



**Nova Scotia
Human Rights Commission**

**Working Together to Better Serve
All Nova Scotians**

**A Report on
Consumer Racial Profiling in Nova Scotia**

Summary
May 2013

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Working together to better serve all Nova Scotians

More often than other ethnic groups in Nova Scotia, Aboriginal people and African Nova Scotians say that when they shop for goods and services they are treated poorly. This is the finding of a new study done by the Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission.

The Nova Scotia study is the first in Canada to look at consumer racial profiling—a form of racism in which staff treat customers poorly because of their race.

What does consumer racial profiling look like?

You may be practising consumer racial profiling without knowing it if you do one or more of these things to customers because of their race:

- ignore them
- take a long time to serve them even when you are not busy
- refuse to serve them
- follow them
- ask whether they can afford a product or service
- use offensive language such as racial slurs
- search them or their belongings
- force them to leave the store or business
- detain them when they do not have stolen goods

Why study consumer racial profiling?

Retailers and service providers need to know about consumer racial profiling so they can be aware of their behaviour when doing business. Consumer racial profiling is a form of racism. Staff may not be aware they are doing it. Studying it will help to create better services for all Nova Scotians.

Consumer racial profiling—a new term for old behaviours

Many members of racialized groups have experienced consumer racial profiling in the past, but it was ignored. Now these behaviours have a name and a study that helps us to identify them as racism.

Racialized groups—Groups that society treats unequally because of their race, particularly in ways that matter to economic, political, and social life

Our study is the first in Canada to bring consumer racial profiling to light. Thanks to this study, retailers and service providers can learn the behaviours that are seen as consumer racial profiling. Those who may have practised these behaviours in the past can become aware of the harm they have caused to people they have profiled and to their own businesses.

Who took part in our study?

Overall, we talked to 1,219 people from the Halifax Regional Municipality, Millbrook, Digby, and Sydney between March 28 and August 21, 2012. Most people took part in a survey. Other people took part in focus group discussions. Figures 1 and 2 show the numbers of people from various ethnic groups who took part in the study.

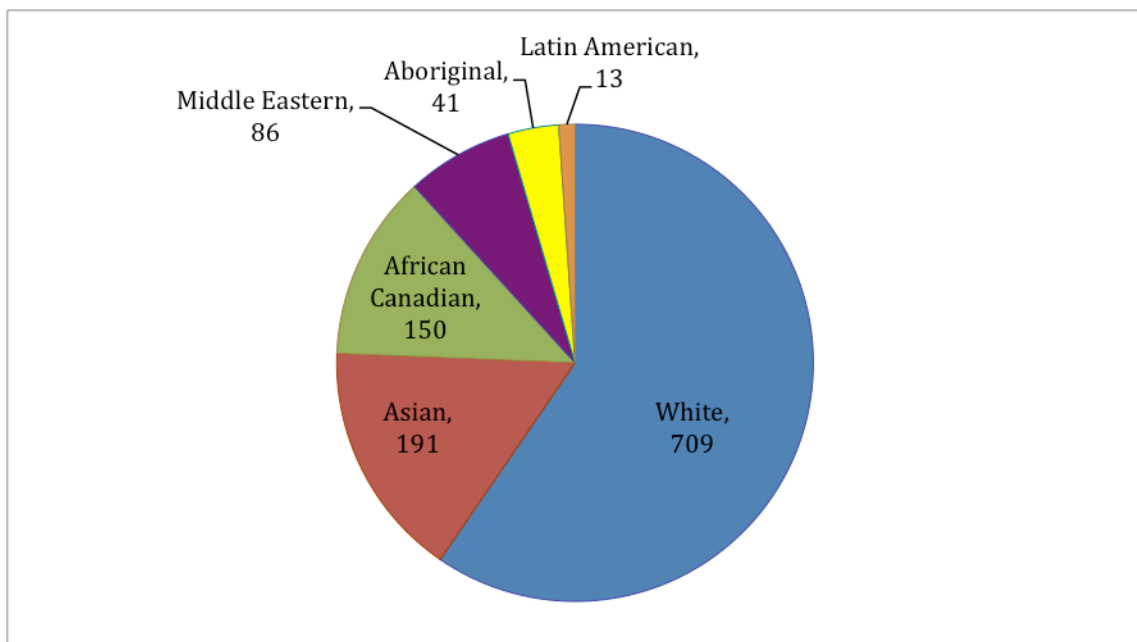


Figure 1. Numbers of survey participants in the Consumer Racial Profiling Project and their ethnicity.

