



Experiences of Discrimination at Work



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The Future Skills Centre (FSC) is a forward-thinking centre for research and collaboration dedicated to preparing Canadians for employment success. We believe Canadians should feel confident about the skills they have to succeed in a changing workforce. As a pan-Canadian community, we are collaborating to rigorously identify, test, measure, and share innovative approaches to assessing and developing the skills Canadians need to thrive in the days and years ahead. The Future Skills Centre was founded by a consortium whose members are Toronto Metropolitan University, Blueprint ADE, and The Conference Board of Canada, and is funded by the Government of Canada's Future Skills Program.

The Diversity Institute conducts and coordinates multi-disciplinary, multi-stakeholder research to address the needs of diverse Canadians, the changing nature of skills and competencies, and the policies, processes and tools that advance economic inclusion and success. Our action-oriented, evidence-based approach is advancing knowledge of the complex barriers faced by underrepresented groups, leading practices to effect change, and producing concrete results. The Diversity Institute is a research lead for the Future Skills Centre.

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The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada.

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Survey on Employment & Skills

The Survey on Employment & Skills

The Survey on Employment and Skills is conducted by the Environics Institute for Survey Research, in partnership with the Future Skills Centre and the Diversity Institute at Toronto Metropolitan University. In early 2020, the Survey on Employment and Skills began as a project designed to explore Canadians' experiences with the changing nature of work, including technology-driven disruptions, increasing insecurity and shifting skills requirements. Following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the survey was expanded to investigate the impact of the crisis on Canadians' employment, earnings and work environments. A second wave of the survey was conducted in December 2020, and a third wave in June 2021.

The second wave of the study consists of a survey of 5,351 Canadians age 18 and over, conducted between November 24 and December 22, 2020, in all provinces and territories. The third wave of the study consists of a survey of 5,913 Canadians age 18 and over, conducted between June 1 and June 28, 2021, in all provinces and territories. Both waves were conducted online (in the provinces) and by telephone (in the territories). The survey includes oversamples of Canadians living in smaller provinces and territories, those under the age of 34, racialized Canadians and Canadians who identify as Indigenous, in order to provide a better portrait of the range of experiences across the country. Unless otherwise indicated, the survey results in this report are weighted by age, gender, region, education, racial identity and Indigenous identity, to ensure that they are representative of the Canadian population as whole.

Survey reports can be found online at:

> environicsinstitute.org/projects

> fsc-ccf.ca/research/2020-survey-on-employment-and-skills

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Executive Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a dramatic impact on all aspects of Canadians' lives, including the way they work. Many businesses have shifted to a work-from-home (WFH) model, relying on virtual meetings to communicate and stay connected with employees. While some aspects of these changes have been positive, such as increasing flexibility and removing commuting requirements for employees, there have also been some challenges, including fewer social interactions and a blurring of the line between work and home. This shift has been particularly challenging for employees belonging to equity-deserving groups, which is contrary to the notion that the flexibility of WFH has been particularly embraced by these groups. For instance, a common assumption among employers is that workplaces cannot create a hostile work environment when the work is done remotely—yet this assumption has not been thoroughly backed up by empirical evidence.

In this report, we combine data from Wave 2 and Wave 3 of the Survey on Employment and Skills to investigate what impact these changes have had on workplace discrimination, which in this study is defined as “discrimination or unfair treatment in the workplace.” We examine the rates of workplace discrimination across gender, race, Indigenous status, age and disability. We also highlight other notable patterns by occupation, sector and work setting.

Women

Three in ten women experience gender-based discrimination in the workplace, and this experience is more common for women who are younger, highly educated, and employed in professional or executive occupations. Women who experience gender-based discrimination report worse mental health than their counterparts who have not been subjected to gender-based discrimination. The difference is particularly pronounced for younger women between the ages of 18 and 34.

Racialized employees

Two in five racialized employees experience race-based discrimination in the workplace. This increases to one in two for Black employees. Similar to gender discrimination, racial discrimination is also associated with poorer mental health for racialized employees, and this pattern is observed across all age groups.

Indigenous employees

Two in five Indigenous employees experience discrimination in the workplace because of their Indigenous identity. This rises to one in two for First Nations employees. Indigenous women are more likely to experience discrimination in the workplace than Indigenous men (36% of men vs. 45% of women).

Youth employees

One in three young adults aged 18 to 34 experiences age-based discrimination in the workplace. Age-based discrimination in the workplace is more common for younger employees than older employees, where those under 35 are close to twice as likely to experience age-based discrimination than those over 35. Age-based discrimination is consistently more common for women across all age groups.

Employees with disabilities

One in four employees with disabilities experiences discrimination in the workplace because they have a disability. Rates of workplace discrimination due to disability are twice as high for those working in office/clerical and sales/services roles compared to those working in trades/transportation/labour and professional/executive positions.

