

Racialized Women in Quebec Nonprofits

Diversité d'Abord: Racism in the nonprofit sector in Quebec
A research project by the Centre for Community Organizations (COCo)

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To access the full report, please click here: https://coco-net.org/diversite-dabord/

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Diversité d’Abord is a research project conducted by the Centre for Community Organizations (COCo) between 2016 and 2024. The presented data was collected from 252 people via two online surveys for Quebec-based community sector workers of all racial backgrounds, and 5 focus groups with racialized community sector workers. A portion of our findings are detailed in three introductions and two chapters. We outline our choice of terminology when discussing racism in the Quebec community sector context, present the infographic "The ‘Problem’ Woman of Colour in the Workplace," and detail our analysis of the specific experiences of racialized women in the Quebec community sector.

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Introduction

This chapter covers our analysis of the specific experiences of racialized women in the Quebec community sector. Several important findings emerged:

1. Racialized women are overqualified and undervalued for their positions. The data shows important differences in the way racialized women's experience and education are regarded.
2. Racialized women experience more racial microaggressions than any other comparison group. The content of those microaggressions is also different for racialized women than for men.
3. Racialized women are leaving their jobs, or trying to leave their jobs, at higher rates than any other comparison group.

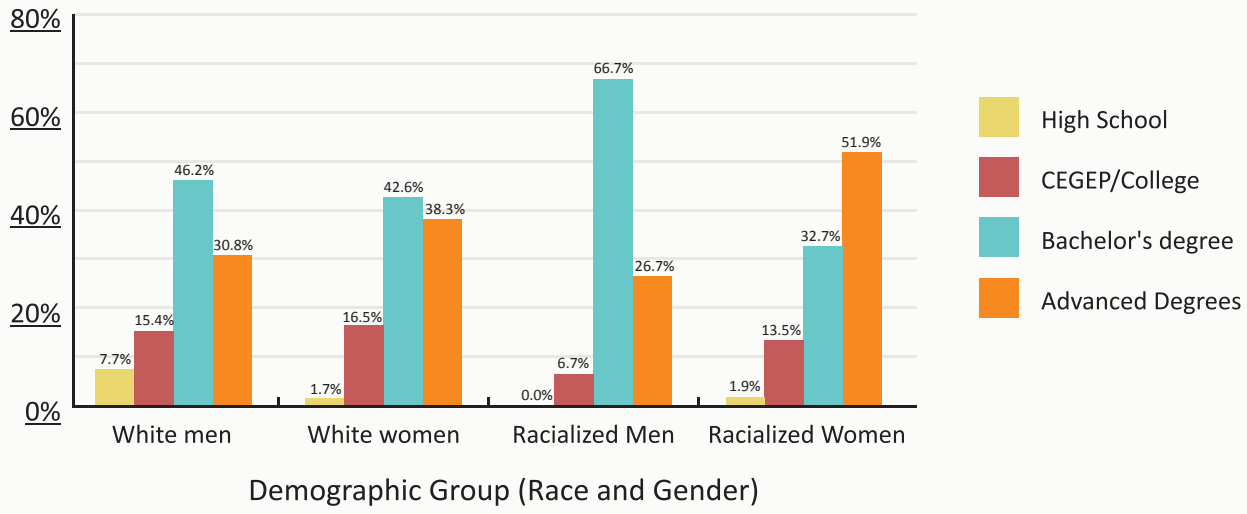
Key Finding: Overqualified and Undervalued

Our research showed that racialized women had the highest education level of any of our comparison groups. However, their formal education and training did not protect them, as job seekers or as employees. Racialized women were the most likely to be stuck in temporary and contract roles. They were also the most likely to have their qualifications and education questioned, and be told that they were a “token diversity hire.”

Education Levels

50% of racialized women survey respondents hold advanced degrees (Masters, PhD, etc.), making them the most educated subset of our respondents. In comparison, advanced degrees were held by 40% of white women, 30% of white men, and 25% of racialized men.

Level of Education by Demographic Group



Demographic Group (Race and Gender)

If we compare our data on education levels to information collected by Statistics Canada, our survey respondents have higher rates of educational attainment than the average population. However, Statistics Canada confirms the general trend of overqualification of racialized people for the jobs they maintain.

