

RESEARCH REPORT

# Measuring Discrimination in Rental Housing Across Canada

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## About us

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The Canadian Centre for Housing Rights (CCHR) is Canada's leading registered charitable organization working to advance the right to housing. CCHR has worked for over 35 years at the intersection of human rights and housing. We advance the right to housing by serving renters to help them stay housed, providing education and training about housing rights, and advancing rights-based housing policy through research, policy development, advocacy, and law reform.

## About this research report

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Though there is limited literature on barriers to accessing rental housing for marginalized groups in Canada, the extent to which discrimination presents a barrier for marginalized groups to access housing in Canada remains unknown. In its work providing services to renters, CCHR hears almost daily about the discrimination they face. These experiences are, however, seldom reported since the provincial channels for filing human rights complaints are long and onerous. For this reason, data from provincial human rights commissions on complaints filed against landlords cannot be interpreted as an accurate barometer of the scale and scope of housing discrimination in Canada.

To address this knowledge gap, CCHR, in partnership with Dr. Gordon Hodson from Brock University, conducted a discrimination audit of 57 communities across Canada, alongside a pan-Canadian survey of nearly 600 renters. This report presents key findings on the extent of discrimination experienced in the rental housing market by marginalized groups in Canada, as well as the discrimination experienced by marginalized groups while living in their rental units.

This research report received ethics approval from the Research Ethics Board at Brock University after a full board review. The ethics materials can be found in Appendix 1 of this report.

## Acknowledgements

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## Executive Summary

Over several decades, CCHR has consistently heard from renters facing discrimination in the rental housing market. Prospective renters will often report that they have been denied the opportunity to view or apply for an apartment, or that their rental applications are rejected based on some aspect of their identity, such as their immigration status, disability, gender identity, sexual orientation, racial or ethnic background, age, the composition of their family, or because they are receiving social assistance.

Research on discrimination in the context of Canada's housing market is limited. In fact, among the most current resources on this topic are CCHR's 2009 report entitled ["Sorry, it's rented." Measuring discrimination in Toronto's rental housing market](#) ("2009 discrimination audit"), and its 2022 report entitled ["Sorry, it's rented." Measuring discrimination against newcomers in Toronto's rental housing market](#) ("2022 discrimination audit"). The findings of our 2009 and 2022 studies were alarming. The initial study found that 14 per cent of lone-parent families and 23 per cent of South Asian men experienced discrimination when trying to find rental housing in Toronto. The 2022 study, which focused on the experience of newcomers to Toronto, found they face up to 11 times as much discrimination than non-newcomers when trying to secure rental housing. Since CCHR's last discrimination audit was carried out in 2022, the housing crisis and its impacts on marginalized renters have only intensified.

To deepen our understanding of housing discrimination in Canada, this research study conducted a discrimination audit of landlords and a survey of renters. In a discrimination audit, applicants of similar identities, except for one or two variable differences (e.g., racial identity, family status, gender identity, newcomer status, or income source), respond to job or housing adverts. Audits can be carried out using email or phone. The responses to the inquiries are recorded and then analyzed by researchers to determine if the individual with the marginalized identity experienced discrimination when compared to a control profile that is unlikely to experience discrimination.

This research set out to expand the scope of our previous research in two key ways:

1. This research expanded its geographic focus beyond Toronto to discern the extent of housing discrimination on a national scale. This study is the first national discrimination audit focused on housing in Canada.
2. Whereas the 2009 and 2022 audits examined discrimination that took place after an initial inquiry about a housing unit (pre-tenancy), in this study the discrimination audit was accompanied by a national survey that examines renter perceptions of discrimination both in those initial interactions, and the discrimination experienced once an individual has secured and is living in a rental unit.

The findings of this study are concerning. Echoing our previous research findings in Toronto, this study found that marginalized groups face discrimination when searching for rental housing in communities across Canada. It also confirmed that marginalized groups report facing an increased incidence of discrimination when living in their rental unit. These findings are particularly concerning because they compound the barriers that marginalized groups already face in accessing adequate and affordable housing as a result of Canada's ongoing and unprecedented housing affordability crisis.

## Summary of findings

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### The pre-tenancy landlord discrimination audit found:

Being racialized versus being white was associated with a:

- 14.34 per cent decrease in response rate.
- 18.83 per cent decrease in word count, meaning that marginalized groups received markedly shorter replies to their inquiries when compared to white men.

Being racialized and having a child versus being racialized and not having a child was associated with a:

- 20.23 per cent decrease in response rate.
- 28.34 per cent shorter response (measured in number of words).
- 36.44 per cent less friendly response.

#### **The survey of renters' perceptions of discrimination found:**

- On average, people who identified themselves as a member of a racialized group (versus white), were asked 27.54 per cent more personal questions (example: asked about their marital status, whether they planned to have children, their immigration status or whether they smoked) by landlords or property managers.
- People who identified themselves as a member of a racialized group were also found to be rejected (example: told that the unit had already been rented or told that it would not be suitable for them) 9.32 per cent more often by landlords or property managers when looking for a unit to rent.
- When living in their unit, people who identified themselves as having a disability were 66.7 per cent more likely to be expected to follow different rules, were 316.67 per cent more likely to experience landlord aggression and were 20.37 per cent more likely to have their boundaries violated by their landlord when compared with people who did not identify as having a disability.
- People who identified themselves as newcomers to Canada were asked 30.73 per cent more personal questions and tended to be rejected 9.96 per cent more often when looking for a unit to rent. People who reported having children (versus those without children) were asked for 10.58 per cent more pieces of documentation to prove their income and employment, and were asked 24.66 per cent more personal questions while looking for an apartment unit.

## Summary of policy recommendations

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The results of this research indicate that the groups who face more barriers to accessing rental housing are lower income households, families with children, single people, women, Indigenous people, racialized people, newcomers and people with disabilities. To address these barriers, the Government of Canada should urgently take the following measures.

### **Reduce barriers to accessing affordable and adequate housing.**

- Dedicate funding to support intersectional organizations and civil society groups that address the unique challenges that different groups face in securing housing.
- Amend the National Housing Strategy Act (NHSA) to explicitly recognize discrimination based on human rights grounds as a barrier to the enjoyment of the right to housing.
- Require provincial and territorial governments to amend their Residential Tenancies Acts to prevent discrimination during the pre-tenancy period.

### **Prevent landlord harassment and neglect in the home.**

- Increase funding to federal, provincial and territorial human rights tribunals and commissions to ensure complaints of discrimination are addressed swiftly.
- Increase funding to legal aid systems so that people who are raising a human rights complaint can get assistance and representation throughout the process.
- Require provincial and territorial governments to establish minimum residential maintenance standards in their laws and support municipalities in the development of rental licensing programs to ensure rental homes are well-maintained and livable.

- Create and fund rental housing navigation services to help renters access the supports they need and mediate with landlords on their behalf when issues arise during tenancies.

**Mitigate the impacts of the financialization of housing.**

- Improve targets for government-funded affordable housing and prioritize funding allocations to non-profit providers to ensure that marginalized groups have access to housing that meets their needs.
- Collaborate with other levels of government to ensure that affordable and non-market housing options are protected and expanded for lower income households.
- Work with provincial and territorial governments to implement effective rent regulation measures, including vacancy control, to prevent unfair rent increases and economic evictions.
- Overcome the legal and operational bottlenecks in addressing housing discrimination by funding and investigating the nature, scope and impact of discriminatory housing practices.

