

# #GotBlood2Give / #DuSangADonner: Exploring the experiences of Black men who have sex with men (cis and trans) with blood donation in Canada

O. Dryden<sup>1</sup>, J. Sinno<sup>1,2,\*</sup>, A. Cadri<sup>3</sup>, E. Lee<sup>4</sup>, Z. Marshall<sup>5</sup>, L. Mbuagbaw<sup>6</sup>, & L. Nelson<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Dalhousie University, Halifax, Canada, <sup>2</sup>University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada, <sup>3</sup>McGill University, Montréal, Canada, <sup>4</sup>Université de Montréal, Montréal, Canada, <sup>5</sup>University of Calgary, <sup>6</sup>McMaster University, Hamilton, Canada, <sup>7</sup>Yale University, Newhaven, US.

## Background

- In Canada, there is a paucity of research aimed at understanding the experiences of African, Caribbean, and Black gay, bisexual, queer and trans men (herein Black GBQTM) in relation to health, including barriers to becoming blood donors.
- Black GBQTM face intersecting forms of erasure, silencing, and stigma due, in part, to anti-Black racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia in both queer communities and the wider Canadian community. (Furman et al., 2018; Jean-Pierre & James, 2020)
- The intersection of sexual and racial marginalization in the context of the HIV epidemic has uniquely shaped the way Black GBQTM have been thought about and presented in research, which have informed specific questions in the Canadian Blood Services (CBS) donor questionnaire. (Bowleg et al., 2022; Dryden & Nnorom, 2021)
- While the donor questionnaire continues to evolve – with questions being removed, rewritten, and updated – questions about Africa, MSM, and trans peoples remain contentious.
- Aim:** to better understand the experiences of Black GBQTM in relation to blood donation in Canada.

