

A photograph of two women in professional attire. One woman on the left wears large, round, light-brown glasses and a white button-down shirt. The woman on the right has curly hair and wears a yellow button-down shirt. They are both looking down at a tablet device held by the woman in yellow. A white text box is overlaid on the image, containing the title.

Building Anti-Racist and Trauma-Informed Organizations



About this Evidence Review

This evidence review was developed as part of the *Building Anti-Racism & Trauma-Informed Practices* project.

While trauma-informed practices have become more widely used across social services, the recognition of intersecting trauma and the integration of anti-racism remains a gap within services and across organizations. Trauma from gender-based violence, community violence, and racism are compounded, and discrimination and fear of discrimination can be a barrier to accessing services and impact service delivery/ engagement.

The project aims to enhance the capacity of organizations to respond to the needs of racialized women survivors of gender-based violence and staff by offering culturally safe environments and services.

About WomanACT

Woman Abuse Council of Toronto (WomanACT) WomanACT advocates for a world where all women and gender-diverse people live free from violence and have economic security. We work collaboratively to eradicate gender-based violence through research, education, and advocacy.

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Introduction

The gender-based violence (GBV) and trauma-informed approach are recognized by anti-violence/violence against women (VAW) organizations as crucial to creating environments that prevent re-traumatization and are safe for all.¹ In the last decade or so, there has been a growing acknowledgement that to be a trauma-informed VAW organization or service means also to be anti-racist and anti-oppressive.² The safety and well-being of staff in VAW organizations impact organizational cultures and the experience of the survivors they are supporting.³ VAW organizations that are safe, inclusive spaces for diverse staff and clients must actively work to integrate anti-racist and trauma-informed principles in their values, structures, policies, and approaches. To do this meaningfully means understanding the roots of racism, especially at the systemic level, and identifying and modifying organizational practices that may reinforce racist aims.

Organizations should maintain awareness of the links between racism and trauma, especially for Indigenous, Black, and Racialized women, and work towards organizational cultures and practices

that promote gender equity and are anti-racist and trauma-informed. Any organization's policies, practices, and structures are an expression of its values. This is especially true for providers offering services to those who have experienced GBV. Board members, directors, staff, and volunteers must be well informed of the links between racism and trauma and take steps to provide everyone involved in service provision with the information and training that they need not only to deliver equitable and responsive services but to address issues of systemic racism within their organization.

This requires people to be supported and empowered to report incidents of racism or gender-based violence and that protocols and procedures are in place for them to do so. It also requires investments in training and resources that promote anti-racist and trauma-informed approaches throughout an organization. A good place to start is by identifying and changing organizational policies, practices, and cultures that adversely affect Indigenous, Black, and Racialized employees, especially women.

Purpose of this Evidence Review

This evidence review aims to inform anti-violence/VAW organizational change processes that advance anti-racism and trauma responsiveness to improve the experiences of racialized employees in the workplace. However, the insights from this review are applicable and valuable to government, private, and public community organizations across the systems.

The review focuses on building organizational capacity by sharing an overview of research on trauma-informed organizational change and anti-racism.

This review covers:

- How racism manifests and its impacts on organizations
- The principles of trauma-informed and anti-racist organizational change
- Strategies and practices to support trauma-informed organizational change with the implementation of anti-racist practices



Limitations

This evidence review offers research-based insights and recommendations. However, some limitations should be noted. First, the language used to talk about Racialized groups is constantly developing and specific to the local circumstances and histories of many individuals and communities. When possible, this review uses the phrase *Indigenous, Black, and Racialized* in addition to simply *Racialized* to refer to people and communities of colour, each of which has intersecting and ongoing relationships with racism and colonization and their own histories of activism in the anti-racist and anti-colonial movements. This review presents disaggregated data about individual communities' experiences when available, though this is often limited. In the research used to inform this piece, the word "racialized" is often used and typically encompasses the experiences of all people of colour. We recognize that this can be problematic in certain instances and advocate for research and data frameworks that more accurately express the diverse, varied, and intersecting experiences of diverse people groups.

Second, this report also included sources from the United States and the United Kingdom, and its findings may not be directly generalizable to a Canadian context. Additionally, many anti-racist and trauma-informed organizational change models have not undergone rigorous evaluation. The frameworks presented here should be treated as educational case examples rather than definitive solutions.

It is recommended that service providers engage with local Indigenous, Black, and Racialized populations to tailor their approach to specific community needs, reflect the language preferred by the community, and, as far as possible, seek out research specific to the people being served. This localized, collaborative effort is essential to creating meaningful and sustainable organizational change.

Lastly, a person's race intersects with additional identities, including gender, to impact a person's experience in a given environment. This review focuses on building an understanding between trauma and race and the impact it has on the experiences of racialized people in the workplace. A companion review, [Race and Gender in the Workplace](#), provides an overview of the structural and individual dimensions of gender and racial discrimination and how the intersection impacts the opportunities and experiences of Indigenous, Black, and Racialized women in Canadian workplaces. Additionally, it spotlights the intersection of gender-based violence in the workplace.

Why do organizations need to be trauma-informed and anti-racist?