Workplace discrimination by workplace context

Except for employees with disabilities and women, workplace discrimination is less common in the private sector than in the public and not-for-profit (NFP) sectors. People with disabilities experience the lowest rates of discrimination in the public sector (12%), but what is astounding is the significantly high rate of discrimination they experience in the NFP sector (50%). Workplace discrimination is more common for those working from home (WFH) than those working in the office, except for race-based discrimination, where the pattern is reversed. Interestingly, rates of workplace

discrimination for those working in a hybrid format (mix of WFH and on-site) are equally as high as in WFH contexts (if not higher), with the exception of discrimination due to disability.¹

Conclusions

The assumption that remote workplaces are free from hostility may be a misconception. As our research shows, workplace discrimination not only remains prevalent when working from home, but is in fact a more common employee experience when working from home compared to working on-site. We also consistently find that workplace discrimination is even more common for those at the intersection of multiple equity-deserving groups. These findings underscore the importance of continuing to invest in equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) solutions and the need to challenge the assumption that the situation has improved for equity-deserving groups because of the lack of face-to-face interaction. As WFH becomes the norm for many, further research is needed to identify ways to mitigate workplace discrimination in the “new normal.” We conclude the report by suggesting avenues for future research and offering resources for employers to help address discrimination in the workplace in the post-pandemic world.

1 However, as the survey question did not specify when the discrimination had occurred, it is unclear when the actual discrimination event took place. It is possible that someone may have experienced discrimination in the office prior to switching to WFH, but we are not able to make this distinction based on the current data.

Introduction

Discrimination in the workplace has been a prevalent issue in Canada, and the problem seems to have been intensifying in the years since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Environics Institute's 2021 survey on race relations found that, since 2019, there has been an increase in the perception of unequal treatment in employment settings for various racialized groups.¹ Despite advancements in policy and legislation and cultural shifts engendered by social movements such as #MeToo, gender-based discrimination has persisted.

The pandemic has drastically changed the way we work, with many shifting to remote or hybrid work. There are many assumptions about how this shift impacts experiences of discrimination in the workplace among equity-deserving groups. On the one hand, fewer in-person interactions may shield marginalized employees from discriminatory or derogatory comments and behaviours. Research seems to support this assumption, as only 3 percent of Black employees indicate wanting to return to full-time in-person work, compared to 21 percent of white employees in the United States.^{2,3} While some of these concerns have been anecdotally echoed among Black Canadians,⁴ early data from this series found that Black Canadians were slightly less likely to want to continue to work from home (WFH)—suggesting that the Canadian experience of WFH may be different from the United States.

On the other hand, the transition to remote work may also exacerbate barriers for certain groups because it removes opportunities to build networks and relationships with senior leaders and managers. Employees may also take advantage of unmonitored one-on-one meetings and the absence of bystanders to harass other employees.⁵ Virtual meetings also force employees to broadcast their living arrangements, sending cues about their social class and cultural signals to their employers and clients.^{6,7} Moreover, there is strong evidence demonstrating the efficacy of intergroup contact in reducing prejudice, and thus reduced interactions between different groups and limited opportunities for exchanging different viewpoints and experiences could reinforce existing biases about “the other.”⁸ However, this is largely speculative, and there has been limited research to date on how the pandemic has impacted discrimination in the workplace for specific racialized and marginalized groups in Canada. Previously in this series, based on data from late 2020, we found that newcomers, racialized people, and Indigenous Peoples were more worried that working from home would have a negative impact on their careers,⁹ though it's unclear how these perceptions have changed two years into the pandemic.

One study that provides some insights about the pandemic's effects on workplace discrimination is a survey administered by the Government of Canada in 2020. Results show that three in ten respondents experienced some form of discrimination in



the workplace, and one-third of respondents reported experiences of discrimination online.¹⁰ Yet these results are not nationally representative, as the sample—although consisting of 35,000 respondents—was crowdsourced. And while we can surmise that part of the online discrimination took place in an employment setting, the term “online” also encompasses virtual classrooms and social media, among other forums.

This report aims to fill this gap in research and provide an overview of workplace discrimination during and as a result of

the pandemic. While we acknowledge that there are many equity-deserving groups deserving of attention, this study focused on the following groups: women, racialized employees, Indigenous employees, youth employees, and employees with a disability. Unless otherwise specified, the current report is based on both Wave 2 and Wave 3 samples from the Survey on Employment and Skills. If the same question was asked in both waves, then the weighted responses are averaged to provide more robust estimates based on a larger sample size.

Women

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated gender inequalities in employment, with women-dominated sectors of the economy, such as the retail, hospitality and service industries having been hit especially hard.¹¹ School closures have disproportionately impacted women, as they often assume the child care responsibilities in the household. Women continue to shoulder a double burden of work, as they are responsible for more of the domestic duties in the household while participating in the workforce at the same rate as men. In Ontario, for instance, women spend on average 50 percent more time on unpaid domestic work than men.¹² This problem is also exacerbated by the fact that women are often responsible for caring for elders on top of child care and housekeeping.