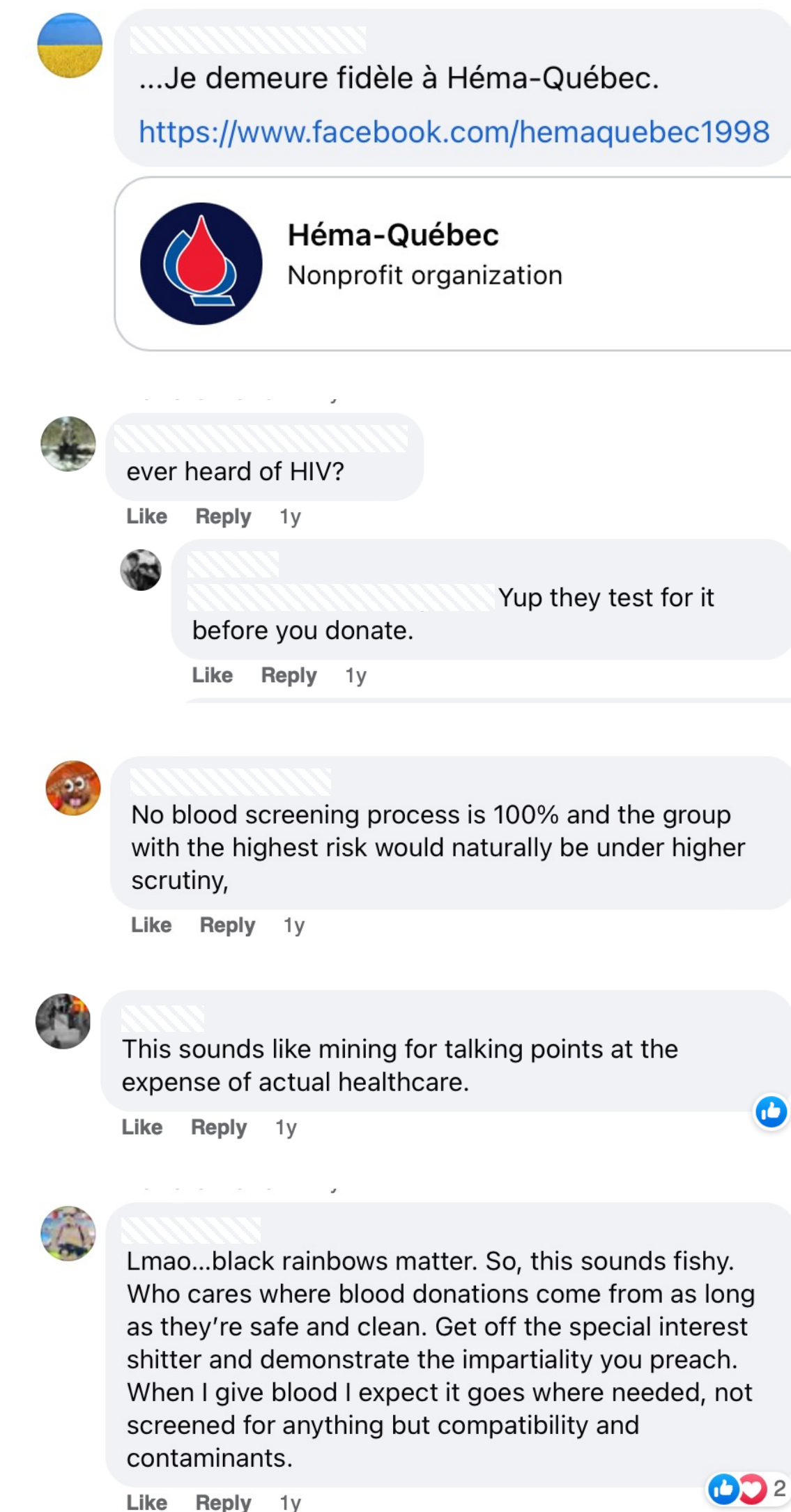
## Results

- Analytic sample of 288 Black GBQTM (Halifax=12, Ottawa=29, Montréal=83, Toronto=164).
- Mean age was 29.36 years (sd=9.08).
- A majority were assigned male at birth (n=268, 92.4%), currently identify as men (n=250, 86.5%), and gay (n=182, 63.0%). Over one-quarter of participants also identified as non-binary, gender diverse, or other (n=82, 28.5%) (note: participants could select several gender identities).

