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Unfair treatment, racism and discrimination in community sports in Canada

by Andrew Canning

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Unfair treatment, racism and discrimination in community sports in Canada

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Overview of the study

Racism and discrimination in sports have recently garnered significant public attention, which has led to efforts among sports organizations to implement policies and programs to advance a culture of safety to prevent harm.¹ This study uses data from the 2023 Survey Series on People and their Communities to examine issues concerning unfair treatment, racism and discrimination in community sports in Canada among those aged 15 years and older.

The study sheds light on the prevalence of unfair treatment, racism or discrimination (UTRD) within the wider sports community, which included those in athletic and non-athletic roles (e.g., coaches, referees, volunteers, managers, administrators), as well as spectators. Contextual information surrounding UTRD in sports was also explored, such as the motivations for discrimination, and the types of discriminatory behaviour that victims experienced. The study also examined broader perceptions about racism and discrimination in community sports among those in athletic roles, including sports participants' confidence in the training of sports personnel to prevent and address incidents of racism and discrimination.

- In 2023, over one-quarter (26%) of sports participants in athletic roles reported feeling that racism and discrimination are problems in community sports in Canada.
- Within the wider sports community (i.e., those in athletic and non-athletic roles, including spectators), 6% of individuals reported experiencing unfair treatment, racism or discrimination in community sports in the previous five years.
- Prevalence rates of unfair treatment, racism or discrimination in community sports were higher among the racialized population² (12%), persons who identify as having a disability (9%), and people who are 2SLGBTQ+³ (21%), compared to individuals who are not part of these groups.
- Over one in five (22%) victims of unfair treatment, racism or discrimination in community sports reported being threatened or harassed, and one in seven (14%) reported being physically attacked or assaulted.
- Close to one-quarter of sports participants in athletic roles lacked confidence in the training of sports personnel to prevent (22%) and address (27%) incidents of racism and discrimination in community sports.
- Among those who participated in athletic roles in community sports in the previous five years, over one in ten (11%) discontinued participating due to a negative experience.

Introduction

In 2023, over half (57%) of Canadians aged 15 years and older reported participating in athletic roles in community sports in the previous 12 months.⁴ Participation in sports has been shown to be beneficial for physical and mental health as well as social outcomes.⁵ However, without sufficient safeguards and accountability, there is risk of harm to individuals involved in sports.

High-profile cases of abuse and maltreatment in sports have recently garnered significant public attention, which has led to efforts among sports organizations in Canada and abroad to develop initiatives to advance a culture of safe sport.⁶ Some Canadian studies have highlighted institutional cultures and environments that enable and perpetuate forms of explicit and implicit racism and discrimination.⁷ This research has also uncovered some systemic issues in sport, such as underrepresentation of racialized individuals in positions of authority, lack of institutional policies and protocols (e.g., anti-racism policies, incident reporting processes), and lack of awareness and training among coaching staff and those in authority to effectively prevent and address incidents of racism and discrimination.

Despite public interest and concern, there are few prevalence studies on racism and discrimination in sport. In the Canadian context, a report on racism among student-athletes affiliated with Ontario University Athletics found that nearly half of athletes felt that racism was somewhat, very, or extremely common where they work or play.⁸ Among athletes, coaches, and staff, more than one in 10 reported having been upset about something racist they had experienced.

Other prevalence studies typically have a broader focus on maltreatment and harm, rather than racism and discrimination specifically. A recent study examined maltreatment among current and retired Canadian Olympic and Paralympic athletes, finding that three-quarters of respondents experienced at least one type of maltreatment-related harm in the previous 10 years.⁹ The study found that athletes who were women, racialized, Indigenous, and LGBTQ2I+ individuals were more likely to experience various forms of harm. International studies have also found certain groups to be at higher risk of these types of harm, including racialized individuals, ethnic minorities, sexually and gender diverse individuals, persons with disabilities, and those who compete at higher levels.¹⁰

To date, the prevalence of experiences of unfair treatment, racism and discrimination in community sports in Canada remains under examined. The current study aims to fill this gap by using the Survey Series on People and their Communities (SSPC) to examine several areas of interest, including perceptions of racism and discrimination as problems in community sports¹¹ among sports participants in athletic roles;¹² prevalence of experiences of unfair treatment, racism or discrimination (UTRD) within the wider sports community, which includes those in athletic and non-athletic roles, as well as spectators;¹³ the context surrounding incidents of UTRD (e.g., type of discriminatory behaviour, role of instigator, location, etc.); the level of confidence sports participants in athletic roles have in the training of sports personnel¹⁴ to prevent and address racism and discrimination; and the types of

negative experiences that have led individuals to stop participating in sports.

Over one-quarter of sports participants in athletic roles reported feeling that racism and discrimination are problems in community sports in Canada

Perceptions about racism and discrimination in sport can impact participation in sports.¹⁵ In 2023, just over one-quarter (26%) of sports participants in athletic roles felt that racism and discrimination were problems in community sports. In general, racialized sports participants (29%) were more likely to feel this way compared to their non-racialized counterparts (24%). This was particularly evident among Korean (38%^E), Filipino (35%), Black (34%), and South Asian (33%) people. Perceptions regarding this issue did not differ significantly based on immigration status (e.g., between non-immigrants and recent immigrants).

There was a notable gender effect to these perceptions, with about 3 in 10 non-racialized women¹⁶ (31%) indicating that they felt these were issues, compared to about 2 in 10 non-racialized men¹⁷ (19%). However, this gender difference was not evident among racialized sports participants, where about 3 in 10 reported this concern among both women and men (Chart 1).

Perception of racism and discrimination as problematic in community sports was highest among sports participants aged 15 to 24 (36%), which was significantly higher than that reported by most other age groups (ranging from 20% to 26%). Among racialized participants, the perception of racism

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and discrimination was somewhat consistent across most age groups, with the exception of older adults, who were less likely to believe racism and discrimination were problems in community sports.

It is noteworthy that participation in community sports is more common among younger groups. For instance, three-quarters (74%) of those aged 15 to 24 years had participated in community sports in the previous 12 months, compared to under half (44%) of those aged 65 years and older. As explored further later, those aged 15 to 24 were also more likely to participate in competitive sports compared to older age groups. These factors may impact perceptions regarding racism and discrimination in community sports.