Canada is a country rooted in settler colonialism. The purpose of settler colonialism is the theft of Indigenous land and resources, often through violent means, resulting in the marginalization and oppression of Indigenous people, whose cultural practices, social structures, and rights as sovereign nations are undermined.⁴ Settler colonialism is ongoing, continuously reinforcing these power dynamics and inequities today.

Colonialism is justified and perpetuated through racist ideologies that dehumanize and marginalize Racialized people.⁵ These racist ideologies are embedded in social, political, and economic systems, leading to lasting inequities and oppression. The intergenerational effects of this systemic racism continue to undermine the well-being and rights of Indigenous, Black, and other Racialized communities, perpetuating cycles of disadvantage and trauma.⁶ Colonialism and racism are mutually reinforcing.

The link between racism and trauma is apparent. Research has shown that the psychological effects of prolonged and frequent encounters with racism can resemble post-traumatic stress disorder and include depression⁷, anger⁸, and physiological symptoms.⁹ As a social determinant of health, racism significantly influences the well-being and quality of life of Indigenous, Black, and Racialized individuals beginning in early childhood.¹⁰

Service providers, corporations, and all levels of government are called upon to develop and implement practices that promote the rights, dignity, and safety of their clients, employees, and constituents. This must include addressing the ways that structural racism influences workplace and organizational culture.



For service providers and client-facing organizations, anti-racism and trauma informed work begins at the level of organizational structure and management.



Defining Racism

Racism is a socially constructed concept that, as the Ontario Human Rights Code explains, asserts that one racial group is superior to another. Racism is “any distinction, conduct, or action, whether intentional or not, but based on a person’s race, which has the effect of imposing burdens on an individual group, not imposed upon others or which withhold or limits access to benefits available to other members of society.”¹¹

Racism is any individual action or institutional practice which treats people differently because of their colour or ethnicity. This distinction is often used to justify discrimination.¹²

Structural racism refers to the process of embedding racial biases and ideologies through history, culture, and institutions, normalizing racism into the fabric of social structures, and systematically disenfranchising and marginalizing Racialized individuals and communities.¹³

Individual racism refers to racial prejudices towards others. The prejudices shape individual behaviour and are expressed through words and actions that, directly or indirectly, target Racialized individuals.¹⁴

Institutional racism refers to institutional norms, values, and principles that systemically reproduce the differential treatment of Racialized groups. Institutional racism helps to maintain power structures that favour dominant social groups, such as cisgender White Canadian males.¹⁵

Internalized racism refers to the acceptance of racial bias and negative stereotypes among Racialized individuals and communities due to persistent racial discrimination and messaging from dominant social groups.¹⁶

Systemic racism is the interlocking relationship between racism at the individual (including interpersonal and intrapersonal expression), institutional, and structural levels. Each level functions to mutually reinforce racism.



The Impact of Racism in Organizations

Job advancement and opportunities for capacity building

Employees experience racial trauma and harm in the workplace in several ways. Some of the most cited experiences are associated with opportunities for job advancement, such as not being offered a promotion or raise due to race or ethnicity. A survey conducted by York University in 2021 found that 47% of Black Canadians, 24% of Indigenous people, and 26% of other people of colour reported unfair treatment by their employers in pay, promotion, or hiring activities over a 12-month period.¹⁷ In comparison, only 16% of White Canadians reported unfair employer treatment.

Racial discrimination also occurs in the labour market. Although Racialized Canadians are more likely to be active in the labour force than non-Racialized Canadians, Racialized individuals have a higher unemployment rate (9.2%) than non-Racialized Canadians

(7.3%)¹⁸ suggesting that Racialized people have more difficulty finding and keeping jobs despite being more active in the labour force. Indigenous, Black, and Racialized jobseekers may face discrimination even before they enter their place of work.

A lack of career advancement and choice has costly impacts on Indigenous, Black, and Racialized individuals across generations. On average, Racialized workers make \$12,500 less than non-Racialized workers.¹⁹ In particular, Black immigrants earn a much lower annual income of \$37,000 compared to \$50,000 for non-Racialized immigrants.²⁰ Even after residing in Canada for three or more generations, Black Canadians have an average income of \$32,000, compared to \$48,000 for non-Racialized Canadians.²¹ Income inequality, therefore, becomes intergenerational for Black Canadians and other Racialized workers in

Canada and adds another dimension to racial trauma.

Racial discrimination in the workplace is gendered as well as Racialized. Racialized women have the highest unemployment rate of 9.6%.²² They also experience the steepest gender pay gap, earning 59 cents for every dollar a White Canadian male earns.* Racialized women are also more likely to work part-time and less likely to receive performance-based pay (e.g., commission or bonuses), deepening the gendered and Racialized pay gap.²³

WomanACT's community-based research into the intersections of employment and intimate partner violence of Racialized women found that 51% of survivors experienced racism during the job application and hiring process.²⁴ Nearly half of the respondents (49%) also reported that workplace discrimination worsened their trauma symptoms from the abusive relationship. Our research demonstrates that racial trauma often interacts with and compounds trauma from other lived experiences, such as gender-based violence.

* According to the Ontario government's Pay Equity Office, Arab (58%) and West Asian (59%) women have the highest gender pay gap, with Black women earning 44% less and Indigenous women earning 24% less.

