

New research examines experience of racialized communities during COVID-19

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The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on all Canadians, but new research shows how racialized and marginalized communities have been disproportionately affected.

The groundbreaking research project was led by co-investigators Gervan Fearon, President of Brock University, and Walid Hejazi, Associate Professor of Economic Analysis and Policy at the University of Toronto, in partnership with the Canadian Arab Institute (CAI).

Published on Thursday, May 13, "[A Year in Review: Experiences of Racialized communities during the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)" identifies the challenges faced by marginalized groups and makes recommendations to inform [government policy](#), program development and civil society interventions.

To capture the pandemic experiences of these communities, five lead researchers worked with 25 research assistants representing a wide range of racialized and marginalized communities across Canada.

Over the course of four months from September to December 2020, more than 200 participants were interviewed and surveyed to better understand their lived experience of the pandemic up to that point.

"We knew COVID-19 has affected racialized communities way more than non-racialized communities, and we were really looking to conduct race-based data collection to better understand those experiences," said Shireen Salti, CAI Executive Director. "There is strength and power in [community members](#) coming together to learn experiences of one another and we really wanted to make sure we could document those experiences and shape the policy priorities of the community moving forward."

Fearon said Brock wanted to be involved because of the role universities and colleges play in advancing Canada's goal of being an inclusive society and fostering understanding across communities.

"Canada is known for its major efforts in being an inclusive society. We

can see it in government policy and legislation and the broad thematic of multi-culturalism," Fearon said. "That means all of our institutions across Canada have to be a resource and an asset for addressing important questions that affect different communities within the Canadian mosaic."

Hejazi said his time researching policy development at all levels of government in Canada and around the world has taught him the importance of solid evidence in decision-making.

"In order to develop effective policy and implement that policy, there's an absolute essential need for evidence," he said.

In analyzing the data that resulted from the research, Hejazi said it was clear the impact of COVID-19 differed across various racialized communities, but also within sub-groups of those communities.

However, there were four general themes that emerged which showed:

- A significant lack of access to medical and [mental health services](#) for these communities.
- A preponderance of high-risk employment often requiring work outside of the home within these communities.
- A lack of access to information and trusted supports.
- Although governments have made many supports available to all Canadians, there exists a disproportionate understanding of how to access these supports within these communities.

"The pandemic has created challenges for all Canadians, but these have been particularly acute across racialized and marginalized communities," said Hejazi.

Within the report, the researchers made three key recommendations to

the Canadian government as they plan and implement COVID-19 recovery initiatives:

- Build trust between government and racialized communities—Engage communities by working with trusted community members to create safe, trusted access points for credible information. Trusted community agencies and networks can facilitate collective action, decision-making and greater factual information sharing within communities. Building trust between government and communities through ongoing engagement is essential for establishing the foundation needed to effectively address health and emergency challenges.
- Enhance communication through existing and new channels—Frequently engage with the community to ensure consistent and appropriate communication. Communities can ensure factual information is shared amongst trusted networks and draw on their awareness of cultural nuances to develop multiple modes of communication and access points.
- Increase overall well-being of racialized Canadian communities—Ensure access and knowledge of financial, physical and emotional well-being resources. Develop an ongoing engagement strategy with racialized communities to connect them with resources such as vaccination clinics, food banks, community health centers and childcare, and addressing underlying social and economic inequities.

"As our governments continue to work toward a safe and equitable recovery plan, the CAI strongly believes the recommendations can be used to build back better and support racialized communities across the country," said Salti. "To be able to collaborate and partner with other racialized [communities](#) for a common goal to amplify their voices and document their experiences was crucial for the future of this country in terms of the policy recommendations that will be put in place to better

ensure their well-being socially, economically and politically."

Fearon said an added benefit of the research project was how it helped build a more diverse research community.

"The project was able to collect important information and allowed us as post-secondary institutions to support the development of that next generation of researchers who will not only give voice to important issues affecting their community, but also be part of the important dialog and action we need as Canadians regarding how we build an inclusive society that benefits us all," he said. "COVID-19 has shown us that our well-being and prosperity are interrelated, which make inclusive society likely more able to respond to challenges and to act on opportunities."

More information: Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Equity-Seeking Groups across Canada:

www.canadianarabinstitute.org/covid19study

Provided by Brock University

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