CAREER PATHWAYS FOR
VISIBLE MINORITY
NEWCOMER WOMEN

Experiences with Discrimination and Racism in Employment:

An Exploratory Study with Participants in the Career Pathways for Racialized Newcomer Women Pilot Project

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isans Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia
MOSAIC
OFE Opportunities for Employment
SEO Société économique de l'Ontario
achēv
WORLD SKILLS Employment Centre d'emploi Compétences mondiales
YWCA METRO VANCOUVER

Introduction

Although the women in this study felt welcomed as racialized newcomers in Canada, they were disappointed and surprised to experience discrimination and racism as they looked for employment, accessed employment services, and when they found work, in the workplace. This qualitative study explores the experiences of these women, with the aim of gaining a better understanding of racialized newcomer women's perceptions and personal experiences with discrimination and racism while looking for employment or in the workplace. As it is exploratory, findings from this study cannot provide conclusive results. Rather, the results contribute to an important dialogue to promote positive changes to support racialized newcomer women's integration into the Canadian labour market as it is affected by racism and discrimination.

This is what we heard...

Career Pathways for Racialized Newcomer Women Pilot Project

The Career Pathways for Racialized Newcomer Women (CPRNW) pilot project[1] was designed in 2018/2019 to implement and evaluate four models aiming to address the needs of racialized newcomer women in their integration with the Canadian labour market. The models differ by target population (e.g., women with different skills or different language levels) and by program activities.

The three-year pilot project involves eight service provider organizations tasked with implementing variations of the four models. The overall goal of each model is to support racialized newcomer women in successfully transitioning to the labour market.[2]

[1] Formerly called the Career Pathways for Visible Minority Newcomer Women Pilot Project.
[2] For more information about the pilot project and evaluation. https://cpvmnw.ca/

Need for the study

This study came about as a result of findings from the evaluation of CPRNW. In the fall of 2020, as part of the evaluation, focus group discussions were held with participants to learn about their experiences with the CPRNW employment programs and services. Although it was not part of the interview guide, during these discussions, several participants volunteered their experiences with discrimination in employment. This theme was also identified in results from the baseline survey[3] completed by all participants in CPRNW. The survey results showed four per cent of respondents (34 women) indicated that they had experienced racism and/or gender discrimination in the workplace.[4] Therefore, we found it relevant and important to explore this topic further, especially within the context of a project providing employment service supports to racialized newcomer women as they integrate into the Canadian labour market.[5] We felt it was a critical part of the CPRNW evaluation considering the fact that perception bias related to self-reports of discrimination may result in underreporting of actual experiences.[6]

In this report, discrimination is defined as treating someone differently or unfairly because of a personal characteristic or feature, which, whether intentional or not, has an effect that causes disadvantages not imposed on others or that denies or limits access that is given to others.

Adapted from the Supreme Court of Canada definition for discrimination in its 1989 decision in *Andrews v. Law Society of British Columbia.*

To conduct this, we held focus groups and interviews with 13 racialized newcomer women who participated in CPRNW. This briefing note summarizes findings from these discussions and interviews, including the impacts of the discrimination on the participants' well-being. We conclude with implications from the findings for policy, programs, and future research in CPRNW.

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[3] One survey question asked respondents to indicate the employment barriers they faced in their job search; discrimination was one item on this list of potential barriers. However, the survey question was not explicit about their experiences with discrimination or unfair treatment.

[4] In the New Partners Retrospective Study, six per cent of the 461 racialized newcomer women who received services across 13 organizations reported discrimination as a challenge in finding a job. https://cpvmnw.ca/wp-content/uploads/NPRS-Final-Report-May-2021.pdf

[5] Research Co. and Glacier Media looked at the experiences of Canadians in the job market and found that 10 per cent of Canadians believe they were unfairly treated in the hiring process because of their gender (11 per cent) and their ethnicity or national origin (also 11 per cent). https://biv.com/article/2021/10/large-proportion-canadian-job-seekers-are-skeptical-about-hiring-process?utm_source=BIV+Newsletters%2C+effective+July+1%2C+2017&utm_campaign=746529a44b-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2021_10_18_06_10_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_c5e00a74ef-746529a44b-211402689

[6] For a detailed discussion on perception bias and factors for underreporting discrimination, see Lewis, T., Cogburn, C. & Williams, D., 2014. Self-Reported Experiences of Discrimination and Health: Scientific Advances, Ongoing Controversies, and Emerging Issues. *Annual Review Clinical Psychology*, 2015. 11:10.1–10.34 https://cdn1.sph.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/114/2014/11/Williams-annual-review-summary.pdf

Methodology

This study consisted of two focus group discussions with five participants each, one group interview with two participants, and one individual interview, all held between July 27th and August 24th 2021. A total of 13 participants participated in this study. The CPRNW involves a randomized control trial, and the focus group participants includes women from two groups: seven from the program group (participates in the program) and six from the comparison group (does not participate in the program but eligible for existing programs and services). Participants were recruited directly from the CPRNW pilot project. Due to the pandemic, these discussions and interviews with researchers took place online through Zoom and lasted between 60 to 90 minutes. The discussions were audio recorded with participants' consent, transcribed and analyzed thematically using Nvivo.