> *Immigrants tend to be highly educated because education is part of the selection criteria of Canada's immigration system... At the same time, immigrants with foreign degrees face above-average rates of overqualification (i.e., having a bachelor's degree or higher but working in a job that typically requires a high school education at most), and this is particularly the case among racialized people despite their high levels of education."*[1]

Their data also shows us that different racial groups had different education levels - for example, Chinese and South Asian people tended to have higher levels of education than the general population. Other research shows us this is particularly true for women who are a "visible minority":

> *47.7% of Canadian-born visible minority women of core working age had a university degree, compared with 25.8% of same-aged women who were not a visible minority."*[2]

Stable Employment

Our survey data suggests that overall, white people in the sector have more access to stable employment in the form of permanent, rather than contract, roles. The chart below shows how many people, divided into white and racialized respondents, had a permanent or a contract role in the 3 years prior to the survey.

1. Statistics Canada. "A Portrait of Educational Attainment and Occupational Outcomes among Racialized Populations in 2021." January 18, 2023.
2. Lean In Canada. "The Successes and Challenges of Visible Minority Women in Canada." September 24, 2017.

Reported Roles Held in the 3 Years Prior to the Survey, by Race

Racial Group	% Contract Positions	% Permanent Positions
Racialized People	45.78%	45.78%
White People	27.81%	61.59%

This data shows that many more racialized community sector workers are in contractual positions in the sector, compared to their white peers. This data gets even more stark when we look only at women.

Despite the higher levels of education and multilingualism described above, once in the job market, racialized women have significantly less access to stable employment. Within the 3 years we asked about in the survey, we found the following:

Reported Roles Held in the 3 Years Prior to the Survey, by Women

Racial Group	% Contract Positions	% Permanent Positions
Racialized Women	52.83%	56.60%
White Women	30.43%	64.35%

Reported Roles Held in the 3 Years Prior to the Survey, Racialized Women Versus Everyone Else

This table compared racialized women to everyone else (racialized men and white people).

Racial Group	% Contract Positions	% Permanent Positions
Racialized Women	52.83%	56.60%
Everyone Else	35.59%	56.76%

This issue has been noted elsewhere, including in an important survey from 2010 about women's organizations in Montreal. The researchers write that: "we note that despite the under-representation of diverse women in women's organisations, they are overrepresented in the most precarious employment contracts."[3]

It is worth noting that while this is not the focus of this chapter, this data does tell us that racialized men have very high rates of being in contract positions as well. They are more than twice as likely as white men to be in contractual roles (47% vs. 19%).

Racial Wealth Gap

The overrepresentation of racialized women in part time, contractual positions is a clear example of structural and systemic racism in the nonprofit sector in Quebec, which becomes even more striking against the backdrop of their overqualification. This form of structural racism has a direct impact on issues of poverty, wealth accumulation, home ownership, and so on, which define the racial wealth gap in Canada and Quebec. The Conference Board of Canada stated:

> *"Not only does this gap contribute to the racialized experience of poverty, but it also creates marginalization, vulnerability, and social alienation in the workforce and for communities of racialized Canadians."*[4]

Indeed, research by the Conference Board of Canada tells us that "university-educated Canadian-born members of a visible minority earn, on average, 87.4 cents for every dollar earned by their Caucasian peers" [sic].[5] This number is highest in Quebec, compared to all other provinces, and again, is highest for racialized women, with a 20% difference in wages for university-educated racialized women compared to the general population.[6] This data is even more striking when considering the narrow scope of this report. Researchers had strict controls on variables, and only compared people who had a university education, were Canadian-born, and had full-time, salaried positions. If the study accounted for part-time work, people without citizenship, or people with less education, our assumption is this gap would be even wider.

3. Lacharité, B., et al. "Facteurs favorisant l'embauche et le maintien en emploi des femmes des communautés culturelles et immigrantes dans les groupes de femmes de Montréal." Montreal: Tables des Groupes des Femmes de Montréal, 2010.

4. The Conference Board of Canada. "Racial Wage Gap." January 1, 2011.

Ultimately, economic precarity is a form of structural violence that limits opportunities, both professionally and socially, and thus impacts people's ability to define their own lives. The lived consequences of the resulting stress and anxiety serve as a reinforcing variable. By embedding our analysis in an understanding of precarity, we can explore the subtle yet significant impacts of racism on racialized workers, the organisations within which they work, and the sector at large. The following quote highlights this complexity.