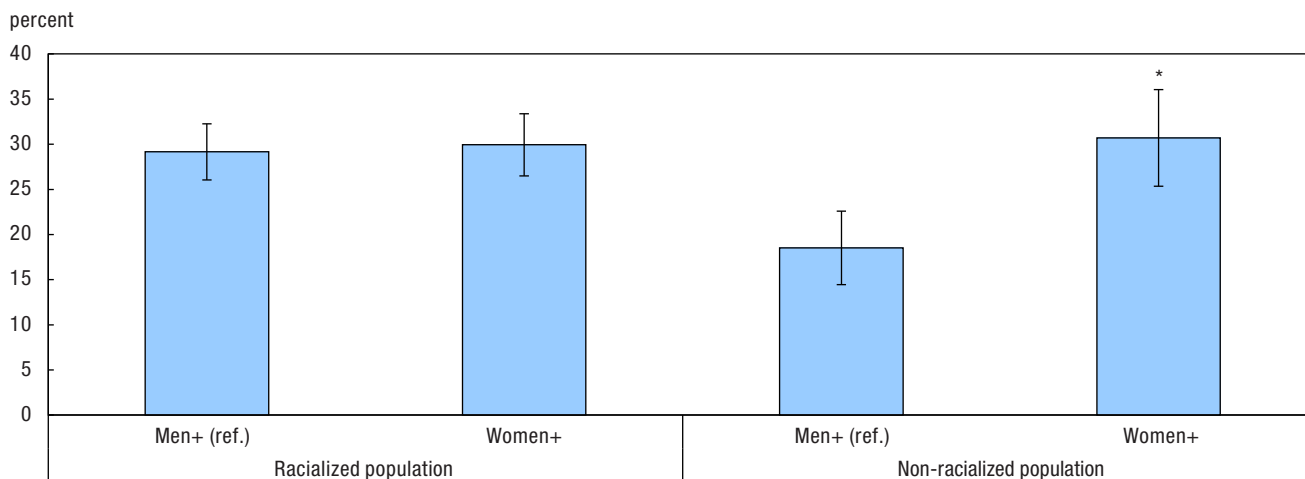
Within the wider sports community, prevalence of unfair treatment, racism or discrimination was higher among the racialized population, persons who identify as having a disability, and people who are 2SLGBTQ+

The SSPC asked respondents who were involved in the wider sports community (i.e., those in athletic and non-athletic roles, as well as spectators) whether they experienced unfair treatment, racism or discrimination (UTRD) in community sports in the previous five years (2018-2023). Nearly half of Canadians aged 15 years and older (52%) were part of the wider sports community during this period.

In 2023, 6% of individuals in the wider sports community reported experiencing UTRD during the previous five years. The racialized population (12%) was three times more likely to report these experiences compared to the non-racialized population (4%). Furthermore, after adjusting for other sociodemographic characteristics, the probability of experiencing UTRD was significantly higher for each racialized group compared to the non-racialized population (Table 1). These results align with other studies pertaining to sports environments, as well as in broader society,¹⁸ which have found that racialized groups are at higher risk of experiencing forms of harm and discrimination than the non-racialized population.¹⁹

Chart 1

Sports participants in athletic roles who feel that racism and discrimination are problems in community sports, by racialized status and gender, 2023



* significantly different from reference category (ref.) ($p < 0.05$)

Notes: Error bars represent the 95% confidence intervals and can be interpreted as such: if the survey were repeated many times, then 95% of the time (or 19 times out of 20), the interval would cover the true population value. The study population included those aged 15 years and older who participated in athletic roles in community sports in the previous 12 months. The concept of "racialized population" is based and derived directly from the concept of "visible minority" in the 2021 Census. The *Employment Equity Act* defines visible minorities as "persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour." It consists mainly of the following groups: South Asian, Chinese, Black, Filipino, Latin American, Arab, Southeast Asian, West Asian, Korean and Japanese. Indigenous people are not included among the racialized population in the current analysis. Given that the non-binary population is small, data aggregation to a two-category gender variable is sometimes necessary to protect the confidentiality of responses. In these cases, individuals in the category "non-binary persons" are distributed into the other two gender categories and are denoted by the "+" symbol.

Source: Statistics Canada, Survey Series on People and their Communities (Panel 4), 2023.

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In the current study, 2SLGBTQ+ people were more than four times as likely to experience UTRD in community sports (21%), compared to their non-2SLGBTQ+ counterparts (5%). This finding aligns with other studies where lesbian, gay and bisexual individuals were more likely to experience interpersonal violence in sports,²⁰ and LGBTQ2IA+ people were more likely to experience sexual harm in sports.²¹

Individuals who identified as a person with a disability were also more likely to report experiencing UTRD (9%), compared to those who did not (6%). There are mixed results on discrimination and harm among those with disabilities in sports literature. For instance, in one European study, children who participated in parasports²² were more likely to have experienced

harm, whereas another study of Canadian adults with a disability did not report a similar increased risk.²³ Mixed findings may, in part, stem from differences in the cohorts being studied (e.g., age differences; contextual factors such as competitive parasports versus community sports; athletes versus wider sports community).

Concerning age, those aged 15 to 24 (9%) were more than twice as likely to report experiencing UTRD compared to those aged 25 to 34 (4%), and nine times more likely than those aged 65 years or older (1%). However, after controlling for other factors, there was no evident trend to suggest that prevalence of UTRD decreases uniformly with increasing age, as there was no significant difference between the youngest age group and those in age groups between 35 and 64 years.²⁴

An important caveat is that younger sports participants were more likely to play competitive sports, compared to those in older age groups. Data from a different panel of the SSPC revealed that about one in four (24%) individuals aged 15 to 24 participated in competitive sports in the previous 12 months, which was significantly higher than that reported by other age groups (ranging from 1% among those aged 45 to 54 to 11% among those aged 35 to 44%).²⁵ Given that competitive sports would typically entail increased playing time and a greater likelihood of having coaches, spectators, and other persons of authority present, these factors, though not measured directly in the study, may in part explain higher prevalence of UTRD among younger sports participants.

Table 1
Percentage and predicted probability of experiencing unfair treatment, racism or discrimination in community sports in the previous five years, among individuals in the sports community (athletic and non-athletic roles, including spectators), by demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, 2023

Characteristics	Estimated value	95% confidence interval		Predicted probability
		lower bound	upper bound	
		unadjusted		
	percent			
Racialized group				
South Asian	12.5	7.7	17.3	12.8*
Chinese	10.3	6.7	14.0	11.2*
Black	14.0	9.8	18.3	15.5*
Filipino	16.7	10.4	23.1	14.6*
Arab	12.1	6.8	17.4	13.0*
Latin American	9.0	5.3	12.6	10.5*
Southeast Asian	9.7	5.6	13.9	11.6*
West Asian	13.6	5.3	21.9	16.7*
Korean	11.0 ^F	3.3	18.7	14.5*
Other racial identity	8.4	4.6	12.3	7.9*
Non-racialized (ref.)	3.9	2.4	5.4	3.8
Immigrant status				
Non-immigrant (ref.)	5.1	3.6	6.7	7.1
Established immigrant	8.6	6.9	10.2	4.9
Recent immigrant	8.7	5.3	12.1	3.7*
Non-permanent resident	9.0	5.3	12.6	4.8

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Table 1

Percentage and predicted probability of experiencing unfair treatment, racism or discrimination in community sports in the previous five years, among individuals in the sports community (athletic and non-athletic roles, including spectators), by demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, 2023

