

“Responding to Ongoing Racism in the Government of Ontario”

Written By: Iosko Assenov

Written in response to recent OPS memos from Senior OPS Management and Cabinet

Date: June 8, 2020

I hope you, your family, and your colleagues are doing well during this challenging and unprecedented time.

Firstly, I would like to thank you for your leadership and ongoing communication in regards to COVID.

My name is Iosko Assenov. I am one of your current Government of Ontario employees. I am a 33 year old man, who resides in Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario. I have been with the OPS since March 10, 2014. I work as an ASC, for the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (ODSP).

I am writing to you because I am a passionate Human Rights advocate. I am a dedicated and accomplished employee with no discipline on my file. I am a man of integrity and leadership. I am a man who takes of my oath to Public Service seriously. I am a man who can't be a bystander but needs to act when I see wrongdoing.

By compiling this report, I will disclose very personal, emotional, and painful experience and relieve my trauma once again. I trust however that in doing so, my voice will give voice to the voiceless racialized men and women both across the Province and within the Ontario Public Service. I trust and have faith that all of my effort in doing so will not be in vain.

I am putting this document together to inspire actual front line change and to facilitate productive conversations around racism experiences and ways to move forward as an organization.

The goals of this report are to:

- Providing my real frontline experiences and of systemic and targeted racism
- Provide perspective to the severity of racism that occurs within the Ontario Public Service
- Providing perspective as to just how difficult it has been to report racism in law enforcement / OPS
- Connect with and communicate between senior levels management and myself
- Inspire change, listen to creative ideas in regards to Anti-Racism initiatives and change within the OPS.
- Be heard. Have a voice. Be acknowledged.

For transparency purposes, I will be sharing this report with other Senior Managers from the Ministry of Social Services and the Ministry of the Solicitor General, in addition to advocating to make this a public document for further discussion. Management needs to understand the complexities of experiencing and reporting racism.

Protests

In these past weeks we have seen an unprecedented number of people united to protest prejudicial, targeted, and unjust treatment of African-American's in the United States. The general public believes these biases and racist motives have fueled controversial and deadly use of force cases in Law Enforcement. I wanted to take this time and speak out about my experiences of racism and injustice in the OPS. Now, more than ever, do we need to listen, understand, and repair the trauma of those who have been mistreated in our Province.

Memos

Since the protests, I have received a number of memos. One of those memos coming directly from the Secretary of the Cabinet's Office titled 'Confronting Anti-Black Racism.' In this memo, the OPS confirms its staff may be experiencing "***outrage, fear, frustration and tiredness – not only related to recent events, but to the broader systemic barriers, biases and the ongoing impact of racism that (minority staff) face daily.***"

This memo goes on to ask staff to a call of actions, the OPS calls upon "***all leaders in our organization to speak up and create safe spaces to have important conversations around anti-Black racism and discrimination, but also to lead change throughout our organizations. It is important for us all to understand that it isn't about not being racist, it is about being anti-racist.***"

The memo ends by reminding OPS members that we have a commitment to abide by the OPS Anti-Racism Policy and the Respectful Workplace Policy, as the OPS reaffirms it's commitment to anti-black, anti-Indigenous, and any forms of racism.

I then received two emails from my Senior Management within my Ministry which echoed the same sentiments of the memo sent to all OPS employees. I was encouraged to share my experiences by management. I have felt compelled to share my experience management in order to provide much needed perspective of what it is like facing, living with, and reporting racism in both Law Enforcement and in the OPS.

Bare with me as I take you through my story, and show you just how difficult doing exactly what these memos asks of us has been, what the negative implications have been, how it changed my life, and the sacrifices I have made in order to champion Human Rights and Inclusion for all across the OPS. I want to show you how our current system not only failed me, but continues to fail the men and women who stand against racism.

Who Am I? (Background)

My name is Iosko Assenov. I am a 33 year old male. 6+ years, working with the Government of Ontario.

I work for the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services as an ASC, and support youth with disabilities and mental health conditions in my community as a mental health and behavioural consultant.

I am a visible minority of mixed race (Roma - South East Asian, Middle-Eastern, European cultures) I was born in Bulgaria and I am an ethnic Romani-Turk, a culture that the European Union and Amnesty International currently recognizes as one of the most discriminated and marginalized peoples in the world.

I grew up experiencing racism and discrimination as a normal occurrence of everyday life simply because of the colour of my skin, which differed from that of the white majority. Some examples of racism experienced as a child are:

- I recall the feeling of being called racial slurs by adults on my way to school.
- Told by my parents that they were forced to change their Arabic names to predetermined white names and enforced by the Government
- Ticketed for speaking a different language in the streets
- I recall being targeted by white Police Officers who openly hurled racial slurs at Roma children.
- I recall what it feels like being denied access to sit and eat at a restaurant with my family, simply because of the colour of my skin and the fact we were 'not accepted'.

Escaping inequality and racism was a pivotal factor in immigrating to Canada for my family and I.

I am grateful and proud to be a Canadian. I strive to embody the values Canada stands for - values of equality, justice, inclusion, and the freedom from discrimination and oppression of all Canadians. I realize that no system can be perfect, yet it is our moral duty to fix that which we know can be repaired.

The only time I have ever experienced any other racism, marginalization, and discrimination besides the country I immigrated from has ironically been while working in Corrections, for the Government of Ontario.

Pre-Ontario Public Service

From an early age I knew that my life's focus will be about servitude of others and connecting with humanity.

I have always known that my mission in life is to make a positive impact and change the lives of those around me and those I serve. I knew Public Service and working for the Government would therefore be my chosen career path. I also knew that getting into government was competitive and would take time and hard work.

My career aspirations were set on getting into the humanities field as I aspired to get into Policing / Corrections / and or Probation and Parole work and I knew I wanted to work for the Government of Ontario.

In preparing myself for my career pursuits, I strived to be a versatile, knowledgeable, and experienced professional in my field of expertise. I wanted to understand the dynamics, challenges, and intricacies of my selected profession. In my early 20's I was able to accomplish the following:

- Worked with children in Mental Health facilities
 - Worked in group homes
 - Worked at youth detention centre
 - Worked in shelters
 - Worked on Youth Justice and Diversion Board
 - Security Supervisor for City Hall, Various Security positions
 - OPP – Mentorship Camp
 - Waterloo Regional Police Auxilliary Officer Training
 - Probation and Parole (VPO) Volunteer
 - 10 + years of Coaching Elementary and High-School Sports
 - Pathways to Education – Youth Mentor
 - KW Multicultural Centre English Tutor for newcomers to Canada
 - 8,000 + hours volunteer community service in Kitchener-Waterloo
 - Nominated by CKCO News as a Local Hero for Community Impact with Youth
 - Nominated for an 'Outstanding Leadership with Youth Award' at the City of Kitchener
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Joining the Ontario Public Service

At the end of 2013, I applied to the Ministry of Corrections for a dream role with the Ontario Public Service. I received confirmation I had been selected to training for Corrections to work at a new state of the art facility that promised to hold a strong rehabilitative focus through it's Direct-Supervision Model approach.

I had to make some changes and sacrifices in moving to a new city but I believed it was all worth it. I was willing to do anything I could to work for the OPS, and took great pride that I would hold this role.

In 2013, I successfully completed the application, testing, interviews and was on my way to work as a Correctional Officer at the Windsor Jail and the brand new South West Detention Centre in Windsor, Ontario.

I passed all of my Correctional Officer Training and Assessment with exceptional grades and performance, positive references, and even received the **Ministry's Inclusion Scholarship Award** for my written piece and commitment when I articulated how I would personally bring Inclusion and Diversity to the OPS.

In March of 2014, I began my career in Law Enforcement. I took great pride in my badge, what it stood for, and how hard I had worked to achieve what I did. I knew that this career and my journey had only just begun. I invested my entire self into my career and this was my way to give back to my community.