> *"Because it's work, because it's livelihood, it's not something you can escape. It's not like, I'm walking down the street, and someone said something mean [that] I'm going to cross the street and go somewhere else. When so many of us are hired under contracts, when so much of the work we do is under our qualifications – we can't really move, we can't really change jobs if we don't like it. There's captivity attached to the workplace."*
>
> — **Samah**, Focus Group Participant

The Tokenism Trap

Tokenism is a term that is used to describe "the practice of doing something (such as hiring a person who belongs to a minority group) only to prevent criticism and give the appearance that people are being treated fairly."[7]

Discussions about tokenism often surround individuals from minority groups (such as racialized women) feeling that they have been hired into their roles "as a token." The concept of tokenism was developed to name the hypocrisy or superficial nature of many white dominant institutions' efforts toward inclusion.[8]

> *Seeing that bias in hiring and being aware that I was hired for this contract because they wanted to work with a* woman of colour *but they didn't support any of the work that I was doing. It was a 6-month contract and I realized at some point that they didn't care about any of the work.*"
>
> — **Ananas**, Focus Group Participant

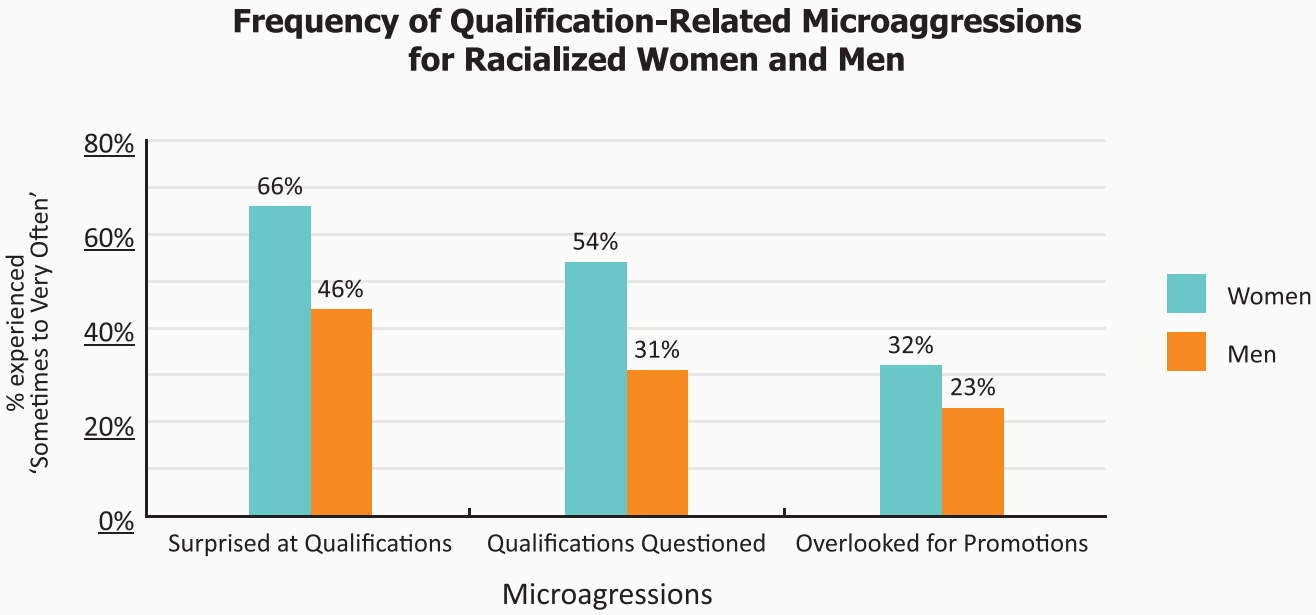
However, our research showed another side of tokenism: that regardless of their qualifications, their own feelings about their qualifications, or the intentions of the organisation, **being accused of being a token hire** is one of many ways that racialized women were made to feel unwanted and unwelcome in the community sector. We measured this behaviour by looking at the frequency that individuals had:

- Their qualifications questioned
- Colleagues express surprise at their qualifications
- Were overlooked for promotions internally

7. Encyclopædia Britannica. "Tokenism." January 23, 2023.

8. Malcolm X. "The Race Problem." Lecture, African Students Association and NAACP Campus Chapter, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI, January 23, 1963.