Characteristics	Estimated value	95% confidence interval		Predicted probability
		lower bound	upper bound	
		unadjusted		
	percent			
Region				
Atlantic region	3.4	0.7	6.1	4.3
Quebec	5.5	2.7	8.2	5.7
Ontario (ref.)	6.8	4.6	9.1	6.3
Prairies	6.0	3.3	8.8	5.8
British Columbia	6.3	3.3	9.3	6.3
Gender				
Men+ (ref.)	6.7	4.9	8.5	6.5
Women+	5.4	3.6	7.1	5.4
Age group				
15 to 24 years (ref.)	8.7	5.2	12.2	6.8
25 to 34 years	4.1	2.8	5.3	3.6*
35 to 44 years	10.0	5.9	14.2	9.8
45 to 54 years	7.4	3.9	11.0	7.3
55 to 64 years	3.9	1.6	6.2	5.1
65 years and older	1.4	0.0	2.9	1.9*
2SLGBTQ2+ status				
2SLGBTQ2+	21.4 ^E	11.6	31.1	19.9*
Non-2SLGBTQ2+ (ref.)	4.9	3.8	6.0	4.8
Education				
Less than high school	7.1 ^E	2.6	11.6	6.3
High school or equivalent	4.9	2.6	7.1	4.3
College, trades, CEGEP, certificates and diplomas below the bachelor level	6.0	3.7	8.4	7.0
Bachelor's degree or higher (ref.)	6.6	4.5	8.7	6.3
Persons who identified as having a disability				
Yes	9.2	4.2	14.3	11.1*
No (ref.)	5.7	4.5	6.9	5.4
Income				
Less than \$15K	6.1	3.3	8.9	4.9
\$15K to less than \$30K	9.1	5.1	13.1	8.0
\$30K to less than \$45K	4.3	2.4	6.2	4.7
\$45K to less than \$70K (ref.)	5.6	3.0	8.2	6.6
\$70K and over	4.8	2.3	7.3	5.5
Language spoken most often at home				
English and French only (ref.)	5.4	4.1	6.8	5.9
English or French and non-official language	10.4	6.1	14.7	6.5
Non-official language (neither English nor French)	9.6	7.0	12.1	6.1

^E use with caution

* significantly different from reference category (ref.) after adjusting for all other variables in the logistic regression model ($p < 0.05$)

Notes: The study population included those aged 15 years and older who were part of the wider sports community during the previous five years, which included those in athletic and non-athletic roles, including spectators. The Other racial identity category includes the following groups: Japanese, racial identity not-specified, and multiple racial identities. Given that the non-binary population is small, data aggregation to a two-category gender variable is sometimes necessary to protect the confidentiality of responses. In these cases, individuals in the category "non-binary persons" are distributed into the other two gender categories and are denoted by the "+" symbol. Percentages and confidence intervals are the results from the bivariate analysis (unadjusted). Predicted probabilities are the results from a fully-adjusted logistic regression model.

Source: Statistics Canada, Survey Series on People and their Communities (Panel 4), 2023.

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One in seven victims of unfair treatment, racism or discrimination reported being physically attacked or assaulted in community sports in the previous five years

Victims of UTRD, among those in the wider sports community (i.e., athletic and non-athletic roles, including spectators), reported experiencing a range of discriminatory behaviours and sometimes experienced more

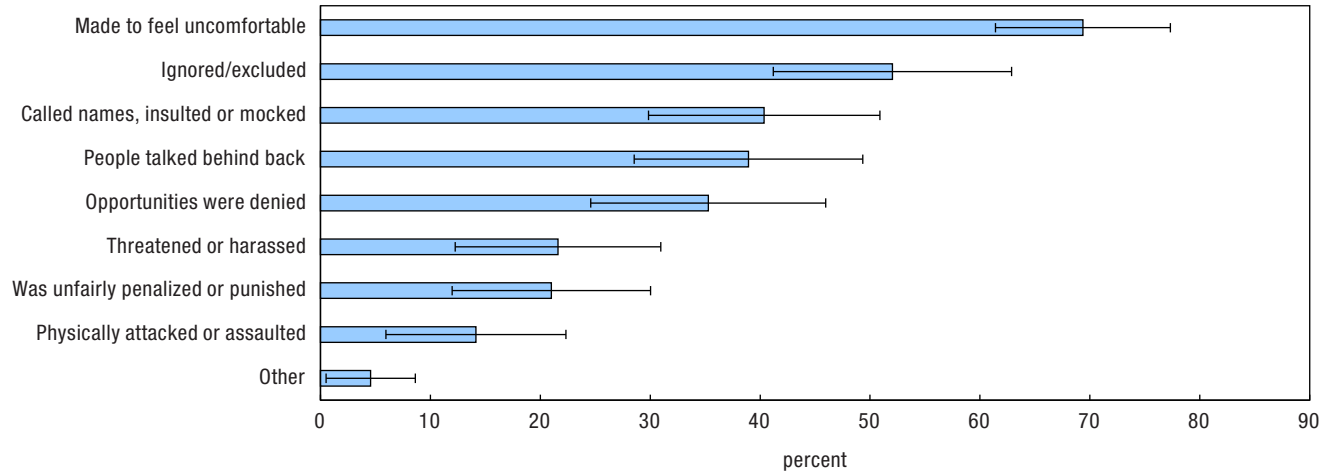
than one type of behaviour.²⁶ Most commonly, victims were made to feel uncomfortable (69%). Acts of greater harm that may meet the threshold of criminal behaviour were also reported, with over one in five (22%) victims reporting being threatened or harassed, and one in seven (14%) reporting being physically attacked or assaulted. Victims could indicate more than one type of discriminatory behaviour (Chart 2).

The motivations for UTRD varied, though those most often cited by victims were based on race or skin colour (54%), ethnicity or culture (37%), physical appearance (34%), sex (22%), or religion (20%). Less than one in five victims reported other motivational factors (Chart 3).

In addition to the types of harm, it is also important to consider the frequency of these incidents, as research has shown that factors

Chart 2

Types of discriminatory behaviour victims reported experiencing in community sports in the previous five years, 2023



