

Fact Sheet # 4

Understanding the Racialization of Poverty in Ontario In Health & Well-being in 2007

How does racialized poverty affect people's health & well-being ?

Many research studies have clearly shown that racism, discrimination, poverty and income inequality have a strong impact on chronic stress, chronic disease, and health & well-being generally. Factors that affect health include:

- * unemployment; under-employment; precarious employment; poor or unsafe working conditions
- * poor nutrition and housing conditions
- * socially and otherwise unsafe neighbourhoods; polluted or contaminated environments, communities or regions
- * trouble accessing health supports, healthcare and other social services

People from homes with incomes of less than \$20,000 are almost three times more likely to see a decline in their health than people with the highest incomes. Because a higher percentage of racialized people live in such poverty, they are more at risk for poor health. Because many are also employed in unsafe work situations, they have more injuries & little protection from work-related risks.

In a 2003 study 20% of participants reported experiencing racism in the healthcare system 8.6% found doctors to be culturally insensitive or ignorant, and 6.2% reported receiving an inferior quality of care.

Women from lower income groups and racialized women are less likely to have clinical breast exams, mammogram X-rays to test for breast cancer, or PAP smears to test for cervical cancer.

Nearly 70% of men living in wealthiest neighbourhoods will live to age 75, while only 50% of men living in the poorest neighbourhoods will reach that age.

Immigrants tend to be healthier than other Canadians when they first arrive but, over their time in Canada, their health tends to decline.

Immigrants from non-European countries are twice as likely to report declining health as those from European countries. Refugees face higher risks of poor health than other newcomers.

The 3 month waiting period for newcomers to obtain Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP) coverage has led to exacerbated health disparities.

Refugees and people without legal status are often denied care because they lack such coverage.

All of the above highlight the critical need to apply a truly comprehensive and inclusive social determinants of health approach to understanding health disparities as they impact racialized groups.

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.

Everyday Lives

“One of the problems is that many people of colour find in hospitals and different places... they don't treat them the same as they treat Caucasians, the other groups.”

(older cancer patient from the Caribbean)

“I have noticed a whole bunch of newcomers, that come to the country quite healthy and they now have mental health problems because of the stress, depression...”

(shelter worker)

“Canada has a fantastic medical system... But the people in the medical system, I don't know why, but everywhere I've gone I've found a racist environment.”

(immigrant woman)

“Sometimes I am afraid of going to a white doctor. Sometimes I get a look like I shouldn't be there.”

(young woman of colour)

“Racism... ensure[s] that we end up with mental issues... depression... lack of self-esteem... [It's seen as] a result of 'me' and not the system out there.”

(healthcare practitioner)

“I have been in Canada for 10 years [applying to get refugee status]... I was sick many times and had nowhere to go because I had no OHIP... I was sent home the same day I had [my] baby. It was terrible.”

(woman living with HIV/AIDS)

Immigrants with serious medical conditions are often deemed “medically inadmissible” to Canada. Some people who already live in Canada but have serious health problems are in fact denied OHIP on that same basis.

Children who live in poverty are much more likely to experience injuries, disability, alcohol and substance abuse, as well as mental health problems.

The Ontario Women's Health Council notes that poor women and women from racialized communities are among those most at risk for depression.

Women living in poor neighbourhoods are more likely to be pregnant in their teens and to have babies of low birth weight.

What can be done, and examples of who is doing it ?

The **Health Equity Council** works toward increasing access, equity and inclusion for all in the health sector, promoting systemic change by collectively addressing health and healthcare service disparities and inequities in the province of Ontario.

Contact - www.healthequitycouncil.ca

E-mail - healthequitycouncil@gmail.com

Access Alliance works to promote health with dignity and general well-being by improving access to services for immigrants and refugees in Toronto using a medical, social, economic and environmental determinants of health anti-oppressive framework.

Contact - www.accessalliance.ca

Phone - 416-324-8677

Across Boundaries - recognizing that systemic racism and racial violence impact the health of individuals and communities of colour this ethnoracial community mental health centre provides a range of holistic and integrated supports and services.

Contact - www.acrossboundaries.ca

Phone - 416-787-3007

Womens Health in Womens Hands is a pro-choice, anti-racist, multilingual, participatory community health centre for women of diverse backgrounds in the greater Toronto area.

Contact - www.whiwh.com

Phone - 416-593-7655

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

The Colour of Poverty Campaign -

www.colourofpoverty.ca