Microaggressions

Microaggressions are defined as everyday insults or messages, including nonverbal exchanges, that are directed at Indigenous, Black and Racialized people.²⁵ Microaggressions in the workplace include demeaning comments that invalidate or exclude Racialized people's experiences, feelings, or thoughts.²⁶ Sometimes, the aggressor may not be aware that what they are saying is harmful. For example, a Black or Asian employee might be met with surprise by peers upon realizing they are a person of colour. Some examples include comments like "You don't sound Black" or "Oh wow! You're the CEO?" In other cases, co-workers or supervisors may make statements that imply that Racialized employees are less competent or skilled, such as "You only got this job because of affirmative action" or "I don't want to talk to you. I want to talk to your boss." Racial microaggressions are also internalized; Racialized employees share that they often

feel like they need to work harder than their non-Racialized peers and that their peers heavily scrutinize their work.²⁷

In Canada, microaggressions are widespread in the workplace. In 2022, 7 in 10 (72%) Black Canadians reported experiencing some form of racism or microaggression at work.²⁸ Researchers argue that a lack of strong social norms around addressing racist behaviour and microaggressions creates an environment where microaggressions are permitted.²⁹ For example, co-workers who witness a microaggression may not be sure if their peers also perceive it as a microaggression. They are, therefore, less likely to speak out and hold the aggressor accountable. A shared understanding of racism, racist behaviour, racial microaggressions, and how to respond to them in the workplace can raise awareness and promote a change in behaviour and thinking.³⁰

Macroaggressions

Macroaggressions are defined as obvious, overt, organizational, and institutional racial offenses and abuse articulated in policies, practices, images and structures of organizations and systems.³¹ Macroaggressions create the climate and conditions that sustain inequity through every organizational structure or system iteration. For example, the lack of diverse representation amongst senior leadership in an organization is a result of a series of organizational practices and structures which disproportionately discriminate against Indigenous, Black, and Racialized employees. The report "The State of Black Women in Corporate America"³² illustrates that the lack of representation of Black women in senior leadership is caused by insufficient support and encouragement from their managers (e.g., not facilitating work-life balance or not giving

Black women opportunities to lead projects and teams). This is compounded by structural dynamics that reduce their chances to interact with senior leaders. Due to these unequal organizational structures, Black women have fewer opportunities to showcase their skills and expertise, influence organizational strategic decision-making and planning, and be considered for promotion.

Macroaggressions can also occur at the interpersonal level. Overt behaviours like physical violence, name-calling, and messaging that are clearly targeted toward a person or group because of their race or ethnicity qualify as macroaggressions.³³ Macroaggressions at the organizational or interpersonal level contribute to creating an environment that enables racism to flourish.³⁴

Intergenerational Trauma

Indigenous, Black, and Racialized communities in Canada experience intergenerational racial trauma. The displacements of Indigenous populations onto reserves and of Black populations through the Transatlantic Slave Trade are aspects of colonial violence and oppression that have disconnected Racialized and Indigenous people from their lands, resources, and cultures. The impacts of this trauma have had far-reaching effects through many generations.³⁵

Intergenerational trauma significantly impacts the health, education, and employment outcomes of Racialized communities in Canada. Indigenous, Black, and Racialized

communities have often been systematically excluded from positions of power and authority, limited in employment options, and restricted in educational choice and attainment.³⁶ Institutional racism is embedded in Canadian systems and reinforced through the overlapping of these systems. For example, the Canadian education system has long failed to include Indigenous perspectives, continuing to uphold settler colonial narratives about Canadian history, in particular. This can result in self-doubt and underachievement that carries over into the workforce and reduces career stability, advancement, and retention.³⁷

Vicarious Trauma

For Racialized professionals and practitioners in client-facing organizations, such as healthcare or social services, racial trauma can be exacerbated by witnessing racism. This can occur through repeated exposure to client experiences of racial harm and oppression. It can also occur in response to witnessing large-scale social events related to historical or cultural trauma,³⁸ such as police violence. These situations expose Indigenous, Black and Racialized employees to secondary trauma and add to the chronic stress, psychological distress, and other poor health outcomes linked with racial trauma.³⁹ Working in private or public systems like healthcare, child protection, criminal justice, or education—which continue to be informed by colonial expectations—can also

be difficult for Racialized practitioners who become involved in systems that contribute to the marginalization of Racialized peoples.⁴⁰ Vicarious trauma can, therefore, be another source of racial trauma. These can add to the chronic stress, burn-out, and compassion fatigue faced by Indigenous, Black, and Racialized professionals and practitioners.⁴¹ Compassion fatigue is the emotional and physical exhaustion that can occur from the chronic demands of caring for others, particularly when witnessing or being exposed to their trauma, leading to a reduced capacity for empathy and care over time.⁴² This cumulative impact underscores the need for systemic changes and supportive measures to mitigate these adverse effects on Racialized professionals.



What can organizations do?