During the interviews, the women were asked about their perceptions of how newcomers to Canada, including themselves, are treated in Canada, their experiences with discrimination and racism while looking for employment or in the workplace, and impacts, if any, from these experiences. We also explored how their identities may intersect to affect their experiences.

Limitations

Because this is a qualitative study with a small sample size, the results from this study cannot be generalized to participants in the CPRNW pilot study or to the broader group of racialized newcomer women. Moreover, racialized newcomer women is a diverse and not homogenous group; thus, the experiences of these women are not representative of all racialized newcomer women. The results should be treated as indicative and not definitive.

Profile of study participants

All participants in this study are racialized newcomer women. Almost all the women have been in Canada for less than five years: six arrived within the last two years, six between three and five years ago and one over five years ago. The women immigrated to Canada from eight different countries (India, Nigeria, Ghana, Iran, Jamaica, Jordan, Nepal and Pakistan). They are all university graduates, with four women holding post-graduate degrees. The women range in age from 27 to 40 (mean age is 34). Eight women are married or in common-law relationships and five women have children. Most have worked in Canada.

What We Heard From Racialized Newcomer Women

Mixed Impressions

More than half of the participants felt non-immigrant Canadians held positive impressions of newcomers. Eight participants felt non-immigrant Canadians are open towards newcomers to Canada; they also perceived their neighbours to be friendly. Most did not indicate any experiences with harassment or discrimination in the communities they are living in. Participants perceived Canada to be a diverse country and because of this, they felt most non-immigrants perceived newcomers positively.

While most participants perceived their neighbours and communities to be welcoming, a significant few did not. They saw non-immigrant Canadians to be ambivalent or negative about newcomers to Canada and mentioned several nuances to the general view. These perceptions described below came from their personal experiences, or what they heard from family and friends.



Newcomers can be treated differently based on locations with low or high ethnic diversity. Participants living in cities or neighbourhoods that are ethnically diverse felt non-immigrant Canadians have more positive impressions of newcomers in comparison to locations that are less diverse. For example, participants compared cities like Brampton, Mississauga and Montreal that were more ethnically diverse to cities like Barrie and Quebec City. Participants who had or are living in low ethnically diverse neighbourhoods spoke about receiving glances from neighbours, feeling less welcomed or less belonging, and hearing negative comments such as *"These people [newcomers] have taken up our jobs."* Some expressed that, *"they talk to you but it's not really friendly and you can't have a really long relationship."*

Several participants recalled experiencing biased treatments from non-immigrant Canadians. Participants mentioned microaggressions,[7] which were lived as more subtle forms of discrimination and racism. Participants thought these happened because of their identities and were often culturally specific; they felt offended or hurt by comments and/or actions made in their specific scenarios. These experiences included:

- People making negative assumptions based on the clothing participants wore. A participant who held both Master and PhD degrees spoke about a scenario in which a woman assumed she was a refugee because of her hijab and was surprised that she was highly educated. The participant explained how these negative assumptions made her feel:

  "And she started talking about the refugees, that they are not educated and so on… […] I did not feel good about the way she was talking and maybe because I'm coming from the Middle East, she thought I was not going to be educated. So that sometimes comes especially like when you wear hijab."

[7] A microaggression is defined by Webster's dictionary as: "A comment or action that subtly and often unconsciously or unintentionally expresses a prejudiced attitude toward a member of a marginalized group (such as a racial minority)."

- Participants being told that they spoke English so well followed by a question that had the effect of reducing their identity: *Where are you from?* Most participants told these stories with frustration in their voices. A participant who immigrated to Canada from India said:

  "So, where there was less diversity, I have always faced those looks and those surprises. 'Oh, my God, you speak very good English for an Indian' without knowing that India has English as one of the official languages. So, it's very weird."

  One participant had a different opinion. She explained that she did not mind people asking her questions about where she was from or about her culture, as she perceived it as curiosity or awareness. She noted, however, *"Sometimes, you feel interviewed."*

- People assuming participants' lack of knowledge about simple common things sometimes felt patronizing. For example, a participant spoke about her experience renting an apartment. The leasing agent found it necessary to explain to her how to use a toilet in Canada because of their belief that bathrooms in India were vastly different, thus forcing the participant into a pre-assumed category of race and nationality.