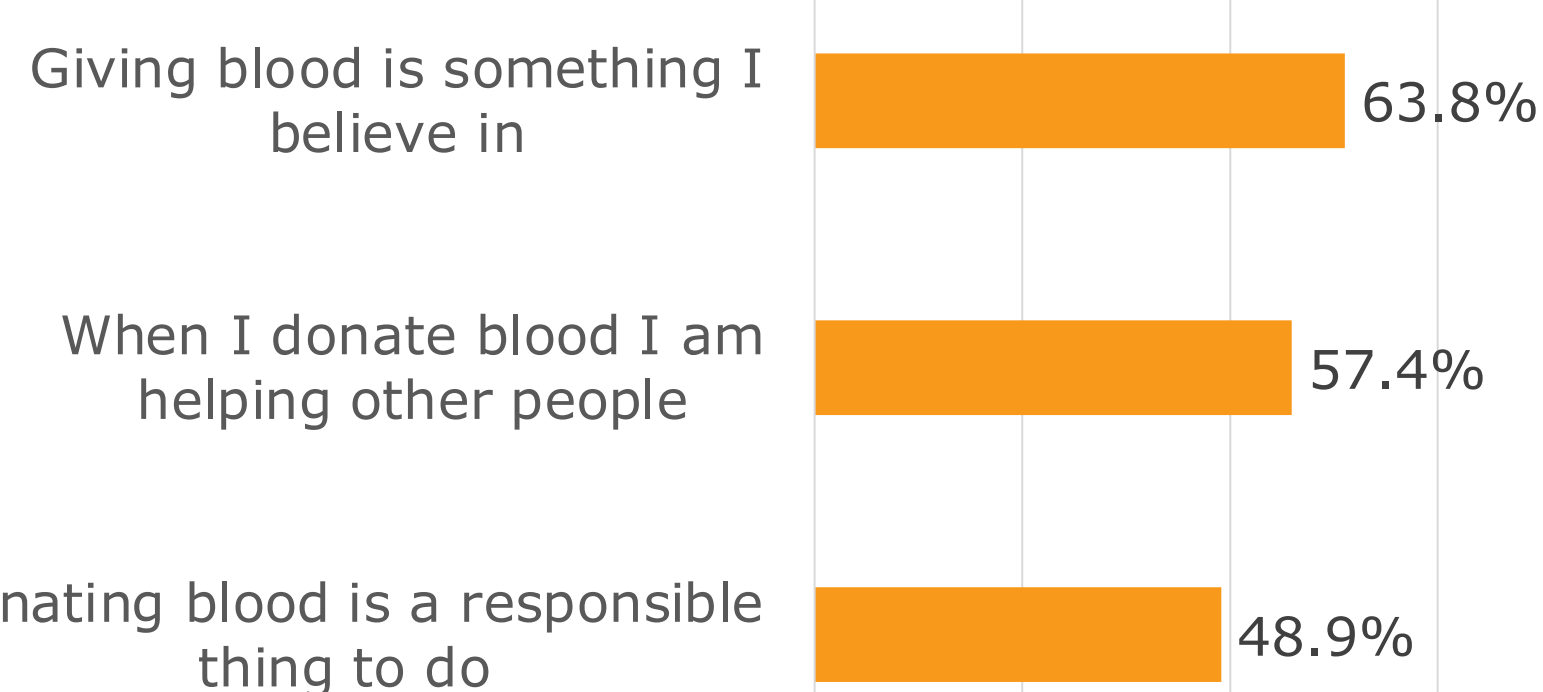
- A majority have previously had an HIV test (n=172, 82.3%; 209 answered this question).
- Top reasons for why they previously took an HIV test were: *I just wanted to find out if I was infected or not* (n=60, 34.88%) and *It was part of a routine medical check-up, or for hospitalization/surgical procedure* (n=57, 34.14%).
- Over three-quarters had never donated blood (n=210, 77.8%; 270 answered this question).