Our full policy recommendations can be found at [housingrightscanada.com](https://housingrightscanada.com).

## Introduction

In our work providing services to renters, CCHR consistently hears about their challenges facing discrimination in the rental housing market. Prospective renters often tell us that they have been denied the opportunity to view or apply for an apartment based on their immigration status, disability, gender identity, sexual orientation, racial or ethnic background, age, the composition of their family, or because they are receiving social assistance. Others tell us that their rental applications were rejected by landlords and property managers because of their identity, family composition or economic position.

These discriminatory practices can in some instances take the form of explicit discriminatory statements, but in others are more subtle and difficult to identify. For example, a landlord or property manager might answer an inquiring email from a prospective renter who does not specify having children, while ignoring an inquiry from someone who shares that they are looking for a unit for them and their child. Because discrimination can be subtle, it can be difficult to understand its full extent in the rental housing market.

While there is extensive research on housing discrimination in the United States and Europe,<sup>1</sup> similar research in Canada is limited. Formal channels for reporting discrimination in Canada can require onerous documentation and long processes that are not accessible for most renters who have limited resources and need to find somewhere to live more immediately. Further, because of the covert form that housing discrimination can take, many people might experience housing discrimination without even realizing that they are being discriminated against. This means that provincial data on human rights complaints relating to discrimination in rental housing markets cannot be taken as representative of the levels of discriminatory conduct that renters face at the hands of landlords or property managers.

CCHR's 2009 and 2022 discrimination audits in Toronto are among the most current and comprehensive resources on the topic in Canada. In these studies, CCHR conducted discrimination audits to measure the incidence of

discrimination experienced by different populations looking for housing in Toronto. In a discrimination audit, applicants of similar identities, except for one or two variable differences (e.g., racial identity, family status, gender identity, citizenship status, or income source), respond to job or housing adverts. Audits can take place using e-mail or by phone. The responses to the inquiries are recorded and then analyzed by researchers to determine if the individual with the marginalized identity experienced discrimination when compared to a control profile that is unlikely to experience discrimination.

The findings of our 2009 and 2022 discrimination audits were alarming. The initial study found that 14 per cent of lone-parent families and 23 per cent of South Asian men experienced discrimination when trying to access rental housing in Toronto. The 2022 discrimination audit, focused on the experiences of newcomers to Toronto, found that they face up to 11 times as much discrimination than non-newcomers when trying to secure rental housing. Since the time these studies were carried out, the housing crisis and its impacts on marginalized renters have continually intensified.

To deepen our understanding of housing discrimination in Canada, this research study set out to expand the scope of our previous research in two key ways:

- 1.** This research expanded its geographic focus beyond Toronto, to discern the extent of housing discrimination on a national scale. This study is the first national discrimination audit focused on housing in Canada.
- 2.** Whereas the 2009 and 2022 audits examined discrimination that took place after an initial inquiry about a housing unit (pre-tenancy), in this study the discrimination audit was accompanied by a national survey that examines renter perceptions of discrimination both in those initial interactions, and the discrimination experienced once an individual has secured and is living in a rental unit.

The findings of this study are concerning. Echoing our previous research findings focused on Toronto, this study finds that marginalized groups face

discrimination when searching for rental housing in communities across Canada. It also confirms that marginalized groups report facing an increased incidence of discrimination when living in their rental unit. These findings are particularly concerning because they compound the barriers that marginalized groups face in accessing adequate and affordable housing as a result of Canada's ongoing housing crisis.

## Research Methods

To understand the extent of discrimination faced by prospective renters of different identity groups in their search for rental housing, and the incidence of discrimination that these renters face once living in a rental unit, this research study took a mixed-method approach by implementing a discrimination audit and a survey of renters across the country. The discrimination audit reveals discriminatory conduct on behalf of landlords against prospective renters during the search for rental housing (pre-tenancy). The survey, meanwhile, asked renters about their perceptions of discriminatory conduct from landlords during both their housing search (pre-tenancy) and when living in their units (during tenancy). This section presents a description of these methods.

### Landlord discrimination audit

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Researchers and research assistants at CCHR and Brock University undertook a discrimination audit to understand the extent of discrimination experienced by people of different identities when searching for rental housing. The audit was conducted over email and set out to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent do landlords respond differently to prospective renters based on their identity?
2. How do these effects vary as a function of the regional or rental unit characteristics?

Four fabricated renter identities were created for the purposes of this study:

- A white man
- A South Asian man
- An Indigenous woman
- An Indigenous woman with a child

Racial identity was indicated to the landlord by the prospective renter's name, which was displayed in the renter's email address and in their message to the landlord. It was also indicated by the use of a profile picture that matched the race and gender of the specified identity. Parental status was indicated by mentioning a one-year-old son in the renter's email to the landlord.

Rental advertisements were collected from Kijiji or Padmapper across 57 regions in Canada. Each ad was randomly assigned to receive a message from one of the four renter identities. The messages were identical except for the renter name and picture, and in the case of the Indigenous woman with a child, the mention of a child. In each message, a spelling mistake was intentionally included.

The message sent to landlords from renters without a child was as follows:

**Hi, my name is [renter first name] and I'm intersted in this apartment. Can you please confirm the rent price? Is there a security deposit, and how much is it? What information do you need for the rental application? Thank you,**  
[Renter first and last name]

The message sent to landlords from the Indigenous woman with a child was as follows:

**Hi, my name is Nimkii and I'm intersted in this apartment for me and my 1-year old son. Can you please confirm the rent price? Is there a security deposit, and how much is it? What information do you need for the rental application? Thank you,**  
Nimkii Kistabish

In total, 1,178 messages were sent to landlords:

- 286 were sent from the white man identity
- 299 were sent from the South Asian man identity
- 298 were sent from the Indigenous woman identity 295 were sent from the Indigenous woman with child identity

The landlord responses were then coded. The coding measures can be found in Appendix 2.

### Rental unit characteristics

To determine whether landlord discrimination varies as a function of the rental unit in question, the following pieces of information were collected from each advertisement:

- Unit size
- Asking rent
- Building type (e.g., apartment building versus house)

### Regional characteristics

To determine whether landlord discrimination varies as a function of city characteristics, audit data collected for the purpose of the study was paired with the following datasets:

- Vacancy rates and average rents taken from Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation's 2021 Rental Market Survey.<sup>2</sup>
- Proportion of the population living with low-income, the GINI coefficient, proportion of the population who are renters and proportion of the population who are visible minorities taken from Statistics Canada's 2021 Census of Population.<sup>3</sup>

## Renter Survey

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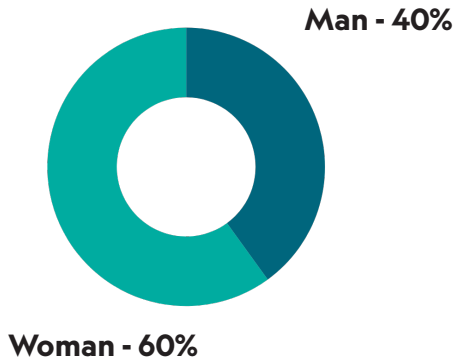
To complement the audit data, a survey of renters across Canada was conducted to shed light on their experiences of discrimination pre- and during-tenancy. The survey set out to answer the following research questions:

1. In the pre-tenancy period, to what extent do marginalized groups face actions at the hands of landlords and property managers that presents a barrier to accessing rental housing?
2. In the during-tenancy period, to what extent do marginalized groups face discrimination from their landlord or property manager after securing a unit?