Our data shows that racialized women experienced these issues at a significantly higher rate than other groups. In the graph below, we compare the rates of racialized women experiencing these issues with those of racialized men; just amongst these two groups, we observe a 20-25% difference in the frequency of these behaviours.



As we explain more below, very few white people said they had experienced racial microaggressions at all. Those who did listed those experiences as occurring "Never" or "Rarely". While white people might experience these issues along other discriminatory lines (for being trans, for being a woman, etc), they did not report experiencing these issues on the basis of race.

Microaggressions in the Workplace

We asked all respondents whether they had been subjected to microaggressions on the basis of their race. If they answered yes, they were then given more examples of forms of racial microaggressions. We created this list based on common forms of racial microaggressions and racial harassment. For each item we asked respondents to provide the frequency with which they experienced the microaggression from "Never" to "Very Often."

The vast majority of white respondents responded that they had never experienced racial microaggressions. The white people who said they had experienced racial microaggressions had experienced it “Never” or “Rarely.” There was no statistically significant experience by white respondents of racial harassment when given specific examples.

The majority of racialized respondents, however, answered that they had experienced racial microaggressions, and of that subset, most had done so “Sometimes” to “Very Often.” Looking only at responses “Sometimes” to “Very Often,” here are the 5 most commonly experienced microaggressions in the Quebec nonprofit sector.

Percentage of Racialized Respondents Who Experienced the 5 Most Common Microaggressions (“Sometimes” to “Very Often”)

Microaggression	% of Respondents
Being expected to speak on behalf of my whole race.	75%
Being expected to undertake all projects relating to race.	62%
Being expected to work with racialized clients because I am racialized.	60%
Minimizing aspects of my race or culture, such as clothes and ways of interacting, in order to "fit in."	58%
Being expected to explain aspects of my race or culture unrelated to my work.	55%

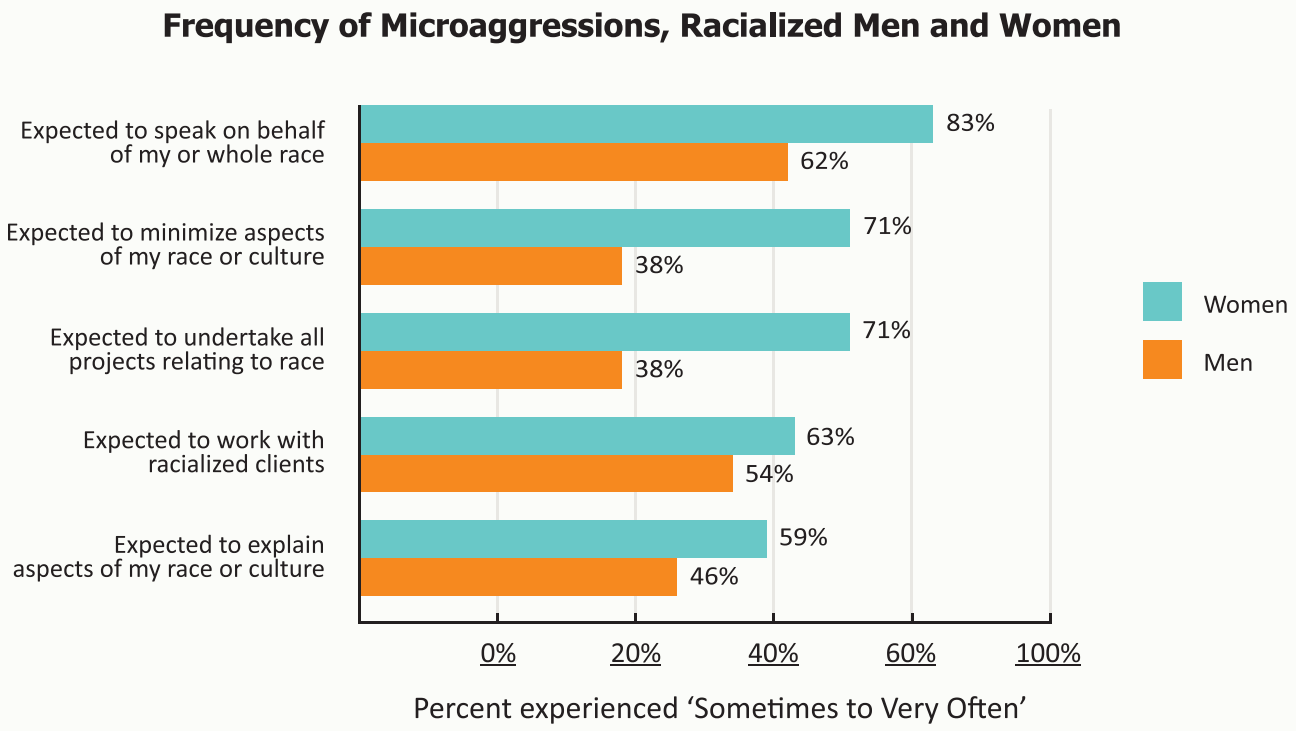
The other racial microaggressions we asked about were:

- Being embarrassed or patronized because of my race.
- Being ignored after expressing ideas or comments because of my race.
- Being put down intellectually because of my race.
- Being called names, insulted, or verbally assaulted because of my race.
- Being subjected to hostile stares because of my race.
- Being physically threatened or attacked because of my race.
- Being expected to accentuate aspects of my race or culture. For example, being expected to wear cultural garb for presentations.
- Hearing/seeing or being exposed to racist cartoons or jokes relating to my race.

It is worth noting that every reported incident of a racial slur or being called a swear word being used in the workplace was related to anti-Blackness. Respondents also reported a higher frequency of these slurs happening in French-speaking contexts.

Our focus group respondents also shared experiences of racial microaggressions in the workplace. Examining the qualitative data on this topic reveals that participants experience different kinds of microaggressions and harassment simultaneously, layered over each other. They accumulate and combine, exacerbating each other. This quote exemplifies the range of experiences that focus groups participants talked about navigating on a day-to-day basis:

> *"As a Black person, I have to work twice as hard to get halfway where white people get; mainly because I might not be taken seriously. Even now, I would have to think about policing myself. I used to hide listening to rap, because if I listen to it and I'm Black I'm gonna look more ghetto. And people would say, "Oh you speak so well!" but I speak the same way as everyone else."*
>
> — **Egg**, Focus Group Participant



Hypervisibility and Invisibility

The five most common forms of racial microaggressions in this data illustrate a tension. Racialized women are expected to do "the racial work" of the organization: dealing with racialized clients, undertaking all projects related to race, being asked to speak on behalf of their race, etc., while simultaneously being asked to minimize their own racial and cultural experiences. One of our focus group respondents explored how this dynamic often served an organization's agenda of seeming diverse while not creating space for Black women within the organization.

> *Our members who were Black women, I feel like they were discriminated [against] in terms of opportunities for work, compared to Black men who are members, who are not taken to represent the face of the organization. There's a way that the faces, the bodies of the elderly Black women who are members and who are very active, they go to demos, they do all kinds of things – there's a way that they are used to promote and be the face of the organization. And I don't see how it's returned to them. I don't see it."*
>
> — **Samah**, Black woman, Focus Group Participant

Other research done by COCo on this subject points to a similar tension: racialized women, and in particular Black women, are made hypervisible at the same time as being asked to make themselves invisible.[9]

Emotional Labour

The most common forms of racism listed above experienced by our survey participants can be thought of as "feminized" forms of labour, like education and relationship building. Others have written at length about how this kind of emotional and relational work is disproportionately placed on women, using terms such as "emotional labour."[10] [11]

Our data allows us to see more clearly the particular and intensified impacts of these microaggressions on racialized women. It can help us expand our understanding of "emotional labour" from "cushioning their responses, managing the emotions of their peers and making their workplace "pleasant",[12] to one that includes managing the racial anxiety and aggression of their colleagues and supporting the well-being of other racialized people and clients in the organization. Many of our research participants invoked the term "emotional labour" to describe their experience.

9. Briones, Emil. "Conflict & Racism: Creating Inroads Towards Learning, Healing and Transformation." Montreal: Centre for Community Organizations, 2018.

10. Willow, Francesca. "What Is Emotional Labour & Why Is It Important?" Ethical Unicorn, 2019.

11. Jeung Da-Yee, Kim Changsoo, and Chang Sei-Jin. "Emotional Labour and Burnout: A Review of the Literature." Seoul: Yonsei Medical Journal, 2018.