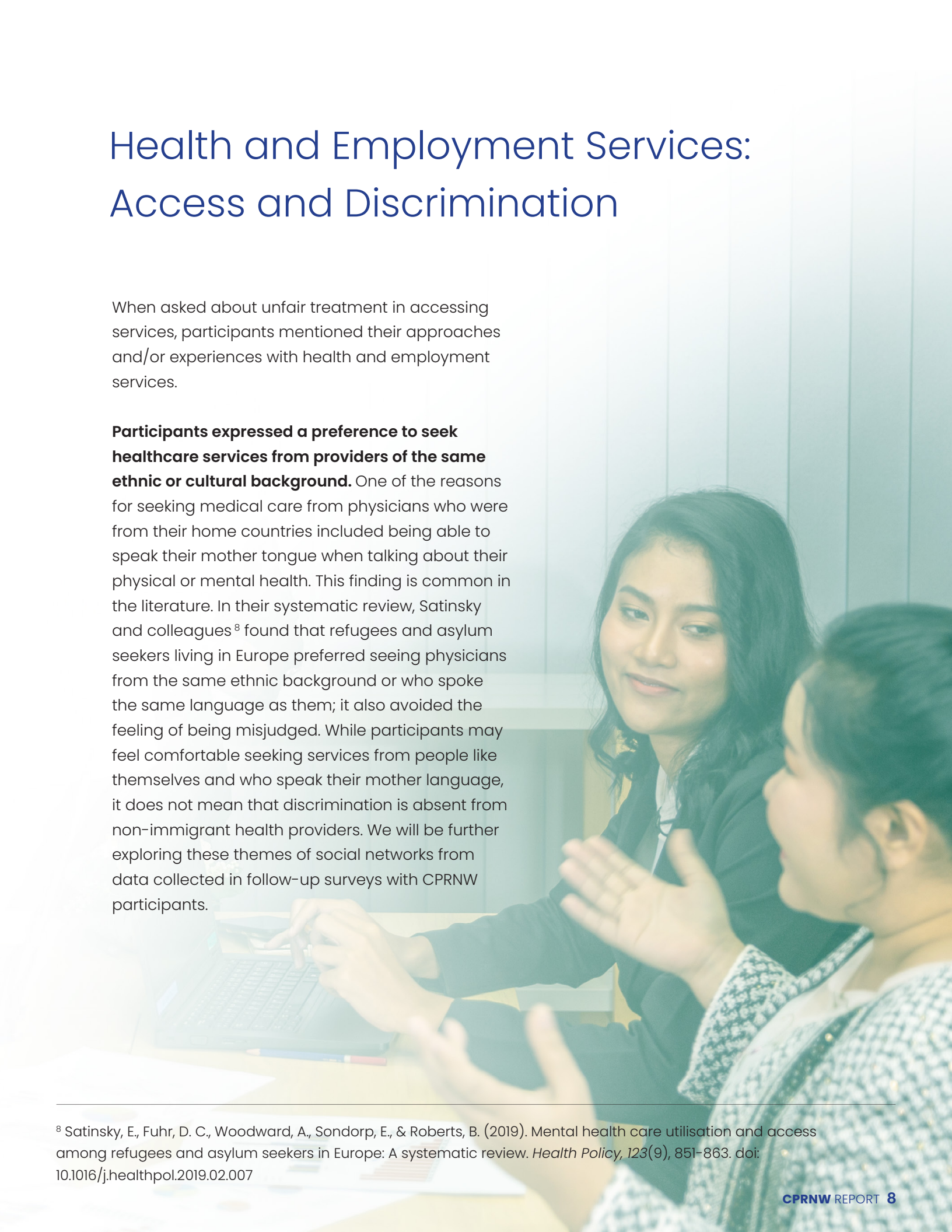
  "While I was searching for a room to rent an apartment, the person showing the room was explaining to me how to use a commode or a Western commode. I don't understand why he… according to that person, Indians only have another style of… They don't have formal system. So I was really offended by that."

It should be noted that none of the above participants explicitly stated that the situations they experienced were racist or were microaggressions. They were common examples of what happened to them on a regular basis and they provided the context that it took place.

Health and Employment Services: Access and Discrimination

When asked about unfair treatment in accessing services, participants mentioned their approaches and/or experiences with health and employment services.