The survey was distributed through the crowdsourcing platform Prolific. In total, 604 renters from across Canada participated in the survey. Participants were excluded from analysis if they did not complete the survey, or did not correctly complete an item in the survey that tested whether they were paying attention. Responses that did not meet these completion criteria were removed, leaving a total of 586 survey responses for analysis. To determine whether renters are treated differently by landlords based on aspects of their identity, participants were asked to indicate their gender identity, racial identity, sexual orientation, income level, citizenship status, marital status, whether they had a child living with them, and whether they had a disability.

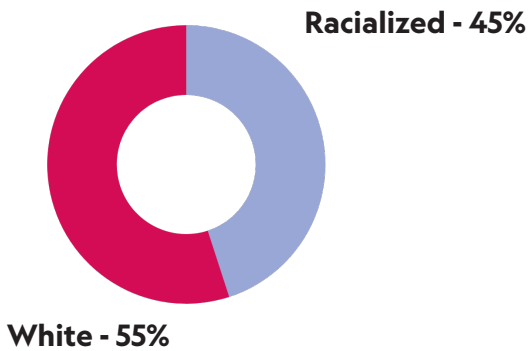
The demographic breakdown of participants is as follows:

### Gender identity



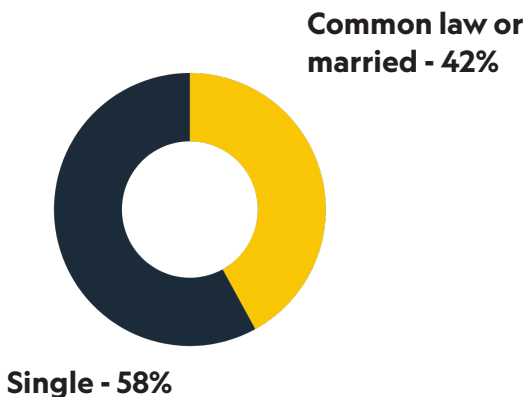
40 per cent of respondents identified themselves as a man.  
60 per cent of respondents identified themselves as a woman.

### Racial identity



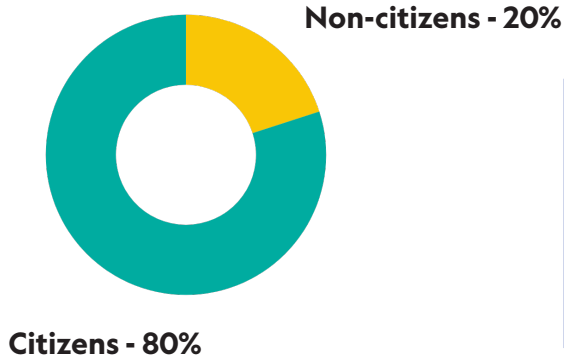
45 per cent of respondents identified themselves as a member of a racialized group.  
55 per cent of respondents identified themselves as white.

### Marital status



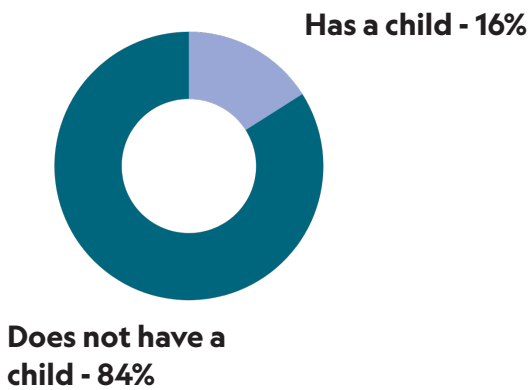
42 per cent of respondents shared that they were married or in a common law relationship.  
58 per cent of respondents shared that they were single.

### Citizenship status



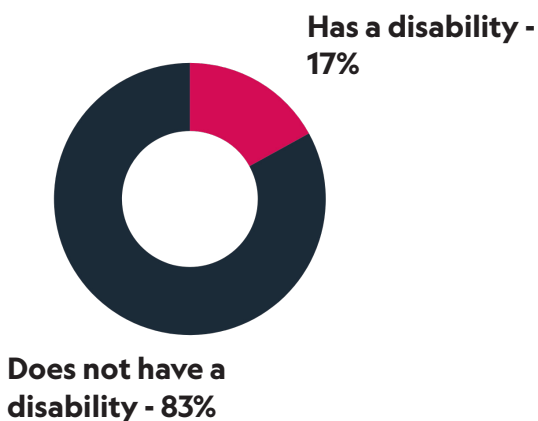
20 per cent of respondents shared that they were not citizens of Canada.  
80 per cent of respondents shared that they were citizens of Canada.

### Parental status



16 per cent of respondents shared that they had one or more children.  
84 per cent of respondents shared that they did not have a child.

### Disability



17 per cent of respondents identified as a person with a disability.  
83 per cent of respondents did not identify as a person with a disability.

An overview of the survey questions can be found in Appendix 3.

## Findings

### Landlord discrimination audit

Across regions, the discrimination audit found that marginalized identities were less likely to receive a response from a landlord and more likely to receive a shorter response than the white identity.

Being racialized versus being white was associated with:

- A **14.34 per cent** decrease in response rate; and,
- An **18.83 per cent** decrease in word count.

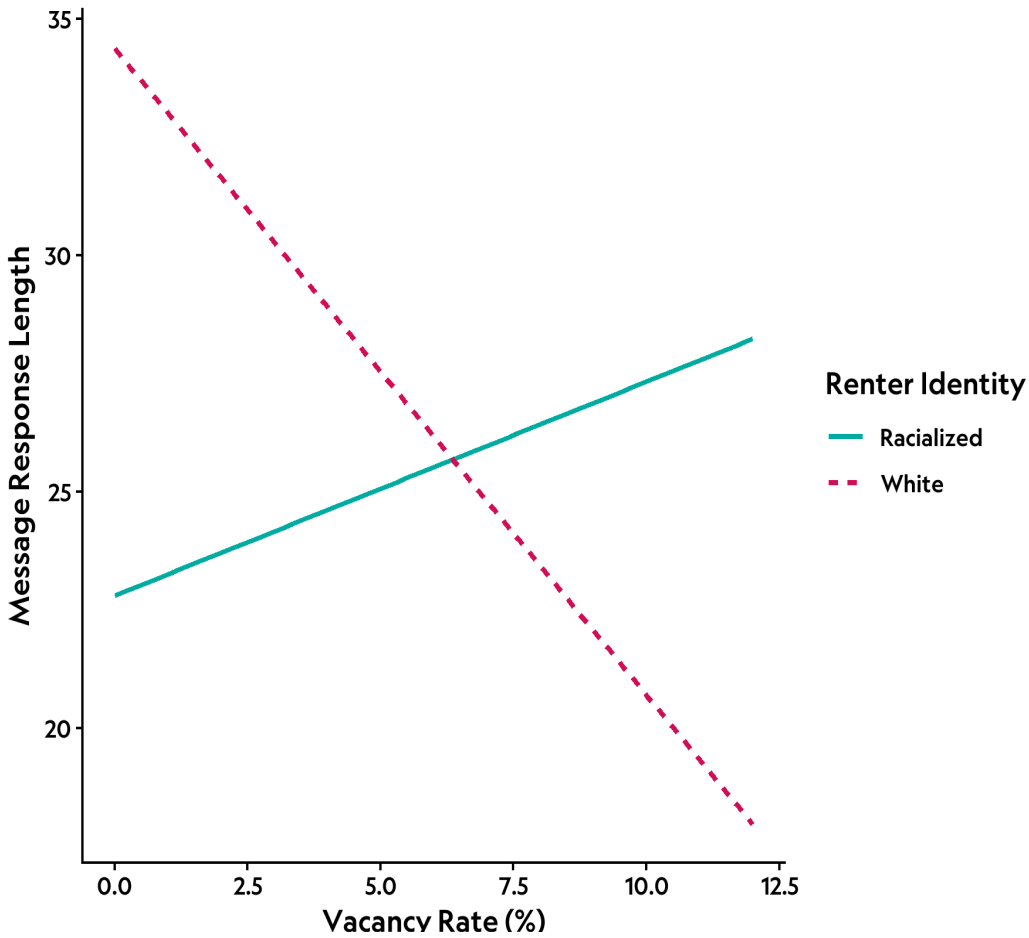
Being racialized and having a child versus being racialized and not having a child was associated with:

- A **20.23 per cent** decrease in response rate;
- A **28.34 per cent** shorter response (measured in number of words); and,
- A **36.44 per cent** less friendly response.