Organizations can prioritize systems-level change and development processes to address racism in the work environment and to support staff experiencing trauma. Companies can adopt organization-wide approaches to build a culture that protects all employees, especially Indigenous, Black, and Racialized people. Organizations that address racism and respond to trauma in their service delivery must integrate these approaches into their organization's culture and structure. These organizational change and development approaches apply to government, private, public, and community sectors and services.

Trauma-Informed Organizational Change & Anti-Racism Principles



The notion of “universal trauma” presumes that those who come into contact with organizations have histories of trauma that can be triggered by their daily experiences, including at work.⁴³ Compelling research demonstrates that organizations that do not work to prevent retraumatization increase the chances of employee burnout and compassion fatigue.⁴⁴

Trauma-informed organizational change (TIOC) models encourage an organization to identify risks for retraumatization and implement precautions to reduce risks. Organizational change occurs by embedding trauma-informed principles into various organizational domains, including Human Resources (HR) policies and practices, organizational processes, the physical environment, and services.

One critique of TIOC models is that they are based on the European medical concept of trauma as an individual experience rather than a whole-of-community experience.⁴⁵ Organizations are acknowledging that Racialized individuals and communities need the racist foundations of systems and structures to change for collective healing

and transformation to happen. If racial justice is not centred on trauma-informed organizational change, organizations risk perpetuating structures and systems that continue to privilege White people and marginalize Racialized individuals and communities.⁴⁶

Trauma-informed approaches emphasize the reduction of retraumatization. Anti-racist approaches facilitate the “metabolization” and “mitigation” of racial trauma and harm to restore a sense of wholeness for Indigenous, Black, and other Racialized individuals and communities.⁴⁷ This requires top-to-bottom organizational change that removes systemic barriers and amplifies the expertise of Indigenous, Black, and Racialized employees. Organizations must acknowledge their complicity in retraumatizing Racialized individuals and communities, including employees. An emphasis on liberation, community healing, hope, and action facilitates organizations’ intentional design and strategic development.⁴⁸ This allows them to support the healing of Racialized individuals and communities and also to be responsive to trauma needs.

Key principles for incorporating an anti-racist approach to trauma-informed organizational change

Radical Healing

The notion of radical healing emphasizes collectivism, critical consciousness, cultural authenticity, radical hope, and restorative self-care.⁴⁹ Organizations that implement radical healing into their approach to trauma-informed organizational change recognize the resilience and strength of Indigenous, Black, and Racialized individuals and communities. The goal is to thrive rather than merely to cope.

The focus on collectivism reminds organizations that change is not a static goal but a collective process requiring sustained commitment across all system levels. It also urges organizations to adopt strategies that are continuously negotiated by all organizational members and implemented collaboratively.

Radical healing can be described as “spirit work.”⁵⁰ It highlights the profoundly transformative experience anti-racist practices can have for Indigenous, Black, and Racialized individuals and communities when they are thoughtfully, collaboratively, and diligently implemented.

Cultural humility

Cultural humility highlights the importance of cultural competence at the service delivery level and critical consciousness at the organizational level.⁵¹ Critical consciousness means applying a critical lens to the power arrangements and identity-making processes and practices in an organization.⁵² This critical lens investigates how White identities dominate organizational structure and culture while Racialized identities are marginalized. Developing and incorporating critical consciousness at an organizational level is needed to advance the dismantling or changing of power structures.

Racial Justice

Centring racial justice in trauma-informed organizational change is about politicizing organizational change and humanizing Indigenous, Black, and Racialized staff and communities. Organizational change is politicized by addressing the institutionalization of White supremacy and racial bias as the root cause of racial trauma and oppression. This means identifying how White supremacy is institutionalized through organizational policies and processes.⁵³ At the same time, it is also about humanizing Racialized staff by acknowledging that they are more than their trauma. This strengths-based approach positions Racialized individuals and communities as leaders in articulating an anti-racist organizational vision and culture. They are leaders in outlining the organizational policies and practices needed to advance such a vision. Additionally, the approach acknowledges that collective healing occurs in connection to culture and community.⁵⁴ Organizations can promote and incorporate opportunities for culturally specific healing to restore a sense of wholistic and healthy racial identity.