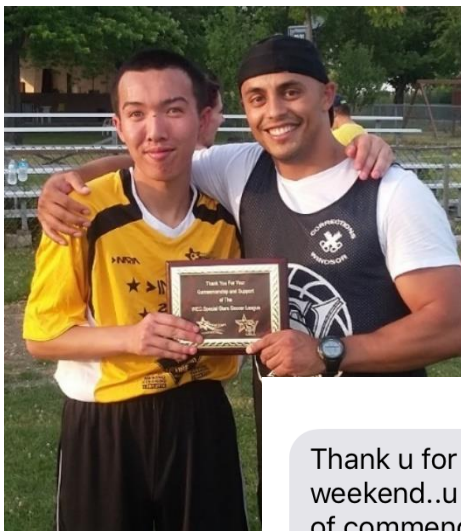
Law Enforcement Accomplishments

In the next 2.5 years I absolutely loved my position in Corrections. I went above and beyond for the OPS. I was always willing to make a difference for my workplace, my colleagues, offenders and the public. In a short amount of time I was able to successfully accomplish the following:

- Held the position of Correctional Officer, Negotiator, Program Officer,
- Spearheaded and Coordinated basketball tournaments / charity events
- Championed positivity, inclusiveness, and diversity
- Dedicated member of CURE – Council for Unity and Racial Equality
- Member of Diversity Mentoring Partnering Program – to work on Racism
- Received the Ministry's Inclusion Scholarship Award
- Volunteered to represent the Ministry – Torch Runs, Public Tours
- Nominated for Ovation Partnership Award from colleagues for bringing positivity in the workplace
- Received personal impact letters from offenders detailing the difference I made in their life
- Received management reference letters
- No reprimands, no disciplines on my file



I did all of this because I cherish the opportunity to give back to my community, this is who I am



Today 4:17 PM

Thank u for the amazing weekend..u deserve a lot of commendment for what u did!! I am honored to know u! Cheers

Aw thanks man



Racism in Corrections

First and foremost, as a former Correctional Officer, I have nothing but respect for the Corrections profession; the sacrifices staff make, the challenges they face from management, offender populations, and colleagues, the dangers of the job, and the overlooking of this profession in Law Enforcement. I salute all of the solid men and women in uniform who tirelessly go in and do what often feels like a thankless, but very essential role.

I am not taking anything away from the Corrections profession or the respect I have for it, and the pride I too had in wearing the uniform and holding the title of 'Correctional Officer.' The majority of men and women go in day in and day out, they do their job, and are decent human beings with good intentions.

I truly believe that racism, injustice, and discrimination of our fellow citizens is bigger than our individual egos, statuses, and titles. This is not about 'bashing' the Corrections profession or the OPS. This is about using my voice and my experience to unearth the very serious and systemic racism issues in this particular sector of Law Enforcement, and educate Senior OPS Management and the public on the very real, long-term effects caused from experiencing and or reporting racism within the Ontario Public Service.

The very first week at being at the Windsor Jail, I was specifically approached and told by a Senior Officer that this is a racist facility and I needed to 'watch my back as a minority'. I did not know what to think of it then.

I was one of only a handful (approx. 5 out of 100) visible minority staff members that worked in this facility.

Systemic racism and discrimination had existed at the Windsor Jail long before I got there. This was well documented and a well known issue prior to my arrival at the facility in 2014. Surprisingly, at no point at the Ontario Police College, where I completed Corrections training, did any of the course instructors or Human Rights speakers address, educate, or make these issues of racism known to new visible minority OPS Officers.

In one of the memo's from the Windsor Jail prior to my arrival, it specifically describes that the workplace was poisoned by gender hostility and discrimination through direct actions of managers and by managers condoning the actions of staff including the following:

- ***Engaging in or permitting co-workers to watch sexually explicit movies in lunchrooms***
- ***Allowing workers to have inappropriate conversations with female staff about sex and their appearance***
- ***Engaging in simulated sex in the workplace***
- ***Using racist language***
- ***Bringing in or wearing Nazi or white supremacist materials or icons***
- ***Segregating inmates by race***

Nobody in their wildest imagination would expect to be entering their new career, especially working in Law Enforcement for the Government of Ontario, and walking into a workplace where their management would condone and promote these types of acts.

Racism In Corrections Cont'd

Racism can begin with subtle comments or actions, and lead to overt and blatant oppression over time.

It can be direct or masked through workplace harassment, discrimination, and or bullying, and preferential treatment. At the Windsor Jail and the South West Detention Centre, it did not take long to witness both.

I have never wanted to accuse someone of being racist. I do not like to call an entire facility racist. I do not like to jump to conclusions, and have therefore always been calculated and ensured I understand the situation, intention, and reasoning behind the comments and actions of my colleagues before I label that act as racist.

Some actions however were completely and blatantly racist and left me speechless the first time I experienced them. Such was the case the first time I heard a white officer calling black offenders the 'n-word' directly.

With more frequent overt acts of racism, my belief that there were racist officers in this particular facility became further solidified. These racist actions were directly from the same group of white staff members.

In less than 3 years with the Ministry of Corrections, these are some of the acts of racism I witnessed directly:

- Told to watch my back from the first week in Corrections and this is a 'racist facility'
 - Witnessing as the black offender range was referred to as the 'monkey range' or 'Jungle Unit'
 - Hearing about how offenders were segregated based on the colour of their skin
 - Witnessing of white officers using the n-word casually to one another and laughing about it
 - Witnessing of white officers hurling racial slurs such as n-word and other's at black offenders
 - Witnessing of white officers hurling racial slurs at Arabic and other brown-skinned offenders.
 - Witnessing the degradation and humiliation of specific coloured offenders as targeted bullying
 - Witnessing the constant aggravation of specific coloured offenders as a form of punishment
 - Witnessing as a Senior Officer called a random member of the public a racial slur (n-word)
 - Witnessing as several white Officers discuss how a black offender is complaining about being called the n-word – and he would like it investigated through the Ombudsman – staff laughing in the lunchroom
 - Witnessing as staff discuss covering up a racist comment made during a Use of Force on an offender
 - Witnessing staff talking about a fellow colleague calling them the n-word
 - Witnessing as members of the public report being called racial slurs in the community by white officers
 - Witnessing as members of the public report feeling some staff are posting racist memes and are extremely uncomfortable about it (email me to report it)
 - Being subjected myself to being called a 'Paki' (I am not from Pakistan)
 - Being subjected myself to a manager calling me 'Muslim' (which I am not but assumed) making me strip search all the Muslim offenders while all white officers stood and watched
 - Being subjected myself to being called a 'terrorist'
 - Being subjected myself to being told I cannot join the employee baseball team, I have to play cricket
 - Being subjected to comments such as "that's what us brown people do isn't it"
 - Being subjected to comments such as "all you brown guys are the same" comments
 - Being excluded myself from various sports functions, along with black Officers (without any invites)
 - Being excluded myself from various social functions, along with the black Officers
 - Being subjected to extreme aggravation from a manager making it as difficult as possible to attend the Council for Unity and Racial Equality, it's training and meetings
 - Being subjected to being told by a Senior Manager that there is a quota for "you people" referring to coloured Officers such as myself when referencing to minorities attending CURE conferences
 - Being subjected to management laughing at me for stating I am attending Racial Diversity Conference and telling me I am wasting my time
 - Being subjected to non-stop targeted bullying and harassment from a set of managers once standing up for myself and reporting incidences of bullying, harassment, racism, and discrimination at work
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Systemic Racism Across the OPS

Each year the OPS pride's itself as being a 'Top 100 Diversity Employer.' Hiring black and visible minority staff is one thing. How these staff are treated inside these workplaces and their ability to effectively address and receive support when reporting acts of racism is another.

As Correctional Officers who hold a badge, our job is to protect and serve our community and we are each responsible to fully abide by Human Rights laws, the Anti-Racism directorate, Workplace Harassment Policy, Code of Conduct, and individual institutional policies and procedures set forth to govern appropriate conduct.

In 2013, for instance the 'Inclusion Now' Government strategy was put forward as an effort to increase 'Diversity and Inclusivity' amongst visible minorities working in the OPS. The Inclusion Now Strategic Plan states that it will include **"an anti-racism strategy with training and clear accountabilities and expectations for respectful behaviour in the workplace"** ... it goes on to state that it is designed to **"create an even more healthy and respectful workplace by addressing systemic issues, including racism, discrimination and harassment, and acting early to remove or mitigate barriers."**

Passed over, bullied, mistaken for janitorial staff. Black women sue Ontario public service alleging systemic racism

By Jennifer Yang Identity and Inequality Reporter
Wed, March 13, 2019 11 min. read



Racist KKK hate mail against black officers at Toronto jail probed by rights' body

A correctional officer working at the Toronto jail has asked the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario to investigate racist graffiti and hate mail against black officers



23 years later, jail guard compensated for racial taunts.

