

Discrimination and racism in sports in Canada

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Several athletes have publicly denounced harassment, abuse and discrimination in sports—behaviours that occur in both competitive and recreational sports. These behaviours can take many forms and represent a barrier to participation in sports for certain groups, such as racialized people and those from the 2SLGBTQI+ community.

The data, released today, are based on data from the most recent wave of the [Survey Series on People and their Communities](#), which examined participation and experiences in community sports. These results examine unfair treatment, racism and discrimination in sports in Canada.

Nearly one in five people report experiencing or witnessing unfair treatment, racism or discrimination in sports in the previous five years

In 2023, one-quarter (25%) of Canadians felt that racism and discrimination were problems in community sports in Canada.

In addition, among [Canadians who participated in a sport](#) in the five years preceding the survey, 18% said they had experienced or witnessed unfair treatment, racism or discrimination in sport.

Certain population groups were more likely to experience or witness unfair treatment, racism or discrimination in a sport. For example, lesbian and gay Canadians (42%) were more than twice as likely as heterosexuals (17%) to report having experienced or witnessed such behaviour.

In addition, the likelihood of experiencing or witnessing unfair treatment, racism or discrimination in a sport decreased with age. Among those who participated in a sport, this likelihood peaked among young people aged 15 to 24 (30%), then gradually declined to its lowest level among people 65 and older (7%).

Racialized people (26%) were also more likely than their non-racialized counterparts (15%) to have experienced or witnessed unfair treatment, racism or discrimination while playing a sport. This was particularly true for Black (34%), Filipino (32%) and Korean (32%) people, who were among the most likely to report having experienced or witnessed these behaviours.

Race or skin colour the most common reason cited for discrimination

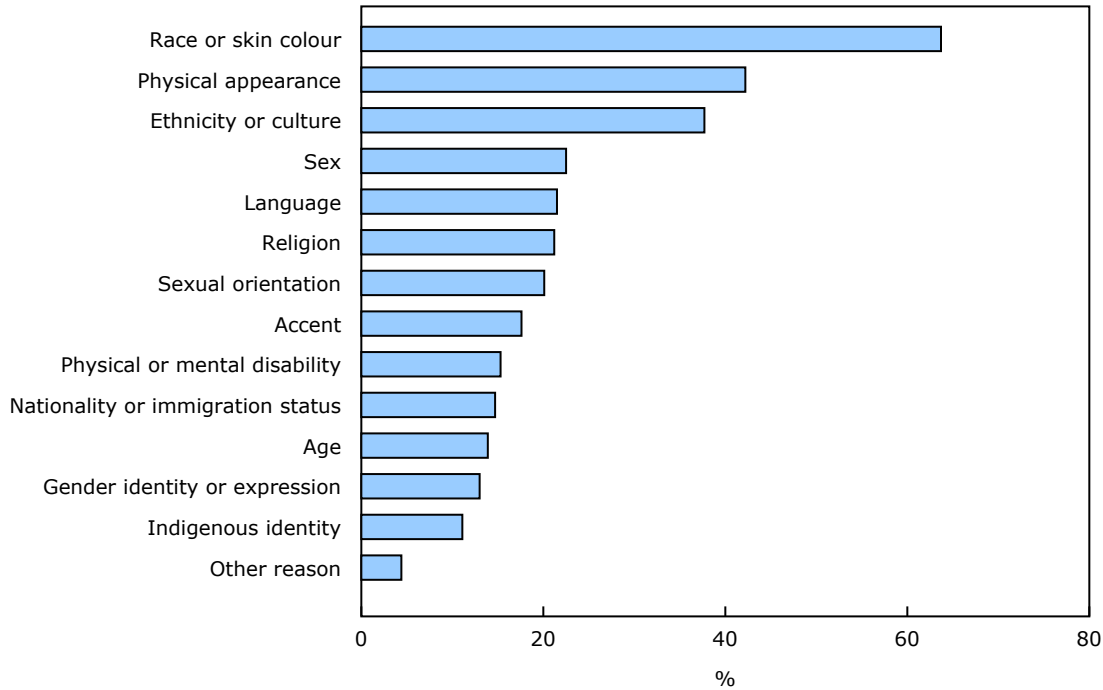
The motivation most often cited by victims and witnesses in incidents of discrimination was race or skin colour (64%), followed by physical appearance (42%) and ethnicity or culture (38%).

A significant share of victims and witnesses also reported sex (23%), language (22%), religion (21%) and sexual orientation (20%) as reasons for the discrimination committed against them or other sports participants.



Chart 1

Reasons reported by victims and witnesses for unfair treatment, racism or discrimination committed against them or others in sport in the previous five years, 2023



Note(s): Sex refers to sex assigned at birth. Discrimination based on physical appearance includes discrimination on the basis of weight, height, hairstyle or hair colour, clothing, jewellery, tattoos or other physical characteristics.

Source(s): Survey Series on People and their Communities – Participation and Experiences in Community Sports (5378), 2023.

Victims and witnesses are most often athletes, participant or spectators, as opposed to coaches, officials, or administrators

No one is spared from discrimination and racism, whether they are participants, coaches, officials or sports team presidents. However, at the time of the incident, most people who experienced or witnessed unfair treatment, racism or discrimination in a sport were participants, athletes or spectators, rather than those in positions of authority, such as coaches, instructors, referees, or sports managers.