Power

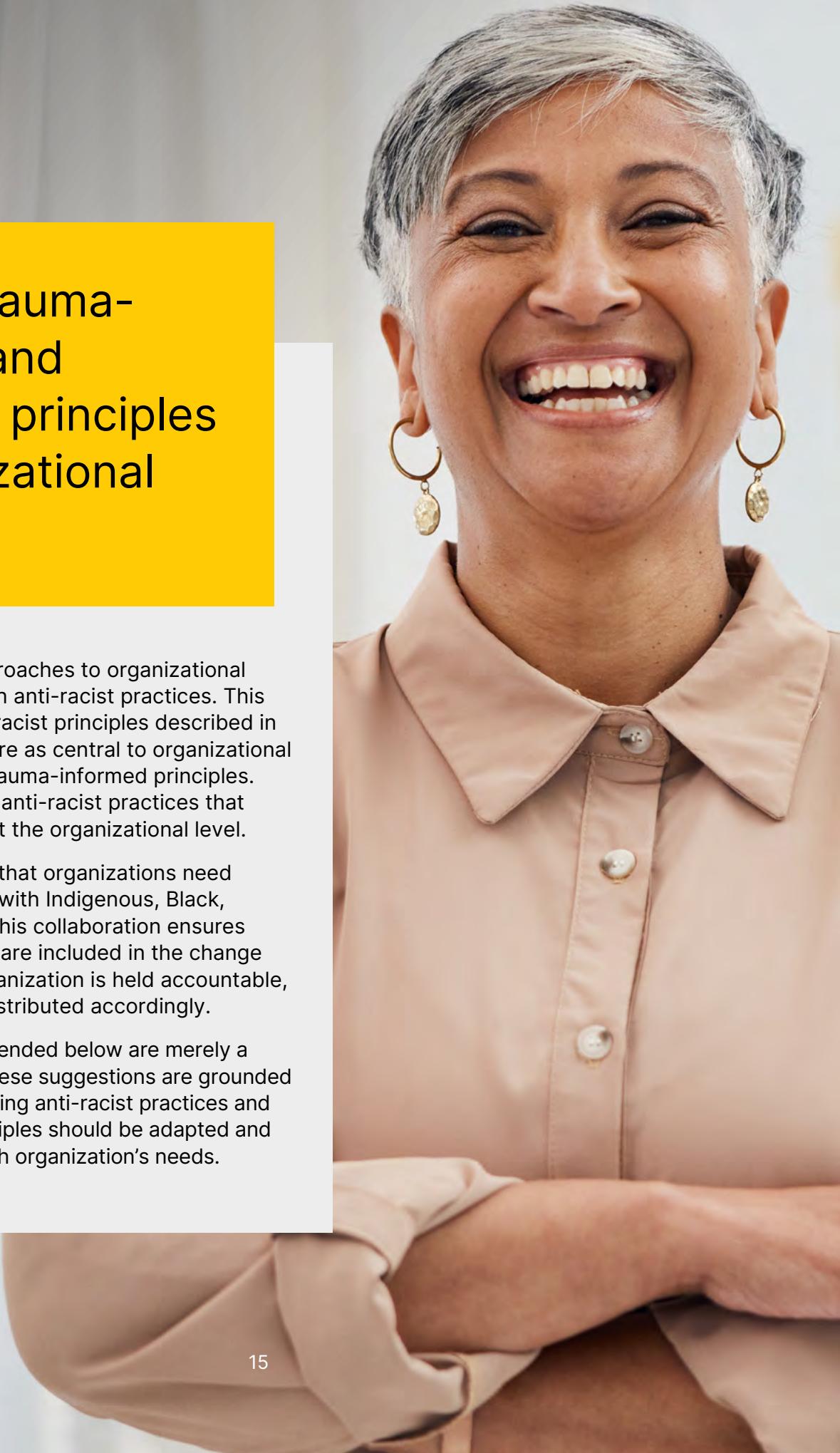
Structural racism is embedded and upheld through power arrangements within organizations, structures, and systems. These unequal power relations contribute to Racialized communities’ social, economic, and political marginalization. A central objective of an anti-racist approach to TIOC is to recognize and dismantle unequal power relations at the organizational level to improve Racialized employees’ social, economic, and political outcomes more broadly.

Aligning trauma-informed and anti-racist principles for organizational change

Trauma-informed approaches to organizational change must align with anti-racist practices. This ensures that the anti-racist principles described in the previous section are as central to organizational change progress as trauma-informed principles. This section suggests anti-racist practices that can be implemented at the organizational level.

It is important to note that organizations need to do this work jointly with Indigenous, Black, and Racialized staff. This collaboration ensures that Racialized voices are included in the change progress, that the organization is held accountable, and that power is redistributed accordingly.

The practices recommended below are merely a starting point. While these suggestions are grounded in research, implementing anti-racist practices and trauma-informed principles should be adapted and expanded to meet each organization's needs.



Trauma-informed principles with anti-racist practices

Key Principle: Safety

This principle includes physical and emotional safety.⁵⁵ Physical safety includes aspects of the built environment, such as layout, signage, and artwork, that promote safety and inclusion. For example, signage is multilingual and gender-inclusive. Emotional safety refers to a sense of safety in the workplace gained through trustworthy relationships and culture. For instance, White co-workers openly acknowledge racial inequities so Black, Indigenous, and Racialized employees are aware of allies in the workplace.

Practices:

1. Organizations acknowledge the effects of racism

Organizations can create a safe environment for Black, Indigenous, and Racialized employees by acknowledging the effects of racism on their employees.⁵⁶ This requires organizations to be attentive to what's occurring within the organization as well as externally. For example, the death of George Floyd and the uncovering of unmarked gravesites at residential schools are external events that can retraumatize Racialized employees. Trauma-informed organizations practicing with an anti-racist lens would acknowledge the impact of this news and offer support. They could allow employees to take paid sick or bereavement leave, offer mental health services, and facilitate organization-wide discussions to raise awareness of the impacts of these events.

2. Regular check-ins and debriefs

Regular debriefing at the team and organization level offers Racialized staff opportunities to share experiences of racism or experiences that may be retraumatizing. Regular check-ins and debriefs can occur at the individual level (staff-to-supervisor) or the team level.