## Methods

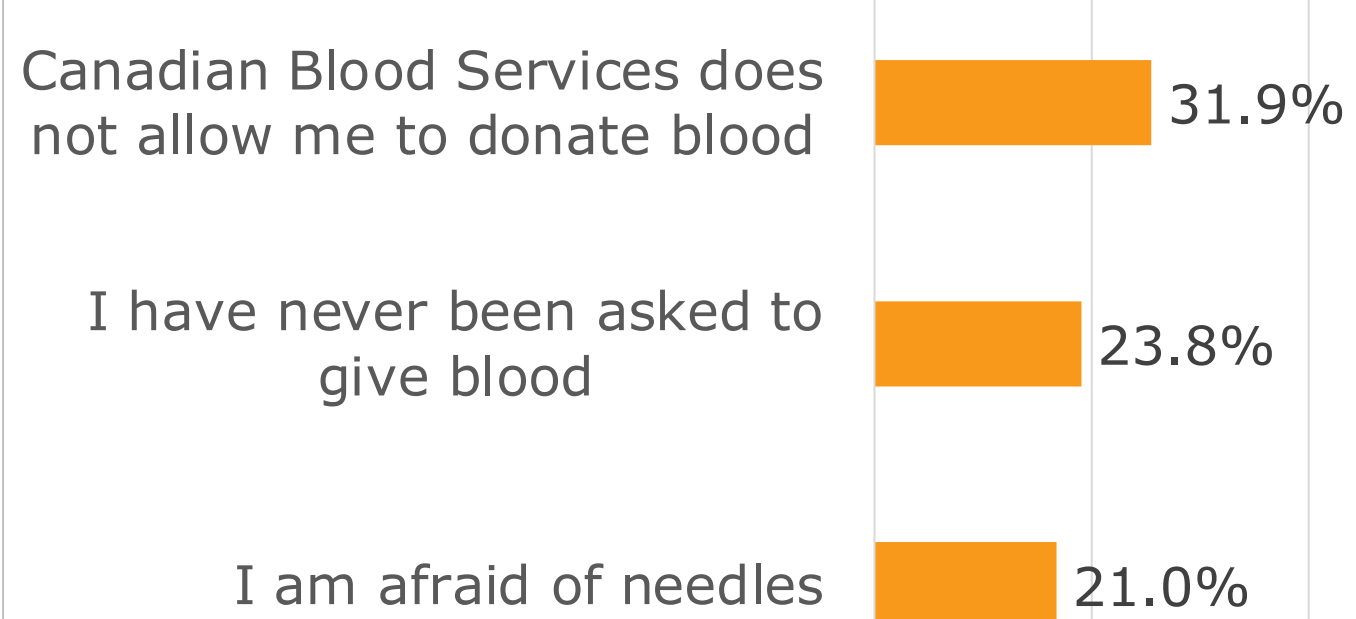
- Black GBQTM living in Halifax, Ottawa, Toronto, or Montréal.
- Ongoing mixed-methods three-part research project. The findings are from part one – an online quantitative survey. Parts two and three consist of interviews with Black GBQTM.
- Participants were initially recruited through respondent driven sampling (RDS; n=85) between 02/2019-11/2019 and then by convenience sample (n=205) 11/2020-03/2021 through online ads on social media.
- E.g., of racist comments in response to study ads to the right.



