



Strip Searches: Measurement & Outcomes

RBDC Video 5 Transcript

Slide 1 – Title Page

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Toronto Police Service
Race-Based Data Collection Strategy

Analysis to Action Model: Roadmap to Equity

Strip Searches: Measurement & Outcomes

The next section addresses strip searches. The Toronto Police Service added Strip Searches to the interactions where race should be collected in 2020, in response to the OIPRD Report “Breaking the Golden Rule”.

This video will take us through data considerations, context of strip searches in arrests, and the key findings

Slide 2 – Arrest Process Breakdown Graph

A strip search is an outcome that results from a series of decision-points in an arrest process. In 2020, there were 31, 979 arrests, of which about 17, 000 (or 53.5%) were booked into custody at a police station.

There were 7, 114 strip searches, representing 22.2% of all arrests or 41.6% of bookings that year.

NOTE: In 2020 (Jan to Dec), **53.5%** of **arrests** resulted in a **booking**; and **41.6%** of **bookings** resulted in a **strip search**.

Slide 3 – Strip Search Breakdown Graph (By Perceived Race)

We look at the breakdown of strip searches by perceived race of individuals...

An individual may be arrested or strip searched more than once. **63%** of individuals strip searched had only one arrest in 2020.

Of the 7114 persons strip searched in 2020,
46% were perceived as White
31% were perceived as Black

4% were perceived as Indigenous
4% were perceived as East/Southeast Asian
3% were perceived as Middle Eastern and South Asian
2% were perceived as Latino

Slide 4 – Relationship to Crime Rate

To ground our understanding of strip search practices and how it relates to community safety needs and concerns, we looked at local crime rates, broken down by specific types of offences, and mapped it against strip search rates by division where the person was arrested. Of note, this may not be the division where the person was booked.

There is a moderately strong relationship between strip searches and crimes rates across Divisions and types of offences.

For different types of offences, the downtown divisions (14, 51 and 52 highlighted in red) tend to have higher crime rates as well as higher strip search rates.

Slide 5 – Finding 1

We worked with the Community Advisory Panel and engagements with stakeholders and Service members to co-develop questions and hypotheses to explore with our data to understand strip search outcomes and racial disparities.

There were four key findings that resulted from this work together. The first is, strip search rates varied throughout the year and dropped significantly following changes in policy and procedures.

Slide 6 – Strip Search Rates Dropped Following Policy Changes

2020 trends allow us to have a baseline to compare changes due to policy and procedure going forward. The chart shows counts of all arrests and strip searches, not unique individuals. An individual may be arrested or searched more than once during the year.

The data also shows the impact of the provincial pandemic response on all the trends in the months immediately following the state of emergency. Arrests dropped as people were ordered indoors and restricted in their activities outside. This also led to drops in bookings and strip searches, all of which began a slow rebound over the summer.

Importantly, the effect of search policy changes took effect in October, and you can see the significant decline in strip searches which began a month earlier as officers were trained and became aware of the change.

NOTE: Effect of policy change on trends

Pre-policy change: 27% of *arrests* resulted in a strip search
or 50.6% of *bookings* resulted in a strip search

Post-policy change: 4.9% of *arrests* resulted in a strip search
or 9.5% of *bookings* result in a strip search



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Repeats: 50% of 21, 131 unique individuals arrested had only one arrest in 2020.
 -2,098 strip searches (13%) involved individuals with only 1 arrest
 → One individual had 8 strip searches done on 31 arrests; another had 17 strip searches on 28 different arrests

Slide 7 – Finding 2

The second key finding shows there were differences by race in strip search rates in 2020, with Black, Indigenous and White people over-represented relative to their presence in arrests. This was reduced following policy changes.

Slide 8 – There are differences by race by Strip Search Rates

To help us understand the broader process leading to a strip search, we look at the arrested population in 2020, and the breakdown by race.

We compare the proportion of each race group arrested with their proportion in strip searches. We can see that arrested Indigenous people were 1.3x over-represented in strip searches, while Black and White people arrested were over-represented by 1.1x.

We used the arrested population as a broad benchmark to understand strip search patterns in 2020. It is important to note that a person has to be booked at a police station before they could be strip searched; hence factors leading to bookings should also be considered to understand strip searches.

In 2020, 53.5% of all arrests resulted in the person being booked at the station, and when we compared strip search rates by race using bookings, it did not differ from the findings we report. However, we identified significant data quality issues with booking data prior to the procedure changes in late 2020 which affects the reliability of results using bookings.

We addressed this with the new template, and have better data going forward, which we will include for Phase 2 analyses of the arrest process and future trend analyses of strip searches.

Slide 9 – These differences were reduced following procedural changes

Analyzing 2020 data is important to establish a baseline for understanding the impacts of changes and tracking our progress. We compared the results with 2021 to see how policy changes affected racial disparities.

We see that the number and percent of strip searches were significantly reduced across the board for everyone, as shown by the blue bars for 2020 and yellow bars for 2021.

However, we still observe slightly higher strip search rates for Black and White people arrested in 2021, compared to the overall average.

Slide 10 – Finding 3

The third key finding shows the difference remain after accounting for repeat offences, including drug related and weapons offences

Slide 11 – There were differences by race based on frequency of arrests in 2020

A person who is arrested multiple times may have increased chances of being strip searched, and this may differ by race. We looked to see if frequency of recent arrests influenced strip searches for different groups. Frequency of arrests refers to the number of times someone was arrested in 2020.