Regular check-ins and debriefs also provide a safe setting for Racialized staff to discuss organizational changes and learn about leadership implementation.⁵⁷ This collaborative approach to staff check-ins and debriefs demonstrates that leadership is committed to implementing anti-racist practices jointly by opening up decision-making processes. These proactive welfare and collaboration processes can all enhance a sense of emotional safety.

3. Tailored safety planning

Indigenous, Black, and Racialized employees are at a greater risk of traumatization from experiencing racism directly or experiencing it vicariously through media reports or client narratives.⁵⁸ Self-tailored safety plans that identify several options for Racialized staff when they are feeling overwhelmed or unsafe can support their psychological safety.⁵⁹ This practice recognizes that Racialized staff have a higher chance of experiencing vicarious trauma and gives them the tools to take the necessary actions for their psychological safety.

Key Principle:

Trust and transparency

This principle refers to the trustworthiness of the organization's processes and policies. Trust can be enhanced with greater transparency about policies, methods, and outcomes and greater follow-up for staff feedback. Organizations endeavouring to apply this principle with an anti-racist lens recognize that Racialized staff may not trust organizational leadership or the system and will need more time to experience a sense of safety in their working relationships and environment.⁶⁰

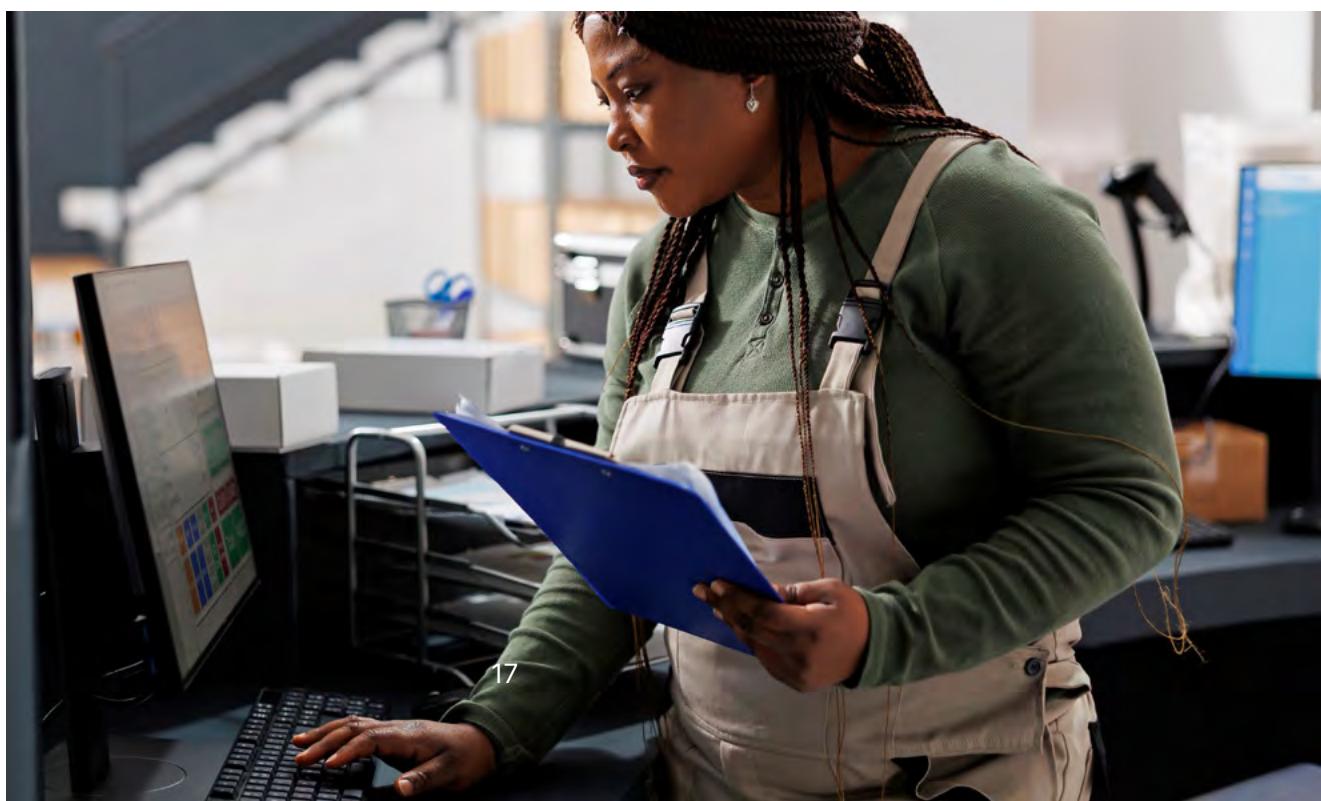
Practices:

1. Clear and transparent reporting processes

Racialized employees have limited avenues to report and address the racial inequity they experience or witness. Organizations can address this gap by jointly developing reporting processes that are easy to follow and transparent about the intended audience (e.g., management, leadership, other staff) and the purpose (e.g., to inform organizational planning). Transparency also means ensuring protocols allow affected staff to provide feedback on the complaint process and actions to redress concerns.