By Ashante Infante Staff Reporter
Mon, Aug 23, 2011 4 min. read



Inclusion Now Link: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/ops-inclusion-strategic-plan-2013-2016-inclusion-now>

According to the survey conducted in the OPS in 2013, **22% to 32%** of employees who identified as Black, Aboriginal, Persons with disabilities or LGBTQ reported that they had experienced discrimination in the workplace. **22 – 32 % of employees is approximately one quarter, a shockingly high number of staff who had been victims of discrimination in the workplace.**

This also shows us that racist and discriminatory conduct occurs at various Ministries, various levels, and various locations across the OPS. This is more than a Corrections issue. This is more than a Windsor issue. I am far off from being a one-off individual who experienced racism in the OPS. The data shows otherwise. My personal accounts show otherwise. The documented Human Rights reports and Articles show otherwise.

Furthermore, my OPS management were completely ignorant to the Inclusion Now Strategy, it's goal for racialized staff, or that it existed.

The 'festering problem' of racism

ANTHONY REINHART
PUBLISHED JANUARY 17, 2008

PUBLISHED JANUARY 17, 2008

This article was published more than 10 years ago. Some information in it may no longer be current.

0 COMMENTS SHARE

Toronto-area correctional facilities have been home to a "festering problem" of racism among guards for at least 20 years, but provincial officials have done little to address it, says a black Toronto lawyer who once worked as a guard at the Don Jail.

"That's the problem with this ministry [the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services]," Selwyn Pieters said yesterday, after at least 30 guards walked off the job at the Don. "There's a culture of silence within the ministry; there's a culture of facilitation and there's a culture of impunity."

Doug Ford acknowledges systemic racism in Ontario, vows 'to stamp this out'



By **Robert Benzie** Queen's Park Bureau Chief
Wed., June 3, 2020 | 3 min. read



On June 3, 2020 our Premier vowed to 'stamp out' systemic issues of racism in Ontario in front of the public, and I applaud that bold statement.

As one of your employees and a visible minority who has experienced a great deal of racism and trauma while working in the OPS, I am proud to hear this publicly.

My question to you is how can we resolve the racism issues of our communities when we tolerate and even promote racism within our own Government?

The Government of Ontario ought to be leading the rest of the Province and the public by setting the precedent on what a healthy and inclusive workplace looks like, one that is free from systemic racism and oppression.

Instead, the reality is this:

- Racism of our Officers from other Officers continues to be an issue
- Racism and cover-ups of racism towards our offender populations continues to be an issue
- Racist remarks towards random members of the public by Officers continues
- Racism towards our offender population and the inability to report these acts continues
- Racism, even when well documented and brought to the attention of management continues
- Reports of racism continues to be met with bureaucracy, silence, dejection, and complete disregard.
- Staff reporting racism continue to be the one's targeted and reprimed against, and go off on sick leave
- Staff racially abusing others continue to thrive and work within the Ontario Public Service

The reality is the mechanisms of actions to address and investigate issues such as these are ineffective, there is no accountability, and the code-of-silence continues to rule over Corrections. Even when Officers such as myself report incidences of racism we are met with further racism, targeted bullying, harassment, and reprisals from both colleagues and management for simply doing the right thing and doing our job.

My point is simple. This system is broken and needs to be fixed.

The public expects Officer's and OPS staff across the Province to do the right thing and pays us for this service.

The public expects that OPS staff would have integrity, that they would stand up in the face of racism and treat members of the public with dignity and humanity, intervene when needed, and report racist incidences.

How can we eradicate racism from Ontario when our own Government of Ontario consists of racist staff members? If our own Officer's and management racially abuse one another, and witnesses don't have the courage nor the trust in their employer to investigate and hold other's accountable, then how can we continue to say that we will eradicate racism from both the OPS and from Ontario?

There are several changes that need to happen. As a Public Servant working for the Ontario Public Service I vow to continue to work on eradicating racism, and would look forward to implementing solutions with you.

Code of Silence and Fear of Reprisals

Since we know my experiences of racism are not isolated incidences, but experiences shared and felt by over one quarter of the OPS staff members who self-report as visible minorities, in addition to the Officers, Managers, and news articles reported, why does this continue to occur and is not dealt with effectively?

There are a number of reasons why not enough staff don't report incidences of racism in the workplace, even though they recognize, experience, or witness racism in the OPS. Staff make a calculated decision based on:

1. *Code of Silence continues to exist – Staff do not want to be seen as 'ratting out a colleague' and being reprisal against (left without equipment, unsafe situations, isolated for the rest of their career)*
2. *Staff don't want to be socially excluded, gossiped about, and left out of social events and friendships*
3. *Staff don't trust the Investigation Process itself due to Conflicts of Interest amongst staff and managers*
4. *Staff don't trust that their colleague's who were witnesses would also do the right thing and report it*
5. *Staff don't trust that their manager and or other manager's won't target them for reporting racism*
6. *Staff look at past investigations and how it went – they feel it is not worth the dangers in reporting it*

Racism Messages:

Please have a look at these messages I have received from black colleagues. Some are Officers, some are Managers from within the OPS. These texts are direct conversations with my black colleagues about racism, cover-ups of incidences in the facility by a select number of officers, and the pain that witnessing and enduring personal racism has had on us who have experienced it within the Ontario Public Service.

We have a sworn duty to report wrong doing when we come across it, yet staff don't speak up.

I included these messages to show you that these issues are talked about, they are real, racism is alive and well in the OPS. Managers and staff are aware, but very few staff come forward in the way I have. Most staff members remain silent, isolated, and fear further reprisals from colleagues and their employer.

Systemic racism/oppression is no joke

There is another one that was said to have told the inmate "you better stay down nigger" but I never heard it so how am I to know for sure

They have hidden there systemic racial issue way too long.

With the history with the WJ and just adding more fuel to the issue Racism can be proven.

very careful cause I'm going to a jail that has earned the title of a racist jail. Fuck man, first

They don't care to understand bcuz they justify racism

It is racist. We asked at the CURE conference how many recruiters are visible minorities and the couldn't fully recall but they think they may have a token in the mix. Fucking joke.

The thing is, is that it isn't false and they have someone off still with the Primary issue being racial discrimination. And she isn't even black it's her daughter that is half.



Text Message



Makes u wanna wonder why that person felt comfortable enuf to use that word in front of that friend too

CODE OF SILENCE:

Not all officers nor management are racist of course, only a select few staff that exhibited this behaviour. Most officers are decent men and women that want to do their job, and go home to their loved ones at the end of their shift.

The issue is that nobody speaks up. Remaining silent in the face of witnessing racism in the workplace makes you complicit in those racist actions. Inaction allows these situations to thrive.

In my experience, there were a select few of the same officers that exhibited these behaviours, and were fearless and ignorant to acting on their racist views in the workplace. These staff were inter-connected and tied to the very same management that would be responsible to investigate them. The facility was a cesspool of conflicts of interest - filled with husband and wife management duos, inappropriate relationships between staff and management, family relatives, and those who showed preferential treatment and personal bias in investigating and disciplining staff.

This makes it extremely difficult to know who to report to, who to trust, and who will actually investigate the matter further. This adds to yet another layer of complexity and inner conflict as staff calculate the risk-to-reward ration of reporting racism to their direct manager in charge.

The majority of staff (Officers and management) were decent human beings but lacked the moral courage to report any of these issues to management despite knowing and admitting to me in person or over the phone that this type of racism is blatantly not right, unethical, immoral, and contravenes our Ministry policies.

On several occasions, I have experienced several of my white OPS colleagues approach me and state they know that the facility can be racist with certain staff present, they know there's an issue, but won't report.

On other occasions, ***I have seen white OPS colleagues question why it's even an issue that a white officer called a black offender the n-word? This colleague continued to tell me he calls black people the n-word from time to time, so why am I making this an issue?***

On another occasion a white officer who saw me outside of work approached me and said ***"man I feel sorry for you coloured guys working here, I wouldn't want to be you, this place is rough to work for you guys."***

As officers, we take an oath that states we have a duty to not only protect and serve our community, but to report wrong doing in our workplace, abide by policy and procedures, and serve the public professionally.

As OPS staff, we should always strive to create an equal, inclusive, healthy, and collaborative environment.

