



Building our communities through research

## Trans PULSE E-Bulletin

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Trans PULSE is a community-based research project investigating the impact of social exclusion and discrimination on the health of trans people in Ontario, Canada. Funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, this project is a partnership between researchers, trans community members, and community organizations committed to improving health outcomes for trans people. We hope that health professionals, policy makers, trans communities and allies will use the results of this research to remove barriers, create positive changes, and to improve the health and well-being of trans people.

### Background

We know that like transphobia, racism and ethnicity-related discrimination are bad for our health.<sup>1</sup> The concept of minority stress<sup>2</sup> can help us to understand how experiences of racism and ethnicity-related discrimination, in addition to transphobia and other forms of social oppression, can lead to negative physical and mental health outcomes. We understand racism to include both structural inequalities based on socially-constructed racial categories, and exposure to specific discriminatory events, though we will focus on the latter here.<sup>3</sup> To date, research has not described experiences of racism and ethnicity-related discrimination among trans people in Ontario or Canada. Therefore, we sought to describe these experiences and their overall burden among non-Aboriginal white, non-Aboriginal racialized, and Aboriginal trans Ontarians.

### Our Approach

Trans PULSE used a research method that allowed us to take the most statistically accurate picture possible of trans Ontarians.<sup>4</sup> Surveys were completed in 2009-2010 by 433 trans people age 16 or older who lived, worked or received health care in Ontario. Participants completed their surveys either online or via paper copy. Participants indicated that they fit under the broad umbrella term of "trans", identified with a range of gender identities, and were not required to have begun a social or medical gender transition. Individuals were characterized as Aboriginal if they indicated a First Nations, Metis, Inuit, or other Aboriginal ethnicity. Non-Aboriginal participants were then categorized as white if they indicated only white backgrounds, or as racialized people (or people of colour) if they clearly indicated non-Aboriginal racialized ethnic backgrounds. Experiences of racism and ethnicity-related discrimination were measured using a scale adapted from Diaz et al.<sup>5</sup> Levels of racism and ethnicity-related discrimination were categorized based on the average frequency of experiences reported; low levels represent having experienced any or all of the forms listed an average of once or twice, while high levels represent having experienced them sometimes or many times, on average.

#### Because of your race or ethnicity, were you ever/ have you...

	White <sup>a</sup> (n=333) %	Racialized <sup>a</sup> (n=62) %	Aboriginal (n=35) %
Made fun of while growing up	26	67	52
Hit or beaten up	12	30	31
Made fun of as an adult	20	69	46
Treated rudely or unfairly	18	65	41
Harassed by police	4	26	35
Turned down for a job	7	22	33
Been uncomfortable in trans spaces	3	31	31
Had difficulty finding lovers	8	33	26
Been objectified sexually	4	37	53
Had partners pay more attention to race than you as a person	5	35	31

<sup>a</sup> Non-Aboriginal; i.e. not First Nations, Inuit, Métis, or other Aboriginal ethnicity. Please note: these represent statistical estimates that have a margin of error, which is largest when groups are small. Please use caution when interpreting these numbers.

## Key Findings

Non-Aboriginal white, non-Aboriginal racialized, and Aboriginal trans Ontarians reported experiencing all the forms of racism or ethnicity-related discrimination we asked about. Approximately three-quarters of racialized, 62% of Aboriginal, and 29% of white trans people reported experiencing any racism or ethnicity-related discrimination. However, white trans people were statistically significantly more likely to report never having experienced racism or ethnicity-related discrimination.<sup>3</sup>

	White <sup>a</sup> (n=333) %	Racialized <sup>a</sup> (n=62) %	Aboriginal (n=35) %
<b>Level of racism or ethnicity-related discrimination experienced*</b>			
None	71	24	37
Low	24	53	41
High	5	23	21

<sup>a</sup> Non-Aboriginal; i.e. not First Nations, Inuit, Métis, or other Aboriginal ethnicity.

\*Percentages have been rounded and may not add up to 100%.

Please note: these represent statistical estimates that have a margin of error, which is largest when groups are small. Please use caution when interpreting these numbers.

## Implications

We asked trans Ontarians about perceived experiences of discrimination based on race or ethnicity, and our results highlight the fact that people from all racial groups may experience such discrimination. For example, non-Aboriginal white individuals may experience discrimination based on ethnicity, religion, or immigration status. Not surprisingly, racialized people were more likely to experience racism or ethnicity-related discrimination than were white people. Aboriginal people were also more likely than white people to experience low levels of racism or ethnicity-related discrimination, as opposed to none.<sup>3</sup>

These results speak to the importance of addressing racism and ethnicity-related discrimination as social determinants of health among trans people. Moreover, Aboriginal and racialized trans people may also be experiencing the abovementioned instances of discrimination, e.g. being turned down for a job, based on being *trans*, highlighting the potential for impact of intersecting oppressions on their health and well-being. Finally, our findings draw attention to the need to challenge racism and ethnicity-related discrimination within trans communities, as 31% of Aboriginal and racialized trans people in Ontario reported feeling uncomfortable in trans spaces because of their race or ethnicity.

## References

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