

Fact Sheet # 1

Understanding the Racialization of Poverty in Ontario

An Introduction in 2007

Did you know that...

- * **Ethno-racial minority group members** – other than Aboriginal persons (ie. people of colour) make up over 13% of Canada's population (**Ontario – 19%**); **by 2017**, this will rise to 20% (**Ontario – 29%**);
- * by the year 2017, well over half of Toronto's overall population will be people of colour;
- * **children from ethno-racial minority communities** (ie. communities of colour) constituted **67% of all children in low income households in 1995**, then increasing to **75% in the year 2000**;
- * Ethno-racial minority (ie. non-European heritage) families make up 37% of all families in Toronto, but account for 59% of poor families;
- * **between 1980 & 2000 in Toronto**, while the poverty rate for non-racialized (ie. white, European or Caucasian heritage) population fell by 28%, **the poverty among racialized families rose by 361%**;
- * 32% of children in racialized families, and 47% of children in recent immigrant families in Ontario live in poverty

What does this mean ?

More & more people in Ontario come from racialized groups (ie. communities of colour). These persons face a much higher risk of being poor & being affected by factors linked to poverty - like unstable/unsafe work conditions and poor health. While poverty can be a concern for anyone, its causes, forms and lived consequences aren't the same for all. Racialized group members face particular challenges - made still worse when combined with any additional basis of exclusion – ie. gender, disability, sexuality or class.

What is meant by poverty ?

Canada most often uses the *Low Income Cut-Off* (LICO) to measure financial hardship. The LICO is based on how much of a family's income is spent on basic needs like food and shelter. It also considers family size and community size. It costs more for instance to live in a large town or city than a small one so a family in a big city will need to earn more to stay above the poverty line - LICO. So, when a family is only making at or around the LICO for their particular town or community, they are likely to spend a disproportionate share of their income on basic needs when compared with the average family.

What is meant by the racialization of poverty ?

Racialized communities experience ongoing, disproportionate levels of poverty. In other words, people from ethno-racial minority groups (ie. communities of colour) are more likely to fall below the LICO and to have related problems like poor health, lower education, and fewer job opportunities, than those from Caucasian or European backgrounds. While it is possible for anyone to experience low income and reduced opportunities, individual and systemic racism plays a large role in creating such problems. Prejudice and discrimination mean that people of colour are less likely to get jobs when equally qualified and are likely to make less income than their white peers. It means they are more likely to live & work in poor conditions, to have less access to healthcare & related supports, & to be victims of police violence.

What does racialized poverty look like ?

This set of ten (10) fact sheets address different aspects of racialized poverty, starting with a **snapshot summary (#2)**, they look at **education & learning (#3)**, **health & well-being (#4)**, **employment (#5)**, **income security (#6)**, **justice & policing (#7)**, **immigration & newcomer settlement (#8)**, **housing & homelessness (#9)** & **food (in)security (#10)**. Although they are separated in order to more easily present the information, all the aspects are intimately inter-linked – ie. having difficulty finding employment or living in unsafe housing conditions can lead to poor health. Lack of educational opportunities makes it difficult to find a job that pays well enough to make ends meet. Individual or systemic racism in Canadian society means that many people of colour have considerably fewer opportunities.

Who do we mean by racialized groups ?

The information in these fact sheets refers to Canadians of non-European background or heritage - **other than Aboriginal Peoples** – Canadian-born people of colour and those who are newcomers to Canada.

NOTE - *We are aware of Aboriginal realities & lived experience and stand in solidarity with advocacy efforts to redress their racialized exclusion. We very much believe there are many links between such struggles and those of other racialized groups in Ontario & Canada. However, we also acknowledge & respect that Aboriginal claims to justice are distinct and require a different set of strategies and policy responses due to First Peoples unique and specific historical relationship with Canada. Therefore, we do not include or address Aboriginal issues & circumstances in the current fact sheets.*

While some use terms such as “visible minorities” or “people of colour” we prefer the term “racialized groups” as the former could be seen or understood to be too static - relating primarily to number and colour, while the latter recognizes the dynamic and complex process by which racial categories are socially produced by dominant groups – in ways that entrench social inequalities and marginalization.

How do we understand racism ?

In societies dominated by people of white, Caucasian or European backgrounds, different ethno-racial groups have long been targets of discrimination & social exclusion. Such groups are said to be *racialized* or *marked*, by the dominant group, as inferior. Racism doesn't just refer to individual beliefs and attitudes toward specific ethno-racial groups in society, it also includes systemic & built-in features of society, the way that institutions like education, health, social services & the justice system work – day in & day out.

Racism has existed in many different forms throughout history. In Canada and other “western” countries, for example, white people have discriminated against racialized groups through the practice of slavery, the deliberate destruction of communities, racial segregation of schools and neighbourhoods, selective and punitive immigration policies, exploitation of certain groups' labour, over-policing in communities of colour, racial slurs, hate crimes and on and on. Assorted behaviours and policies change over time, but the facts of racialized inequality and unequal treatment have not gone away.

The Colour of Poverty Campaign & this set of fact sheets aim to -

- * promote an understanding of how poverty arises within or impacts upon racialized groups
- * suggest ways, tools & strategies for people to work toward equity & inclusion in Ontario.

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

The Colour of Poverty Campaign - www.colourofpoverty.ca