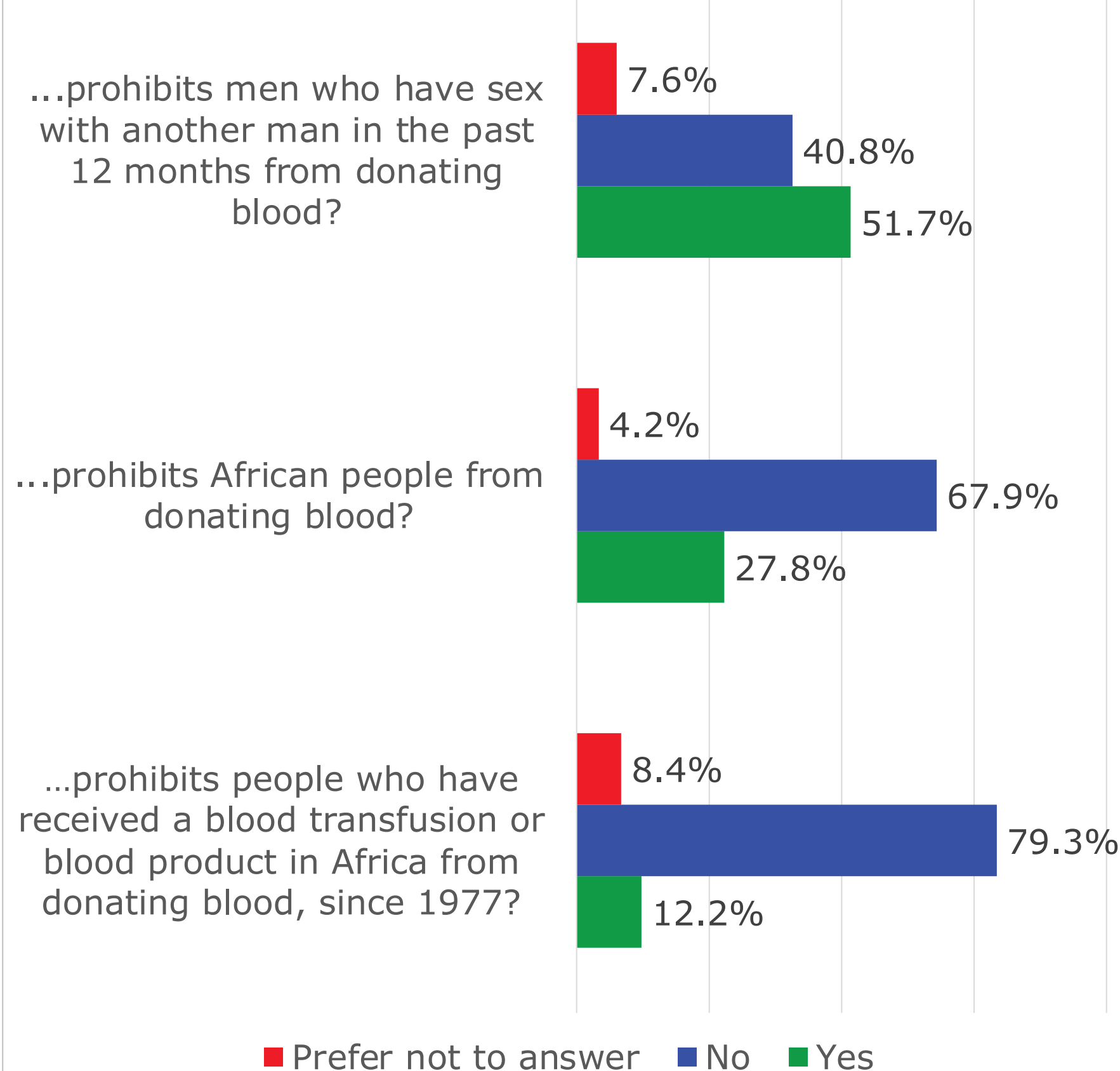
Top 3 reasons for why blood was donated



Top 3 reasons for having never donated blood



Before today, would you say that you were aware of the CBS policy that...



