

Fact Sheet # 3

Understanding the Racialization of Poverty in Ontario In Education & Learning in 2007

How does racialized poverty affect people's access to education & learning ?

Having access to education greatly improves a person's job opportunities, income potentials, health status, learning outcomes and general quality of life. In turn, living in poverty makes it less likely that someone will complete school or to be able to access higher education.

60% of people who receive social assistance are unable to read & write well enough to function in Canadian society.

Children of families with the lowest income levels are about half as likely as those in the top income level to attend university.

Many racialized students experience discrimination and alienation in elementary and secondary schools as well as in colleges and universities. Further they have few teachers and other role models from racialized communities who they see working within the various fields of education.

Black students are disproportionately placed in basic non-academic level and special needs or "at-risk" programs.

Schools with high drop-out (ie. "push-out") rates are those with the highest numbers of racialized students.

Research shows that groups with the least education are those who have come as refugees from war-torn countries (see table below), but disadvantage in education is high for some other racialized groups as well.

Although many immigrant groups are better educated than Canadian-born people, as groups Latin American immigrants, Canadian-born Black students, Indo-Pakistanis and West Asians have been found to have lower educational attainments as compared to others.

Persons without high school diploma (Toronto)

European overall	17%
Grenadian	31%
Guyanese	26%
Vietnamese	46%
Afghan	39%
Sri Lankan & Tamil	39%
Somali	33%
Ethiopian	32%

Persons with university degree (Toronto)

European overall	25%
African overall	14%
Caribbean overall	15%
Tamil & Sri Lankan	10%
Somali	5%
Ethiopian	6%

Quick Notes

- * Ontario's growing racialized communities face a disproportionate, ongoing, and increasing risk of being poor.
- * **Racialized** persons refers to people of colour who are Canadian-born and to newcomer communities of colour.
- * By **racism**, we mean both the individual attitudes and behaviours as well as the built-in ways in which social policies and societal institutions discriminate.
- * Households that fall below Canada's **low income cut-off (LICO)** measure, spend a much larger percent of their income on basic necessities like food and shelter than the average family.
- * Racialized families are from 2 to 4 times more likely than white families to fall below the LICO.
- * Individual and systemic racism have clear & negative impacts on life chances for people of colour in Ontario.

Under Ontario policies like the “Safe Schools Act,” and “zero tolerance,” principals were given broad legal powers to suspend or expel students who they believed were a threat to safety. Researchers, lawyers, community groups, and parents quickly recognized how this has targeted racialized youth in very high numbers, particularly Black, Hispanic, and South Asian students.

Toronto District School Board trustees - who observe expulsion hearings - have reported that at least 80% of students being expelled are from racialized groups – most commonly Black students.

Expulsion from school makes it more likely that a student will drop out.

Racism is rarely addressed in Ontario schools. The focus is commonly on “multiculturalism” or “diversity”, which does not address systemic inequality.

One study in fact found that the word racism did not appear in the kindergarten to Grade 12 Ontario curriculum for any compulsory course !

Professional groups and schools tend to see non-Canadian educational background as inferior to Canadian, often not recognizing newcomers’ credentials.

Ontario has cut as well as allowed the re-direction of funding ear-marked for English as a Second Language (ESL) programs, which are critical to helping both young students and adults successfully integrate into society and the job market.

Personal stories told at a conference on racism in education:

- A young Latino man in a Toronto high school was told he would never go to university, and was often treated with suspicion.
- A young black girl was told in school: “black girls cannot be ballerinas.”
- Children as young as 3 heard racist remarks from teachers, and received learning materials with racist images.
- Teacher candidates were told to beware of “kids with baggy pants because they carry guns.”
- Parents of colour were treated as hostile and pushy when they tried to raise the issue of racism in schools.

Everyday Lives

“I was raised to be educated, to go to university... and have a good job. But all these dreams are not there. I end up at the bottom...”

“When I came to Canada everybody [was] saying you need training. No matter what you have been trained for... you still need new training here.”

“I [can’t] remember learning about one racial or ethnocultural role model.”

“My eldest son was one of the first victims of zero tolerance and [lost] two years [of] high school... it was very hard for him to go back... Not only because the schools didn’t want him, but also because he had lost interest.”

“[t]he drop out rate is much higher in the Black community because of the zero tolerance policies... [W]e have 16 and 17 year-old Black males... who have been kicked out of school, some have learning disabilities and dyslexia and have no jobs skills... no life skills, nothing at all.

“Parents also are treated with horrific disrespect by staff because not only are we African, we’re also living in poverty, and people seem to equate the skin colour combined with poverty to mean stupidity...it seems like they don’t think we know when we’re being disrespected and racially profiled.”

The **African Canadian Legal Clinic** works toward eliminating racial discrimination & racial profiling in Ontario’s schools.

Contact : www.aclc.net

Phone : 416-214-4747 (1-888-377-0033)

The **Antiracist Multicultural Education Network of Ontario (AMENO)** fights inequality and exclusion in Ontario schools by providing a network to support advocacy and related public education.

Contact : www.ameno.ca

E-mail : info@ameno.ca

The **Toronto Coalition for Equity in Education** works to address issues such as employment equity, curriculum related change, ESL promotion, & racial profiling. Contact : www.urbanalliance.ca

For Further Information, Action Ideas & Advocacy Tools please go to -

The Colour of Poverty Campaign –

www.colourofpoverty.ca