With so many staff witnessing incidences, one would assume these issues would have been reported on numerous occasions. That has not been the case at all. Officers consistently stick together and do not want to 'rat' on one another mainly fearing the reprisals and social out-casting they may receive should they report these acts of racism on one of their brothers and sisters in uniform. Being a part of the family in blue means more than doing the right thing. Solidarity as an Officer means more than Integrity as a professional.

Additionally, Officers did not trust management to do the right thing and investigate. With so many conflicts of interests, failed investigations, cover-ups, and reprisals, it makes it an uphill battle for staff to even want to report racism, and therefore it becomes that much more unlikely to have someone do so. Easier to ignore it.

If you happen to be investigated on an issue, during training in the Institution, we were taught by other Officers that when being questioned about an incident that could potentially get one of your colleagues in

trouble, always use “I don’t recall” whether you do or don’t recall, this ensures none of your statement will be used against your fellow colleague during management’s investigation of a reported incident.

Despite the Anti-Racism Directorate, mandatory Human Rights training, and various initiatives that were put forward, that was not enough to ensure racism does not exist in the Ministry of Corrections.

It is my opinion that until this issue with the code of silence is appropriately addressed and new systems of reporting workplace issues are implemented from within, racism will continue to exist and thrive in Correctional facilities across the OPS.

Attempting to Change Systemic Racism

During my time with the Ministry of Corrections, regardless of the fact I was experiencing racism, targeted bullying and harassment from management and other staff, I did everything that I could to continue to individually promote a positive workplace and work culture for everyone.

I connected with CURE – the Council for Unity and Racial Equality. I attended conferences and individual meetings. In one meeting, I brought forward the fact that some staff were using racial slurs (N-word) in the workplace and advised several managers who were present of this. I advised them I was struggling working in that environment, and I really needed their help. I was completely ignored and never heard from them again. At no point CURE connect with me - despite emails, phone calls, and attending meetings and conferences.

I also joined the Diversity Mentoring and Partnership Program (Designed to assist visible minority staff to connect with Senior level Management to work on recognizing racial barriers and creating a more diverse and equal work environment). I consistently met with the Regional Director of the Ministry of Corrections and advised them of the racism and harassment issues in the workplace. The Director’s response was ***“I know it’s bad there, I used to manage it there, it’s brutal...”*** and left it at that. In one email in particular, I advised the Regional Director that I was really ***“uncomfortable working as a visible minority in this workplace.”*** I was hoping that I would receive a phone call from my Regional Director mentor so I could disclose further and debrief, but I received no response by email and no response over the phone even after reaching out for help.

Despite proactively joining and bringing up workplace issues of racism to the two committees designed to combat racism and discrimination barriers in the OPS, I was met with absolutely no support or follow up.

Everyone that I knew talked about the issues of racism existing in the workplace, including management that would admit it directly to me, but nobody, not even one manager was willing to report it nor do anything about it. I felt very alone in my fight to advocate for change in this workplace.

There is something inherently wrong with the fact that a white OPS colleague can so easily approach a coloured colleague such as myself and let them know they feel sorry for them for working in this Ministry, and that it must be hard to work in ‘such a racist environment’ yet do nothing to help change that environment for their colleague into one of inclusion, tolerance, and respect.

If I learned anything in all of this is that racism hurts. It makes you believe and accept that you do not belong. It chips away at your self-worth and your personal dignity, and your very sense of belonging. It especially hurts when those you consider colleagues and friends leave you fending for yourself.

Not only was I dealing with racial issues, but additional further bullying and harassment. The stress from everything going on at work effected me so bad that I had a heart arrythmia and collapsed of work in

November of 2014. It was confirmed that this was as a direct result of dealing with workplace stress, and I know that experiencing racism and having no one to help me was the major component of that stress for me.

Eventually, the racist remarks and actions I witnessed and was subjected to along with the further bullying and harassment that came when I began reporting incidences to my management team began to take their toll on me. It began to poison my work environment and began to negatively effect my physical, emotional, and psychological wellbeing in a way that I had never experienced anytime before I began working for the OPS.

Despite all of the endured racism and toxic work culture, I fought diligently to ensure I remain the positive, caring, community-oriented, and dedicated to my workplace. I continued to give back to my community on behalf of the Ministry. I coordinated and organized sports tournaments for charity, community events for special needs, and spearheaded team training and sports nights to keep staff healthy. I continued to treat offenders with dignity, teaching offender life-skills classes, ran recreation programming for offenders, connected colleagues together for special events, and represented Corrections in a variety of events.

Something I cherish is that on October 14th, 2016 I received an envelope from a group of 3 offenders whom I had just finished teaching. Inside was a letter thanking me for inspiring them. A portion of the letter reads:

“A special thanks to losko, our favourite program officer, he is a real man of his words and teaches in such a way that makes us feel like we have a real chance to change despite being locked away. He says things that hit us deep from within, and helps show light at the end of the tunnel. He goes the extra mile to give us hope, to be helpful, and to support us in our needs”

Reporting Incidences of Racism from Inside Corrections

In the time I was at the Windsor Jail, I had reported issues with racism within the facility to:

- To the Regional Director of the Ministry of Corrections in an email I advised that “as a minority I do not feel comfortable in this work environment” – no response, no email back at all.
- To the Council for Unity and Racial Equality – in person and attempted email/phone
- To the Senior Regional OPSEU Official – their direct response was “***you are not the first to tell me the place is racist***” and they are well ware of racism that exists in the workplace
- To a training manager as I described racism issues and what I had heard directly including the use of the n-word by a Senior Officer. Even after reporting this, at no point was this recorded by the manager, further investigated, nor followed up with me on. Instead their direct reply stated “***They don’t care to understand because they justify racism***”
They don't care to understand bcuz they justify racism
- To several direct Sergeants (managers). Their advice was ***to ‘stay off other manager’s radars’ as there are certain managers that will target you for reporting them for racism and make it awful here***
- To the Deputy Superintendent – directly brought up racism issues in front of my manager and Union representative as witness, management became angry, ended meeting, and never followed up
- To the Superintendent – directly in a meeting who said “I know there is racism, you’re not the first to tell me about it, get over it and grow some thick skin.”

It is not easy being a new officer in general. Being a new Officer of colour and having to report this type of racism to all white management is extremely difficult. At no point was there ever a Senior Manager of colour in this workplace that I could connect with. Part of being in any new workplace is wanting to connect and fit in with others. In a job where you rely on your colleagues to have your back, reporting acts of racism on your own colleagues or management is not only challenging the sub-cultural norms, but it can potentially place you in dangerous health and safety circumstances if colleagues reprimand you and leave you in situations to fend for yourself rather than 'having your back.'

Resignation

I was a new officer in the facility who had a lot of positive accomplishments, lots of potential, no reprimands or discipline, held several titles, positive reference letters, and lots of achievements in a short amount of time.

I went above and beyond for my employer, staying late, spearheading charity events, volunteering to represent the Ministry, and worked diligently everyday. I was proud of the work I did, and proud to say I represented the Ministry to the best of my abilities as a Correctional Officer.

I was not proud of the racism, harassment, discrimination, and corruption that thrived inside the workplace.

I was not proud of the fact that I had reported it to various committees, Sergeants, Deputy Superintendents, Superintendent, Regional Directors, and yet still – nothing had changed, nobody seemed to care despite this. No investigation occurred at any point.

I made one last attempt to report it to my direct Superintendent. I advised my Superintendent that there is racism in this facility and it needs to be investigated. To my surprise, my Superintendent stated **“I know there is racism”** and proceeded to tell me that I need to **“grow some thick skin and get over it, I am woman (white) and I have had to go through a lot myself.”** That was my OPS managers response when reporting racism.