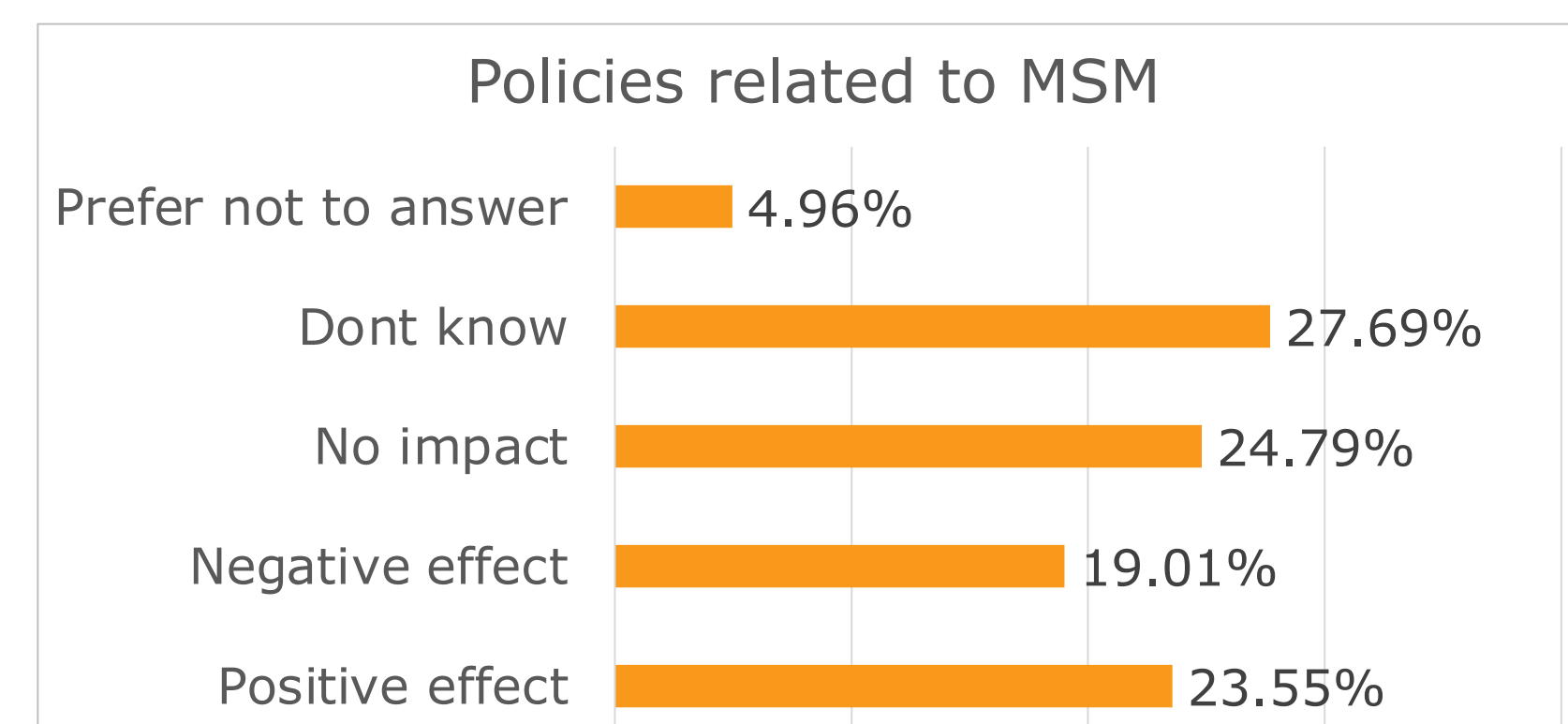
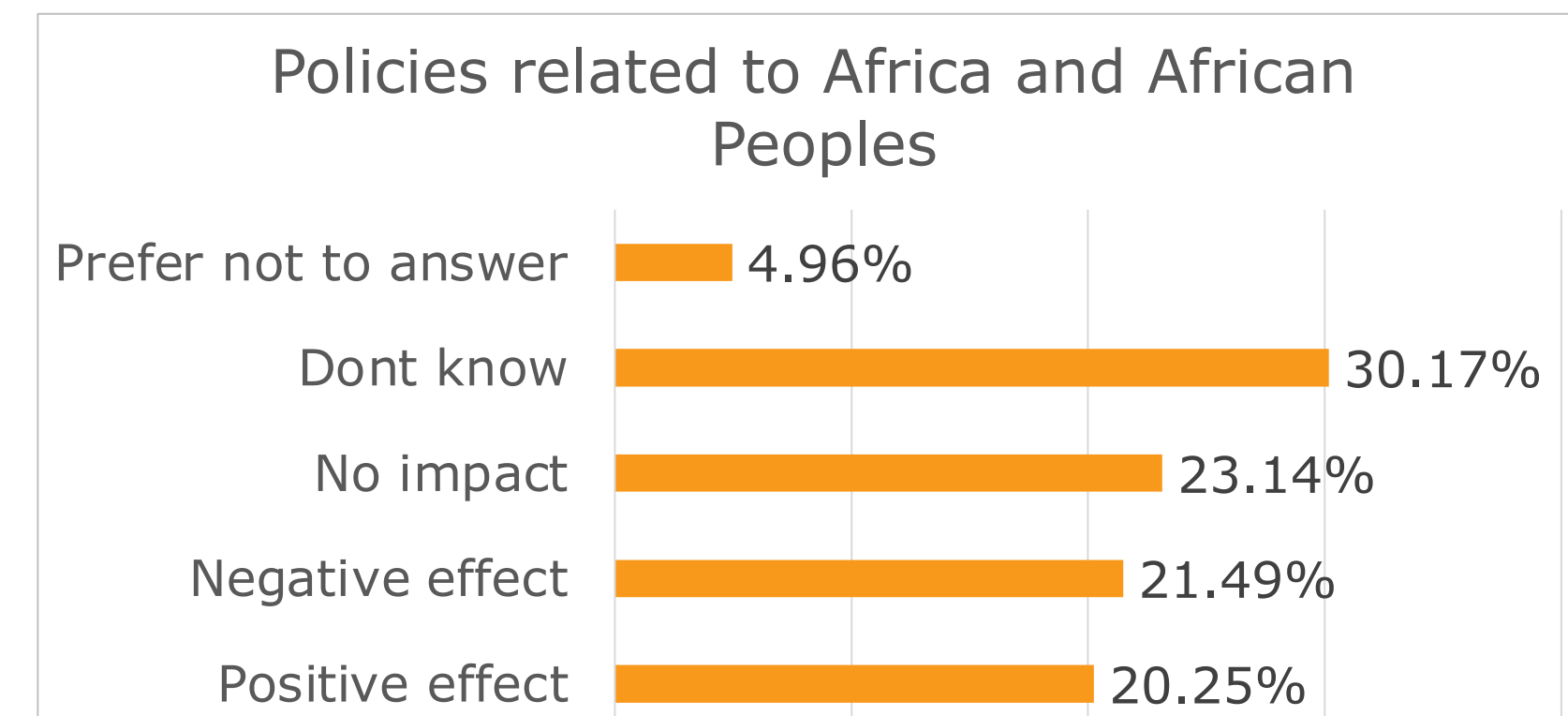
I trust Canadian Blood Services to do what is best for the Canadian blood system



