

Toronto greenspaces create structural and systemic barriers for racialized residents

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Racialized residents could face structural and systemic barriers to accessing, using and navigating Toronto's greenspaces, say the authors of a new report led by York University.

The report, "Park Perceptions and Racialized Realities: Exploring the experiences of racialized [residents](#) in two Toronto neighborhoods," offers several recommendations toward making the city's public greenspaces more welcoming to racialized and Black, Indigenous and people of color.

York Ph.D. Candidate Nadha Hassen led the participatory research project with Professor Sarah Flicker, both of the Faculty of Environmental and Urban Change, in collaboration with Greenchange, Jane/Finch Center and the St. James Town Community Co-operative.

The photographers took photos with a view to access, safety, health and well-being across various Toronto greenspaces identifying structural and systemic barriers to accessing and navigating the spaces.

"Together, we collected more than 200 photos and videos documenting resident experiences and capturing perceptions on issues like access, safety, inclusivity, and [mental health](#) and well-being," says Hassen.

"There were more than 55 online discussions to debrief those experiences and share perspectives on what it means to navigate and use public greenspaces in Toronto as racialized people."

Some of the other key themes include belonging and social connection; exclusion; right to play and children's recreation; maintenance inequities; and gentrification and complex use of space.

"Discussions about greenspaces were an entry point to examining broader issues and barriers faced by racialized residents," says Flicker, York research chair in community-based participatory research. "Many of the experiences transcend the two represented neighborhoods as they are common to others living in underserved, marginalized and racialized neighborhoods across Toronto."

The communities of Jane and Finch and St. James Town are extremely diverse and are home to many [low-income](#) racialized newcomers from various parts of the world. Resident photographers from both communities shared how greenspaces in their neighborhoods can enable people of all races, ages and [diverse backgrounds](#) to have fun and interact, while providing opportunities for connection, enjoyment, peace, mental relief and belonging.

At the same time, they describe [experiences](#) of unspoken racism, prejudice, stigmatization and lack of safety, as well as barriers to inclusion and feeling like they don't belong.

Key recommendations identified by residents include:

- Prioritizing equitable access to high-quality greenspaces in racialized neighborhoods
- Ensuring the inclusion and maintenance of amenities that racialized residents are asking for
- Directing resources equitably
- Ensuring accountability by evaluating and tracking [greenspace](#) changes
- Winterizing outdoor public greenspaces and creating more free indoor community spaces that can be accessed during the cold season
- Improving safety for all, particularly for racialized women

More information: Park Perceptions and Racialized Realities: Exploring the experiences of racialized residents in two Toronto neighbourhoods. [drive.google.com/file/d/1mEC-a ...IQP/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1mEC-a...IQP/view?usp=sharing)

Provided by York University

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