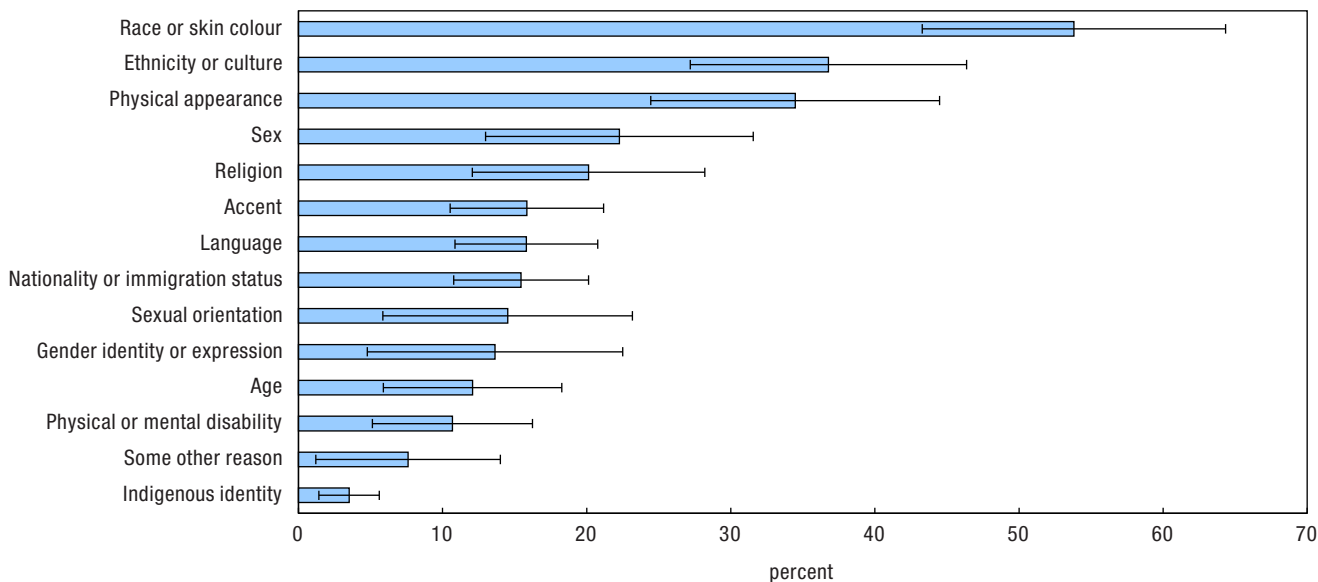
Notes: Error bars represent the 95% confidence intervals and can be interpreted as such: if the survey were repeated many times, then 95% of the time (or 19 times out of 20), the interval would cover the true population value. The study population included those aged 15 years and older who were part of the wider sports community during the previous five years, which included those in athletic and non-athletic roles, including spectators.

Source: Statistics Canada, Survey Series on People and their Communities (Panel 4), 2023.

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Chart 3

Motivations reported by victims for unfair treatment, racism or discrimination committed against them in community sports in the previous five years, 2023



Notes: Error bars represent the 95% confidence intervals and can be interpreted as such: if the survey were repeated many times, then 95% of the time (or 19 times out of 20), the interval would cover the true population value. The study population included those aged 15 years and older who were part of the wider sports community during the previous five years, which included those in athletic and non-athletic roles, including spectators.

Source: Statistics Canada, Survey Series on People and their Communities (Panel 4), 2023.

related to severity, frequency and context play an important role in the short and long-term impact on victims.²⁷ Nearly one-quarter (23%) of victims reported that they experienced consistently recurring incidents of UTRD, and close to 4 in 10 victims reported isolated incidents (37%) or occasionally recurring incidents (44%) (Table 2).

Incidents of UTRD occurred across a broad range of sports environments. The most common locations included playing fields (61%), public community centres (46%), and schools and campuses (32%). A substantial proportion of victims (ranging from 11% to 30%) reported incidents occurring in other locations.

Table 2
Percentage of victims who reported experiencing unfair treatment, racism or discrimination in community sports in the previous five years, by frequency and location, 2023

	Estimated value	95% confidence interval	
		lower bound	upper bound
		percent	
Frequency			
Isolated incident or incidents	37.4	27.8	47.0
Occasionally recurring incidents	43.7	32.6	54.9
Consistently recurring incidents	23.0	12.1	33.9
Location			
Playing fields	60.6	51.1	70.2
Public community centre	45.7	34.5	56.9
Schools and campuses	32.4	22.5	42.3
Public parks	29.5	19.6	39.4
Private sports club or sports centre	22.9	14.7	31.2
Ice rink	16.5	9.0	24.0
Natural parks	11.3	4.8	17.8
Pool	11.0	6.3	15.7

Note: The study population included those aged 15 years and older who were part of the wider sports community during the previous five years, which included those in athletic and non-athletic roles, including spectators.

Source: Statistics Canada, Survey Series on People and their Communities (Panel 4), 2023.

Racism or discrimination among sports participants in athletic roles

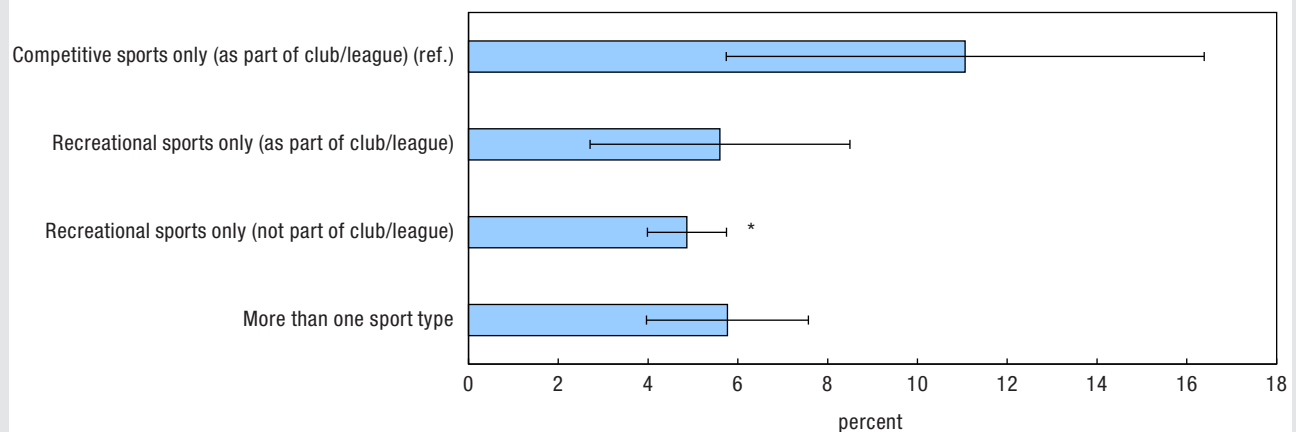
To specifically examine the prevalence of racism or discrimination among those in *athletic roles* (as opposed to among those in the wider sports community, which includes athletes, coaches, spectators, etc.), the following analysis examines a previous panel of the SSPC, collected from May to July 2023.²⁸ The question on this panel was limited to *racism and discrimination* and did not also include reference to *unfair treatment*, as was the case for prevalence rates for the wider sports community.

Among those in athletic roles, 5% of participants reported experiencing racism or discrimination in community sports in the previous five years, with the racialized population (10%) being three times more likely than the non-racialized population (3%) to report experiencing this type of behaviour.

