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Experiences of racism among Ontario BIPOC midwives and students



March 4, 2020

Canadian study looks at racism in midwifery

In summer 2019, a research study was conducted by staff members Feben Aseffa, RM, MHM and Lwam Mehari, MPH — Experiences of Racism among Ontario BIPOC Midwives and Students in Midwifery Education and Profession. The purpose of this research was to understand how racism manifests in midwifery and what solutions need to be implemented to dismantle its prevalence.

"It is the first Canadian study looking at racism in midwifery," explains Aseffa. "We conducted this study in response to a gap that was identified in the work that the AOM has conducted to date. We've focused on various equity issues, such as restoration of Indigenous midwifery, 2SLGBTQI issues, disability accommodation... but we haven't addressed racism until this study."

ongoing work on racial equity in midwifery. The AOM continues to encourage learning opportunities such as the [Anti-racism Workshop](#) so that midwifery practice groups and other midwifery workplaces can reflect on their personal and organizational practices and policies to create equitable working environments for everyone.

Here is what we know about the experiences of BIPOC midwives and midwifery students in their work or study environments.

The impact of racism

When study participants were asked how racism or fear of racism impacts them:

- 90% agreed or strongly agreed that racism impacts how they communicate or express themselves
- 90% felt it impacts their mental health
- 87% felt it impacts their comfort in working in any community where work is available
- 81% felt it impacts how they feel their colleagues valued them
- 64% felt it impacts how they care for their clients
- 63% of participants reported feeling that their race/identity negatively impacted their career opportunities

"In most cases this was connected to racial discrimination and white privilege in policy and structure of predominantly white practice groups," explained Aseffa and Mehari.

These experiences may impact the success and retention of BIPOC midwives in the profession. As one research participant stated, "If I had to leave [midwifery], it would be because it's mentally exhausting to be questioned [about] who you are and not [being] accepted as equal, or to be questioned [about] your culture, your looks, your behaviour and to be constantly assaulted by microaggressions and macroaggressions."

Another midwife said, "My experiences of racism in [university] were so terrible that I feel it highly impacted my ability to excel to my fullest capacity in school. As a result, I also lost a great deal of confidence and was simply less 'marketable' as a new midwife."

Implicit bias

Implicit bias was a recurring theme throughout the study.


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opportunities due to their ethnic names or appearance as visible minorities.

These issues were echoed by the research participants, who stated:

"When the practice was hiring an NR [new registrant], if the person had an 'ethnic name' the partners said, 'Oh, she might have a hard time in our community' and would not consider her a candidate. I do not have an 'ethnic name,' but it makes me curious that if I did I might not have been offered an interview at my clinic."

Feeling like you don't belong, or don't fit the mould was another recurring sentiment. One participant said, "So many things in midwifery are based on compatible personalities, and because of my race and religion (Muslim), I feel that I'm already a few steps behind my peers in finding commonalities with the midwifery community."

Biases against black people was also expressed. A participant reports, "I was afraid of being perceived negatively because of how black women are shown in our culture and media — i.e., lazy, angry, ghetto. I didn't think people would take me seriously or think I was smart enough. I also was aware that because people might have that perception, I would have to work twice as hard to be recognized and accepted. I was worried about burning out."

Anti-racism Workshop

On Wednesday, March 11th, the AOM will be holding the [Anti-racism Workshop](#). Led by Stacey Alderwick, she will guide participants through self-reflection, discussion, role play and small and large group exercises to support participants in building anti-racism and anti-oppression practice and skills to create equitable opportunities for BIPOC midwives/students.

Stacey has over 18 years' experience working with non-profit, health, social service, academic and government sectors. She is familiar with the environment in which midwifery practices operate, having been contracted to provide services to multiple midwifery practice groups for over 10 years.

Come join us! Free for members.

Questions? Contact [Feben Aseffa](#).


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