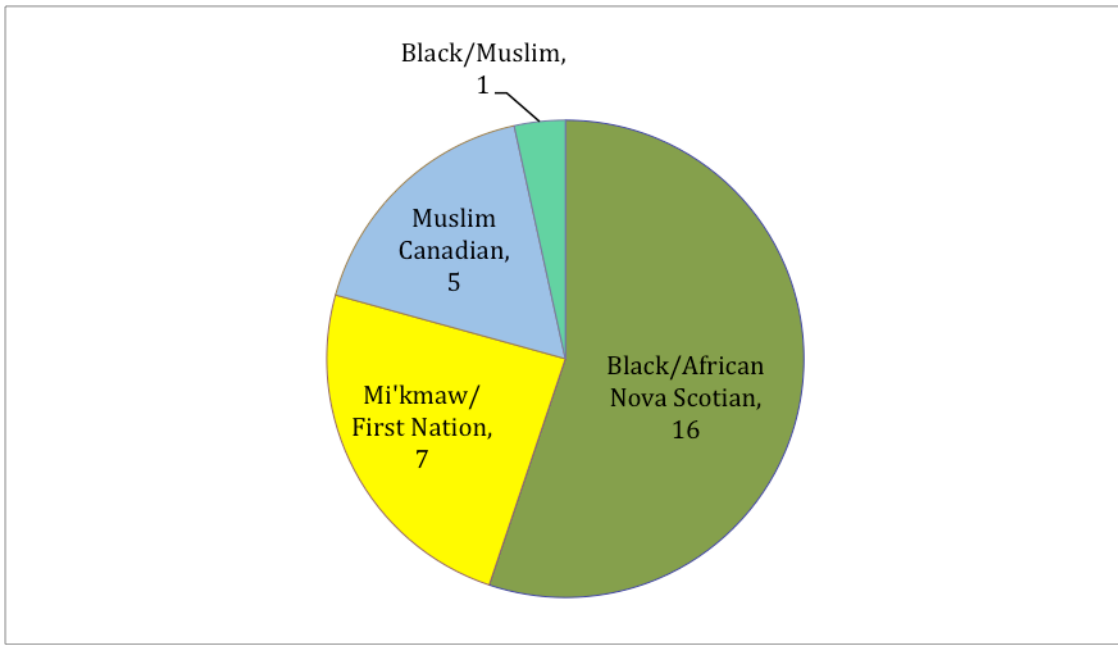


Figure 2. Number of focus group participants in the Consumer Racial Profiling Project and their ethnicity.

How did we gather our information?

We created a survey, which 1,190 participants completed. In face-to-face interviews, we asked each person the same questions about the way retail staff had treated them in the past year. These interviews took place in public places, such as on busy street corners, at different times of the day. Our goal was to reach a wide cross-section of the community. We then held focus groups with 29 people chosen for their ability to talk about their experiences with consumer racial profiling.

What did we ask?

We asked each survey participant these questions:

- In the past year, have you been **ignored by staff** while shopping for goods and services?
- In the past year, have you **received slow service** while shopping for goods and services?
- In the past year, have you been **refused service** while shopping for goods and services?
- In the past year, have you been **followed around by staff or security personnel** while shopping for goods and services?
- In the past year, have you been **questioned about your ability to afford a product** by staff or security personnel while shopping for goods and services?
- In the past year, have you been the **target of offensive language** used by staff or security personnel while shopping for goods and services?

- In the past year, were you or your belongings **searched** by staff or security personnel while shopping for goods and services?
- In the past year, have you been **physically removed from a store** by staff or security personnel while shopping for goods and services?
- In the past year, have you been **wrongfully detained** (i.e., detained without possession of stolen goods) while shopping for goods and services?