To further examine racism and discrimination across different sports environments, five-year prevalence rates were produced based on the level of sport competition. Prior studies have shown that harm against athletes is more likely to occur in higher level, competitive sports.²⁹ Similarly, according to the SSPC, the prevalence of racism and discrimination among those who participated exclusively in competitive sports was generally higher (11%) than that reported by those who participated exclusively in recreational sports (5-6%)³⁰ (Chart 4). Differences between competitive versus recreational sports in terms of the amount of time spent playing sports and the likelihood of the sport having persons of authority (e.g., coaches) and spectators present may, in part, impact differences in prevalence rates. However, amount of time spent participating in sports and the presence/absence of coaches, spectators and other sports personnel could not be directly measured in the survey.

Chart 4

Experiences of racism and discrimination in community sports in the previous five years, among those who participated in athletic roles in sports in the past 12 months, 2023



* significantly different from reference category (ref.) ($p < 0.05$)

Notes: Error bars represent the 95% confidence intervals and can be interpreted as such: if the survey were repeated many times, then 95% of the time (or 19 times out of 20), the interval would cover the true population value. The study population included those aged 15 years and older who participated in athletic roles in community sports in the previous 12 months.

Source: Statistics Canada, Survey Series on People and their Communities (Panel 2), 2023.

Instigators of unfair treatment, racism or discrimination within the sports community were most often athletes or participants, followed by coaches or instructors, and spectators

Among those in the wider sports community, 6% were victims of UTRD during the previous five years (2018-2013). The SSPC asked victims to indicate the positions that they and the instigator occupied during incidents of UTRD occurring in community sports. Given that more than one incident could have been experienced, it is possible that victims experienced incidents while in different positions and by instigators occupying various positions. Almost two-thirds (64%) of victims reported that they experienced UTRD as athletes or participants, while 42% were victimized as spectators. Fewer

than one in five victims reported experiencing UTRD in other types of positions (Chart 5).

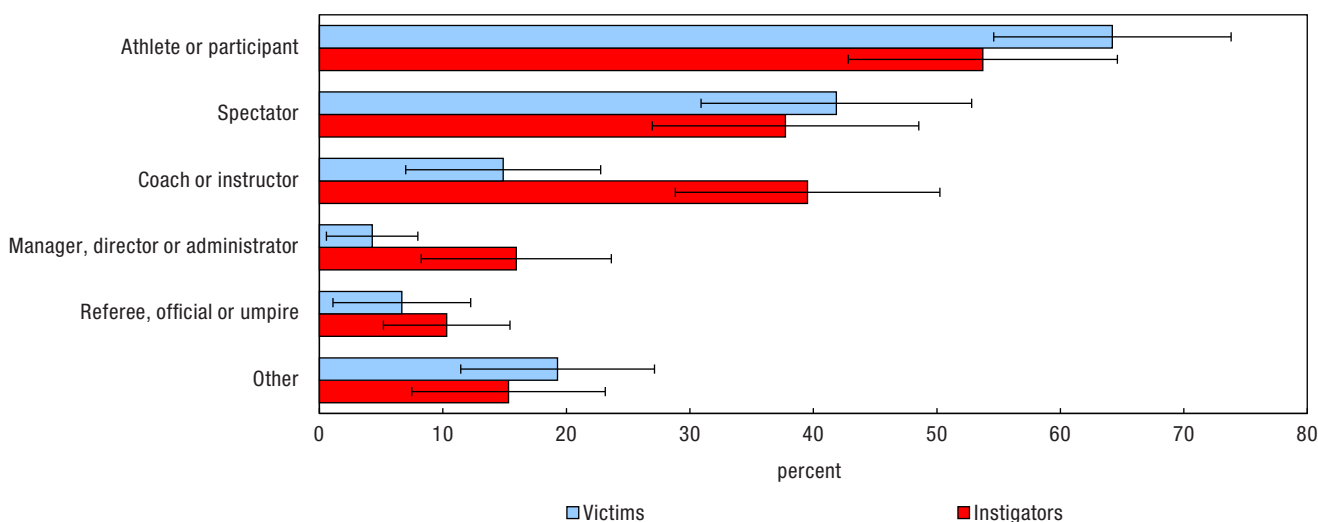
Victims reported that instigators of UTRD were most commonly other athletes or participants (54%), coaches or instructors (40%), or spectators (38%). These results differ somewhat from another recent Canadian study which found coaches to be the most common perpetrator of harm in elite level sports.³¹ It is noteworthy that the study pertained specifically to elite level sports (Olympic and Paralympic) rather than community sports, as was the focus of the current study. The types of harm were also not directly comparable. Furthermore, the study populations differed in that victims in the prior study were athletes whereas the current study included victims from the wider sports community (i.e., athletes/participants, those in non-

athletic roles, and spectators). These factors may account for differences in findings between the two studies, particularly given that coaches and spectators are more likely to be present in competitive and elite levels of play compared to popular forms of community sports, such as recreational and drop-in activities.

One-quarter (24%) of victims of UTRD stated that the incidents were formally reported (e.g., filed a complaint or report with a coach, administrator, referee, organizer, police, or security). Further, one-quarter (24%) of victims indicated that the incidents were informally disclosed (e.g., told a teammate, friends or family member, discussed on social media). Four in ten (40%) stated that the incidents were neither formally nor informally reported or disclosed. Many (23%) were unaware if the incident had been reported or disclosed.³²

Chart 5

Experiences of unfair treatment, racism or discrimination in community sports in the previous five years, by sports position of victims and instigators, 2023



Notes: Error bars represent the 95% confidence intervals and can be interpreted as such: if the survey were repeated many times, then 95% of the time (or 19 times out of 20), the interval would cover the true population value. The study population included those aged 15 years and older who were part of the wider sports community during the previous five years, which included those in athletic and non-athletic roles, including spectators.

Group columns do not total to 100% as victims may have experienced incidents in various positions. Victims may have also experienced incidents perpetrated by individuals of various positions. **Source:** Statistics Canada, Survey Series on People and their Communities (Panel 4), 2023.

Close to one-quarter of sports participants in athletic roles lack confidence in the training of sports personnel to prevent and address incidents of racism and discrimination in community sports

Regardless of whether they experienced racism or discrimination, close to one-quarter of individuals who participated in athletic roles in sports in the previous 12 months (sports participants) lacked confidence in the training of sports personnel to prevent (22%) and address (27%) incidents of racism and discrimination in community sports.³³