Participants expressed a preference to seek healthcare services from providers of the same ethnic or cultural background. One of the reasons for seeking medical care from physicians who were from their home countries included being able to speak their mother tongue when talking about their physical or mental health. This finding is common in the literature. In their systematic review, Satinsky and colleagues [8] found that refugees and asylum seekers living in Europe preferred seeing physicians from the same ethnic background or who spoke the same language as them; it also avoided the feeling of being misjudged. While participants may feel comfortable seeking services from people like themselves and who speak their mother language, it does not mean that discrimination is absent from non-immigrant health providers. We will be further exploring these themes of social networks from data collected in follow-up surveys with CPRNW participants.



[8] Satinsky, E., Fuhr, D. C., Woodward, A., Sondorp, E., & Roberts, B. (2019). Mental health care utilisation and access among refugees and asylum seekers in Europe: A systematic review. *Health Policy, 123*(9), 851-863. doi: 10.1016/j.healthpol.2019.02.007

The "work first" approach with employment services may not work for many newcomers, especially skilled individuals. While many employment services outside of CPRNW were helpful in building their resumes and cover letters, participants felt "pushed" by these services to settle for survival jobs. One participant spoke about her experience at an employment service she went to:

> *"I was asked to hand out flyers. I was asked to give directions for the TTC for another position. I was asked to do some filing. None of which I did, because that, of course, leads to depression. Once you've studied for that many years, and that's what employment service agencies are calling you for. I applied for numerous jobs that were on their websites and that I thought would be best for me based on my work experience and my qualifications. And I was never called to be interviewed for one of those positions. It was always an entry level position, even though I came here with over a decade of experience and very qualified."*

What we heard from participants resonates with findings from Weizman et al.[9], in which the researchers found that there is a certain level of racism among settlement service providers, such as placing participants in survival job positions, or a lack of action in informing participants about racism and discrimination in workplaces and strategies to address these situations.

[9] Weizman, A., Boakye, F., & Cacace, M. (2021, October 6-8). Inclusivity and immigration: Integrating anti-racism strategies in the settlement sector [Workshop presentation]. Metropolis 4th Annual Forum, Online Conference.

Experiences Looking for Employment and in the Canadian Workplace

To understand newcomer women's experiences in employment, we asked participants about their experiences in two parts: looking for employment in Canada and working in a Canadian workplace. While all participants shared similar accounts of discrimination and racism experienced during the recruitment and hiring process or in the workplace, factors such as the type of employer (e.g., large vs. small) or work environment contributed to making their experiences more or less negative.



Experiences looking for employment

The women all indicated some experience with racism and discrimination in their job search. They mentioned forms of discrimination related to education, gender, ethnicity, culture and colour; the latter three elements have been found to be the most common forms of discrimination against immigrants.[10]

Lack of Canadian work experience was a main systemic barrier in finding meaningful employment in Canada. Similar to results from the Evaluation of the Canadian Work Experience Pilot Projects [11] and other studies,[12] participants identified their lack of Canadian work experience as the greatest challenge in finding employment. Many of the women said employers would not hire them without Canadian work experience. Some participants reported going back to school to obtain a Canadian credential; however, even with Canadian credentials, the lack of Canadian work experience remains a challenge to employment. Their experience is similar to the newcomer men and women in Creese and Wiebe's study[13], in which many who also chose to obtain Canadian degrees continued to face challenges finding employment and/or commensurate work.

Participants identified key systemic barriers in finding meaningful employment as racialized newcomers. Participants shared many experiences of racism and unfair treatment during the recruitment process, namely employers not hiring newcomers because they do not have a *"local face"* or employers placing newcomers *"at the bottom of the list."* One participant stated that being a newcomer raised a red flag for employers. Similarly, Nangia and Arora[14] found that out of 168 Canadians who identified as racialized in their study, 19 per cent felt discriminated against while looking for employment, and out of 350 Canadians who identified as a woman, about 17 per cent reported feeling discriminated. The experiences of our participants support the findings of Nagia and Arora and suggest the intersection of gender, racialization and newcomer status tends to amplify the barriers to employment for newcomers.

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[10] Nangia, P. (2013). Discrimination Experienced by Landed Immigrants in Canada, RCIS Working Paper No. 2013/7 November 2013.

[11] Rodier, J., Hui, S-W., Gurr, S., Lehrer, K., & Appiah, A. *Evaluation of the Canadian Work Experience Pilot Projects: Final Report. Report* submitted to IRCC, June 2020. Ottawa, Ontario: SRDC. https://www.srdc.org/media/553107/cwe-pilot-projects-final-report.pdf

[12] Association for Canadian Studies (2021). *Finding Solutions for the Immigrant Serving Sector - Literature Review/Analysis.* https://acs-aec.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/ACS_WES-Literature-Review-1.pdf

[13] Creese, G. & Wiebe, B. (2012). 'Survival Employment': Gender and Deskilling among African Immigrants in Canada. *International Migration*, 50: 56-76. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2435.2009.00531.x

[14] Nangia, P. & Arora, T. (2021). Discrimination in the workplace in Canada: An intersectional approach. *Canadian Journal of Sociology, 46*(2), 147-178.