Information on how friendly and unfriendly responses were determined can be found in Appendix 2 where the audit coding measures are described.

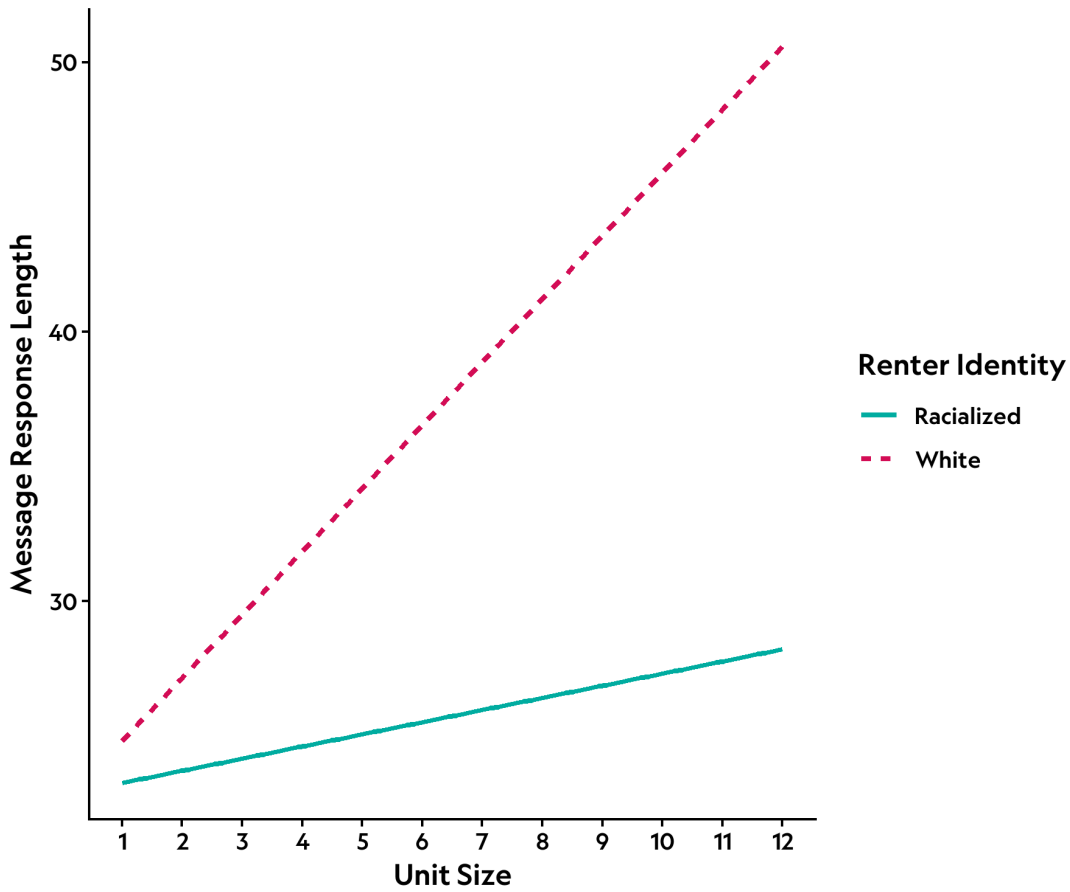
The audit provided some evidence that **discrimination is exacerbated by certain regional and rental unit characteristics** as described in the following graphs.

Figure 1: Interaction between Racialized (Versus White) and Regional Vacancy Rate in Predicting Message Length



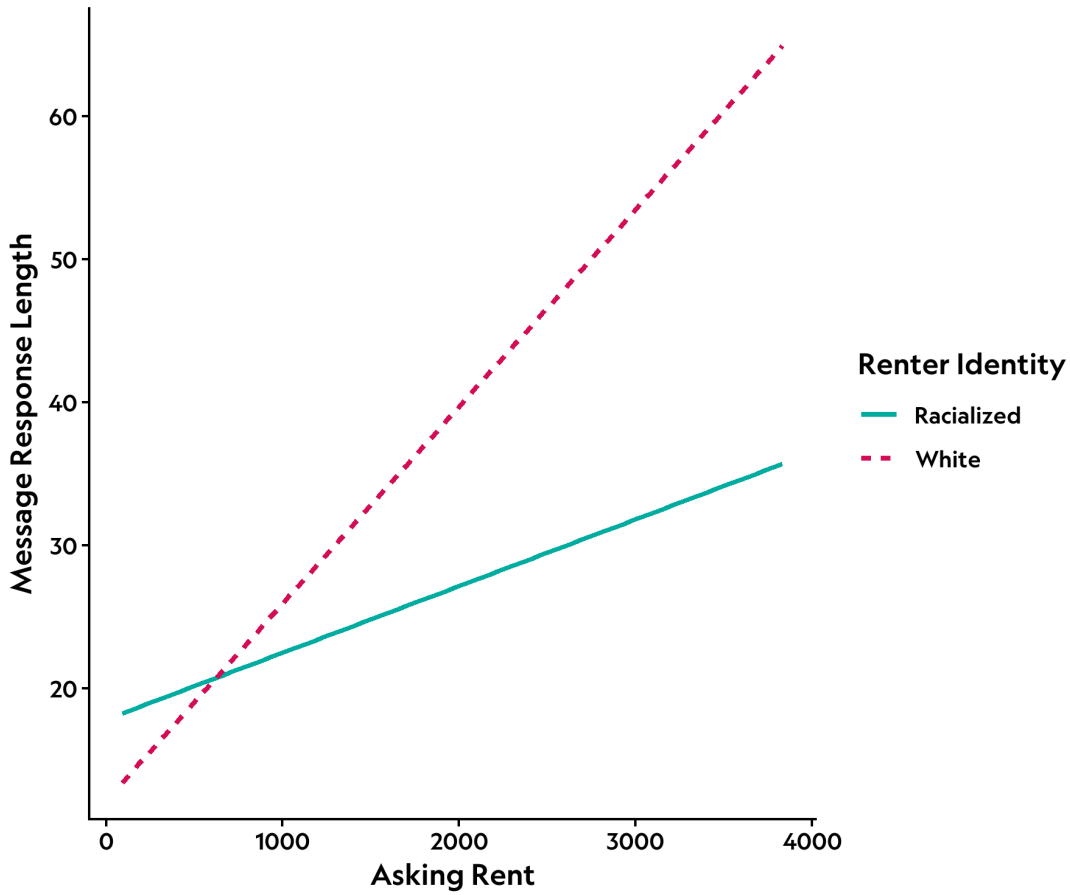
**Interpreting the data:** As vacancy rates decrease, racialized identities receive shorter messages from prospective landlords, while white identities receive longer messages.