In addition to having assumed more responsibilities, survey results show that three in ten women said they experienced some form of gender-based discrimination in the workplace, compared to one in ten men. Gender discrimination was more common for younger women, where 37 percent of younger women between the ages of 18 and 34 experienced discrimination, compared to 32 percent of women aged 35 to 54 and 21 percent of women above the age of 55.

While research suggests that higher educational attainment can sometimes shield certain marginalized groups from discrimination,¹³ this was not observed for women in this sample. Experiences of discrimination were more prevalent among more educated women. Approximately 42 percent of women with a university

FIGURE 1

Have you ever experienced discrimination or been unfairly treated in the workplace because of your gender? (By age)

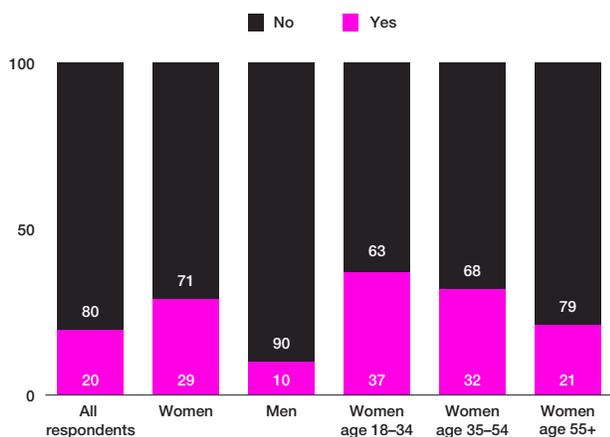
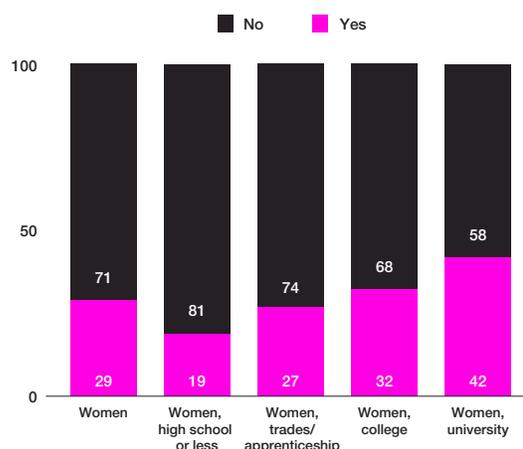


FIGURE 2

Have you ever experienced discrimination or been unfairly treated in the workplace because of your gender? (By level of education)



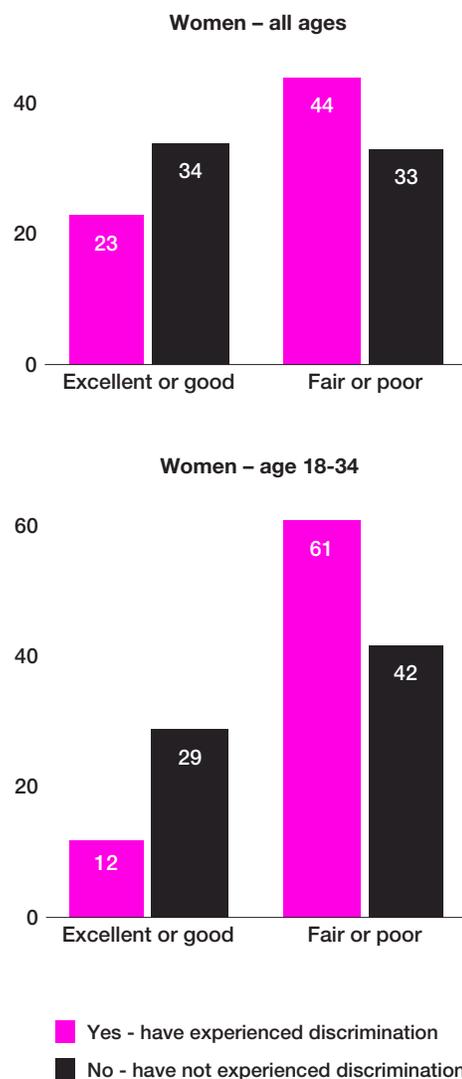
degree reported experiencing gender-based discrimination in the workplace, compared to 32 percent of women with a college diploma, 27 percent of women in trades or apprenticeship, and 19 percent of women with a high school diploma or less.

These patterns are consistent with prior research. Women with higher levels of education are more likely to work in places where they are a numerical minority and work longer hours, both of which are factors that tend to increase the likelihood of experiencing gender-based discrimination.¹⁴

Consistent with prior studies examining the detrimental impact of gender discrimination in the workplace,¹⁵ we also see in our sample that gender discrimination is associated with poorer mental health for employees, particularly for younger women, who are already experiencing poor levels of mental health during the pandemic.¹⁶ Across all women, 44 percent of those who have experienced gender discrimination report their mental health as fair or poor. This increases to 61 percent for younger women between the ages of 18 and 34. Conversely, among those who have experienced gender discrimination, just 23 percent report their mental health as excellent or good, which reduces to 12 percent for younger women between the ages of 18 and 34.

