



Network for Economic and Social Trends (NEST)

An In-Depth Look at the Discrimination Experienced by Immigrants and Racialized Individuals in London and Middlesex and Strategies for Combatting this Discrimination

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Study Context

- The London & Middlesex Local Immigration Partnership (LMLIP) has been working on projects to address racism and discrimination for many years
- In 2021, the LMLIP and 7 other Local Immigration Partnerships across Southwestern Ontario surveyed members of their communities to examine experiences of discrimination in the region
- That study found that immigrants and racialized people often experience discrimination in workplace settings (i.e., when applying for a job or promotion and at their job) and in public settings (e.g., while using public transit, in parks, stores, restaurants), and that discrimination levels seem to be higher in these small and mid-sized communities than in large urban settings

Study Purpose

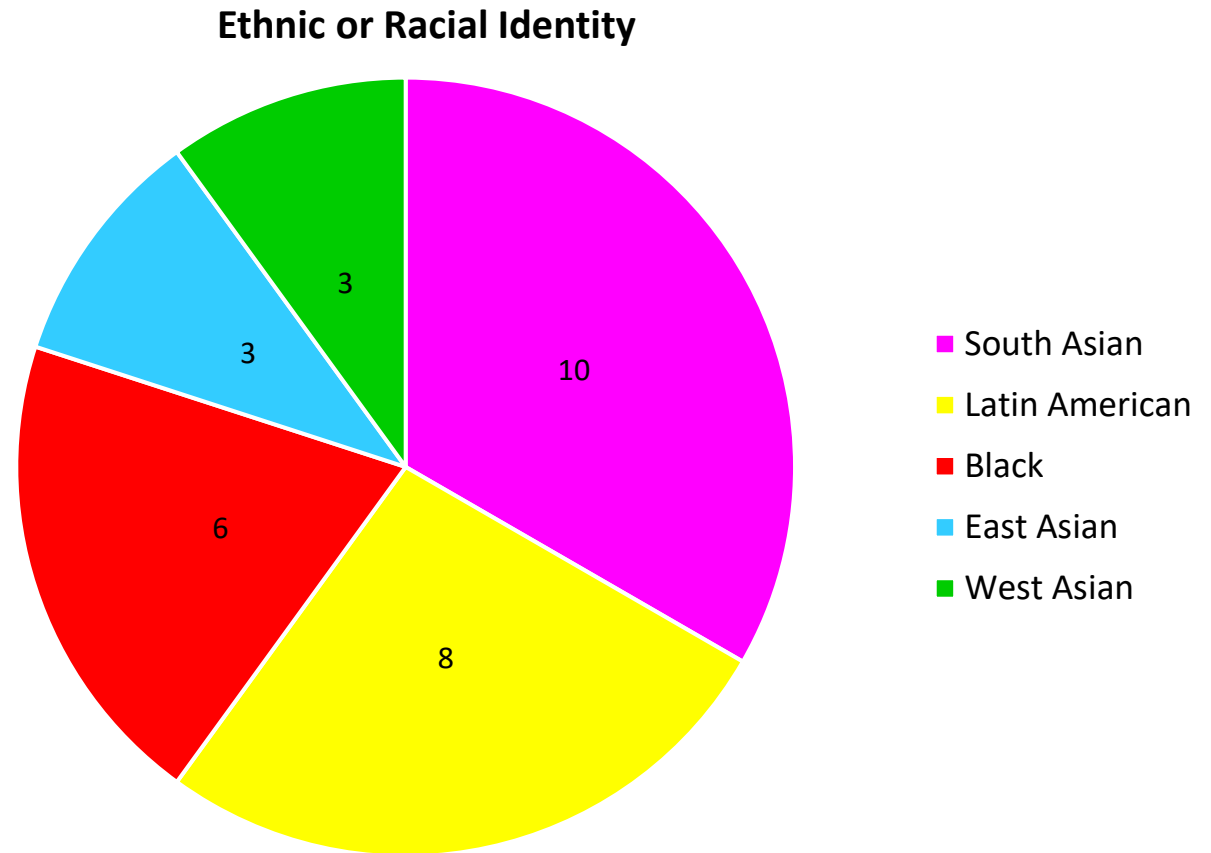
- To gain a more detailed understanding of the lived experiences of immigrants and racialized individuals in terms of the discrimination they are experiencing in these settings, the consequences, and possible strategies that would be effective for counteracting this discrimination
- To explore individuals' sense of belonging to the region and desire to stay in London-Middlesex
- To collect practical information that will allow the London & Middlesex Local Immigration Partnership and its partners to take concrete steps in combatting discrimination so that immigrants and racialized individuals thrive and choose to live and work in the region