Figure 2: Interaction between Racialized (Versus White) and Unit Size in Predicting Message Length



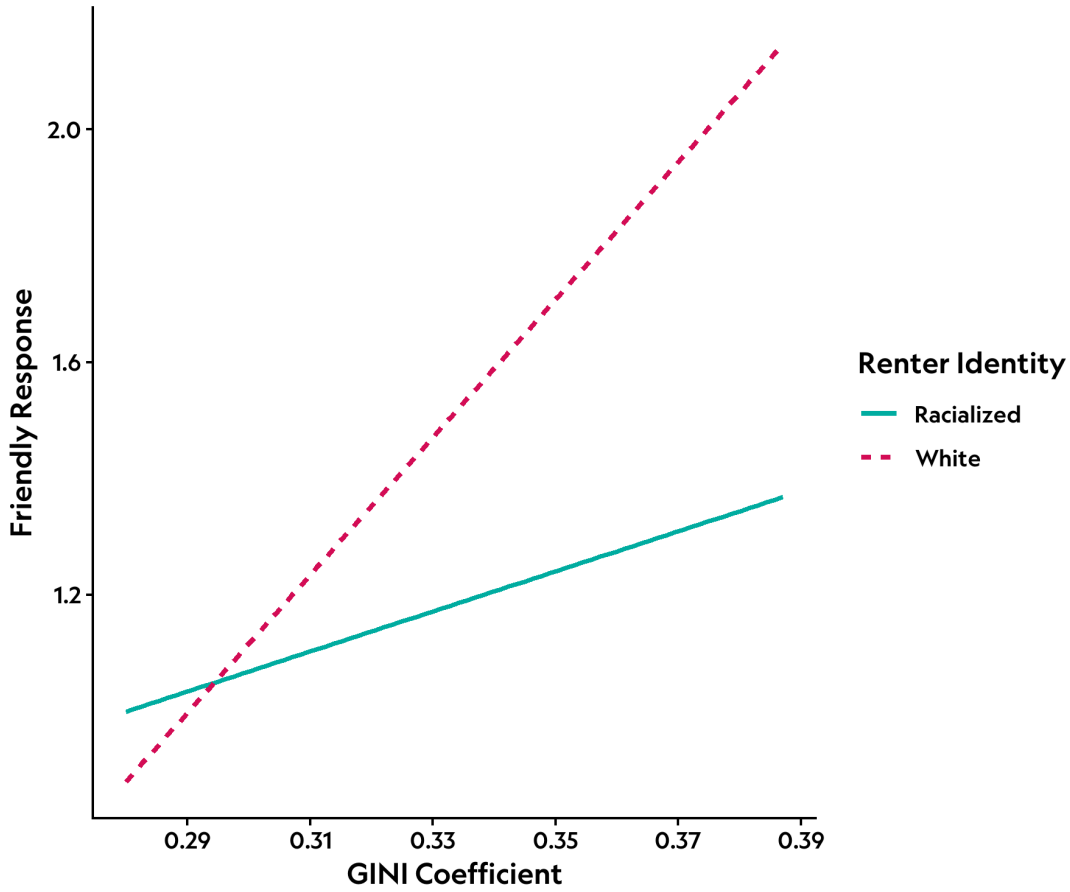
**Interpreting the data:** Compared to a white identity, racialized identities receive shorter responses as unit size increases.

Figure 3: Interaction between Racialized (Versus White) and Unit Rent Price in Predicting Message Length



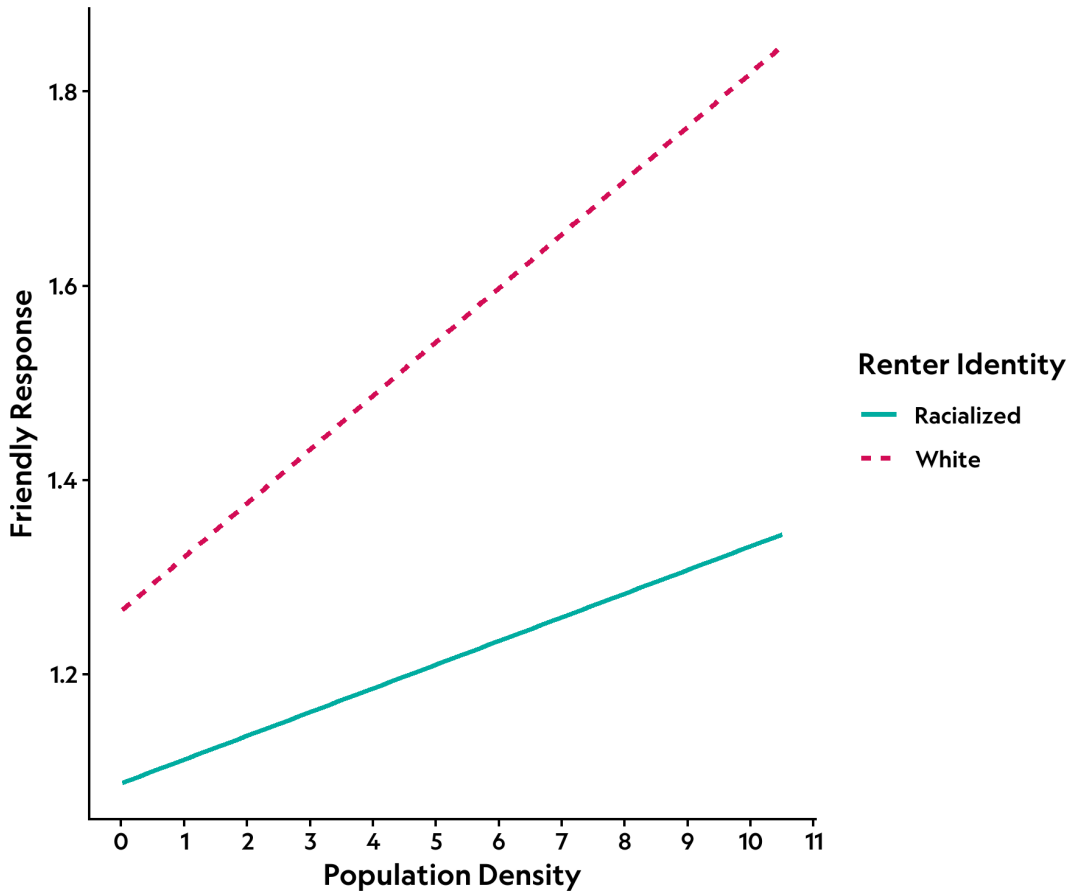
**Interpreting the data:** Compared to a white identity, racialized identities tend to receive shorter responses when inquiring about more expensive units.