There was no interest in even hearing about it further or diving into the issues. I was cut off from speaking about what I was experiencing. My management stated that this was an ongoing thing they are aware of, and made me feel as if I am the problem for even bringing up racism in the first place

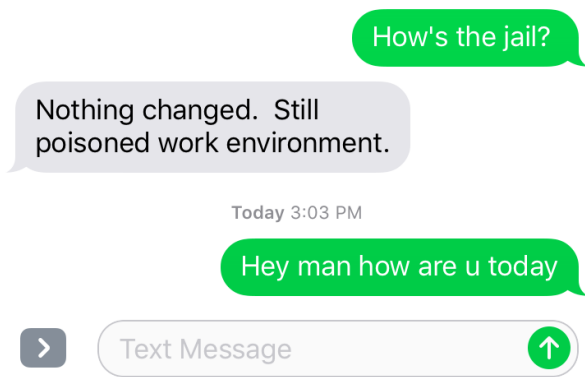
Near the end of our discussion, my Superintendent then **offered me to bribe me into silence and submission of bringing up further complaints about issues in the facility, I was then offered a new position at Vanier's facility (without ever asking for a new role)** As I questioned how I can just take a role that is not posted on the job portal, I was told they would 'just call the other facility and create the job for me' and I could be moved.

I felt completely dejected, and disappointed in my management. Knowing how difficult and rare it is for Officers to come forward about these incidences, knowing how much courage it takes to do so in this type of work environment, instead of investigating the real problem – Racism – I was instead made to be the problem and offered me a promotional opportunity to get rid of me altogether.

I did not take the bribe for a new position. I have a moral conscience and integrity and I did not want to earn my positions through backdoor deals that were only offered as a way to silence me from further reporting about racism.

It was not uncommon to hear of backdoor deals in situations such as these. Feeling in disbelief of what just happened, I reported this to another senior colleague to get his take on the situation, this was his response:

No kidding...They are dirty!!



(Left) Further messages with a colleague about racism, and the poisoned work environment for visible minority staff members. I know I was not the only one who felt this way.

It becomes very difficult to work and feel accepted in a workplace that allows for racism to thrive. It can have a profound effect on your personal well being and work morale when seeing black offenders and other staff members, including myself, subjected to racial slurs, harassment, and discriminatory behaviour on an ongoing bases.

Although I enjoyed my career a great deal, since racism continued and was an ongoing issue that would not be addressed by management, I felt I had no other choice but to resign to preserve my sanity and well-being. I felt if I continue to work in this environment, I too would be complicit in the racism that continued to thrive.

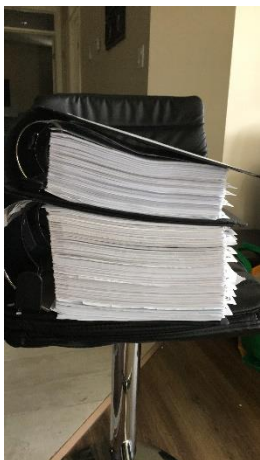
Resigning from a position you take great pride in and enjoy working in is not an easy decision. Not often do people in Government resign from a position that can earn them a six figure salary.

I lost hope and trust in my OPS management to do the right thing and investigate, it was clear they would not be investigating nor holding anyone accountable. I felt I had no choice but to leave a facility that would further abuse me, target, or offer me backdoor deals for reporting racism in the workplace.

I had enough of the racism, conflicts of interest, bullying and harassment, and corruption that occurred.

I had enough of being a target for reporting these issues, gaslighted, and reprisal against.

With no discipline on my file, and solid references, painfully, I submitted my badge and I resigned Dec. 2016.



Documentation and Grievance

I submitted a grievance on the basis of all of what I had been subjected to and as a way for systemic racism to be further addressed, investigated, and eradicated from the OPS.

I filed a formal Grievance in 2016 for the lack of investigations into the workplace racism, harassment, bullying, and discrimination that occurred to me.

I also requested that there be an investigation into systemic racism issues within the facility. I began compiling all of my documentation over the next several months. I would never want to accuse another staff member of being racist or racism existed without being able to at least bring all of the necessary documentation forward to prove that this was the case, and indeed there were racism issues in the workplace.

Grievance # 2018-0230-0012 - Case Name: Grievance of Assenov, Local 230

I would like you to know I am not someone who is looking to cause an issue from nothing. I got nothing but heartache and stress from putting this forward. This is a system that on paper encourages the reporting of racism in the workplace, yet makes it an impossible task for staff to actually do. I am an employee who has a great amount of respect for Human Rights, the dignity of everyone around me, and took my Oath seriously. My goal in submitting this grievance was to prove to the Minister(s) that would see it that there is systemic racism in the OPS, particularly in Corrections, we need an action plan, and we need to fix it.

In order to do that, I committed myself to months of work as I collected and compiled documentation such as:

- Emails from staff / Emails to and from management
- Images and documentation to support my claims
- Text message copies referring to racism, harassment, bullying at work
- Letters from staff regarding racism and discrimination issues at work
- Policies and Procedural documentation to refer to
- Chronologically explained and typed out account of what I had experienced

There have been many difficulties in bringing this grievance forward, including when management said they 'lost my grievance' and even claimed that I had never submitted it despite the fact that it was date stamped, on video, eyewitnesses verified, and I had a copy of the original grievance. .

Human Rights HRTO File: 2017-29611-I

I submitted a Human Rights complaint to ensure for further investigation into systemic racism issues in the workplace. Currently my case sits at the GSB – Grievance Board and is in the Arbitration Process as Human Rights looks to see how that will play out, whether the employer will appropriately address this grievance.

This grievance is me grieving issues that occurred in the workplace. However, I want to make it clear to you that my grievance is about much more than my own experiences of systemic racism in the OPS. My grievance and Human Rights submission is meant to support other visible minority staff members, offenders, and members of the public who are racially abused and targeted by a small group of people.

Consequences of Reporting Racism in the OPS

In recent memo's, OPS staff have been encouraged to report racism, be a leader, and stand up against racism and injustice in the workplace. Nowhere in that memo does it talk about how difficult that is, or the consequences that have been experienced by those who have climbed up this difficult slope.

- What happens when your management rejects your reporting of the issues and does not report, investigate, nor document it themselves as they ought to do under standard procedures?
- What happens if you have reported it to entry level, middle management, senior management, and even the Minister yet nobody has responded to you nor investigated the matter further?
- What happens when you find out other staff have reported racism and are now on sick leave dealing with the depression and anxiety that comes from being further bullied and harassed as a result?
- What happens when you become a target of reprisal from the very same management you report to?
- What happens when your confidential reporting is leaked to other managers you reported on?
- What happens when you become a target of reprisal from your own colleagues for reporting racism?
- What happens when you are left without equipment, and without backup for reporting on colleagues?
- What happens when you submit documentation, but that documentation is 'lost'?

To report racism for me has meant to endure a great deal of suffering and loss. What has it cost me?

Mental Health – Dealing with racism and the fallout of the harassment, bullying, and further targeting of reporting that racism had a tremendous impact on my emotional and psychological health. Prior to entering the OPS I was incredibly healthy, emotionally and physically fit (pre-medical screening). After working here, I was diagnosed with Generalized Anxiety Disorder, Clinical and severe Depression, and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. I resorted to having to take medications that had tremendous and even worse side-effects to my

health, with one specialist even believing I may have a tumour. There were days I couldn't wake up to take a shower and get out of bed. I had suicidal ideation on a weekly basis for several years. I would tear up randomly in public, and at my new office job where I worked to support disabled clients through ODSP, I would have to sneak away to my car and break down crying asking myself why this has been so hard for me when all I am doing is following my conscience and doing the right thing? I felt sad, hopeless, dejected by my employer, alone, completely unsupported and disregarded, like I was the issue.

Over the last year I have improved a great deal, but everyday of the last 4 years has been a struggle to move forward. It has been absolute hell for me, and I can truly say I know what experiencing clinical depression is.

Physical Health – Due to stress I suffered a heart arrhythmia episode, and various other issues along the way.

Loss of Friends/Colleagues/Isolation – nobody wants to be associated with the 'rat' that reports issues, regardless if it's for the greater good of the OPS or visible minorities. There were no calls from management, no investigations, and no calls from staff to check in on me as they too feared being branded through associating with me. The only calls I have ever got were to ask me how to file a Human Rights report, but nobody ever checked up on me again nor returned by texts. I lost all friendships with all of those colleagues.

Loss of Money – During this time I lost all of my savings, and incurred a great deal of debt. Not only did I give up a six figure salary and take less than half the pay in my next role, I had to take several mental health leaves, take time off of work, some of which was completely unpaid, and used up my sick and vacation time. All I wanted to do was work and contribute to society, but I was not well at this time. I attended counselling, doctor's appointments, psychiatrist, and countless amounts of blood work requisitions in order to get better.