Study Details

- Qualitative study involving in-depth interviews over Zoom
- 30 immigrant and racialized adults who had experienced discrimination in the London-Middlesex region in the past 3 years
- The interviews covered the following topics:
 - Description of an incident of discrimination that the respondent had experienced, including the assumed reason for the discrimination, observers' reactions, and respondents' reactions
 - Sense of belonging to the region and whether the respondent plans to stay
 - Knowledge of strategies to respond to discrimination and supports available
 - Characteristics of a reporting tool that would be most likely to be used
 - Useful supports that could be put into place for people who experience discrimination

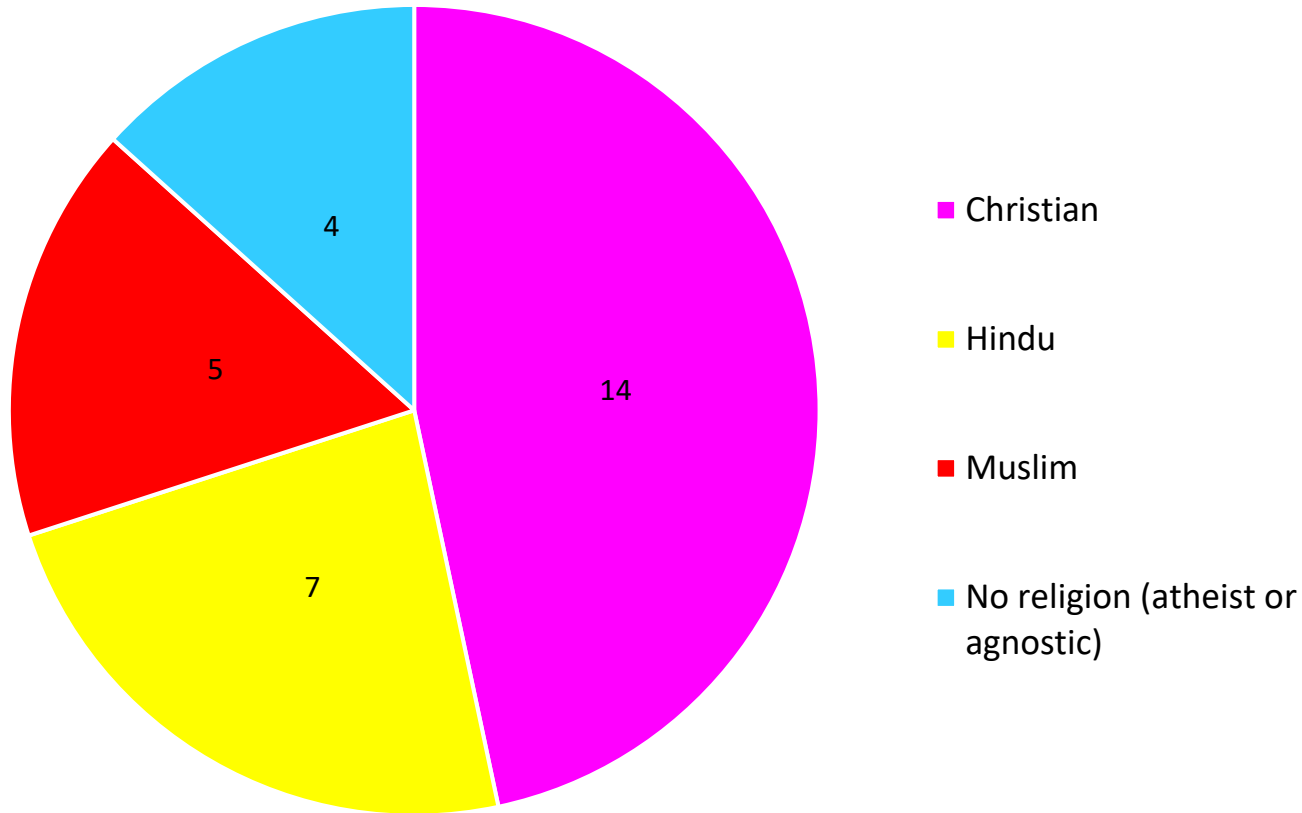
Characteristics of Interviewees

- 27 female, 1 male, 1 non-binary
- 18 – 61 years old
- All but one born outside of Canada: those born outside of Canada had lived here an average of 7 years
- Many had arrived on temporary visas, but more than half have since become permanent residents or citizens



Characteristics of Interviewees

Religious Identity



- Well-educated: 17 university or professional degree, 13 college/vocational training or completed secondary school
- Mainly employed or students

Discrimination in the Workplace

- Respondents reported having derogatory language directed at them, being treated differently than others, having their abilities questioned by patrons, and patrons not wanting to be served by them
- Respondents also reported being socially excluded, being stereotyped, being undermined, and in some instances being yelled at and physically attacked by co-workers and superiors

“So I asked them, ‘what would you like?’ And they immediately turned to my co-worker, and they were like, ‘I don't want her to take my order. I want you to make it’ . . . I went to put in the orders in the system for him . . . he again told my co-worker, ‘no you put it and she might do it wrong.’ So then my co-worker was like, ‘no it’s fine. She’ll do it right.’ So when I did and I printed the bill he stood there for five minutes to check each and every one. He asked the price for each and every thing, and then he made sure that I put all the orders correctly.”

“So yeah I acknowledged him and he threw something at me. And then he did say he didn’t want help from someone who wasn’t from here.”

Bystanders and Personal Responses