It is also interesting to note that most participants did not explicitly associate their negative experiences with racism, discrimination or microaggressions, but rather, employers' ignorance. Other examples of the microaggressions the women faced in finding meaningful employment as racialized newcomers are described below.

- **Having an accent** was a major hindrance for the participants in finding meaningful employment. Many participants said that their accents were impeding their chances of being hired by employers because employers perceived applicants with accents as less qualified.

- Employers assumed participants had low levels of English language skills because they were newcomers. One participant, who is well-articulated, shared that she called the employer to follow up after submitting her job application and received a disappointing response from the employer, which left a negative impression of the workplace:

  "And then the response you get is, "Oh, sorry, you have to work on your English. […] I felt a bit disappointed with that comment. But you did not have any objections to me introducing myself. But you have objections to the fact my English or the person's English is not the Canadian English, let's put it that way. […] I didn't even know what to do. How can someone say something like that?"

- A few participants perceived employers as **having negative assumptions about newcomer women** that made them less fitting for the Canadian workplace. One participant explained,

  "I think there's a common perception that women from racialized groups, newcomer women in particular, don't know how to conduct themselves in a corporate setting. And even though that was never said to me outright, that's the impression that I always got."

- Some participants perceived that employers viewed newcomers differently than White Canadian candidates based on their **religious clothing**. For instance, hijabs could be *"indicating that she might not be from here."* This perception was particularly true with the rise in popularity of online platforms, such as LinkedIn, in which profile pictures are often shown on the candidates' page. This finding is supported by a Canadian study conducted in 2002 by Women Working With Immigrant Women (WWIW) that highlights the experiences of discrimination in employment that Muslim women wearing hijabs face.[15] Some examples included receiving unfair treatments from the interviewer, such as dismissiveness or bad looks, or not being hired because of their hijab.

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[15] Persad, J. V., & Lukas, S. *"No Hijab Is Permitted Here"*: A Study on the Experiences of Muslim Women Wearing Hijab Applying for Work in the Manufacturing, Sales and Service Sectors. December 2002. Women Working With Immigrant Women. http://atwork.settlement.org/downloads/No_Hijab_Is_Permitted_Here.pdf

Newcomer women faced specific gender challenges in obtaining meaningful employment. While the barriers mentioned above are applicable to all newcomers — men and women — it is even more so with newcomer women.[16] Participants believe newcomer women have significant challenges during the recruitment process as compared to men. Namely:

- In male-dominated fields, such as Information Technology (IT), participants believed or experienced that they were not hired because of their gender. For example, when one participant asked for feedback about her application, a recruiter had told her,

  "It's a tech job, and if it's between two people to be selected, we will always prefer a man."

- Having children was perceived to be a significant barrier during employment recruitment, particularly during the pandemic, because children would cause disruptions while participants are trying to build rapport with employers and impress them. For example, a participant shared that during the middle of an interview, her child's voice could be heard in the background. The participant mentioned that the atmosphere of the interview changed immediately:

  "I've seen an instance where you're having a conversation with a hiring manager and then the conversation is going smoothly. You're making progress, like they're asking questions. […] And then they hear the sound of a child. And then, the whole interview changes. You just feel it. And there's nothing you can do."

- Some participants with children reported that it was difficult to spend time looking for employment and applying for jobs as they did not have the same access to child support through friends and family in Canada that they had back in their home countries.

The examples above demonstrate how the different facets of a newcomer woman's identity overlap and can and do result in them experiencing discrimination, which further limits their economic opportunities.

[16] Data from Statistics Canada indicates that recent woman immigrants experienced the largest increase in the rate of transition to non-employment during the initial contraction of the economy in April 2020. Hou, Picot, & Zhang. Transitions into and out of employment by immigrants during the COVID-19 lockdown and recovery. STATCAN COVID-19: Data to Insights for a Better Canada. Catalogue no. 45280001 (2020).



Mixed Experiences in the Canadian Workplace Related to Discrimination and Racism

Many participants had positive experiences in their current workplace and perceived no discrimination or racism. When participants were asked about their experiences in the workplace, whether a current or past workplace, most participants said that their current place of work was a positive and healthy environment where they did not perceive racism or discrimination from colleagues and supervisors. Some of the factors contributing to a positive work environment according to participants included a large number of employees, an ethnically diverse workforce, and a workplace with many women colleagues and supervisors.