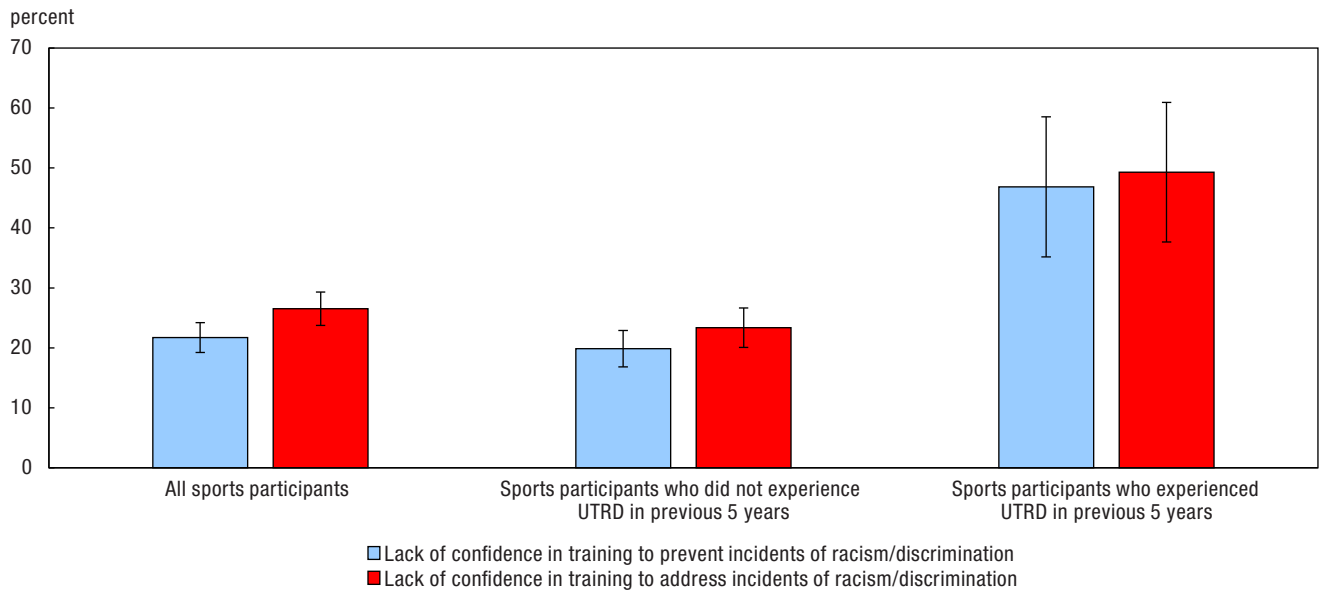
Lack of confidence in this type of training was higher among sports participants who experienced UTRD. Among sports participants who experienced UTRD in the previous five years, nearly half lacked confidence in the training of sports personnel to prevent (47%) and address (49%) such incidents (Chart 6).

Lack of confidence in training to prevent and address UTRD varied by age. Mirroring the higher prevalence of racism and discrimination in community sports among young people, the youngest age cohort (15 to 24 age group) was also most likely to lack confidence in the training of sports personnel to prevent (31%) and address (33%) incidents of racism and discrimination. By comparison,

the proportions of those in age groups 45 to 64 years who lacked confidence in the training of sports personnel to prevent and address incidents were significantly lower. In particular, 16% of individuals aged 45 to 54 lacked confidence in prevention training and 17% lacked confidence in training on addressing racism and discrimination. Similar proportions were seen for those aged 55 to 64 (17%; 21%).

Gender comparison revealed that women who participated in sports were more likely than men to lack confidence in training to prevent incidents (27% versus 18%). However, there were no gender differences with respect to confidence in training to address incidents.

Chart 6
Sports participants in athletic roles who lack confidence in the training of sports personnel to prevent and address incidents of racism and discrimination in community sports, 2023



Notes: Error bars represent the 95% confidence intervals and can be interpreted as such: if the survey were repeated many times, then 95% of the time (or 19 times out of 20), the interval would cover the true population value. The study population included those aged 15 years and older who participated in athletic roles in community sports in the previous 12 months. UTRD refers to unfair treatment, racism or discrimination in community sports.

Source: Statistics Canada, Survey Series on People and their Communities (Panel 4), 2023.

Discontinuation of participation in community sports due to negative experiences among individuals in athletic roles

A previous panel of the SSPC (collected from May to July 2023) examined reasons why participants in *athletic roles* stopped participating in sports. Among those who participated in sports in the previous five years, over one in ten (11%) discontinued due to a negative experience (Table 3).³⁴

Among those who stopped, more than one in five reported that they did not feel included or welcome (21%), and a similar proportion discontinued due to unsportsman-like conduct by other players. Concerns with harm and discrimination were also evident. Over one in 10 of those who discontinued reported being subjected to unfair treatment or discrimination (12%) and bullying or harassment (11%).

Table 3
Reasons given for discontinuing participation in community sports in the previous five years, among individuals in athletic roles who stopped due to a negative experience, 2023

Reasons	Estimated value	95% confidence interval	
		lower bound	upper bound
		percent	
Health or safety concerns	57.4	52.4	62.4
Did not feel included or welcome	21.3	17.0	25.6
Unsportsman-like conduct by other players	20.9	16.6	25.2
Unfair treatment or discrimination	12.3	8.7	15.9
Bullying or harassment	10.9	7.3	14.5
Unfair rules or procedures	5.3	2.8	7.8
Other	13.5	10.0	17.1

Note: The study population included those aged 15 years and older who participated in athletic roles in community sports in the previous five years.

Source: Statistics Canada, Survey Series on People and their Communities (Panel 2), 2023.

Conclusion

According to the SSPC, unfair treatment, racism or discrimination (UTRD) exists within community sports in Canada, with differing prevalence rates depending on demographic and socio-economic characteristics. In 2023, 6% of those in the wider sports community (i.e., those in athletic and non-athletic roles, including spectators) reported experiencing such incidents, though prevalence was higher among the racialized population, persons who identified as having a disability, and people who are 2SLGBTQ+. These disparities remained after controlling for a range of other sociodemographic characteristics in the logistic regression analysis.

Victims of UTRD in community sports reported a range of types of discriminatory behaviour. Notably, over one in five victims of UTRD reported being threatened or harassed, and one in seven reported being physically attacked or assaulted.

Incidents of UTRD were perpetrated by a range of instigators, though most commonly by athletes or participants, followed by coaches, and spectators. Incidents occurred in a broad range of locations but was most common on playing fields, followed by community centres, and schools and campuses. Higher prevalence on playing fields may relate to this location being more likely to host team-based sports

and competitive play. Results from the current study suggest that prevalence of UTRD is higher at competitive levels, in alignment with prior research.

In the current study, over one-quarter of sports participants in athletic roles indicated that they felt racism and discrimination were problems in community sports. Perceptions about the inclusivity and safety of sports environments can impact participation in sports.³⁵ Relatedly, among those who participated in athletic roles within community sports in the previous five years, over one in 10 (11%) indicated that they recently discontinued due to a negative experience (e.g., feeling unwelcomed, discrimination, health and safety reasons, etc.).

Unfair treatment, racism and discrimination in community sports in Canada

The study also found that close to one-quarter of sports participants in athletic roles lack confidence in the training of sports personnel to prevent and address incidents of racism and discrimination in community sports. The proportion was much higher, nearing half, among sports participants who had previously experienced UTRD in community sports.