12. Wilding, Melody. "How Emotional Labour Affects Women's Careers." Forbes, 2019.

> *As a woman of colour, addressing racism requires emotional labour and energy that I don't always have.*"
>
> — Racialized Survey Respondent

For our participants, "emotional labour" included administrative and logistical work that is not recognized. One focus group participant said:

> *Every time, it was the people of colour who had to clear the room, think about food, ask where someone was, check in with people. I cannot believe that these things are happening again. At the end of the meeting, who is bringing the dishes to the kitchen? Always the two people of colour. Everyone else is networking, chit-chatting, greeting each other. I almost felt guilty, everyone thinks I'm a nice generous person but you don't always want to be. I had a cigarette, sat down, and waited to see if anyone else would clean up, and no one did.*"
>
> — **YNAA**, Focus Group Participant

This dynamic, and the use of "emotional labour" to describe it, has also been investigated by researchers looking at this topic, especially as it relates to Black women's experiences:

> *Black women described that their emotions were disproportionately seen as aggressive or angry while white colleagues who expressed passion or anger did not receive the same reaction. "Our passion is 'being aggressive'," one focus group participant described, "whereas their passion is 'truly genuine passion' and they 'truly mean well'." As a result of these stereotypes, the Black women in our survey and focus groups— and in other documented research in this area—engage in a great deal of emotional labour to regulate their responses to others and manage how others perceive them. One Black woman executive director in New York said she has to "spend a lot of time trying to make people comfortable. That wastes my time, because I am credible."*[13]

The researchers go on to say that:

> *For Black women, research indicates that the emotional labour required to regulate responses based on the perceptions of others causes significant stress that can ultimately impact job performance."*[14]

[13 & 14.] Biu, Ofronama. "Race to Lead: Women of Color in the Nonprofit Sector." The Building Movement Project, 2019.

Key Finding: More Racialized Women Are Leaving Their Jobs

Our data analysis suggests that racialized women leave their jobs at higher rates than other groups.

Employee retention rates are an important factor for organizations to track. Employee retention - how long an employee stays at an organization - is usually measured using a percentage over a period of time. For example, an 80% retention rate might mean that in a given year, 80% of the staff of an organization stayed in their jobs. Calculating retention rates, especially at small community organizations, is quite easy, and can provide an invaluable metric for evaluating the health and strength of your organization. This data can be even more useful if specific categories of employees are investigated. For example, if there is always turnover in a certain role or department. Sector-level retention data is also useful, especially when qualitative information about why people left their jobs is uncovered. For example, in a 2010 survey and report, Commongood Careers found that more than a quarter of employees of Colour in the nonprofit sector had left a position because of a "lack of diversity and inclusiveness."[15]

Racialized Women and Retention

Specifically for racialized women, experiencing microaggressions has a direct impact on their ability to stay in their positions in the community sector.

> *There are so many organizations that when they hire one woman of colour, the conditions make it pretty much impossible for them to stay, whether the emotional labour or the racism."*
>
> — **Ananas**, Focus Group Participant

1 out of 5 of racialized women respondents reported having left or resigned a position in the community sector in the year prior to the survey due to an unwelcoming working environment for

[15.] Shwartz, R., et al. "The Voice of Nonprofit Talent: Perceptions of Diversity in the Workplace." Commongood Careers & the Level Playing Field Institute, 2010.

racialized people or due to racialized harassment. This increases to 1 out of 3 when we look at the three years prior to the survey.

% of Racialized Women Who Left a Job Due to an Unwelcoming Environment or Racial Harassment

n	In the past year	In the past 3 years
53	20.75%	32.08%

It's important to look at not only those who left but also those who are considering leaving, but cannot. At the time of the survey, close to 15% of all racialized women respondents indicated that they were currently considering leaving a position due to an unwelcoming working environment for racialized people or due to racial harassment. The percentage jumps up to over 30%, when the question was broadened to whether or not they had considered leaving a position for the same reasons in the past year.

In comparison, 10% of our racialized survey respondents regardless of gender were currently considering leaving a position because of an unwelcoming working environment for racialized people or racial harassment; and 27% when the question was broadened to whether or not they had considered leaving a position for the same reasons in the past year.