A higher percentage of people who experienced or witnessed unfair treatment, racism and discrimination in the previous five years were either participants/athletes (80%) or spectators (26%) at the time of the incident, as opposed to coaches, referees or those occupying other non-athletic roles (5% to 15%). Similar patterns were observed among both victims and witnesses. However, witnesses (85%) were more likely than victims (64%) to be participants or athletes at the time of the incident. Meanwhile, victims (42%) were more likely than witnesses (25%) to be spectators.

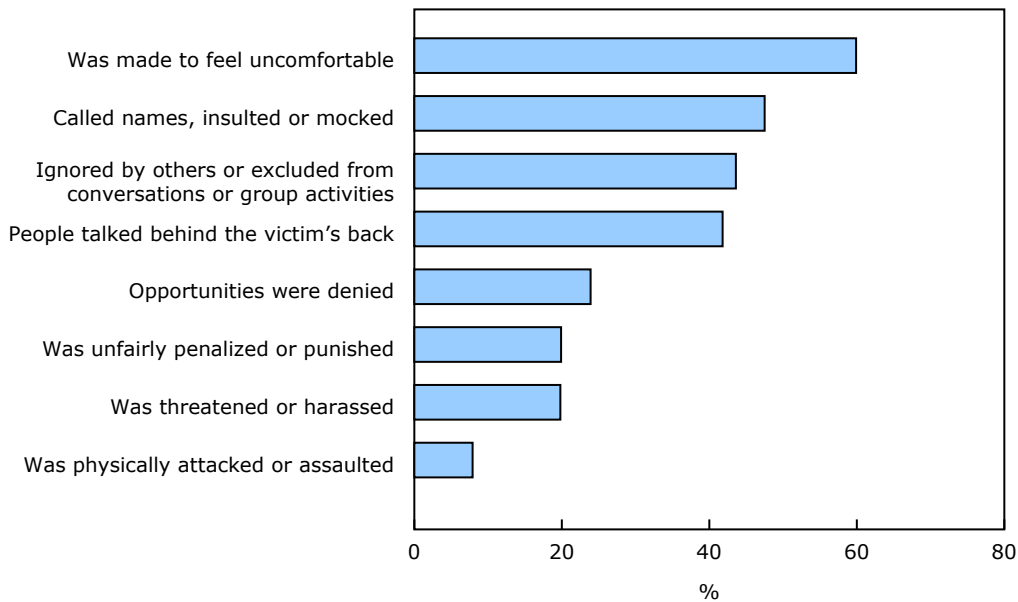
Participants and athletes (64%), spectators (39%), as well as coaches and instructors (36%) were also most often responsible for acts of discrimination. In fact, they were much more likely than referees or officials (10%), or than managers, directors and administrators (13%) to commit such acts.

In total, one in five people report having experienced or witnessed threats or harassment in a sport

The most common types of discrimination reported by victims and witnesses involved being made to feel uncomfortable, such as through insensitive jokes or remarks (60%), or being called names, insulted or mocked (48%). This was followed by being ignored by others or excluded from conversations or group activities (44%) and people talking behind the person's back (42%).

However, a considerable proportion of victims and witnesses also reported having experienced or witnessed threats or harassment (20%), and physical attacks or assaults (8%).

Chart 2
Types of discriminatory behaviour reported by victims and witnesses in sport in the previous five years, 2023



Source(s): Survey Series on People and their Communities (5378) – Participation and Experiences in Community Sports, 2023.

Many incidents of discrimination, racism and unfair treatment are never reported

In many cases, witnesses of discrimination, racism and unfair treatment sought to comfort the victim (42%) and/or defended or confronted the instigator (37%). Some also reported the incident (25%) and sought help from others (18%).

However, in many cases, witnesses observed the incident without taking any action to help the victim or stop the instigator (36%). Some witnesses even participated in the assault by joining in with the instigator (7%).

Many of these incidents were never reported by the victim or the witnesses (32%). Nevertheless, almost one-quarter (23%) of victims and witnesses said they reported at least one incident officially, that is, by filing, for example, an official complaint or report. An even larger proportion of victims and witnesses (35%) said they informally reported the incident, such as by telling a teammate, friend or a family member, or discussing it on social media.

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Note to readers

The data in this release come from the Survey Series on People and their Communities (SSPC) – Participation and Experiences in Community Sports, which were collected from November 27 to December 17, 2023. This release is based on the most recent wave of the SSPC, which collected information on participation in community sports and the experiences in playing these sports.

The SSPC target population is comprised of people aged 15 and older living in Canada's provinces. Racialized and immigrant groups were oversampled to provide adequate coverage of these groups.

"Community sports" refers to organized sports, including those played in community and school sports leagues and clubs, competitive and recreational sports, as well as pick-up sports. These sports can be organized and offered by neighbourhoods, villages, municipalities, local organizations or volunteers.

The Government of Canada adopted the acronym 2SLGBTQI+ to refer to Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex people and those who use other terms related to gender and sexual diversity.

Sexual orientation refers to how a person describes their sexuality. For example, a person may describe their sexuality as heterosexual, lesbian, gay, bisexual or pansexual.

The concept of racialized population is measured with the "visible minority" variable in this release. "Visible minority" refers to whether a person belongs to one of the visible minority groups defined by the Employment Equity Act. The Employment Equity Act defines visible minorities as "persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour". The visible minority population consists mainly of the following groups: South Asian, Chinese, Black, Filipino, Latin American, Arab, Southeast Asian, West Asian, Korean and Japanese.

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [5378](#).

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; infostats@statcan.gc.ca) or Media Relations (statcan.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.statcan@statcan.gc.ca).