2. Establish accountability metrics to monitor progress

Organizational change takes time and commitment. Co-developed accountability metrics on racial equity can monitor progress across organizational areas to monitor progress and sustain organization-wide implementation. Organizations should develop an evaluation plan to review the equity assessment and metrics regularly and then communicate evaluation results to the whole organization for input.



Key Principle:

Peer support and mutual self-help

In the context of TIOC, peers are other trauma survivors. The principle of peer support and mutual self-help means learning from and supporting co-workers to build safety, trust, and collaboration and to draw hope from their lived experiences as a source of healing.⁶¹

Practices:

1. Create affinity groups for Racialized staff

Affinity groups are safe spaces created for and led by Racialized staff members to share their thoughts and experiences of racial equity and trauma and how this has impacted their work. They offer Racialized staff the opportunity to explore the intersection of professional and racial identities (something that even family members may not fully understand) and support each other toward healing in the organizational context.

2. Centre culturally appropriate healing

For Racialized staff, experiences of racial inequity and vicarious trauma can lead to burnout or compassion fatigue.⁶² An anti-racist approach to self-care centres cultural and ancestral healing and practices for and led by communities of colour.⁶³ Organizations must recognize and support culturally appropriate self-care strategies, such as offering healing circles with Elders or faith healing with Black Canadian faith leaders.

3. Peer training

Organizations can empower Racialized staff by creating more peer-led training and education opportunities for other staff and leadership members. The training topics can range from education around racism in the workplace to issues in the professional field (e.g., housing needs of Racialized communities). The idea is to learn from the lived experience of Racialized staff and to recognize that those experiences do not define their entire identity or knowledge bases. Practitioner knowledge and experience can also offer rich insights. Creating peer training opportunities encourages Racialized staff to bring their authentic selves into the workplace, an act of anti-racism.

Key Principle: Collaboration and mutuality

This principle refers to flattening power imbalances between all organization staff, including administrative, frontline, management, and executive leadership. This trauma-informed principle correlates with the anti-racist principle that collective healing occurs when unequal power arrangements are levelled out.⁶⁴

Practices:

1. Co-creation of anti-racist and trauma-informed organizational vision, policies, processes, and metrics

Organizations must engage all Racialized staff in processes to co-create an anti-racist and trauma-informed organizational culture. This can start with creating an anti-racist and trauma-informed organizational vision and mission and ensuring that subsequent policies, processes, and metrics reflect this vision. This can be done through facilitated processes, such as staff surveys or an organization-wide town hall.

2. Opportunities for anonymous feedback

Not all staff will want their names attached to organization change suggestions. This may be the case for Racialized staff who feel they may become targets of microaggression or macroaggression. Organizations should provide avenues for anonymous feedback to ensure that all staff can still collaborate in organizational change, yet in a safe and confidential manner. For example, an external consultant could conduct anonymous staff satisfaction surveys, from which aggregated results are shared and discussed across the organization. This can ensure that Racialized staff can still highlight concerns and recommendations for organizational review, without becoming a target in the workplace.



Key Principle:

Voice, choice, and empowerment

Organizations must foster a culture that makes everyone feel validated and heard. This means recognizing that individual staff and leadership members bring unique strengths and experiences. Organizations practicing this principle believe that collective experiences of trauma are both harmful and resilience-building; these organizations empower Racialized staff to turn their lived experiences into a source of action and hope and to shape their pathways of healing.⁶⁵

Practices:

1. Enable Racialized staff to lead the design of culturally appropriate services and programs

Racialized staff working in human and social services may feel that there are limited opportunities to support the healing of Racialized clients or communities. Organizations can empower Racialized staff to design and implement services and programs that are culturally grounded, healing, and unifying for Racialized clients and communities.

2. Centre Racialized survivors in positions of power

Organizations can elevate the voices and decision-making power of Racialized survivors by making them integral to organizational structures of power. For example, Racialized staff or community members should be prominent in Boards of Directors and advisory councils and regularly consulted.



Key Principle:

Cultural, historical, and gender issues

This evidence review has explored how historical trauma continues to impact Racialized populations. Organizations implementing trauma-informed and anti-racist principles should recognize and address intersecting trauma experiences by creating an organizational culture and policy framework that is culturally responsive and gender-responsive.

Practices:

1. Build leadership capacity for self-reflection on racial equity and racial justice

As de facto representatives of an organization, there is an expectation that leadership will drive organizational change around racial inequity and trauma. However, an organization's leaders cannot achieve this if they do not understand how their organization contributes to racial inequity and harm. The first step is to assess the leadership's understanding of racial equity and racial justice and identify the benefits of racial equity for the organization. Without this initial understanding and buy-in from leadership, there will likely be a lack of commitment and investment for long-term organizational change. Organizations can bring external consultants specializing in anti-racism and trauma-informed organizational change to facilitate reflection and understanding. Hiring external consultants removes the emotional labour from Racialized staff who may be asked to share their experiences over and over again.

2. Build organizational fluency on anti-racist and trauma-informed tools and vocabulary

Most organizations are not innately anti-racist or trauma-informed. It will take time to integrate organization-wide fluency in anti-racist and trauma-informed principles and practices. Strategies to build organizational knowledge include developing a library with toolkits and resources on anti-racist practices and offering annual staff training on race and racism to refresh existing and new staff members.

