-cultural and racialized populations](#)

Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2016.

[How to provide anti-racist mental health care](#)

Cénat, J. M. (2020). *The Lancet Psychiatry*.

[More than being against it: Anti-racism and anti-oppression in mental health services](#)

Corneau, S., & Stergiopoulos, V. (2012). *Transcultural Psychiatry*, 49(2), 261-282.

[Stress & trauma toolkit for treating African Americans in a changing political and social environment](#)

American Psychiatric Association, 2018.

## Recognizing microaggressions

[Examples of microaggressions](#)

Adapted from Wing, C., et al. (2007). *American Psychologist*, 62(4), 271-286.

[A guide to responding to microaggressions](#)

Nadal, K. L. (2014). *CUNY Forum*, 2(1), 71-76.

[The impact of racial microaggressions on mental health: Counseling implications for clients of color](#)

Nadal, K. L., et al. (2014). *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 92, 57-66.

[Racial microaggressions against Black Americans: Implications for counseling](#)

Sue, D. W., et al. (2008). *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 86, 330-338.

## Reading

- *How to Be an Anti-Racist*, Ibram X. Kendi
- *White Fragility*, Robin DiAngelo
- *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack*, Peggy McIntosh

## Videos

- [What Dark-Skinned People Will Never Tell You](#) (BuzzFeed)
- [It's Time to Unpack White Fragility](#) (Refinery29)
- [The difference between being "not racist" and antiracist](#) (Ibram X. Kendi on TED)

## Podcasts

- [BLM in Canada](#) (CBC)
- [Colour Code](#) (*The Globe and Mail*)
- [Missing & Murdered](#) (CBC)
- [A Decade Of Watching Black People Die](#) (NPR)
- [Seeing White](#) (Scene On Radio)

# Sources

1. Mental Health America. (n.d.) Racism And Mental Health. <https://mhanational.org/racism-and-mental-health>
2. McKenzie, K., et al. (2016). *The Case for Diversity: Building the Case to Improve Mental Health Services for Immigrant, Refugee, Ethno-cultural and Racialized Populations*. Mental Health Commission of Canada. [https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/sites/default/files/2016-10/case\\_for\\_diversity\\_oct\\_2016\\_eng.pdf](https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/sites/default/files/2016-10/case_for_diversity_oct_2016_eng.pdf)
3. Morneau Shepell. (2020, July). *The Mental Health Index Report: Canada*. <https://www.morneaushepell.com/permafiles/92896/mental-health-index-report-canada-july-2020.pdf>
4. Lawrence, K., & Keleher, T. (2004). *Structural Racism*. Race and Public Policy Conference. <https://www.racialequitytools.org/resourcefiles/Definitions-of%20Racism.pdf>
5. Kafele, K. (2004). *Racial discrimination and mental health in racialized and Aboriginal communities*. Ontario Human Rights Commission. <http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/race-policy-dialogue-papers/racial-discrimination-and-mental-health-racialized-and-aboriginal-communities>
6. Tochluk, S. (n.d.) *4 Types of Racisms*. Edmonton Shift Lab. <https://www.edmontonshiftlab.ca/reflection-pool-a-shift-lab-2-0-prototype/4-types-of-racisms/>
7. University of Minnesota School of Public Health. (n.d.). *Examples of Racial Microaggressions*. <https://sph.umn.edu/site/docs/hewg/microaggressions.pdf>
8. Bivens, D. K. (n.d.). *What Is Internalized Racism?* Racial Equity Tools. [https://www.racialequitytools.org/resourcefiles/What\\_is\\_Internalized\\_Racism.pdf](https://www.racialequitytools.org/resourcefiles/What_is_Internalized_Racism.pdf)
9. Morneau Shepell. (2020, August). *The Mental Health Index Report: Canada*. [https://www.morneaushepell.com/sites/default/files/assets/paragraphs/resource-list/canadamhienglishaugust2020final\\_1.pdf](https://www.morneaushepell.com/sites/default/files/assets/paragraphs/resource-list/canadamhienglishaugust2020final_1.pdf)
10. Cénat, J. M. (2020). How to provide anti-racist mental health care. *The Lancet Psychiatry*, 7(11), 929-931. [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpsy/article/PIIS2215-0366\(20\)30309-6/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpsy/article/PIIS2215-0366(20)30309-6/fulltext)
11. Medical News Today. (n.d.) Postpartum depression in women of color: 'More work needs to be done'. <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/postpartum-depression-in-women-of-color-more-work-needs-to-be-done>
12. Canadian Mental Health Association - York and South Simcoe. (n.d.). Racism and Mental Health. <https://cmha-yr.on.ca/learn/news/racism/>
13. Fante-Coleman, T., & Jackson-Best, F. Barriers and facilitators to accessing mental healthcare in Canada for Black youth: A scoping review. *Adolescent Research Review*, 5, 115-136.
14. Kirmayer, L. J., et al. (2020). *Position Statement: A Call to Action on Racism and Social Justice in Mental Health*. Canadian Psychiatric Association. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0706743720964333>