FIGURE 3

Mental health, based on experience of gender discrimination in the workplace



Racialized Employees

Racialized employees have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic—they are more likely to have lost hours of work, income and employment.¹⁷ Globally, East Asians report experiencing more discrimination since the start of the pandemic, and many report that it is taking place at work.¹⁸ In Australia, about two in three Asian Australians reported experiencing discrimination at work, which represents an increase of about 15 percent in six months during the early stages of the pandemic. In a diverse sample of Canadian adults surveyed in Quebec, East Asian respondents were more likely to report discrimination due to their presumed COVID-19 status (i.e., the assumption that they were sick with the virus) because of their ethnicity. A crowdsourced survey by the Government of Canada found that Chinese, Korean, Southeast Asian and Black participants were twice as likely to report discrimination than their white counterparts.¹⁹

Sub-Saharan African immigrants in Canada are more likely to be university-educated than the general population, yet they are more likely to work in lower-skilled, lower-paying jobs, while also experiencing higher rates of unemployment. Many hold jobs that are deemed “non-essential,” making them vulnerable to lay-offs and economic hardship, and those that hold “essential” jobs are put in environments with an increased risk of COVID-19 exposure.²⁰ Overall, racialized employees are concentrated in high-risk occupations, which also tend to be correlated with lower socioeconomic conditions.²¹

There is significant variation between racialized and non-racialized individuals in their perception of workplace discrimination and of the severity of the issue. A recent survey that was administered between March and May 2021 found that about 96 percent of Black Canadians report racism to be a problem at work, with 78 percent of Black Canadians reporting that workplace racism is a serious or very serious issue. In comparison, the majority (56%) of white participants saw racism in the workplace as a small problem or not a problem at all. Seven in ten Black Canadians experienced racism on a regular or occasional basis.²² Some Black, Indigenous and other racialized people have been able to avoid experiences of racism in the physical office space with the shift to remote work, but remote work has also exacerbated barriers they face in career advancement, as there are fewer opportunities to interact with their managers.²³

FIGURE 4
Have you ever experienced discrimination or been unfairly treated in the workplace because of your race or ethnicity?

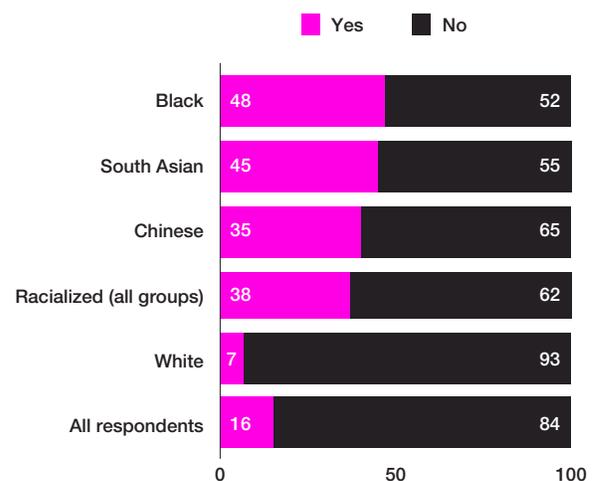
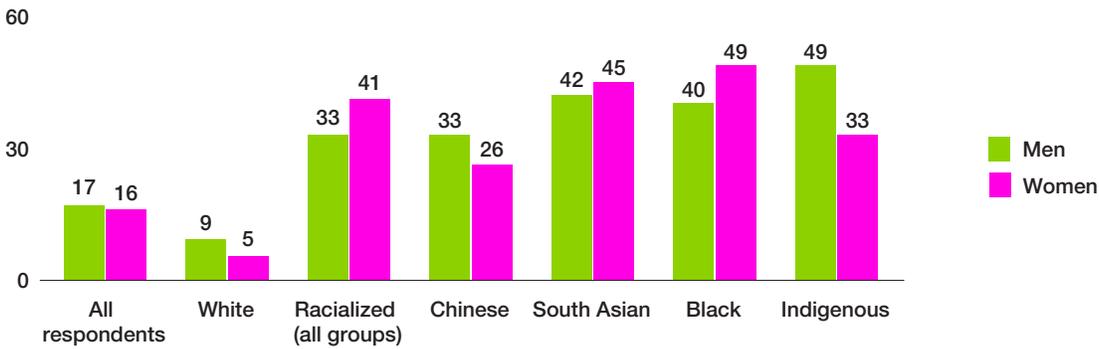


FIGURE 5

Have you ever experienced discrimination or been unfairly treated in the workplace because of your race or ethnicity? (By gender)



According to our study, two in five racialized employees experience race-based discrimination in the workplace, and the rates are highest for Black employees, at one in two. However, both South Asian and Chinese employees were much more likely to experience discrimination in the workplace compared to white employees, with rates being 45 percent, 40 percent and 7 percent, respectively.

