

Racism

Racism is acting on prejudice by targeting an individual or group and assuming that group to be inferior. Racism generally includes negative emotional reactions, acceptance of negative stereotypes, and/or discrimination; in some cases, it leads to violence.

Occurrence and Prevalence

It is estimated that at least one in four complaints to the Canadian Human Rights Commission relate to racism. In Canada it has been found that 43% of hate crimes were motivated by racism; racialized Canadians earn an average of 81 cents to the dollar compared to other Canadians; and employers are about 40% more likely to interview a job applicant with an English-sounding name despite identical education, skills, and experience.

Psychology of Racism

One of our survival mechanisms is dividing the social world into groups. When we know little about groups different than ours, we tend to generalize and create social stereotypes. Negative stereotypes can cause negative attitudes and emotions (even fear) toward the “other”. When that informs unfair and unequal treatment, that becomes discrimination. Discrimination negatively affects the health of the victim. Racism has been associated with health problems like high blood pressure, heart disease, obesity, depression, anxiety, distress, and substance abuse.

Solutions

The Canadian Government has several federal initiatives that aim to address issues such as racism and discrimination, and/or have a focus on Indigenous Peoples, religious minorities or racialized communities. Psychological research suggests that those experiencing racism may benefit from:

- 1. Reflection** – Identifying how you have been impacted and your emotional response.
- 2. Awareness** – Learn more about Canada’s history of racism – it’s not just you.
- 3. Action** – Nonviolent actions help us feel empowered – talk about it; seek support

Treatments that Work

For those traumatized by racism, which can lead to PTSD, there are several treatment options.

Psychotherapy – most commonly, cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), cognitive processing therapy (CPT), cognitive therapy (CT), and prolonged exposure therapy (PE).

Other Methods – Social support, good self-care, a healthy lifestyle, and exercise all have been demonstrated benefits for recovery, quality of life and well-being.

Medication – Talk to your doctor about the right medication for you to treat PTSD.

Resources – [Racism, bias, and discrimination](https://www.apa.org/subject-areas/racism), APA.org

References – Canadian Psychological Association: [“Psychology Works” Fact Sheet: Racism](#)
Canada [Facts and figures](#) & [Building a Foundation for Change: Canada’s Anti-Racism Strategy 2019-2022](#)