- Many discrimination incidents were observed by the respondents' co-workers. Yet, most observers did not intervene, with respondents suggesting that this was because their co-workers did not necessarily perceive the incidents as problematic.
- A number of respondents did nothing in response to the discrimination at the time because they were afraid of making the situation worse

“Because like I said it doesn’t click to everyone. Things like microaggressions, like I said it takes you . . . to know what’s happening to actually even acknowledge them. For me I don’t think that any of my colleagues . . . would recognize those. They’d . . . laugh it off”

“And I think also as people of colour . . . it almost comes back to us to not be very offended but if you feel offended, you have to communicate it in a very, I don't know, professional, if I may use that word, manner. Why? Why is the onus on me to correct you or tell you that that's not okay? But also these are older people, these are more senior people, and you think twice before you say something. And you let it go and you laugh it off like ‘oh that's so funny or whatever.’”

Personal Consequences

- As a result of the discrimination they experienced, respondents reported feeling negative emotions, feeling unsafe in London-Middlesex, having their career trajectory hindered or changed, burnout, and poor physical health

“I was feeling awful. I was feeling uncomfortable especially because this happened . . . in front of someone else. I felt ashamed at that moment . . . ”

“The emotional aspect is real and disheartening. And also it just makes me not want to even work or live in a public place, like kind of pushed me to going into remote work rather than being face to face with people.”

“At the end of the year, I was diagnosed with burnout . . . you are not immune for the consequence about aggression like this.”

Reporting

- Some respondents reported their experiences of discrimination to a superior or a human resources department after the incident. For some, the reporting resulted in action, whereas for others, it did not.
- Those who did not report the experiences of discrimination indicated that they did not think it would have an impact and might even lead to negative consequences

“So, it was just kind of brushed under the rug really quickly and I think they were just really afraid to talk about it. And it's a little weird because we have all of these trainings about DEI, and especially (since) these are our leaders so they should have a little bit more specialized training to be able to handle situations or have these conversations but I don't think they're there yet.”