If a person answered “yes” to one or more of the questions, we asked them how often such things had happened in the previous 12 months.

We used the following questions to guide the focus group discussions:

- What are your experiences of consumer racial profiling?
- How do you, as a consumer, know that you are being racially profiled?
- How have your experiences with consumer racial profiling impacted your shopping habits?
- How has consumer racial profiling impacted your personal lives, in terms of family, employment, education, access to general services, and so on?
- What changes are necessary that would allow you, as a consumer, to shop throughout Nova Scotia without fear or concern that you might encounter consumer racial profiling?

What did we learn?

In our survey, Aboriginal people and African Canadians more often reported being treated poorly by staff than did any other group. In fact, people from all racialized groups, including Asian, Latin American, and Middle Eastern people, reported being treated poorly by staff far more than did White people.

In the focus groups, several participants commented on being made to feel “lower class” or like “second-class citizens” when shopping. Aboriginal people, African Canadians, and Muslims had three things in common:

- They were targets of offensive language.
- They were treated as if they were physically threatening.
- They were seen as potential thieves.

One participant said, “I was profiled as a Black man who was potentially violent, although I was doing everything to make sure I was not.”

Aboriginal people stated that their rights were not recognized. They said they often had to go to the back of a store to have their tax-free purchases looked after.

Muslims said they were often complimented on their English and asked about their first language. This bothered them because most of these participants were born in Canada and grew up speaking English.

Participants from all racialized groups talked about going to great lengths to avoid being racially profiled:

- They dressed up to go shopping.
- They did not bring bags from other stores with them.
- They made sure their pockets were empty.
- They did not let their children bring toys on shopping trips.
- They greeted security staff when they entered a store.

One participant described such activities as “mentally and emotionally exhausting.” Others said they no longer enjoy shopping, but just buy what they need, and then leave. Many said that they avoid retailers and service providers who have profiled them in the past.

A new kind of racism

Our research supports the idea that racism is rarely open and public today. Consumer racial profiling is based on stereotypes. Retailers and service providers may not even be aware that they are being racist.

What happens next?

The Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission will help reduce consumer racial profiling. Our work will support people in learning how to recognize consumer racial profiling and to understand the harm it causes to those being profiled. This work will benefit the overall community as well as business owners.

We want to work with retailers and service providers to improve services to racialized groups through the following:

- increasing awareness of consumer racial profiling
- developing training materials
- supporting best practices

We hope this report will encourage businesses to take a good look at their employee training, policies, and business practices to make our province a welcoming and respectful place for shoppers from all ethnic groups.

For our part, we at the Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission will use this research to guide us in our future work.

Acknowledgements

The Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission would like to thank all the people who made this project possible.

First we would like to thank all the Nova Scotians who gave their time to take part in this research project. Special thanks go out to the communities of Millbrook, Dartmouth, and Halifax for their partnership and willingness to host focus groups. We want to thank the academic leaders who held a panel presentation on cultural competency in research: Dr. Wanda Thomas Bernard, Dr. Gail Baikie, and Dr. Brian Noble from Dalhousie University, and Dr. Judy Haiven from Saint Mary's University.

This study was made possible through the hard work of many people. Crystal Taylor, owner of CT-Ebony Consulting Company, facilitated the focus groups. The student researchers who collected the data include Olanrewaju Dada, Bryanne Harris, Elizabeth McGiffin, and Fatima Mensah.

This project would not have been possible without the dedication and participation from our staff on the Consumer Racial Profiling Project committee:

- Ann Divine – Manager of Race Relations Equity and Inclusion
- Gerald Hashey – Manager of Dispute Resolutions
- Shawn MacKenzie – Researcher and author
- Alise Browne – Researcher
- Linda Nicholl – Human Rights Education Officer
- Rosemarie Cadogan – Former Human Rights Officer

We would like to send a special note of gratitude to David Shannon, our director and CEO, for his determination to see a discrimination-free society. We also thank our commissioners for their enthusiasm and dedication, which allowed this work to take place.

Contact information

If you want to learn more about this study or get a copy of the full report, please contact the Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission or visit our website.

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