> *"There are different colours of every human on this planet. So, it's going to be very difficult to feel left out because you look to your right, you see somebody who looks like you. You look to your left; you see somebody who talks like you. You look to your back; you see somebody who is just like you. So you feel really, really at home."*

It is noteworthy that most participants were in entry level positions and did not have much Canadian work experience at the time of the discussion, and thus, their experience may differ over time. One participant, despite being happy with her current workplace and not perceiving racism or discrimination foresaw barriers when she wanted to advance her career.

> *"When you want to somehow climb that ladder, that may cause some problem when you are not the same as others or your language or your accent or your background or your time of living in Canada is the same as others. And I think that maybe I will face that problem."*

Participants attributed negative workplace environments due to poor inclusivity practices. While participants, overall, found their current workplace to be positive, there were examples of participants who did not. They did not feel socially included in with their colleagues because of language barriers or lack of knowledge about the topic of conversation. One participant explained,

"I find that especially at the workplace, I don't have a lot to contribute because I don't have a lot of local knowledge. I have a language barrier. Sometimes I can't understand questions or they speak too fast in the group. So sometimes I stay very quiet and I feel I don't have any contribution in group work."

The experiences of these participants is similar to the lack of workplace inclusivity reported amongst internationally educated nurses (IENs) in Canada,[17] in which racialized IENs may feel less workplace integration compared to non-racialized IENs. Some of the key factors that may support workplace integration for IENs and for racialized newcomers in general include improving their occupation-specific and communication skills, establishing good relationships with co-workers, and developing workplace knowledge and skills.

Many participants experienced and perceived unfair treatment from past workplaces, ranging from microaggressions to overt shows of discrimination and racism. Racialized employees experiencing racism and discrimination in the workplace have been reported across many studies. For instance, racialized Canadian federal public service workers are twice as likely to experience workplace discrimination than non-racialized workers.[18]

[17] Covell, C., & Sands, S. R. (2020). Does being a visible minority matter? Predictors of internationally educated nurses' workplace integration. *Canadian Journal of Nursing Research, 0*(0), 1-10.
[18] Jones, A. M., Finkelstein, R., & Koehoorn, M. (2019). Disability and workplace harassment and discrimination among Canadian federal public service employees. *Canadian Journal of Public Health, 109*, 79-88.

Participants in our study perceived that much of the discrimination and racism they experienced in their previous workplaces were due to them being racialized newcomer women.

- Participants shared examples of **microaggressions they had experienced from customers** in the workplace. These participants provided customers with services over the phone; they told of being asked *"Where are you from?"* but also *"Can I speak to someone from this country?"* based solely on their accents.

- Many participants reported experiencing **microaggressions from supervisors or managers.** Some of these instances involved participants receiving racialized comments from supervisors. The following are selected examples:

  A manager asking a participant to perform heavy labour outside her job, but not asking White employees to do the same. When the participant asked why her supervisor did not ask her colleague, the supervisor responded, *"Because she is White."* The participant added that the supervisor is also a racialized woman.

  A manager making inappropriate comments about a participant having body odour. When the participant approached her colleagues regarding this comment, they assured her that she did not have any odours and she was very presentable.

  A manager suggesting that the participant remove her tradition Indian jewelry because it was drawing too much attention from colleagues.

  "I as a Hindu woman in India, I was newly married, and I was wearing some pieces of jewelry which signified that I am married. But most of the times I would be asked about them that this is not going with what you are wearing. This piece of jewelry is too bright. […] I was also given subtle hints that this is catching attention, so it would be better if you dress up in a more subtle way and dress with more subtle pieces of jewelry or stuff like that. So I had to change that."

Participants experienced workplace exploitations. Many participants indicated that employers often took advantage of newcomers' lack of knowledge about the rights of employees in the Canadian workplace. Some of the women who participated in CPRNW programs reported that now they knew their rights and what they could say "no" to.

Participants also perceived that employers took advantage of newcomers' lack of financial stability, lack of Canadian work experience, or challenges in finding commensurate employment. One participant shared that after her final round of interviews with an employer, she was offered a lower position than what she had applied for, with a lower salary. She thought the employer was trying to take advantage of her newcomer situation and persuade her into taking the position. She explained,

"They were trying to convince me that I should be grateful that I got this job without even any Canadian experience. And that was a bad experience for me. I felt bad because I wouldn't have been treated this way if I was not new in this country."

She needed the income and accepted the job.

Effects on Well-being and Coping Strategies



In this section, we describe how some of the experiences with discrimination in employment affected the women. We also present the various strategies participants used to resist racism and discrimination.