Overall, about 76% of people were arrested only once in 2020, 18% were arrested 2 or 3 times, and about 6% arrested 4 or more times.

Those with more frequent arrests also had greater chances of being strip searched. Looking at the top set of bars, we could see that only 13% of those with only one recent arrest were strip searched (the grey bar), compared with 31% of those with four or more arrests (red bar).

This trend is generally observed for all groups; however, it is weaker for some, such as Indigenous and Black people, than for others. This means that frequency of arrests had less of an influence on someone's chances of being strip searched if they were Indigenous or Black, compared to East/Southeast Asian or White people.

Slide 12 – There are differences in strip search rates by race after taking into account primary offences involved

As we saw earlier, strip searches tend to increase in relation to specific offences. We looked at whether this relationship varied by race and if so, which situations we should monitor and address.

We found that in 2020, there were over-representations in strip searches for different groups when considering primary offence types (as shown by the highlighted boxes). Among those arrested for assault and potholder crimes against persons, Indigenous, Latino, Middle Eastern and South Asian people were over-represented in strip searches.

Black, Latino and Middle Eastern people were over-represented in strip searches when they were involved in weapons and homicide-related offences.

Slide 13 – Finding 4

The fourth finding is There were differences across arrest locations by Divisions in strip searches conducted in 2020.

Slide 14 – There were differences by location for White, Black & Indigenous people

To visualize differences by arrest locations by division on a map, we show where there were higher strip search rates in darker colours. Each map presents the rates for the three groups with higher strip search rates (Indigenous, Black, and White people).

We can see that there are largely similarities, but also some differences, with Black and White people having higher strip search rates when arrested in southeast Scarborough and Indigenous people in East York.



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We need to unpack this further to understand the root causes behind these trends, and work with local Indigenous organizations and members of communities to come up with meaningful and relevant solutions.

Slide 15 – These differences remained after looking at population demographics

To see whether differences in strip search rates were influenced by the demographic make-up of the area where individuals are arrested, we compared the degree of over-representation of each race group in strip searches relative to arrests (on the vertical axis) with their representation in the local population (on the horizontal line) compared to the city average.

Values above 1 on each axis indicate an over-representation of that group by Division. Each coloured dot represents a race group by arrest location at the divisional level

As you can see in the shaded area, Divisions with higher over-representations of:

- Indigenous
- Black and
- White people

in strip searches had lower proportions of that race group in the local population.

To look at this graph in an interactive form, please visit the Public Safety Data Portal on tps.ca

Slide 16 – Other Analysis of Interest:

Were items found as a result of conducting a strip search? This was an important question to answer as it speaks to the quality of decisions made for strip searches and could help us to refine our policies to be more effective while minimizing potentially unnecessary searches.

When trying to answer this question, we noted several data quality issues within our data systems that have worked towards resolving. Despite the data quality issues, we are reporting on this data in the interest of transparency following questions from communities and our members.

We addressed this in the analysis by removing any items that would have or should have been found in protective or frisk searches, such as shoelaces, drawstrings, necklaces, etc. We have taken steps to improve how items found is recorded and there is closer supervisor scrutiny to ensure the search template is completed properly.

Overall, items were found in 40% of strip searches conducted. Earlier, we saw that there were differences in search rates by offence types and also that this affected groups differently. We looked to see whether those differences indicated room for improvement in how we conduct searches and reduce disparities.

We found that search rates and items found rates were highest for drug-related offences, followed by break & enter and weapons and homicide-related offences. While search rates were

lowest for arrests related to robberies & thefts, when they did occur items found tended to be higher than average (as indicated by the cross bars in the chart).

Slide 17 – Other Analysis of Interest: Items Were Found in 40% of Incidents

Because we are breaking it down by the offence type related to the original arrest, we focus on the two largest groups – White people (bottom graph) and Black people (top graph) – to see whether the rate of searches and items found tracked in similar ways.

There were similarities when it comes to drug-related offences, where search rates and items found rates were both high, suggesting that search decisions were effective for both groups in that type of arrest.

However, when it comes to arrests related to weapons and homicide-related offences, there are more clear differences. Search rates were lower for incidents involving White people (38% of arrests), but when a strip search was conducted, items were found 50% of the time.

In contrast, Black people were more likely to be searched (48%) and when searched, items were found only 38% of the time. This suggests that strip searches involving Black people arrested for weapons offences were less effective, and we need to explore this further to minimize potentially unnecessary searches while protecting the safety of all concerned.

Of note, items found refers to any items found, and doesn't necessary mean it is related to the nature of the offence. That said, it also excludes items **not** considered to be evidence, drugs, cause injury, or potentially assist escape from custody. We also exclude any items that would've been found at lower levels of search, such as shoelaces, drawstrings, earrings or necklaces, items found in pockets, etc.

Slide 18 – Other Analysis of Interest: Reasons for Search

Officers must state the reasons why they believe a strip search is necessary and supervisors must assess those reasons before making any approvals for the search. There could be more than one reason given for a strip search.

The most common reason given to conduct a strip search was to ensure the person was not concealing any items that may cause injury to themselves, officers or other people whom they may be held in custody with. About 79% of strip searches were to ensure personal safety. The next most common reason provided was to search for potential weapons (47%), followed by evidence (41%) and assist escape (37%).

We found very little or no racial disparities in reasons provided for a strip search. The only exception was for searches involving Latino people arrested, where they were more likely to be searched for weapons.