3. Establish a leadership committee to guide the organizational change process

The leadership committee would extend beyond executives to include staff members representing all areas of an organization. The purpose of this committee is to lead the implementation of the trauma-informed organizational change process and intentionally consider how anti-racist principles have been integrated as part of the trauma-informed principles reflecting the connection between racism and trauma. Involving Racialized staff in this leadership committee ensures that their voice and expertise, from survivor experience, is always centred in the organizational change process.



Conclusion

Incorporating anti-racist and trauma-informed principles supports the development of systems and services that are responsive to racial trauma and racial inequity. As discussed in this evidence review, organizations, corporations, and institutions need to align trauma-informed and anti-racist principles because racism is a source of trauma and retraumatization. For Indigenous, Black, and Racialized employees in the Canadian workforce, exposure to racial trauma can happen in the form of microaggressions, macroaggressions, and vicarious trauma. In the workplace, racial discrimination is an extension of the systemic racism and oppression that is both historical and ongoing. This review outlined the many sources of racism and racial trauma experienced by employees who identify as Indigenous, Black, and Racialized.

Organizations that are trauma-informed and anti-racist must be aware of the different sources of racial trauma and should identify different ways racism occurs at individual, interpersonal, and structural levels.

Importantly, organizations need to recognize racial trauma(s) as a form of trauma and take steps to prevent retraumatization in the design and implementation of organizational policies, procedures, practices, and structures. This review has offered examples of anti-racist practices aligned with trauma-informed principles to support organizational change that recognizes and acknowledges the connection between racism and trauma.

Crucially, organizations need to embed anti-racist and trauma-informed principles and practices with the goal of empowering Racialized employees and clients. This goal is essential to an anti-racist framework where radical and collective healing, social transformation, and racial justice are fundamental tenets. Organizations implementing anti-racist and trauma-informed principles and practices must work with Racialized employees and clients to define an organizational vision and approach to racial justice. This review has highlighted anti-racist and trauma-informed principles to ground organizational change and development in the key tenets of anti-racism.

Resources

Anti-racism and Trauma-informed Organizational Change Models and Frameworks

This section provides a selection of trauma-informed and anti-racist models or frameworks to support organizational change or development. When reviewing or using these resources, it is important to note the historical and cultural contexts underpinning each framework. The varied contexts shape the experiences of oppression and discrimination in different countries: the experiences of Racialized communities will differ between Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom. Another important caveat is many anti-racist and trauma-informed organizational change models have not undergone rigorous evaluation, even though they are all grounded in the evidence about trauma, racism and the impacts of intergenerational racial trauma.

These limitations have implications for the reliability and applicability of anti-racist and trauma-informed organizational change models and frameworks. Organizations should treat the below resources as educational case examples of different ways to approach organizational change. All organizations still need to do the work with Racialized populations to define what an anti-racist and trauma-informed organization looks like in their local context.





Bond's Anti-racism and Decolonising Organizational Framework

Bond is a U.K. based network of non-governmental organizations working in the international development sector. Bond engaged people of colour from across the U.K. charity sector to develop a framework, with toolkits. The goal is to aid organizations tackling racism in their organizations, and to decolonize organizational practices, procedures, and structures.

There are two toolkits available to implement anti-racist practices across organization areas, such as human resources, senior leadership, programming, and research. The ideas and intentions behind both toolkits are similar but the tools do differ.

Links:

Anti-racism and decolonising: A framework for organisations

→ www.bond.org.uk/resources/anti-racism-and-decolonising/

Becoming locally led as an anti-racist guide

→ www.bond.org.uk/resources/becoming-locally-led-as-an-anti-racist-practice-a-guide/

Sanctuary Model

The Sanctuary Model was developed in the 1980s by Sandra Bloom and her colleagues to address experiences of retraumatization in hospital settings.

This model is a roadmap for organizational development that promotes safety and recovery from adversity through the creation of a trauma-informed community, or "sanctuary." Primarily a trauma-informed approach to organizational change, this model has been adapted to advance anti-racist organizational change. For example, the Methodist Home for Children in Southern United States⁵² and a New York youth group home⁵⁷ applied the Sanctuary Model's tools to address racism within their organizational structures, policies, processes, and mission.

Learn more:

→ [www.thesanctuaryinstitute.org/
about-us/the-sanctuary-model/](http://www.thesanctuaryinstitute.org/about-us/the-sanctuary-model/)

Institute on Trauma and Trauma-Informed Care's Organizational Change Manual

The Institute on Trauma and Trauma-Informed Care (ITTC) was started at the University of Buffalo in 2012. The latest iteration of its trauma-informed organizational change manual incorporates an anti-racist and anti-oppressive lens into the narrative. The manual provides a framework, along with worksheets, to support organizations undertaking trauma-informed and anti-racist change. The manual is structured according to different stages of trauma-informed organizational change: pre-implementation, implementation, and sustainability. It highlights key development areas in each stage.



Learn more:

The manual is available for free download on their website.

→ socialwork.buffalo.edu/social-research/institutes-centers/institute-on-trauma-and-trauma-informed-care.html

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