The unfair treatments, and racist and discriminatory acts on the participants negatively affected their physical and mental health. After participants shared their experiences in employment, they were asked how these negative experiences had affected them. Participants commonly reported that these experiences lowered their confidence and their self-esteem and also expressed sadness and frustration. Researchers observed that when some participants told their stories, there was anger in their voices. Regarding a previous workplace she found to be negative, one participant described how she felt before going into work:

> *"So going to work every day, I fear going to work. You know when you open your eyes in the morning and you've been sleeping and then you have to go to work. I just have these things like this string is pulling my hat."*

Participants try to resist racism and discrimination. Participants shared examples of how they resist discrimination and racism, whether looking for employment or in the workplace. Two strategies emerged:

- Some participants responded in an **act of overt resistance** by being vocal:

  Speaking up to supervisors about mistreatment or in one participant's case, bringing the issue to their local Human Rights Commission. However, this process took a toll on the participant's physical and mental health.

- Most participants adopted **covert forms of resistance**:

  Changing identities to avoid unfair treatments during the recruitment process, such as simplifying previous job roles they held, removing higher credentials from their resumes, or anglicizing names.

  Finding ways to move on because they have to and feeling there was nothing they could do to change the situation. One participant elaborated:

  "I thought about it for just one minute, and that was the end. That's the first thing you have to do, because the moment you keep on thinking someone has said something to you or you don't feel good about something, then it takes a toll down your day, your week, the whole month and then you just feel shattered inside. So I didn't want that to spoil my day. I just thought, whatever. And I just moved on with my life."

Women often simply have to move on and cannot address the discrimination as it occurs, which means it leaves the women feeling disempowered at work and undermines their sense of belonging. Spates et al.[19] discuss more covert ways of coping with racism, including trying to blend in with and be accepted by others around them, or moving forward if they experienced racism and hope for a change. This means that the women often cannot bring their authentic self into the workplace.

[19] Spates, K., Evans, N. M., Watts, B. C., Abubakar, N., & James, T. (2020). Keeping ourselves sane: A qualitative exploration of Black women's coping strategies for gendered racism. *Sex Roles, 82,* 513-524.

Summary

The discussions in the focus groups and interviews with women who are participating in the CPRNW pilot provided insights to experiences with discrimination and racism in employment for racialized newcomer women. What we heard from the women echoed much of what is in the current literature on racism at work: it exists. Besides devaluing foreign earned credentials and work experience, racialized newcomer women face additional challenges in their integration into the Canadian labour market including discrimination and racism and navigating new and unfamiliar practices without the same cultural capital that native-born job seekers and employees possess. Participants also told us about the negative effects these experiences have had on their physical and mental well-being. They shared some of the ways they have used to resist or fight these oppressions. Below we summarize selected highlights from this exploratory study.



- Most participants reported feeling welcomed and included in their communities, but there were a few nuances to the inclusiveness, especially in communities that are less ethnically diverse. Several participants told of incidences of unfair treatment and subtle forms of discrimination, mainly due to their identities.

- Several women reported experiencing racism or stereotyping when receiving employment services. Instead of the focus being on their assets and upskilling, they felt pushed to take survival jobs.

- All the women indicated some experience with racism and discrimination in their job search. Besides gender and education, they also mentioned forms of discrimination related to ethnicity, culture and colour that have been found to be the most common forms of discrimination against immigrants.[20]

- The women who are currently employed said they are happy in their current workplaces and have not experienced or perceived any unfair treatment as racialized newcomer women.

- Some participants reported experiencing racism and discrimination with previous employers. Some also mentioned feelings of being taken advantage of because of their lack of knowledge of rights of employees in the workplace and their newcomer status.

- The different facets of a newcomer woman's identity overlap, which can and did result in experiences of oppression and discrimination, and further limit their economic opportunities in unique ways.

- Using an intersectionality lens, the different elements of a newcomer woman's identity overlap and can compound their experiences of discrimination and racism in employment.

- The women shared how the discrimination and racism affected them. They talked about impacts on their mental health as well as loss of confidence and lower self-esteem.

- While some participants resisted the discrimination in overt and covert ways, these efforts were mostly inadequate in addressing the issue.

- The experiences of the women highlight that often people cannot see past the "newcomer" identity they associate with racialized newcomer women, and make assumptions based on stereotypes or biases. They do not take the time to get to know the individual on a deeper level but instead associate them as a member of a newcomer group.

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[20] Nangia, P. (2013). Discrimination Experienced by Landed Immigrants in Canada, RCIS Working Paper No. 2013/7 November 2013.

Implications for Programs, Policy and Future Research

Economic integration is central in newcomers' settlement journey in Canada and to their and families' well-being. This study shows the consequences of discrimination and racism to racialized newcomer women's labour market integration. The findings contribute to an important and ongoing conversation on discrimination and racism in employment for racialized newcomer women and changes to address the inequities and systemic nature these barriers pose to racialized newcomer women in their integration into the Canadian labour market. Some selected implications for policy, programs and research in CPRNW are summarized below.



