

Racial Profiling: a Myth?

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Abstract

Police carding is the act of “randomly” stopping people and documenting their information to create a database that helps in police investigations. The Toronto police contend that these random stops alleviate crime and keep residents of Toronto safe. However, the outcomes of carding are grossly disproportionate with the aims of the practice. Black residents of Toronto are disproportionately targeted by the Toronto police.

Background

- 6 out of 10 black respondents saw racial profiling as a big problem in Canada.
- Racial profiling is not a new phenomenon; however, society is now forming different vocabulary to describe these instances. The term ‘racial profiling’ seeks to redefine discrimination on a more individualistic level.
- The police are in denial of racial profiling. Just as the president of the Police Association, Craig Brommel, has claimed “no racial profiling has ever been conducted by the Toronto Police Services...”



Figure 1. © 2014 Toronto Police Service

Findings

- Police pay more attention to this community; as a result, there are more convictions.
- 44% of people of colour reported being stopped by the police at least once and 30% reported being stopped multiple times whereas only 12% of white people reported being stopped by the police.
- White people are more likely to be set free at the scene whereas black people are likely to be detained and questioned for longer periods of time.
- The likelihood of black people being detained upon police stop is between 1.3 and 1.7 times more likely than white people.
- 76.5% of the white people stopped by the police are released at the scene compared to 61.8% of black people.
- Black people are 4.2 times over-represented in traffic offences, 3.7 times over-represented in cocaine charges, and 3.0 times over-represented with respect to drug possession.
- White people are only over-represented in impaired driving.
- Black professionals who have higher incomes are more likely to be stopped by the police than black people with lower incomes e.g. DWB.

“When you’re a black male... you don’t have to do anything... You could be a good student, you could be a good father or whatever, but when you’re out on the street, you’re seen as a criminal...a drug dealer.”

Anonymous 1

“If you dress in a suit everyday, with a nice haircut, they won’t harass you. With Black youth, you see them wearing baggy clothes, lots of rings and necklaces, they automatically think that they are drug dealers.”

Anonymous 2

“Another participant disagreed, stating, “clothes is nothing. It’s your colour, your colour and it’s your colour.”

Anonymous 3

Methodology

This research is founded in various interviews with the community members, scholarly secondary sources as well as news articles on the topic. The goal of this research was to explore the broader effects of racial profiling in the lives of people of colour and how this might contrast to the dominant group in society.

Conclusion

- The perception of black people: “up to no good”.
- Criminalizing diversity: white becomes the norm, everything else is “othered”.
- Stigmatizing ethnic communities.
- Psychological harms of over-representation in jails.
- Community members lose trust in the police and they become intolerant to police questioning even if it is for legitimate purposes.
- A need for systemic reform to address the root causes of the problem.