Figure 4: Interaction between Racialized (Versus White) and GINI Coefficient in Friendly Responses



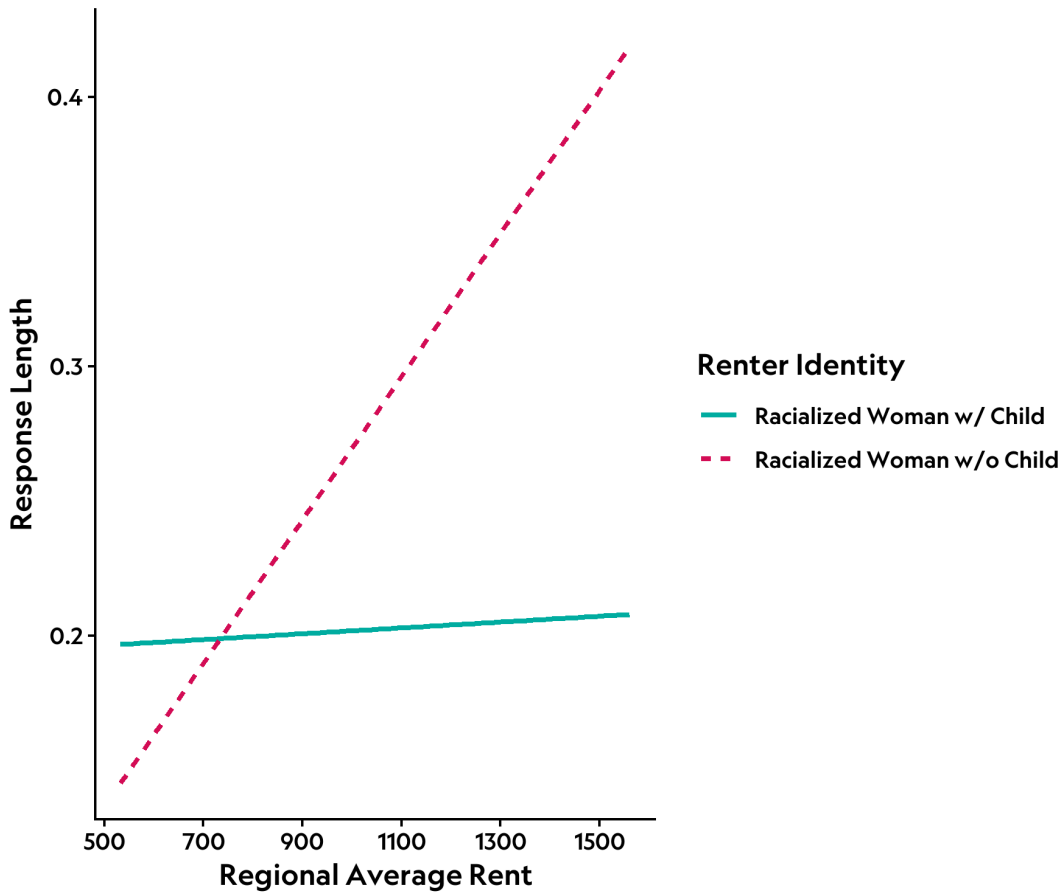
**Interpreting the data:** Compared to the white identity, racialized identities tend to receive less friendly responses in areas with a higher population density.

Figure 5: Interaction between Racialized (Versus White) and Population Density in Friendly Responses



**Interpreting the data:** Compared to the white identity, racialized identities tend to receive less friendly responses in areas with a higher population density.

Figure 6: Interaction between Regional Average Rents and Presence of a Child in Response Length



**Interpreting the data:** Compared to the identity of a racialized woman without a child, the identity of a racialized woman with a child tended to receive shorter responses in areas with more expensive rents.

## Key Learnings

### Overall findings from the landlord discrimination audit:

- Marginalized (versus white) identities were likely to get shorter responses in areas with lower vacancy rates (see Figure 1); and,
- Marginalized (versus white) identities were likely to get shorter responses when asking about larger and more expensive units (see Figures 2 and 3).

### Overall findings from the renter survey:

#### Gender identity:

- The survey found that on average, in comparison to men, women were asked for **10 per cent** more pieces of documentation to verify their information – for example, proof of their employment status or income source – when looking for a rental unit.

#### Racial identity:

- When searching for a place to rent, people who identified themselves as a member of a racialized group (versus white) were asked **27.54 per cent** more personal questions by landlords or property managers (for example, about their marital status, whether they planned to have children, their citizenship status or whether they smoked).
- When searching for a place to rent, people who identified themselves as a member of a racialized group were also found to be rejected by landlords or property managers **9.32 per cent** more often (for example, told that the unit had already been rented or that it would not be suitable for them).
- While living in their rental unit, people who identified themselves as members of a racialized group were **40 per cent** more likely to be

expected to follow different rules than what was specified prior to renting and/or than what was expected of other renters (for example, being told that the unit does not allow pets, that it is not suitable for children, and whether or not the renter was expected to follow rules that the other renters did not have to follow).

### Citizenship status:

- When searching for a place to rent, people who identified themselves as non-citizens of or newcomers to Canada faced **18.32 per cent** more monetary barriers, were asked **30.73 per cent** more personal questions, and tended to be rejected **9.96 per cent** more often.
- While living in their rental unit, newcomers were **24.53 per cent** more likely to have their boundaries violated by a landlord (for example, landlords unexpectedly entering their unit).

### Income status:

- When searching for a place to rent, people who reported lower (versus higher)<sup>4</sup> income received a response from a landlord **9.86 per cent** less often and were rejected **9.44 per cent** more often.
- However, when searching for a rental unit, people with lower (versus higher) income were asked to provide **24.09 per cent** fewer pieces of documentation to landlords (for example, proof of their income and employment).
- While living in their rental unit, people with lower income reported having maintenance issues disregarded by landlords **19.08 per cent** more often than higher income people, were **300 per cent** more likely to experience landlord aggression, and were **27.92 per cent** more likely to have their boundaries violated by their landlord.

### Marital status:

- When searching for a place to rent, people who identified themselves as single (versus common-law or married) reported being asked for **9.8 per cent** fewer pieces of documentation.
- While living in their rental unit, single people were **66.67 per cent** more likely to be expected to follow rules not agreed upon during the signing of the lease or rules that other renters did not have to follow. They were also **17.65 per cent** more likely to report having their boundaries violated by a landlord.

### Presence of children:

- When searching for a place to rent, people who reported having children (versus those without children) were asked for **10.58 per cent** more pieces of documentation proving their income and employment status and were asked **24.66 per cent** more personal questions.
- However, while living in their rental unit, people with children were **15.28 per cent** less likely to have their boundaries violated than people without children.

### Disability:

- When searching for a place to rent, people who identified themselves as having a disability received a response **7.84 per cent** less often from a landlord when compared to those who did not identify themselves as having a disability.
- While living in their unit, people who identified themselves as having a disability were **66.7 per cent** more likely to be expected to follow different rules, were **316.67 per cent** more likely to experience landlord aggression and were **20.37 per cent** more likely to have their boundaries violated by their landlord when compared with people who did not identify as having a disability.

## Discussion

Because there is limited existing research on the barriers to accessing housing and the discrimination faced by marginalized groups in Canada, it is challenging to gauge the extent of discrimination that these groups experience in rental housing markets across the country. This study, alongside the findings from CCHR's 2009 and 2022 discrimination audits, demonstrate what CCHR hears from tenants directly. Discrimination acts as a significant barrier to accessing rental housing for marginalized groups in Canada, and renters also continue to face discriminatory conduct from landlords and property managers upon securing a rental unit. This study also reveals that marginalized renters across Canada are experiencing discrimination from landlords and housing providers after they secure a unit to rent.

### Implications of research findings

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#### **Discrimination against marginalized renters looking for a place to rent is widespread in Canada.**

Our discrimination audit found that being racialized versus being white was associated with a 14.34 per cent decrease in response rate from landlords and property managers, meaning that racialized renters are being excluded from hearing more about or viewing available rental units. The discrimination audit found that the discrimination that racialized people experience in the rental housing market is compounded by disclosing the presence of a child in the household. Among racialized women, having a child was associated with individuals receiving 20.33 per cent fewer responses, a 28.34 per cent decrease in word count when a reply was sent, and a 36.44 per cent less friendly response when compared to racialized women without a child.