Loss of Self – The biggest loss I suffered was that I lost my sense of self. I worked hard for over 10 years to get into Law Enforcement with the Ontario Public Service, believing this was my destined career. Everything I studied, all of the experience I had, and all of the effort I put in was directed at being in this field. I didn't know how to move forward, who I was, or who I would be going forward. I had to learn to redefine myself.

All this happened as a direct result of nobody listening and responding to racism reported in the workplace, racism that they knew had existed in this facility for many years. Racism that was well-documented and even admitted to by my very own Superintendent. I have been shocked at how much disparity in the Policies that come from above, and what is actually implemented and allowed to go on in the frontlines of the OPS.

Silence is Complicity in Racism

Despite the emotional, psychological, physical, and financial issues I had been dealing with in the background, I continued to take a stand for Human Rights and Anti-Racism issues in the OPS, particularly in Corrections.

Reach out to MPP's

Myself, and several other Officers reached out to local MPP's in 2018.

We met with one in particular who, after Officer's explained the systemic racism in the institution said he would 'die for fighting for our cause' and that he would do anything he can to support anti-racism in the OPS. After dropping off documents and sharing our pain, we never heard from this MPP again. I reached out to another MPP, attempted to make appointments and meet with him to advocate for anti-racism in the OPS, yet again this MPP was too busy to meet, nor followed up with me in person at any point.

As staff who simply wanted to report racism, we continued to try to access different resources for advocacy.

Going to the Media

I just want you to understand that when one of your actively employed Government of Ontario employees resorts to going to the media, it is done so as a last resort, as a cry for help. It is not done to 'bash the Government', but as a last resort to communicate with the Ministry and those holding positions of power within government showing them how racism effected me and continues to effect other OPS staff, and crying out for assistance. I did not want to do this for quick fame, or status. I knew that going to the media could be something that may further be used against me in future employment opportunities. In no way shape or form does it help your career.

To my core, I believed that it is necessary to take the step to speak to the public about what I had experienced, both as an educational opportunity that could foster systemic change, and as an opportunity to show other staff that they are not alone in their experiences of racism in the OPS and can come forward without shame or prejudice. I know that this decision, helped make a significant impact based on the countless messages of gratitude I received from fellow OPS employees, Correctional Officers, and the public.

After combing through my evidence carefully, and meeting with me to discuss the details of my allegations, on April 18, 2018 this article was published about my experiences of racism in the OPS by CBC News.

Article Link: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/windsor/south-west-detention-centre-racism-harassment-correctional-officers-1.4623070>

Windsor · Exclusive

Racism, harassment rampant at South West Detention Centre, allege former correctional officers



Former guards call for Canada-wide tip line to report abuse

 Dan Taekema - CBC News - Posted: Apr 19, 2018 4:00 AM ET | Last Updated: April 19, 2018



(Left) is picture from the article about me

The article reads: "Iosko Assenov says he was subjected to bullying and racial slurs while working as a Correctional Officer at the South West Detention Centre from 2014 to 2016."

"A Correctional Officer who resigned from his post at the South West Detention Centre (SWDC) in Windsor, Ont. Is asking the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario to investigate racist incidents, bullying and sexual harassment he alleges targeted him and other officers of colour." "He

"He was drawn to the career out of a desire to be part of a team to help rehabilitate inmates, but said the men and women he was so excited to work with turned their backs on him, attacking him about his racial background and intentionally leaving him in unsafe situations."

"Things that I've seen myself? Sexual harassment toward me from a female manager. Racism, racial slurs, racial epithets toward inmates, toward officers, complete bullying and harassment from managers toward myself and to other officers," he explained, describing the detention center as a "poison work environment."

"He said he was called a "Paki," a terrorist, a "thug hugger" and was the butt of "brown jokes" about how he should play cricket, not baseball, and how he and other "coloured guys" just love their basketball.

“When he spoke up about the slurs he was hearing and harassment he witnessed, Assenov said his situation became even worse. He alleges he was intentionally struck with remotely operated doors controlled by other officers and, in some cases, purposefully left in potentially dangerous situations with inadequate equipment and backup.

'Code of Silence' allows racism to continue

Assenov points to what he calls the "Code of Silence" as a major reason for why abuse in Canada's jails continues.

"Corrections is a subculture — nobody wants to rat anybody out so everything is, for the most part, hidden," Assenov explained. "When somebody goes to management and says 'Hey there is a systemic racial issue here' and it comes back to those officers who are being racist ... then it comes back on you as the guy who's the rat. So, it's a form of punishment."

- [Number of prison workers suffering from PTSD much higher than official stats, union says](#)

Suffering from severe depression, he said he had no choice but to resign in December 2016.

"I ended up needing counselling and I had a heart arrhythmia from the stress. I actually blacked out," said Assenov, adding he visited a counsellor and psychiatrist who prescribed him a long list of medications and told him the stress was work-related.



"I overheard somebody using racial slurs on the floor, but I wasn't sure who they were directed at," he explained. Then he heard the same words used in the lunch room.

"It's a group of guys that you work with who are in there, so you wonder 'Is that how they refer to people here? Is that the culture? Is that what it is?'"



"There are times where you feel very alone," he explained, adding he reported the abuse to management 16 separate times, but he claims an internal investigation was never launched.

"Worthless, that's how it leaves you feeling, like you don't belong because of the colour of your skin."

One specific incident involved escorting 10 inmates across the facility to the gym. Assenov was a recreational officer at the time and only wearing shorts and a T-shirt. He alleges he was left alone, without a fully armed guard, as an act of reprisal for speaking out about racism at SWDC. I further talked about why racism thrives in this type of setting:

The article continues to show another former Officer of colour who worked within the same Institution who joined me in reporting racism. He describe experiences of racism as:

"I overheard somebody using racial slurs on the floor, but I wasn't sure who they were directed at," he explained. Then he heard the same words used in the lunch room. "It's a group of guys that you work with who are in there, so you wonder 'Is that how they refer to people here? Is that the culture? Is that what it is?'"

“Beechey witnessed what was happening to Assenov, but said when he stood up for his colleague the other officers started to pull away from him, leading him into a deep depression.”

No response from Ministry

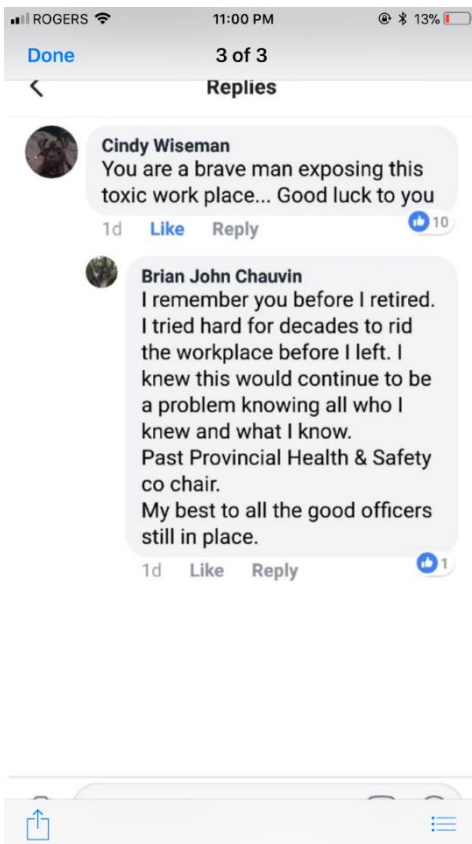
Despite hearing about my allegations, and those of Tyler Beechey, at no point did the Ministry's management, the Minister of Corrections, the Deputy Minister of Corrections, the Anti-Racism Minister of Corrections or a Human Rights Advisor connect with me or the other Officer in the article to find out what is going on from inside this facility, to hear of our experiences, or further investigate into their legitimacy.

If this type of racism is happening to our own racialized Correctional staff forcing us to leave our career, what is happening to black offenders in the system, during everyday interactions, and use of force incidences?

If they are being racially abused who will report it, and how can we ensure that those reports will be investigated at all?

After attempting to reach out through the news to the Minister and Senior Management, Nobody from the OPS contacted me. No investigation occurred. I received nothing but silence from my employer, and it is the silence about this racism that makes the OPS complicit in the racism itself.

Publics Response



I did receive a lot of positive public support, of members of the public that were commending me for standing up against racism, giving me their personal opinions and positive encouragement.