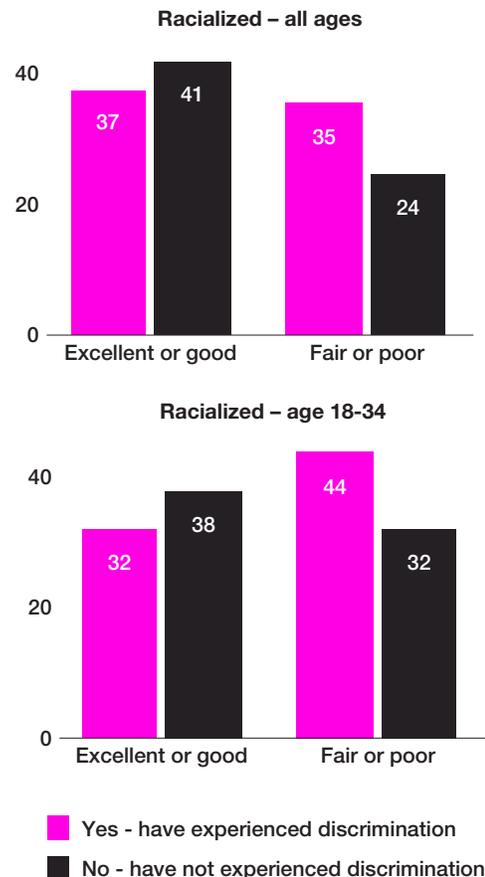
Looking at the intersection of gender and race, women were more likely than men to experience racial discrimination for Black (Women: 49% vs. Men: 40%) and South Asian employees (W: 45% vs. M: 42%) while the pattern was reversed for Chinese (W: 26% vs. M: 33%) and white employees (W: 5% vs. M: 9%).

Similar to gender-based discrimination, racial discrimination is also associated with mental health. Racialized employees who reported experiencing discrimination were more likely to report their mental health as fair or poor (35%), compared to those who have not experienced discrimination (24%). Conversely, racialized employees who experienced discrimination were also less likely to report their mental health as excellent or good (37%) compared to those who have not experienced discrimination (41%). These findings are in line with the

vast literature on the negative impact of discrimination in the workplace on mental health.^{24, 25, 26} Unlike gender discrimination, however, the relationship between racial discrimination and mental health was similar across all age groups.

FIGURE 6

Mental health, based on experience of racial discrimination in the workplace



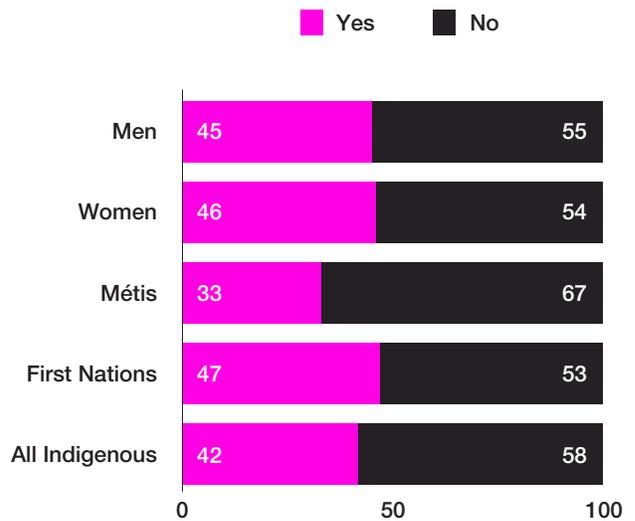
Indigenous Employees

Prior reports in this series have highlighted various disparities between Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous people. Indigenous Peoples are two times more likely than their non-Indigenous counterparts to have become unemployed as a result of the pandemic. While the shift to remote work has been generally viewed as a positive change for many, Indigenous Peoples are more likely to worry about paying for high-speed internet and cell phone access than non-Indigenous Canadians.²⁷

Two in five Indigenous employees experience discrimination in the workplace because they are Indigenous. The rate of discrimination is particularly high for First Nations employees, who experienced discrimination at rates of 47 percent. Indigenous women (45%) are more likely to experience workplace discrimination than Indigenous men (36%), which is in line with a recent study that found that Indigenous women are twice as likely as Indigenous men to be on guard to experiences of bias.²⁸

FIGURE 7

Have you ever experienced discrimination or been unfairly treated in the workplace because you are an Indigenous person?



Note: 71% of Inuit employees responded “Yes” to this question, although this should be interpreted with caution due to the small sample size.

Youth Employees

A previous report in this series highlighted that youths (under 25 years of age) were severely impacted by the pandemic in the past year: they were more likely to lose hours of work, become unemployed or lose income. While ageism in the workplace has traditionally focused on older employees, new research suggests that the problem may be a slightly worse for the young, as traditional workplaces tend to prioritize seniority and younger employees are expected to start at the bottom and climb the ladder.²⁹ There have also been some indications that ageism against youth became more prevalent throughout the pandemic. For instance, social media and news outlets often emphasized that young people were not following the rules of public health and often portrayed them as selfish and ignorant of other people’s needs. Based on a study in the U.K., young people are also perceived as being the most likely to break enforced rules during the mandatory lockdown.³⁰ One study based on a Quebec sample also found that younger people were more likely to experience COVID-related discrimination (i.e., they are presumed to have COVID-19) than older adults—in the

context of work, 30 percent of younger adults (18–40) experienced COVID-related discrimination compared to 20 percent of older adults (40–59).³¹

We find similar results based on our representative sample of Canadians. One in three young adult employees experienced discrimination in the workplace because of their age. There is a clear cut-off at the age of 35, where those younger than 35 are more likely to be discriminated against than those older than 35.