Sports organizations in Canada and abroad have recently begun developing initiatives to advance

a culture of safe sport.³⁶ For instance, in 2021, the independent Sport Dispute Resolution Centre of Canada³⁷ was mandated to establish an independent safe sport mechanism at the national level. As a result, the Office of the Sport Integrity Commissioner was created and is responsible for implementing the Universal Code of Conduct to Prevent and Address Maltreatment in Sport (UCCMS).³⁸ Accordingly, the rules of the UCCMS are to be

adopted by sports organizations that receive federal funding.³⁹ Future research and monitoring should be pursued to help determine if actions undertaken by sports bodies have meaningful impact on the prevalence of unfair treatment, racism and discrimination in community sports in Canada.

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Data sources, methods and definitions

Data sources

The [Survey Series on People and their Communities](#) (SSPC) is a series of social surveys that began in 2022, which involved creating a panel of people who agreed to complete a series of short surveys. This release used Panel 4 for the majority of the paper, with Panel 2 for some additional contextual analyses that appear in text boxes. These surveys were administered in 2023 and covered topics on sports participation and racism and discrimination in community sports, among other topics. Reference periods for each survey were as follows: November 27, 2023 to December 17, 2023 (Panel 4); May 05, 2023 to July 25, 2023 (Panel 2). Although the same respondents were approached for each panel, cohorts differ between each panel of the SSPC, due to varying response rates.

The SSPC is part of Statistics Canada's Disaggregated Data Action Plan (DDAP), which aims to produce detailed statistical information to highlight the lived experiences of specific population groups, such as women, Indigenous peoples, racialized groups, and people living with disabilities. Using the 2021 Census survey frame, the sample for the SSPC included an oversampling of immigrants, and Canadians self-declaring as being part of racialized groups. This enabled production of more reliable statistics for diverse racialized groups and immigrant populations.

The target population for the SSPC are those aged 15 years and older living in the ten provinces of Canada. Excluded

from the SSPC's coverage are: residents of Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut; full-time residents of institutions (e.g., inmates, patients living in nursing homes); and residents of reserves and other Indigenous settlements. These groups together represent an exclusion of less than 2.5% of the Canadian population aged 15 and over. Since the survey frame is based on the respondents to the 2021 long-form Census, the observed population does not include individuals who immigrated to Canada after the census reference date on May 11, 2021.

The survey series target sample consisted of a total of 70,000 individuals, with response rates of 13.1% for Panel 4 (8,955 individuals) and 33.8% for Panel 2 (23,387 individuals). Survey weighting procedures were undertaken, including non-response adjustment and calibration, to align the sample with the target population. More information on SSPC sampling procedures can be found here: [Surveys and statistical programs - Survey Series on People and their Communities](#).

Respondents were contacted through mail, email, or telephone for their first survey of the SSPC, and through email or telephone for subsequent surveys in the series. Data were collected directly from survey respondents either through an electronic questionnaire (EQ) or through computer assisted telephone interviewing (CATI).

Methods

All estimates were produced using survey weights, which addresses non-response bias and makes the results representative of the Canadian population. The sampling variance was calculated by using bootstrap weights. Logistic regression analyses were conducted to model risk of experiencing UTRD.

Different populations were used in the study, depending on the outcome examined and phrasing of the panel question:

- Individuals from Panel 4 who participated in athletic roles within community sports in the previous 12 months (referred to as *sports participants*) comprised the cohort for outcomes pertaining to perceptions about racism and discrimination being problems in community sports, and level of confidence in sports personnel to prevent and address racism and discrimination in sport.
- Individuals from Panel 4 who were a part of the wider sports community in the previous five years, which included those in athletic and non-athletic roles, as well as spectators (referred to as those in the *sports community*) comprised the cohort used for outcomes pertaining to experiences of unfair treatment, racism or discrimination in community sports in the previous five years.
- Individuals from Panel 2 who participated in athletic roles within community sports in the previous five years comprised the cohort used for the analysis on prevalence of racism and discrimination specific to the athletic sports population (see [Text Box 1](#)), and prevalence of discontinuing participation in sports due to a negative experience (see [Text Box 2](#)).
- Individuals from Panel 2 who participated in athletic roles within community sports in the previous 12 months comprised the cohort used for the analysis on prevalence of racism and discrimination by competitive sports level (see [Text Box 1](#)).

Limitations

Panel 4 of the SSPC did not allow for disaggregation of outcomes related to experiences of unfair treatment, racism, or discrimination (UTRD) in community sports by type of sport participant (e.g., athlete versus coach). Rather, estimates pertained to the wider sports community, including those in athletic and non-athletic roles, as well as spectators. To overcome this limitation, Panel 2 data was also used for contextual analysis, which enabled prevalence of experiences of racism or discrimination to be produced specifically for those in athletic roles (see [Text Box 1](#)). Caution should be used if comparing prevalence rates between those in athletic roles (Panel 2) and those in the wider sports community (Panel 4) due to differences in the survey questions. The former asked about experiences of *racism or discrimination* whereas the latter survey had broader scope, which included experiences of *unfair treatment, racism, or discrimination*.

Response rates to each of the surveys were also somewhat low, particularly for Panel 4. Therefore, caution should be exercised when interpreting the results.

Definitions

Canadians refers to all people living in Canada, regardless of citizenship status.

Community sports are organized sports activities that include community and school sports leagues, competitive club sports, recreational sports, and drop-in sports. Community sports can be organized and offered by neighbourhoods, townships and municipalities, by local organizations or by volunteers.

Sports participants refers to individuals who participated in athletic roles in community sports in the previous 12 months. It does not include those who participated in community sports *exclusively* in non-athletic roles.

Sports community refers to individuals who participated in community sports (i.e., athletes, players) and those involved in non-athletic roles, such as coaches, referees, volunteers, managers, administrators, as well as spectators, within the previous five years.

Sports personnel refers to coaches or instructors, referees or officials, managers, administrators and volunteers in community sports.

Women+: This category includes women (and/or girls), as well as some non-binary persons.

Men+: This category includes men (and/or boys), as well as some non-binary persons.

Racialized population: The concept of “racialized population” or “racialized group” is derived directly from the concept of “visible minority” in the 2021 Census. The Employment Equity Act defines visible minorities as “persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour.” It consists mainly of the following groups: South Asian, Chinese, Black, Filipino, Latin American, Arab, Southeast Asian, West Asian, Korean and Japanese. Indigenous people are not included among the racialized population in the current analysis. Estimates specific to Indigenous groups were not reportable due to small sample sizes.

2SLGBTQ+ refers to people who are Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer, or who uses other terms related to gender and sexual diversity.

Immigrant refers to a person who is, or who has ever been, a landed immigrant or permanent resident. Such a person has been granted the right to live in Canada permanently by immigration authorities. Immigrants who have obtained Canadian citizenship by naturalization are included in this group.

Recent Immigrants: Immigrants who first obtained a landed immigrant or permanent resident status between years 2016 and 2021.

Established Immigrants: Immigrants who first obtained a landed immigrant or permanent resident status prior to 2016.