Policy

- Solutions should focus on **addressing systemic barriers** to employment linked to discrimination and racism and not just on the personal barriers newcomer women may have that affect their access to the labour market. This is important as the systems barriers are not ones the women can overcome through their own initiative or by increasing their individual capacity. Many employment programs are focused on newcomer women's personal-level barriers — increasing their confidence, helping them fit into Canadian works; it is important to focus on the environment.

- The focus groups and interviews with racialized newcomer women tell us that **not all employers are the same**. There are employers who have created welcoming workplaces for employees, but many have not. Becoming an anti-racist organization, like diversity and inclusion, is a process, a journey that will require commitment from the organization and all its employees. Recognizing racism in the system, which can manifest in policies, procedures and practices that divide people into different paths of opportunities — greater and better access for some and less for others due to discrimination and diversity is a first step. After that, any initiative must be authentic, transparent and have accountability. To make positive changes in anti-racism and discrimination in organizations, all employees and at all levels from top to bottom must be engaged; it must also be championed from the top.

- **Train employers on workplace inclusivity and diversity** to help foster belonging between racialized newcomer women employees and other employees. This should be an organization-wide approach and delivered through the workplace to all levels in the organization.

- To dispel stereotypes and prejudices, **deliver training for employers on anti-racism and discrimination** to not only build awareness but to change attitudes and behaviour.

- Various initiatives are taking place across the settlement agencies to train staff on anti-racism in delivery and practice. Importantly, staff in the sector need **tools to know how to address racism and discrimination** head on. One example is the *Be More than a Bystander* training that would focus on the importance of creating a safe environment for newcomers, learning about tools that equip and empowers one to shift from being a passive to an active witness and initiating change.

Programs and practice

- It is important for racialized newcomer women and others to have **safe spaces** to bring up their experiences with discrimination and racism in employment. For employment programs, cultivate safe spaces to have these conversations so that participants can feel comfortable sharing their experiences they have had or are encountering. Sometimes it is only through reflection and the availability of a safe space, that these unfair treatments can be talked about. These are critical conversations and acknowledge inequities from those with lived experiences.

- Include **training on employee rights** and **provide personal or individual support** to services to newcomers, as well as information to newcomers to build awareness and inform them about discrimination and racism in workplaces and strategies to address them if experienced. This information has been included in the CPRNW pilot projects.

Future research for CPRNW

- While participants in CPRNW reported racism and discrimination as barriers to employment, the proportion reported in the survey is low. We recognize the potential for this to be underreported. Nangia and Arora[21] found that only a small group of Canadians who identified as racialized and as a woman reported discrimination in the workplace. Furthermore, Vang and Chang[22] reported that recently arrived racialized newcomers to Canada are less likely to report incidences of discrimination compared to Canadian-born individuals or immigrants who have been residing in Canada for a longer period of time. The authors provided several explanations as to why more recently arrived racialized newcomers may have low rates of reporting discrimination, one of them being, *"Recent immigrants may not have had enough exposure to host country institutions to learn their place in society."* The CPRNW has taken the following actions:

  We have taken a closer look at the CPRNW surveys from an anti-racism and discrimination lens in order to identify areas to collect specific data, providing evidence to support meaningful conversations for action for systemic changes. We have enhanced and added questions with this perspective to the surveys, including an additional module to look at discrimination in looking for work and in workplaces, as well as the individual consequences of these actions.

  While it may not be feasible for this project, we commit to seeking and/or developing questions that collects information on discrimination and racism in ways that are relevant to racialized newcomer women.

  We suggest carrying out a longer-term follow-up surveys to include specific questions on racism and discrimination in employment to look at experiences of racialized newcomer women who have been in Canada for a longer time and see if their experiences with discrimination and racism change with more time in Canada.

- Conducting smaller group discussions or interviews may work better to deal with sensitive issues and ensure trauma-informed practices are used to facilitate the discussions.

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[21] Nangia, P., & Arora, T. (2021).

[22] Vang, Z. M., & Chang. Y. (2019). Immigrants' experiences of everyday discrimination in Canada: Unpacking the contributions of assimilation, race, and early socialization. *International Migration Review, 53*(2), 602-631.

This is an exploratory study on a priority issue. It is important to keep the conversation going but more importantly to act to reduce or remove the systemic barriers in employment due to discrimination and racism. Results from studies like this need to be made widely available and shared with employers or business associates and other interested and affected parties so that the conversation can expand outside the circle of those who are already active in this space.