FIGURE 8

Have you ever experienced discrimination or been unfairly treated in the workplace because of your age? (By age)

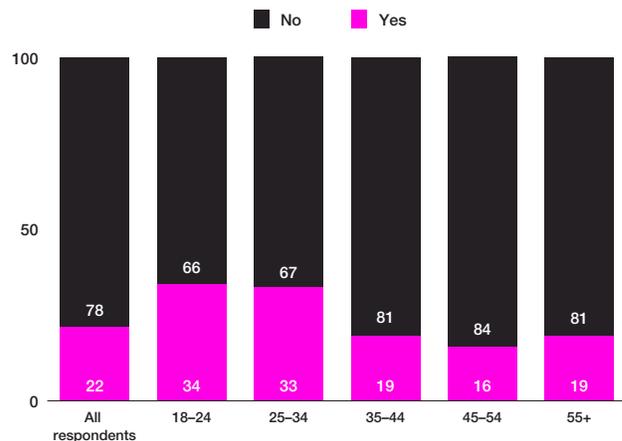
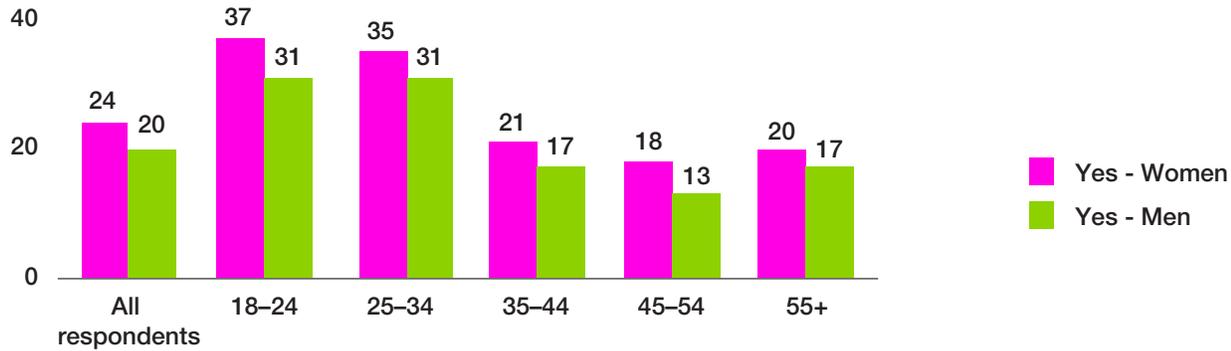




FIGURE 9

Have you ever experienced discrimination or been unfairly treated in the workplace because of your age? (By age and gender)



Looking at age discrimination by gender reveals a similar pattern: while women experienced more age-based discrimination across all age groups, both women and men under the age of 35 are twice as likely to experience discrimination than women and men over the age of 35.

Employees with Disabilities

Based on the results of the survey, one in four employees with disabilities experiences discrimination in the workplace. This is in line with a prior study that found the rate of discrimination was 26 percent for employees with a disability in the Canadian Federal Public Service.^{32, 33} It is important to note that in this survey, disability was defined as “those who report having a physical or mental condition or difference that limits the amount or the kind of activity that they can do on a typical day,” and so we are not able to differentiate between employees with a physical disability and employees with a mental disability (or both).

In the United State alone, over one million people with disabilities lost their jobs during the pandemic; this group also tends to be the last to be hired into the workforce.³⁴ Based on findings from a previous report in this series, persons with disabilities were less likely to be employed, were more likely to lose income and struggle financially, and have less social support during the pandemic, compared to persons without disabilities.³⁵ A recent study from the U.K. found that one in three employees with disabilities were treated unfairly at work during the pandemic, a quarter felt unsafe at work due to the risk of catching the virus, and only half were comfortable enough to discuss their additional risk of COVID-19 due to their health status/disability with their employer.³⁶

A previous report in this series also found that, compared to employees with no disability, persons with disabilities felt that their employers were less helpful in helping them manage the changes to their work situation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.³⁷ Even among employees with disabilities who were working from home, about half had difficulties working from home, struggled to maintain work–life balance, and worried that working from home would hurt their careers. About 40 percent also mentioned that they did not have the right computer equipment or software to allow them to do their job properly while working from home.