In the comments section of the public forum, a member of the public (below) recognized my efforts in bringing these issues forward.

Below this, a former (recently retired Officer) spoke out about the fact that he recognizes there are issues in the workplace that need to be addressed indeed stating:

“I knew this would continue to be a problem knowing all who I knew and what I know.”

Staff fear reprisals from their colleagues and management so much that they feel it is only safe to speak up when out of the workplace. This is not the way a collaborative relationship between employer and employee ought to be. It should be a two-way chain of communication, where both parties strive to listen, validate, and understand the concerns of one another. Unfortunately, my experiences have shown me otherwise so far.

Further Harassment and Reprisals for Reporting Racism

The OPS states that it has a zero tolerance policy on racism, Zero tolerance for targeted bullying and harassment, or racial discrimination, and zero tolerance to do doing so via social media.

After reporting incidences of racism through the CBC article, several (all-white) Officers and a manager took to a Facebook Correctional Officer group, and began further harassing me for standing up against racism in the OPS. This was all posted online, for over 100+ Officers and several managers to see and humiliate me. Included in the group was even a Staff Sergeant, a Deputy Superintendent, and an Acting Sergeant.

These Officers, turned my article into a mob mentality of bashing me and my experiences, further harassing me for reporting this racism. They were extremely defensive, and took it extremely personal that I reported it.

Had roles been reversed, I would question what has happened to this officer that they have gone to report it. I would try to come from a place of empathy, and try to understand. I would recognize that these things do occur, I am not always working with the same staff and around them at all times, I cannot invalidate someone else’s experiences of racism. I would recognize that nobody just goes to the news and resigns without reason.

This was not the case at all however and on this Facebook page the first Officer shared my article.

Directly beneath that, another Officer and Acting manager posted this:



40m Like Reply

“Either With us or Against Us”

Ether with us or against us about racism?

That’s what a white Acting manager has to say about a racialized Officer reporting his experiences of racism in his facility?

OPS management is responsible to tackle racism if they are made aware of it, which in this case they were, and managers ought to ensure that staff reporting racism are protected, not further reprimed against for reporting the racism issues in the workplace.

This is evidence that the ‘thin blue line’ exists and there is a definite ***Code of Silence in Corrections*** which adds an enormous amount of pressure for any staff members to report incidences of racism or any wrongdoing in the workplace. ***Why would anyone else speak out about sexual harassment, discrimination, racism, or corruption in the workplace when they see the harassment I took for doing so?***

This was an Acting Manager, not a rookie, but a potential senior leader in the future who not only disregarded the experiences of two racialized OPS staff, their trauma, their dignity, but further promoted and incited hate speech and divisiveness through this visual – forcing people to pick a side, either with us or against us.

Further below in this Facebook discussion was several other Officers who posted things such as the below meme in regards to the sharing of racism experiences within the OPS :



The Officers continued to hurl insults at me and post memes of me – these were their comments and memes (copy pasted) in front of all of my other colleagues and managers on social media.

I was able to see it.

Wow he should be a famous actor.

What a Loser

WDHP Reporting

At no point did a manager or other officer tell them to stop on the posts.

I sent all documentation, screenshotted to a WDHP Advisor and filed for a Workplace Harassment Claim. I was told that 8 counts of Harassment were deemed to have occurred by the WDHP Advisor. When I asked what would happen next, I was advised that it is up to management’s discretion, they will deal with it whatever way they see appropriate. Some of these individuals are directly related to and or in relationships with other managers. Therefore, no real authentic accountability will be had. I was never again followed up with by WDHP Advisors, nor management from the facility, as I am not allowed to know how they were disciplined.

The WDHP Advisor did say that they could be simply ‘warned’ and that this would suffice.

Racism towards members of the Public

After this news report, several members of the public connected with me and reported that they did agree, they too have been victims of racial slurs from Correctional Officers in uniform from this facility.

My name is [REDACTED]. I recently seen story on news about a woman facing racist co workers at jail in windsor ont. It brought back a time i was Macs gas station on Erie and Ouellette. I was pulling up to pump and a black Mustang GTO cut me off . i got out of car and said to the guy. Oh i guess i didnt want gad. He responded oh you niggers want everything. He was Caucasian. I went in to pay and was telling the clerk. He said he's a prison guard. He said his name but 4 yrs passed and i forget what it was. I went to police station to see if they have same code of contact and they suggsted i report it to his supervisor at the jail. Nothing happened after that. No call or email pr letter. I left my name and number at the jail. With the person who greets you when you come in. I was shocked and mad . i experienced racism in Windsor but never to that extent or called a derogative name. Racism was alive and well that day

1. In one instance, an elderly black woman reached out to me and told me that she had once parked at the Mac's, and a white Correctional Officer from Windsor called her the n-word out in public. (Left: Her report emailed to me)

She had reported it to the facility management, and no investigation or follow up occurred.

She had reported it to the local police, and no investigation or follow up occurred.

This was of no surprise to me, as I knew that this is how the facility dealt with incidences of racism.

This further highlights that our own OPS employees, Correctional Officers, paid for by the Public, can even racially abuse elderly black women in the community and get away with it. Even this didn't warrant an investigation into their code of conduct.

This may interest you....a current "leader" at the jail!! Very offensive that promote people like this!!! Publically showing this only imagine what happens behind the scene!!

2. A member of the public emailed me this personally, saying he was offended by seeing racist meme's like this on a Correctional Officer's Facebook page and "**can only imagine what happens behind the scenes.**"

(Left) This was the meme posted on an OPS member's Facebook page that a member of the public found offensive.

For perspective purposes, in the past few weeks, a comparable situation occurred within the Ottawa Police. The Chief of Police was disgusted with seeing racist meme's circulating amongst his Police Officer's, and charged one of his officers holding them accountable for racism and the violation of their code of conduct.

I applaud this Police Chief in his actions and leadership. Yet when I reported it, with proof, nobody even responded to me from the OPS, I was met with complete silence.



Ottawa police officer charged after racist meme circulates, chief addresses criticisms of police

Shaamini Yogaretnam
June 2, 2020 · 5 minute read



Emails Sent to OPS

On multiple occasions I have tirelessly emailed the highest levels of the chain of command to report racism.

On one occasion for instance, June 5, 2020 I reached out to the **Minister of Anti-Racism**, the **Minister of Corrections** and the **Deputy Minister of Corrections**. I attached a very detailed email of the issues. I attached several screenshots, images, and articulated the issues I have personally witnessed and I am aware exist.

One of the texts in that email read this:

There is another one that was said to have told the inmate "you better stay down nigger" but I never heard it so how am I to know for sure

Once again it was utter silence. I did not receive any response, no reply back, no phone call, no meeting.

Again, absolutely no response when reporting racism in the OPS, even when it comes from an OPS employee.

Tweeted for Advocacy



Iosko Assenov
@IoskoAssenov

POLITICIANS... @NDP @fordnation
@mlatifawan CONNECT WITH US
OFFICERS VICTIMS OF RACISM &
HARASSMENT, FIND OUT HOW THIS
IS ACCEPTABLE BY THIS
GOVERNMENT? @TorontoStar
@CBCCanada @CTVNationalNews
@globalnewsto

Aside from the articles, the emails, and grievance, I sent multiple tweets to the Ministry and Anti-Racism Minister requesting to meet up, to connect, and facilitate a dialogue to see why black people and racialized OPSers and members of the public are being racially targeted in this way by OPS employees?

I sent multiple tweets with direct links to articles, and screenshots.

I sent one to directly to Premier Ford, requesting desperately to connect and allow for dialogue to begin.

I heard absolutely nothing from anyone from the OPS.

No response, again and again.

Instead of support and further investigation, I received nothing but silence and disregard every step of this journey, every single time I reached out and attempted to report racism to the OPS.

Ignoring racism, and ignoring those that report it with visual evidence, witnesses, and other employees willing to speak up has had devastating psychological and emotional consequences for these staff that report it.

It has felt as though racism issues are of absolutely no importance. As if I am a nuisance.

What I have learned in this entire process is that generally those who commit racism go untouched.

Those who report it are the ones that have to suffer, and the ones that are actually targeted.

More Officers Speak Out

Claims coworkers used slurs to describe daughter

But after reading about the racism and harassment other correctional officers say they suffered at the South West Detention Centre — which replaced the Windsor Jail and opened in 2014 — Bauer said she's tired of staying quiet.