These findings were echoed in the survey findings, where all marginalized identities surveyed reported experiencing high levels of discrimination when searching for housing. In particular, the survey found that women, members of racialized groups, non-citizens of Canada, lower-income people, people with

children, and people with disabilities experience high rates of discrimination from landlords when searching for housing. This means that discrimination presents a significant barrier for marginalized groups trying to access housing in rental housing markets in communities across Canada.

**Members of racialized groups, newcomers, lower income people, single people, and people with disabilities report experiencing high rates of discrimination while living in their rental unit.**

Our survey revealed that people who identified themselves as being a member of a racialized group, single people, and people with disabilities reported having to follow different rules while living in their rental unit more often than other groups. The survey also found that newcomers, lower income people, single people, and people with disabilities were more likely to have their boundaries violated by landlords. Lower income people reported being significantly more likely than other groups to have landlords neglect necessary repairs. And finally, lower income people and people with disabilities were over 300 per cent more likely to experience landlord aggression than other surveyed groups. This means that renters from marginalized groups are experiencing violations of their right to housing and right to live free from discrimination and harassment in their own homes.

**Discriminatory treatment by landlords and property managers is often hidden.**

In most instances, the discriminatory conduct recorded in the audit and in the survey was very subtle. Most of the differential treatment identified in this study might not be immediately apparent to the individual on the receiving end of this treatment. For example, the discrimination audit recorded that people of marginalized identities received significantly lower response rates and lower word counts in email replies. Indigenous women with children received the lowest response rate and the lowest word counts. Being racialized (versus white) was associated with a 14.34 per cent decrease in response rate, and an 18.83 per cent decrease in word count. People of marginalized identities also generally received less friendly emails from landlords and property managers. Indigenous

women who shared that they had a child received a 36.44 per cent less friendly response than Indigenous women who did not disclose they had a child. These discriminatory interactions would not have been identified without using an experimental approach with random assignment.

**Discrimination in the rental housing market is more severe as rental market conditions tighten and inequality deepens.**

A systemic barrier for housing access in Canada is the lack of affordable housing supply. Concerningly, however, this research found that in communities with lower vacancy rates and higher income inequality, there is a higher incidence of discrimination against racialized groups looking for housing. In particular, this study found that as vacancy rates decrease, racialized identities receive shorter messages from landlords, while white identities receive longer messages. This means that in communities where affordable housing is scarce, marginalized groups face additional barriers to accessing the little affordable rental housing that exists.

**Discrimination in the rental housing market is precluding marginalized groups from accessing housing that meets their needs.**

The discrimination audit found that compared to white renters, when racialized renters inquire about more expensive or larger units, they receive shorter email replies. This discriminatory conduct from landlords and property managers may act as a barrier to racialized groups in accessing housing that adequately meets their needs.

**The discrimination captured here is likely only the tip of the iceberg.**

This discrimination audit reveals discrimination that takes place at the initial point of contact between landlords and prospective renters. Renters can face discrimination from landlords and property managers at all stages of their search to secure rental housing. While prospective renters might secure an appointment to view a rental unit, they may be subject to discrimination during that viewing. They could be invited to submit an application to rent a unit, and later have their application denied based on their identity. As the

survey portion of this study demonstrates, renters of different identities also experience discrimination while living in their unit. More research is needed to understand the full scope and scale of the discrimination that renters of different groups experience in the rental housing market. Additional research is also needed to better understand the barriers that they face in accessing and living in rental housing engendered by discrimination, as well as the dynamics that marginalized groups experience when they are able to secure housing, given that discrimination by landlords reduces their housing options.

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Figure 6: Interaction between Regional Average Rents and Presence of a Child in Response Length

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Ethics Materials

- Clearance form 1 (page 35)
- Clearance form 2 (page 36)
- Consent form (page 37)

### Appendix 2: Audit Coding Measures (page 40)

This section explains the system used to organize and analyze the data during the audit.

### Appendix 3: Survey Questions (page 42)

This section lists all the questions asked in the survey to gather feedback from participants.



**Brock University**  
Office of Research Ethics  
Tel: 905-688-5550 ext. 3035  
Email: reb@brocku.ca

Social Science Research Ethics Board

**Certificate of Ethics Clearance for Human Participant Research**

DATE: 2/21/2024  
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: HODSON, Gordon - Psychology  
FILE: 23-209 - HODSON  
TYPE: Faculty Research  
TITLE: National Audit of Landlord Discrimination

**ETHICS CLEARANCE GRANTED**

Type of Clearance: NEW Expiry Date: 2/1/2025

The Brock University Social Science Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above named research proposal and considers the procedures, as described by the applicant, to conform to the University's ethical standards and the Tri-Council Policy Statement. Clearance granted from **2/21/2024 to 2/1/2025**.

The Tri-Council Policy Statement requires that ongoing research be monitored by, at a minimum, an annual report. Should your project extend beyond the expiry date, you are required to submit a Renewal form before 2/1/2025. Continued clearance is contingent on timely submission of reports.

To comply with the Tri-Council Policy Statement, you must also submit a final report upon completion of your project. All report forms can be found on the Office of Research Ethics web page at: <https://brocku.ca/research-at-brock/office-of-research-services/research-ethics-office/#application-forms>.

In addition, throughout your research, you must report promptly to the REB:

- a) Changes increasing the risk to the participant(s) and/or affecting significantly the conduct of the study;
- b) All adverse and/or unanticipated experiences or events that may have real or potential unfavourable implications for participants;
- c) New information that may adversely affect the safety of the participants or the conduct of the study;
- d) Any changes in your source of funding or new funding to a previously unfunded project.

We wish you success with your research.

Approved:

Caitlin Mahy, Chair  
Social Science Research Ethics Board

**Note:** Brock University is accountable for the research carried out in its own jurisdiction or under its auspices and may refuse certain research even though the REB has found it ethically acceptable.

If research participants are in the care of a health facility, at a school, or other institution or community organization, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to ensure that the ethical guidelines and clearance of those facilities or institutions are obtained and filed with the REB prior to the initiation of research at that site.



**Brock University**  
Office of Research Ethics  
Tel: 905-688-5550 ext. 3035  
Email: reb@brocku.ca

Social Science Research Ethics Board

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**Certificate of Ethics Clearance for Human Participant Research**

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DATE: 5/1/2024  
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: HODSON, Gordon - Psychology  
FILE: 23-302 - HODSON  
TYPE: Faculty Research  
TITLE: 10 minute survey about experiences as a renter

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**ETHICS CLEARANCE GRANTED**

Type of Clearance: NEW Expiry Date: 5/1/2025

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The Brock University Social Science Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above named research proposal and considers the procedures, as described by the applicant, to conform to the University's ethical standards and the Tri-Council Policy Statement. Clearance granted from **5/1/2024 to 5/1/2025**.

The Tri-Council Policy Statement requires that ongoing research be monitored by, at a minimum, an annual report. Should your project extend beyond the expiry date, you are required to submit a Renewal form before 5/1/2025. Continued clearance is contingent on timely submission of reports.