As the pandemic has decimated the financial security of many businesses, many employers felt that they were not able to hire people with disabilities during the pandemic as the accommodations may be too costly. However, this concern fails to acknowledge how the shift to remote work can have some potential benefits for those who have trouble commuting, need frequent breaks due to their health condition, or need to remain close to medical equipment. While some of the employment barriers faced by employees with disabilities may be lessened with the shift to remote work, they continue to face similar wage gaps in on-site and home-based work. Additionally, people with disabilities are twice as likely to not have internet access at home (17% of persons with disabilities vs. 9% of those without disabilities).³⁸

Other Notable Trends

Discrimination by occupation

We compared rates of discrimination across four broad occupational types: 1) office/clerical; 2) sales/services; 3) trades/transportation/labour; and 4) professional/executive. Discrimination is the highest for racialized employees trades/transportation/labour, at 46 percent, while hovering around 40 percent for the other three job types. Women in professional/executive positions are almost twice as likely to be discriminated against compared to women in other job types. Rates of discrimination against younger employees are similar across all job types. Discrimination due to Indigenous status is more common for those working in office/clerical and professional/executive roles compared to those working in sales/services and trades/transportation/labour. For discrimination due to disability, those working in office/clerical and sales/services positions are almost twice as likely to

experience discrimination than those working in trades/transportation/labour and professional/executive roles, though the rates for all of these categories are below 25 percent.

Discrimination by sector

Except for discrimination against women and those with a disability, various forms of discrimination tend to be less common in the private sector than in the public and not-for-profit sectors. For persons with disabilities, discrimination tends to be more common in the not-for-profit sector (50%) than in the public (12%) and private sectors (22%). While several prior studies have shown that there is less discrimination in the public sector than in the private sector, as the public sector is more subject to public scrutiny and accountability to others, more recent research has found little to no difference in workplace discrimination

TABLE 1

Have you ever experienced discrimination or been unfairly treated in the workplace... (by occupation)

Type	Group	Office/ Clerical	Sales/ Services	Trades/ Transportation/ Labour	Professional/ Executive
Because of your race or ethnicity?	Racialized	37	42	46	40
Because of your gender? ^a	Women	26	26	24	41
Because of your age? ^a	18–34	30	35	31	33
Because you are an Indigenous person?	Indigenous	54	39	36	47
Because you have a disability? ^b	Disability (always/ often limits)	20	22	10	14

^a This question was asked only in Wave 2.

^b This question was asked only in Wave 3.

TABLE 2

**Have you ever experienced discrimination or been unfairly treated in the workplace...
(by sector)**

Type	Group	Public Sector	Private Sector	Not-for-Profit Sector
Because of your race or ethnicity?	Racialized	48	37	50
Because of your gender? ^a	Women	33	36	39
Because of your age? ^a	18–34	40	33	25
Because you are an Indigenous person?	Indigenous	58	35	60
Because you have a disability? ^b	Disability (always/often limits)	12	22	50

^a This question was asked only in Wave 2.

^b This question was asked only in Wave 3.

between these sectors.^{39, 40, 41} It would be interesting for researchers to reinvestigate this question, as organizations in the private sector have started to invest more heavily in their EDI initiatives, with many at the forefront of this movement.⁴²

Discrimination by work setting

In general, rates of discrimination are higher for those working from home compared to those working on-site. The magnitude of the difference is largest for employees with disabilities (26 point difference), followed by women (16 point difference), Indigenous employees (7 point difference), young adults (5 point difference), and racialized employees (3 point difference). Discrimination by race or ethnicity, age, and Indigenous identity is most common for those working in a hybrid format (both the office and at home), suggesting that in some circumstances, working simultaneously in both settings can open one up to discrimination through face-to-face and virtual interactions. It is important to note, however, that the survey did not specify when the discrimination event took place so the results should be interpreted with some caution. For

instance, it may possible that an employee experienced discrimination in the office prior to working from home, but we are not able to discern this scenario with the present data.

While the shift to remote work has generally been celebrated as a win for employees, it may have the unintended consequence of widening existing disparities across various demographic groups. For better or for worse, working in the office forces employees to interact with one another regularly. However, working from home offers them more flexibility to tailor their social interactions. As people generally tend to like others who are similar to themselves, individuals from marginalized groups may often be left out.⁴³ As virtual meetings are less personal than face-to-face interactions, they are also more prone to “selective incivility” – subtle slights, interruptions and disregard that are more commonly experienced by people from equity-deserving groups.⁴⁴ Additionally, as many of the hallway conversations and water cooler chats have disappeared, it becomes challenging for these individuals to find social support to cope and handle these incivilities.

It is also important to note that the differences in rates of discrimination by work setting may be attributable to other confounding factors, such as industry. For instance, working from home is more common in certain industries, such as public administration and finance, but less common in educational services and health care.⁴⁵ As the opportunity to WFH varies by a multitude of variables such as industry, occupation type,⁴⁶ income⁴⁷ and job level,⁴⁸ future research should identify the possible factors

that explain the differences in rates of discrimination between employees who WFH and employees who work on-site. While our study is unable to pinpoint why we observe these differences, our results clearly illustrate that discrimination remains a prevalent issue for those working from home and should not be ignored.

