



Landmark Racial Profiling Study

By

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As a co-author of the Traffic Stop Race Data Collection Project (TSRDCP) for the city of Ottawa, along with Dr. Les Jacobs and Dr. Bobby Siu, I want to correct one falsehood that has been circulating from the point of the study's public release. This racial profiling study was *not* conducted under the supervision of the Ottawa police.

It would be hard to imagine any police service actually sanctioning the release of the deeply troubling statistics revealed in this study. Yet, immediately upon its release questions were raised regarding the independence of the analysis.

The African Canadian Legal Clinic (ACLC), for instance, officially declared: "We at the clinic did not have any say with regard to consultants to conduct the study, as such; we do not believe the study is credible." As someone who has admired the strong leadership and focused policy skills of the ACLC over many years, I find this new sclerotic mind-set very disappointing.

The suggestion that the police are studying themselves here, as it were, has the effect of turning racialized communities away from thinking carefully about the troubling statistics, and allowing apologists for 'bad policing' and 'biased policing' to control the narrative that is unfolding in the public arena.

The fact is the TSRDCP study represents the largest and most comprehensive undertaking of race-based data collection in Canadian policing history. A total of 81,902 records of traffic stops were examined. Each record included complete information on race, sex and age, along with complete information on police districts, reasons for traffic stops and outcomes.

Police officers were required to collect the disaggregated race data for a two-year period from June 2013 to June 2015, as part of a settlement agreement between the Ottawa Police Services Board (OPSB) and the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC). The settlement agreement resulted from a human rights complaint filed by

Chad Aiken, an 18-year old African Canadian youth, alleging racial profiling by Ottawa police at a traffic stop driving his mother's Mercedes Benz. The Ottawa Police Service (OPS) has continued to collect the data beyond the 2 years required by the settlement.

As reported by Tom Godfrey in *Share* (02.11.16), the TSRDCP study found that Middle Easterner and Black groups, irrespective of their sex and age, are the two race groups with disproportionately high incidences of traffic stops.

Middle Easterner Drivers were stopped 10066 times, which constituted about 12.3% of the total stops over the two year period. However, these drivers represent less than 4% of the total driving population in Ottawa. This means that Middle Easterner Drivers were stopped 3.3 times more than what you would expect based on their population.

Black Drivers were stopped 7238 times, which constituted about 8.8% of the total stops over the two-year period. However, these drivers represent less than 4% of the total driving population in Ottawa. This means that Black Drivers were stopped 2.3 times more than what you would expect based on their population.

The disaggregated race data in the study is strong prima facie evidence of problematic police-minority relations; and supports the call for the Ottawa Police Service to closely examine their policies and practices, and take action to address and prevent racial discrimination.

As the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) noted, "the significant disproportion in traffic stops is consistent with racial profiling and sends a strong message that work against racial discrimination must now translate into action and accountability." (http://ohrc.on.ca/en/news_centre/report-race-based-data-traffic-stops-ottawa-police-service-must-lead-action).

Racialized communities cannot rely on one set of data or one study to solve the riddle of racial profiling. The nature of proof in social research requires building a body of knowledge through the replication of study findings and observation, and the triangulation of different study methods around the social problem.

On the other hand, with the TSRDCP study what we now have is considerable and reliable evidence that can finally serve as a foundation for rational discussion and development of defensible strategies to eliminate profiling and discrimination in the relationship between police and people of colour in Canadian cities.

Going forward the challenge for racialized communities is to effectively utilize this long-awaited concrete evidence to begin to initiate positive and sustained social change.