Notes

- E Use with caution
1. See Gurgis and Kerr, 2021.
 2. In this article, the concept of “racialized population” or “racialized group” is derived directly from the concept of “visible minority” in the 2021 Census. The Employment Equity Act defines visible minorities as “persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour.” It consists mainly of the following groups: South Asian, Chinese, Black, Filipino, Latin American, Arab, Southeast Asian, West Asian, Korean and Japanese. Indigenous people are not included among the racialized population in the current analysis. Estimates specific to Indigenous groups were not reportable due to small sample sizes.
 3. The Government of Canada adopted the use of 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 or sexual diversity. Statistics Canada uses the acronym 2SLGBTQ+ for data analysis purposes as information is not yet specifically collected about intersex people in surveys.
 4. The percentage of Canadians who participated in community sports reported here differs slightly from that in a previous Statistics Canada publication (see Statistics Canada, 2023). The difference stems from use of different SSPC survey panels. The estimate in the prior publication is based on data from Panel 2, whereas the estimate used in the current study is based on data from Panel 4.
 5. See Oja et al., 2024; Eather et al., 2023.
 6. See Gurgis and Kerr, 2021.
 7. See Joseph et al., 2021, Brown et al. 2021; Gurgis et al., 2022; Joseph, 2020.
 8. See Joseph et al., 2021.
 9. See Willson et al., 2022.
 10. In the United States, according to the 2020 Athlete Culture and Climate Survey, nearly half of current and former U.S. Olympic and Paralympic athletes reported experiencing some form of discrimination during involvement with their governing body. Prevalence of discrimination was higher among racialized and gender diverse athletes, as well as among those who previously played in varsity sports (see U.S. Center for SafeSport, 2021). A prevalence study based in Europe, where adults were asked to report on childhood and youth experiences in sport, found that nearly 4 in 10 had experienced psychological violence, and more than one in 10 had experienced physical or sexual violence. Prevalence of violence was higher among ethnic minorities, persons with a disability, lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals, and among those who competed at higher levels (see Vertommen et al., 2016).
 11. Community sports are organized sports activities that include community and school sports leagues, competitive club sports, recreational sports, and drop-in sports. Community sports can be organized and offered by neighbourhoods, townships and municipalities, by local organizations or by volunteers.
 12. Sports participants refers to individuals who participated in athletic roles in community sports in the previous 12 months. It does not include those who participated in community sports exclusively in non-athletic roles.
 13. Sports community refers to individuals who participated in community sports (i.e., athletes, players) and those involved in non-athletic roles, such as coaches, referees, volunteers, managers, administrators, as well as spectators, within the previous five years.
 14. Sports personnel refers to coaches or instructors, referees or officials, managers, administrators and volunteers in community sports.
 15. See Hylton et al., 2015.
 16. This category includes women (and/or girls), as well as some non-binary persons.
 17. This category includes men (and/or boys), as well as some non-binary persons.
 18. See Hyman et al., 2019; Cotter, 2022.
 19. See Willson et al., 2022 and U.S. Center for SafeSport, 2021. Willson et al.’s study on maltreatment among Canadian Olympian and Paralympians found that racialized athletes were more likely to experience physical harm and Indigenous athletes were more likely to experience psychological harm than their non-racialized and non-Indigenous counterparts. Likewise, the 2020 Athlete Culture and Climate Survey found that the prevalence of discrimination among U.S. Olympic and Paralympic athletes was higher among racialized athletes.
 20. See Vertommen et al., 2016.
 21. See Willson et al., 2022.
 22. Parasports refers to sports played by persons who have a disability.
 23. See Vertommen et al., 2016 and Willson et al., 2022.

24. These results differ from that of prior studies which investigated everyday discrimination using pooled data from the Canadian Social Survey (2021-2024) and the 2013 Canadian Community Health Survey. These prior studies found a consistent negative trend, whereby experiences of discrimination decreased with increasing age. See Statistics Canada, 2024 and Hyman et al., 2019.
25. Results on participation in competitive level sports is taken from Panel 2 of the SSPC. Panel 2 data was used to provide additional findings for context (see Text Box 1 and Text Box 2). The remaining results are from Panel 4 of the SSPC. See the Methods section for further details on the surveys and subpopulations used in the analyses.
26. Victims refers to those within the wider sports community, which includes those in athletic and non-athletic roles, as well as spectators, who experienced UTRD in community sports in the previous five years.
27. See Perron et al., 2008.
28. Data from Panel 4 of the SSPC was used to produce results for this article, with exception to results reported in the two text boxes. A limitation of Panel 4 was that the prevalence rate of UTRD could only be produced for those in the wider sport community, which included a range of groups, such as athletes, coaches, referees, as well as spectators. Therefore, to produce a prevalence rate on experiences of discrimination specific to those in *athletic roles*, data from Panel 2 of the SSPC was required. It is important to note that the question used on Panel 2 differed from the one on Panel 4. On Panel 2, individuals were asked whether they had experienced *racism or discrimination*, whereas on Panel 4, the question was broadened to include *unfair treatment, racism, or discrimination*. This discrepancy should be attended to when interpreting results and in any comparisons made between Panel 2 and Panel 4 findings.
29. See U.S. Center for SafeSport, 2021 and Willson et al., 2022.
30. Those who participated exclusively in competitive sports were significantly more likely to experience racism or discrimination in sports compared to those who participated exclusively in recreational sports that were not part of a club or league (at the 0.05 level). Differences between those in competitive sports and those in club or league-based recreational sports were significant at a higher alpha level (0.10) as the p value was 0.07. Note that the survey question used to determine sports participation level pertained to the previous 12 months, whereas the question on racism and discrimination pertained to the previous five years. Despite the non-overlapping time periods, assuming that there is a correlation in the sports level one participated in during the past 12 months and that of the prior five years, this analysis is suggestive that racism and discrimination is more prevalent at competitive levels of play.
31. See Willson et al., 2022.
32. The sum of percentages pertaining to response options regarding reporting of incidents can exceed 100%, as it is possible for respondents to select multiple response options. For instance, it is possible that a victim experienced multiple incidents of which some were reported and others not.
33. Questions pertaining to confidence in sports personnel to prevent and address racism and discrimination in community sports were asked in a broader or general way, rather than specific to the sports individuals directly participated in, as follows: “how confident are you that coaches or instructors, referees or officials, managers, administrators and volunteers in community sports have been properly trained to do the following?”
34. Data from SSPC Panel 2 (rather than Panel 4) was leveraged to produce results presented in this text box.
35. See Hylton et al., 2015.
36. See Gurgis and Kerr, 2021.
37. More on the Sport Dispute Resolution Centre of Canada can be found here: <https://www.crdsd-sdrcc.ca/eng/about>
38. See Office of the Sport Integrity Commissioner website: <https://sportintegritycommissioner.ca/about>
39. See the Universal Code of Conduct to Prevent and Address Maltreatment in Sport here: [UCCMS-v6.0-20220531.pdf](https://www.sportintegritycommissioner.ca/eng/about)

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