TABLE 3

Have you ever experienced discrimination or been unfairly treated in the workplace... (by work setting)

Type	Group	On-Site	Work from Home	Hybrid
Because of your race or ethnicity?	Racialized	38	41	48
Because of your gender? ^a	Women	29	45	36
Because of your age? ^a	18–34	30	35	42
Because you are an Indigenous person?	Indigenous	26	33	64
Because you have a disability? ^b	Disability (always/often limits)	17	43	21

^a This question was asked only in Wave 2.

^b This question was asked only in Wave 3.

Conclusions & Recommendations for Future Research

Figure 10 offers a visual representation of the prevalence of workplace discrimination among various equity-deserving groups. Each grid illustrates the number of employees who experienced workplace discrimination out of every 100 employees belonging to a particular equity-seeking group.

FIGURE 10

Rates of discrimination across equity-deserving groups



The results from both waves of the survey show that workplace discrimination remains a persistent issue for women, racialized employees, Indigenous employees, youth employees and employees with disabilities. While many businesses have transitioned to working from home, the reduced face-to-face contact has not had any noticeable effect on rates of workplace discrimination. While there are anecdotal reports from individuals that workplace incivility has decreased since the beginning of the pandemic, our survey results do not support these observations.⁴⁹ Workplace discrimination may have become even more frequent for some groups with the shift to online work—particularly for women, Indigenous employees, and employees with disabilities—though it is unclear why we see these differences.

Evidence shows that those at the intersections of different identity groups, such as Indigenous women and racialized youth, are at an even greater risk of experiencing discrimination in the workplace. These results are in line with prior studies that have found that employees who belong to multiple marginalized groups often face greater barriers in the workplace. For instance, a survey of tech employees in the U.S. found that, since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, 30 percent of respondents experienced gender-based hostility at work, while 13 percent faced race-based hostility. However, when examining intersectionality, 45 percent of Black women experience race-based hostility at work—higher than the rates by either gender or race alone. We urge employers to examine issues of workplace discrimination through an intersectional lens, as those who belong to multiple marginalized groups are more likely to

experience discrimination and mental health issues as a result. This also highlights the need for organizations to ensure that they have the right mental health support systems in place for employees who may be dealing with workplace discrimination. Additionally, we also encourage future researchers to expand their scope to less-visible equity-deserving group membership, such as sexual orientation,⁵⁰ social class⁵¹ and newcomers,⁵² who are also at higher risk of experiencing workplace discrimination.

Workplace discrimination in our survey was asked as a “yes” or “no” binary question, so we are not able to assess if the experience of discrimination has become more severe since the start of the pandemic. Workplace discrimination can also happen in many ways: verbal harassment, biases in promotion, and denial of accommodations all fall under this umbrella. As we did not distinguish between different forms of workplace discrimination, we are not able to break down the rates of workplace discrimination by the various types. It is possible that increasing rates of discrimination may be primarily attributable to the increased frequency of workplace incivility in the virtual world or to the increased likelihood of getting passed over for a promotion when working from home.

We highlight the importance of applying an EDI lens in all modes of working—whether businesses go back to the office, stay remote, or work in a hybrid format. As Canadians are becoming more diverse and talent shortages are worsening, employers will have to rely on employees with various backgrounds and experiences.⁵³ While employers often attribute the “great resignation” to low wages and poor work-life balance, it is relational factors, such as feeling valued and having a sense of

belonging, that are more common reasons for employees to leave.⁵⁴ It is not surprising then that many individuals from marginalized groups were also more likely to resign from their jobs, as they tend to feel less valued by their employers, and, as this report has shown, they are also more likely to experience workplace discrimination.⁵⁵ If businesses want to retain their employees and attract new talent, they cannot ignore the additional barriers that their marginalized employees experience in the workplace and need to start implementing solutions that address them.

Our current study is also not able to assess whether workplace discrimination has become more common within a given work setting since the start of the pandemic, as we do not have comparison data from before the pandemic. While the rates of discrimination reported in the Survey on Employment and Skills are similar to what has been found in previous studies (and *higher* in some cases), they are not directly comparable, as the question wording and sampling methodologies are different. With that said, there is no evidence to suggest that rates of workplace discrimination have dramatically decreased to single digit percentages for any of the equity-deserving groups examined in this report.

There is an abundance of resources available to employers who are interested in addressing workplace discrimination, but few focus on how to specifically deal with workplace discrimination against equity-deserving groups in the current context of remote work.⁵⁶ Articles often focus on issues of discrimination for all employees who are working from home rather than focusing on specific demographic groups who face their own unique challenges with

the shift to remote work.⁵⁷ Many guides to reducing workplace discrimination against equity-deserving groups doing remote work are based on personal anecdotes⁵⁸ or common-sense thinking,⁵⁹ but there is little data available to support these interventions, as it has only been two years since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and data is still being collected. As we gather more data and learn more about what works and what doesn't, we hope to provide a more comprehensive guide on how to address the challenges of discrimination in the workplace in the post-pandemic world.

With that said, however, there still exist some helpful resources for those who are interested in addressing these challenges, which we list below for employers and employees:

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