“You get discouraged because the amount of work that is involved and the upheaval of, like, do you really just wanna piss off every manager and become the black sheep that later on you kinda screw yourself over when it comes to an opportunity of moving to a different department or applying for a job later. Do you wanna be known as the troublemaker is basically what I'm trying to say.”

Discrimination in Public Places

- The most common public places in which incidents were reported were public transit, retail stores, and in common areas of shared residences, as well as in healthcare settings, in parks, on the street, and at school
- Respondents had derogatory language directed at them and were treated rudely and as if they were not to be trusted

“We were sitting on the side in the back row and they just started throwing out racial slurs and, out of nowhere, like we did not even talk to them . . . ‘You smell so bad, you’re smelling like curry’ . . . This went on for a very long time, for a good 15, 20 minutes or maybe even more than that. They started opening the windows and it was so cold that day.”

*“We were just talking in Spanish and he turn to me and he say ‘you are in an English speaking country so you have to speak in English, b****.’”*

“I think I introduced myself and she’s like ‘where are you from’ and I was like ‘oh I’m a international student. I’m from Dubai, I come from the Middle East.’ And then she goes ‘oh yeah we take hygiene very seriously here.’”

Bystanders and Personal Responses

- Many respondents reported that the discrimination incidents were observed by others, but nobody intervened. Respondents thought people did not intervene because they did not want to get involved.
- Similarly, many respondents did nothing in response to the discrimination at the time because they did not know what to do

“I don’t find that people try to help other people here. They don’t like to get involved.”

“I just kept quiet. I was more so in a state of shock so I didn't know what to do. A state of shock and confusion, so I didn't do anything. I didn't fight back. I didn't talk back . . . I can't even remember if I said sorry or not, I truly can't remember. I was more so flabbergasted and like, okay, this is happening. That was my immediate response.”

Personal Consequences

- As a result of the discrimination they experienced, respondents reported a wide range of negative emotions

“And I am really upset about it and it's really hurting my heart. I remember I went home and I was crying.”

“But, you know, some situations makes you feel whatever you do you will never be treated like you are a native.”

“There’s just this sense of inferiority. And like we don't belong here and they're just better than us, or something like that. I know they might not feel it at all but we just think that they might also think that they're better than all of us . . .”

Reporting

- The majority of respondents did not report their experiences of discrimination in an official way after the incidents because they did not know how to report the discrimination, were unsure of the consequences and of what difference it would make, did not think the incidents were serious enough to report, and felt it was not worth the time and effort

“One, I don't know where to report it. Two, I don't know if I report it how much scrutiny I will have to go through, or also I don't have the details of this person. And the third thing, and maybe that's the major reason behind why I did not report it because you know, we kind of see the discrimination coming right, when we decided to move. We knew that this will happen. And you know it's just something that you internalize right, and you feel that, you know, it's just a small little incident and it's fine. You know this will keep happening. How many times will go and report. And you know, is it even worth reporting? Is it even worth your time to go report and talk about it and live it again and again and again, or just, you know, kind of shrug it off and move on.”

Sense of Belonging and Retention

- Many respondents indicated that the discrimination they experience makes them feel less welcome and less like they belong in the London-Middlesex region, and want to leave

“It made me realize that some people don’t necessarily see me as just having an equal right to be here.”

“People like that make you feel like you don’t belong, that you’re just a stranger, and that you’re not supposed to be there . . . You feel like they don’t want you here and like you are something that is bothering them, something that should be removed in a sense.”

“I feel like I’m just an outsider. I feel very sad because I leave everything to come here to make new friends and live a good life, but living in this situation, I just want to finish this work and leave this place as soon as possible.”

“I do think of moving away, because this happened to me and I don’t want it to happen again.”

Sense of Belonging and Retention

- Some respondents feel a sense of belonging to London-Middlesex, despite the discrimination

“The experience here has not been always bad. People have been helpful, and sometimes people have gone out of their way to help us out . . . That helps me keep my belief that not everyone is, does, says a racist thing.”

“It took me a while to feel it I belonged in London . . . I think once I had a child, it really helped me to embed myself more into London, just taking her to playgroup, taking her to (the) library, making friends for her, (and) making friends for me. I think that those experiences definitely shaped me to feel like, ‘Wow, London is home, Canada is home. I belong here.’”