% of Racialized Respondents Who Considered Leaving a Job Due to an Unwelcoming Environment or Racial Harassment

n	"Currently considering"	"Considered in the past year"
83	9.64%	27.71%

% of Racialized Women Who Considered Leaving a Job Due to an Unwelcoming Environment or Racial Harassment

n	"Currently considering"	"Considered in the past year"
53	13.21%	30.19%

> *My current barriers to leaving are financial and disability-related. I am also unsure that anywhere else will necessarily be any better.*"
>
> — Racialized Woman Survey Respondent

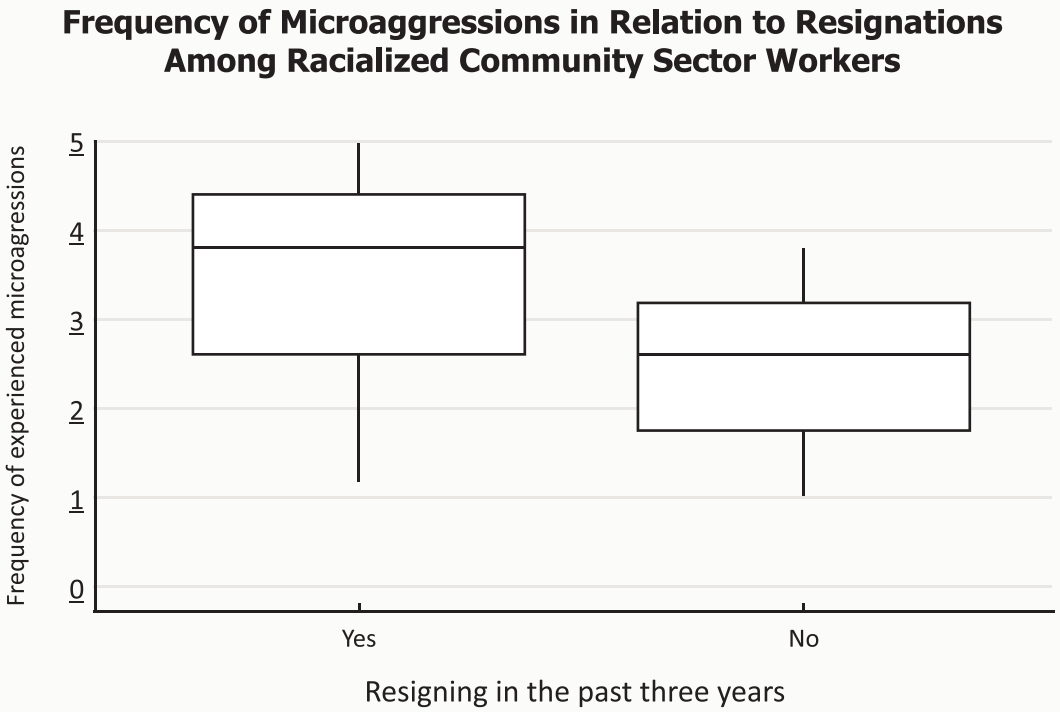
There was no statistically significant number of white respondents who were considering leaving their jobs because of racial harassment; this is related to the very low number of white people who identified having experienced racial microaggressions or harassment at all.

The Frequency of Racial Microaggressions Correlates With Lower Retention

In comparing different survey responses, we observed a correlation between the frequency of experiences of racial microaggression and other forms of harassment with the frequency of resigning or taking a leave of absence. Specifically, as experiences of racial aggressions increase, so do the instances of resigning or taking a leave.

This box plot graph depicts the relationship between the frequency of microaggressions experienced by racialized community sector workers of all genders and the frequency with which they resigned from their roles. A box plot was chosen to illustrate this because it effectively shows the distribution of data, highlighting medians, quartiles, and potential outliers. If you are interested in learning more about box plots, check out this link.[16]

16. "Box Plot (Box and Whiskers): How to Read One & How to Make One in Excel, TI-83, SPSS." Statistics How To, 2022.



A similar correlation exists between higher frequencies of microaggressions and taking leaves of absence.

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Since 2016, the Centre for Community Organizations (COCo) has been engaged in Diversité d'Abord, a research and education project that examines how racism operates in the nonprofit sector in Quebec. Everything you need to know about Diversité d'Abord can be found at: https://coco-net.org/diversite-dabord/.
You can reach COCo over email at: info@coco-net.org or explore our website at: https://coco-net.org.
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