I trust Canadian Blood Services to act in the best interest of the public



Do you think these changes have had a positive effect, a negative effect, or have no impact on the safety of the blood supply?



## Discussion & Conclusion

- This study faced several challenges, including: 1) a paucity of rigorous research tools uniquely tailored to the needs of Black GBQTM (RDS makes specific assumptions that may not be true for this population); 2) anti-Black racist attitudes/behaviours that stifled recruitment.
- Our findings suggest that Black GBQTM experience intersecting forms of discrimination reflecting broader CBS donor policies, and there is widespread confusion about the implications of these policies.
- There is an impetus on existing systems to reform the way that blood is donated in Canada and actively working to educate the public about the history of misinformation that has been disseminated widely by CBS (and similar institutions).
- In 2022, CBS introduced a new behaviour-based policy, which we believe still falls short in identifying low-risk Black GBQTM who should be eligible to donate blood. Recommendations from this study highlight suggested changes to the CBS donor questionnaire that would improve blood donation experiences for Black GBQTM.

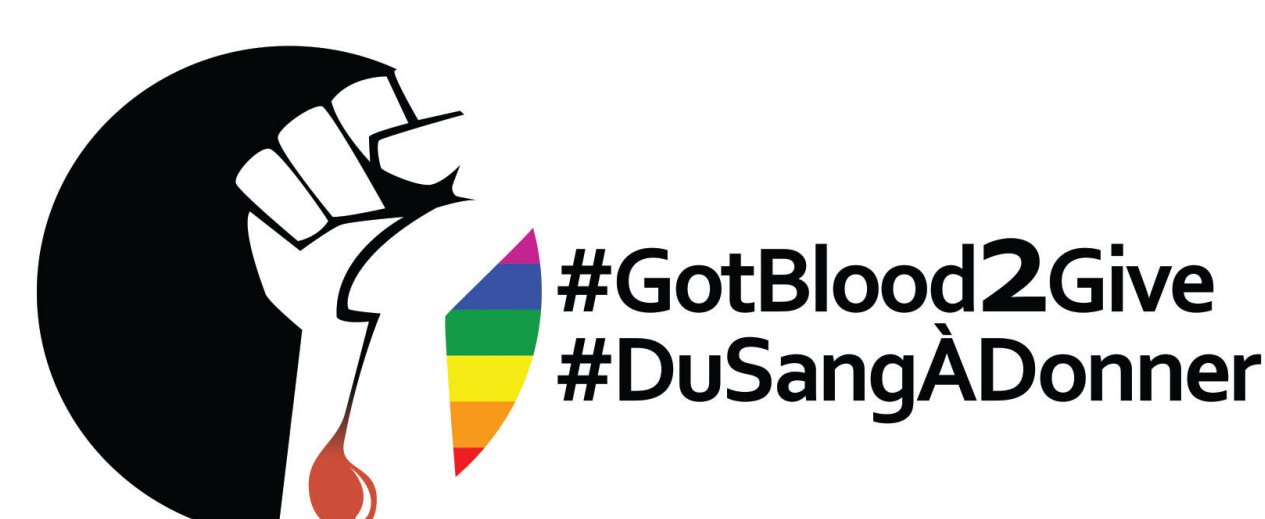
## Recommendations

- Need for a critical review of the existing items in the CBS questionnaire through an intersectional and critical race lens.
- Calls to action at local, national, and international levels to re-evaluate policies and practices to address anti-Black racism, anti-Black homophobia, and anti-Black transphobia in medical institutions.
- Need for culturally relevant and rigorously validated research tools for conducting research with Black GBQTM.

## References

- Bowleg, L., Malekzadeh, A. N., Mbaba, M., & Boone, C. A. (2022). Ending the HIV epidemic for all, not just some: structural racism as a fundamental but overlooked social-structural determinant of the US HIV epidemic. *Current Opinion in HIV and AIDS*, 17(2), 40-45.
- Dryden, O., & Nnorom, O. (2021). Time to dismantle systemic anti-Black racism in medicine in Canada. *CMAJ*, 193(2), E55-E57.
- Furman, E., Singh, A. K., Darko, N. A., & Wilson, C. L. (2018). Activism, intersectionality, and community psychology: The way in which Black Lives Matter Toronto helps us to examine white supremacy in Canada's LGBTQ community. *Community Psychology in Global Perspective*, 4(2), 34-54.
- Jean-Pierre, J., & James, C. E. (2020). Beyond pain and outrage: Understanding and addressing anti-Black racism in Canada. *The Canadian Review of Sociology*, 57(4), 708-712.

For more information contact Dr. OmiSoore Dryden at [omisoore.dryden@dal.ca](mailto:omisoore.dryden@dal.ca) or visit [gotblood2give.weebly.com](http://gotblood2give.weebly.com)



\*Presented at Blood 2022 (Sydney, Australia)