“I would say the fact that there are a lot of other races, nationalities, immigrants here, so I sort of feel like I’m not the only visible minority, and especially if I go to places and . . . I get to see a person of my race or colour or a fellow immigrant in a managerial position or executive position.”

Tool for Reporting Discrimination

- A large majority of respondents indicated that they would be likely to use an electronic reporting tool (e.g., website, app) if it were available
- However, use of a reporting tool would depend on key features:
 - Anonymous and confidential (option to provide contact information for follow-up)
 - Neutral, independent, culturally sensitive host – e.g., local community organization; most said **not** the police or government
 - Easy to use – clear instructions and short and straightforward questions
 - Available in multiple languages
 - Ability to upload videos and documents
 - Clearly state who has access to the information and what they will do with it
 - Linked with information about supports available for those who have experienced discrimination

Supports for Those Who Experience Discrimination

- Respondents described the supports and resources that should be made available for those who experience discrimination:
 - Importance of being heard and taken seriously
 - Immigrants and racialized people should be consulted on initiatives to support them
 - Provide spaces and support groups for those who have experienced discrimination to talk with mental health professionals and to other immigrants and racialized people who have had similar experiences
 - Create spaces for immigrants and racialized people to come together in general
 - Address systemic issues and be proactive to create change
 - Educate and raise awareness among the broader community, including those who are discriminating and those who have power to make change – classes, workshops, events to encourage education and interaction
 - Educate immigrants and racialized people about their rights and what constitutes discrimination

Supports for Those Who Experience Discrimination

“I think we’re more of a reactive community instead of a proactive community. I think we do more ‘Oh, that bad event happened, we should do walks, we should do this, we should educate.’ Why can’t we do that beforehand?”

“Sometimes, we, as racial minorities, we sometimes don't understand that what just happened is not right. We also sometimes don't accept that ‘okay that was racism.’ So, you know, just to reach out to these people . . . for everyone to also be able to identify (discrimination) and then maybe look for support.”

“The onus should be on racist people and the people who do these things need to learn to stop this stupidity because the onus can’t be on me because people need to stop behaving badly. They need to figure out what their problem is, learn about their problem, resolve it, and leave me out of it.”

Recommendations for Businesses and Employers

- **Recommendation #1:** Have a clear, explicit policy on non-discrimination and zero tolerance of employee harassment, with specific steps to take if one experiences discrimination and clear consequences for those who violate the policy
- **Recommendation #2:** Implement a straightforward and confidential procedure for reporting experiences of discrimination that formally documents an investigation and the outcomes
- **Recommendation #3:** Provide employee training focused on countering stereotypes, encouraging perspective taking, and education about what constitutes discrimination, including microaggressions, as well as bystander intervention training

Recommendations for London-Middlesex

- **Recommendation #1:** Develop a zero tolerance of discrimination community protocol for the region and clearly display notices of the community protocol in public places
- **Recommendation #2:** Provide education to the broader community about the benefits of immigration to the community, the discrimination that is being experienced in our community, and the damage caused by this discrimination
- **Recommendation #3:** Provide training for the public and for staff of public facilities focused on countering stereotypes, encouraging perspective taking, and education about what constitutes discrimination as well as bystander intervention training

Recommendations for London-Middlesex

- **Recommendation #4:** Develop a discrimination reporting tool that is widely advertised and provides information on supports available for targets of discrimination
- **Recommendation #5:** Provide information to immigrants and racialized individuals about what constitutes discrimination (including microaggressions) and their rights, as well as specific steps to take if one experiences discrimination in the region
- **Recommendation #6:** Provide immigrants and racialized individuals with support groups and safe spaces to discuss their experiences with each other and seek professional help and resources

Full report is available on the LMLIP website:

<https://london.ca/immigration/community-support/london-middlesex-local-immigration-partnership/lmlip-publications>

“In-Depth Report on Cases of Discrimination in London-Middlesex and Strategies to Combat It”

THANK YOU

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