- [Racism, harassment rampant at South West Detention Centre, allege former correctional officers](#)

"There was a lot of talk about a new building that's going to change everything, but as long as you have the same managers in there who clearly don't respect women and don't care for black people, then nothing is going to change."



On May 13, 2020, another Officer came forward from within the same Institution about her experiences with racism, harassment, and discrimination in her workplace.

This officer found me online, called me, and personally thanked me for coming forward and reporting racism in the weeks prior as she saw the CBC article I was featured in.

This officer stated that she had been suffering in silence for a very long time, and had her story to share. By speaking up I gave her the courage and inspiration to also share her story, and for her to know she is not alone.

This was the reason why I went to the media. Knowing some of our staff are depressed,

suicidal, struggling to cope with experiencing racism in the OPS and feeling completely isolated and unsupported by their employer. These staff need to know they are not alone and that's what I was able to at least give them comfort that they are not alone.

Below is the link to the article:

Link (below): <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/windsor/nadine-bauer-harassment-windsor-jail-ministry-corrections-1.4634942>

MPP Article

Windsor

Local MPPs call alleged harassment at former Windsor Jail 'unacceptable'



Dan Taekema · CBC News · Posted: May 16, 2018 9:24 PM ET | Last Updated: May 17, 2018



Following both of the featured articles of myself and the other staff who came forward, CBC Published this third article (left) on May 16, 2020.

This article interviewed and asked MPP's for their thoughts on this situation involving racism, harassment, and discrimination.

Both MPP's shared their disapproval for racism and harassment in the workplace.

However, at no point have any staff members who were featured in these articles, including myself, been contacted by these MPP's.

YouTube Video “Racism, Harassment, and Corruption in Ontario Law Enforcement”



Racism, Harassment, and Corruption in Ontario Law Enforcement

On May 8, 2019 I created and edited my own YouTube Video to describe some of the experiences I had in the OPS, to shed light on it.

I connected with various staff, racialized officers, and management, to find out what the central issues are for them.

I wanted to show that these are reoccurring issues staff have experienced across the Province, focusing on racism, harassment, and corruption.

I received positive comments from members of the public who watched this YouTube video.

One particularly inspiring and supportive comment from a member of the public reads:

“That’s awful. These are people in positions of power...planting contraband in an inmates cell so they go to segregation...wtf...Everyone must pull together and do the right thing. Together. Keep supporting each other and I hope racism, especially in the work place becomes a thing of the past. Thank God for you, Iosko, for having the courage and morals to speak up, not only for yourself but your coworkers of colour, inmates, and the public. You could have taken that job too, you’re a good human being, please know that and people like you are rare. You’re a gem. Thank you so much. Please, don’t give up, keep talking about this to anyone who will listen.”

Call to Action

In the recent memo sent to all OPS staff it reads:

“We call upon all leaders in our organization to speak up and create safe spaces to have important conversations around anti-Black racism and discrimination, but also to lead change throughout our organizations.”

You can now see the difficulties I, and many others, have faced in reporting racism to the OPS. I have highlighted for you the various barriers, systematic inefficiencies, and personal struggle and loss it has cost me (and other OPSers) who have took this stand and vowed to eradicate racism in our workplace. Taking a stand against racism in the OPS has meant enduring a great deal of financial, emotional, psychological, and physical trauma in order to simply ‘do the right thing.’ Despite tirelessly advocating for anti-black, and anti-racism in the OPS, I have been met with a complete lack of acknowledgement and support from the OPS..

At no point to date has any OPS manager responded back to any of my emails, tweets, article, or video.

At no point to date has any OPS manager or senior member of cabinet cared to sit, listen, investigate.

At no point to date has anyone been held accountable for any racist behaviour.

It has been 4 years since I have left Corrections. 4 very painful, difficult years of my life.

My grievance continues through the GSB and is in Arbitration currently.

My Human Rights complaint pending.

All I have ever wanted, was to do the right thing and report these issues, so that no other staff member within the OPS, no offender, and no member of the public has to experience the effects of racism from other staff.

That's it. That's all I ever wanted, for the next guy or girl to not have to go through this.

Working Together on Initiatives

During this time of anti-racism protesting, let's create a positive movement. Let's create dialogue. Let's create safe spaces for our employees. Let's create initiatives that will be meaningful, thought provoking, and long-lasting. Let's do more for our community.

I would love the opportunity to connect and share creative and inspiring ideas I have with you.

I would love the opportunity and spearhead these initiatives on behalf of the OPS.

Despite feeling institutionally betrayed by my employer, regardless I have remained a positive, dedicated, and resilient team player who continues to champion for Human Rights and Inclusion in my workplace.

I want to be a leader in the OPS. I want to do more for my community, clients, and colleagues.

I take great pride in inspiring and bringing people together. I want to use my negative experiences to help make real, significant, long lasting change in the OPS.

OPS Role

Currently I work out of ODSP (Ontario Disability Support Program) in the capacity of Administrative Support Clerk. This has been a big change from working in Corrections. In this role, I support disabled clients, those with mental health challenges, and the homeless on a daily basis. I am a major proponent of Health and Safety. I enjoy working with my colleagues, who are amazing dedicated professionals that work within the Ministry of Social Services and deserve a great deal of recognition for the work they do in the OPS.

Community Work

Outside of the OPS, I do lots of community work such as coaching youth sports and consulting youth with disabilities, mental health, and behavioural challenges on a one to one basis. I am very passionate about this. I get to personally change kids lives, and have a profoundly positive impact upon them and their future.

I support these youth by (some examples include):

- One to one Counselling & Family mediation
 - Advocating on their behalf
 - Recreation Therapy
 - Teaching of various life skills
 - Setting up Volunteer placements
 - Setting up Employment opportunities
 - Helping them with Housing, chores, hygiene
 - Supporting them with appointments
 - Supporting them with medication
-

Our Future

Four years later, I am still speaking out about racism in the workplace and calling others to action as well the same way I did when I first began this journey in 2016.

At times I have asked myself has it all been worth it? The trauma, pain, and losses?

Is it worth it to stand up against racism for a black offender I don't even know?

Is it worth it to report racism for a black elderly member of the public who makes an allegation of racial slurs?

When I begin to think this way, I recognize I am thinking about my individual pain and challenges in navigating how to report and address these issues with an employer who has remained silent on racism for so long.

Then I remind myself that I needed to be a leader. I needed to stand up and speak out, it's who I am. To remain silent this entire time would make me complicit and no different than those perpetuating racism.

I am proud of myself for standing up, without a fancy title, against tremendous odds, I was able to lead by example and do everything I could within my personal power and experience to do the right thing. By speaking up about this, I have made a dent in the system. I have made a positive impact in the lives of my colleagues, members of the public, my friends, my family, and the community I support

It has not been easy, but doing the right thing is always worth it.

During this difficult time I have had my wife by my side, who is a loving, supportive, and empathetic staple by my side. If it was not for her I honestly don't know if I would have made it this far.

At the end of this year, my wife and I are expecting our first child, a baby girl.

I will continue to do my part in advocate and being a leader for anti-racism, leading by example around those closest to me in my roles as a father, a husband, a son, an OPS employee, a coach, and youth worker.

In the years to come, I will be teaching my daughter to treat everyone with the respect, dignity, and equality each of us human beings deserve as her father does. I will teach my daughter to stand up for herself in the face of oppression and injustice as her father did. I will teach my daughter to stand up for others in the same way as her father did regardless of how consequences may play out. I will teach her to do the right thing.

I want to know what type of Ontario will my daughter live in? Will she too be discriminated on the basis of her skin colour by her employer and colleagues? Will her request for assistance from her government be unanswered? Will her bravery in responding to racism be rewarded with an investigation? Or will we continue to allow for acts of racism and reprisals to go unnoticed until the next set of protests, and the next memos? I trust and pray that she will be able to thrive by being treated with dignity, equality, and respect.

My hope is that Ontario becomes a world leader in Human Rights and Anti-Racism.

I would love the opportunity to connect and begin an open and honest dialogue.

I would like to be an active member of facilitating change, spearheading projects and initiatives and collaborating with my community, colleagues, and management on these issue.

Thank you for your time, love, and support, as we all begin to move forward with a healing heart.

Iosko Assenov