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# Consent Form

**Principal Investigator:**

Dr. Gordon Hodson, Professor  
Department of Psychology  
Brock University (Ontario, Canada)  
[ilab@brocku.ca](mailto:ilab@brocku.ca)

**Co-Investigator:**

Megan Earle, Adjunct Professor  
Department of Psychology  
Brock University (Ontario, Canada)  
[ilab@brocku.ca](mailto:ilab@brocku.ca)

**INVITATION**

You are invited to participate in a study. The purpose of this study is to investigate renters' experiences with landlords in Canada.

**WHAT'S INVOLVED**

As a participant, you will be asked to fill out several questionnaires meant to measure a variety of experiences with landlords while looking for an apartment, as well as experiences with landlords while living in a rental unit. You will also be asked to respond to questions about your health and well-being. Standard demographic questions will be asked and will be used to describe our sample in a manuscript. Participation should take approximately 10 minutes of your time.

**POTENTIAL BENEFITS AND RISKS**

There are no direct benefits to participants beyond your compensation for participation (£1.20 or approximately \$2.06 CAD; for more precise and current conversion rates see <https://www.xe.com/currencyconverter/convert/?Amount=1.2&From=GBP&To=CAD>). The researchers will benefit from a greater understanding of renters' experiences navigating the rental market. There are potential risks of participation, in that it is possible that you may feel distress and be uncomfortable when answering some of the questions. If you feel distress or discomfort, there will also be resources in the debriefing form at the end.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY**

All information you provide is considered confidential; your name will not be included or, in any other way, associated with the data collected in the study. Prolific may have data on whether you complete this survey, but Prolific will not have access to your survey responses. Furthermore, because our interest is in the average responses of the entire group of participants, you will not be identified individually in any way in written reports of this research. Gordon Hodson and Megan Earle from Brock University will have full access to the data. The Research Department from the Canadian Centre for Housing Rights, which currently includes Jeremy Wildeman, Sophie O'Manique, and Jon Paul Matthais, will have access to the de-identified data. All electronic data will be stored online on a Brock Sharepoint managed by Gordon Hodson, with access to the storage folder limited to the research team. Electronic data will also be stored on Gordon

Hodson's lab computers which are password-protected. De-identified raw data will be retained indefinitely to facilitate requests from other researchers to verify results. Responses to questionnaires will be collected with Qualtrics, an online survey platform. Because Qualtrics is located on an American server, it is subject to the Patriot Act. As such, any responses could be read by this third party; however, you are not asked for your name or other identifying information.

## **VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION**

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you wish, you may decline to answer any questions or participate in any component of the study. You may leave any open-ended questions blank and select "Prefer Not to Say" for any other types of questions that you do not wish to answer. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time – to do this simply close the window or click the bottom of the page and your data will not be used in our analyses. You will not receive compensation if you withdraw from the study however. Please note that once the questionnaires are completed, they are not identifiable your responses, and therefore it is not possible to remove your responses should you wish to withdraw after completing your participation.

## **PUBLICATION OF RESULTS**

Results of this study may be published in professional journals, in online reports for general audiences, and presented at conferences. Feedback about this study should be available by December 2024. Participants who wish to receive information about this study at any time can e-mail [ilab@brocku.ca](mailto:ilab@brocku.ca) to receive a document outlining the results.

## **CONTACT INFORMATION AND ETHICS CLEARANCE**

If you have any questions about this study or require further information, please contact Megan Earle or Dr. Gordon Hodson using the contact information provided above. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Research Ethics Board at Brock University [23-302 - HODSON]. If you have any comments or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Research Ethics Office at (905) 688-5550 Ext. 3035; [reb@brocku.ca](mailto:reb@brocku.ca).

Thank you for your assistance in this project. If you like, you can print off a copy of this page for your records.

## **CONSENT**

Please choose one of the options below:

### **I agree**

*I agree to participate in this study as described above. I have made this decision based on the information I have read in this Information Consent Form: I have the opportunity to receive additional details and ask further questions by contacting the researchers or the Brock University Research Ethics Office. I understand that I may withdraw this consent at any time by simply by closing the webpage.*

### **I do not agree**

## Appendix 2: Audit Coding Measures

Each landlord response was coded for the following:

<b>Response rate</b>	Whether or not the landlord responded to the message.
<b>Response time</b>	The length of time taken for the landlord to respond, measured in number of days.
<b>Message length</b>	The length of the message sent by the landlord, measured in number of words.
<b>Friendly responses</b>	<p>Measured as a sum of the following items recorded dichotomously (yes coded as 1, no coded as 0):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whether the respondent confirmed the rent price, as requested</li> <li>• Whether the respondent answered the renter’s question regarding the security deposit</li> <li>• Whether the respondent answered the renter’s question regarding rental application requirements</li> <li>• Whether the respondent offered the renter an incentive to rent the unit</li> <li>• Whether the respondent offered to show the renter the unit</li> <li>• Whether the respondent offered additional contact information to follow-up with the renter</li> </ul>

**Unfriendly responses**

Measured as a sum of the following items:

Requested income or employment information (1 point given for each piece of information asked) including:

- Credit score
- Background check
- Letter of employment
- Length of employment
- Employment position title
- Annual income
- Full-time/part-time employment status
- Pay stub
- References
- Usage of social assistance

Requested personal information (1 point given for each piece of information asked) including:

- If the renter has pets
- If the renter smokes
- If the renter plans on living with another person/people
- Names of any people the renter may be living with
- Marital status
- Any current children
- Plans to have future children/pregnancy
- The renter's age
- The renter's citizenship status
- The renter's ethnicity or race
- The renter's religion
- The renter's sex or gender
- The renter's sexual orientation
- People who may visit the renter
- If the renter has a disability
- Any other piece of information

Rejected the prospective renter (e.g., by saying the unit was already rented, or that the unit would not be suitable for the renter) (yes coded as 1, no coded as 0).

Quoted a higher rent to the prospective renter relative to the value listed in the advertisement (yes coded as 1, no coded as 0).

## Appendix 3: Survey Questions

To assess discrimination that presents a barrier to accessing rental housing, participants indicated the following about the search for their current rental home:

1. How many weeks it took them to find their current home.
2. The percentage of landlords that responded to them when inquiring about potential rental units.
3. Monetary barriers when searching for a home, which was a sum of the following dichotomous (yes/no) items:
  - Whether they were ever asked to pay more rent than what was listed in the advertisement;
  - Whether they were ever asked to provide more than one month's rent as a security deposit; and,
  - Whether they were ever offered an incentive that was not listed in the advertisement (e.g., one month free rent, free parking etc.,) (reverse-coded).
4. Experience with documentation barriers, which was an average of how often the prospective renter was asked to provide each of following items for a potential landlord (each rated on a scale ranging from 1 = never, to 7 = every time): credit score, background check, letter of employment, length of employment, current position title, whether you work full or part time, pay stubs, references, and annual income.
5. Experience being asked personal questions, which was an average of how often the prospective renter was asked to provide each of the following pieces of personal information to a potential landlord (each rated on a scale ranging from 1 = never, to 7= every time): marital status, whether the renter had children, whether the renter was pregnant or planned to have children, age, citizenship status, ethnicity or race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, potential visitors to the unit, receipt of any form of social assistance, whether

the renter had a disability, whether the renter had pets, whether the renter smokes, if the tenant planned on living with other people in the unit, or names of any people the renter was planning on living with.

6. Rejection, which was the average of how often the prospective was told (each rated on a scale from 1 = never, to 7 = every time):
  - The unit was not suitable for the renter;
  - The unit was already rented;
  - The unit did not allow pets; and,
  - The unit would not be suitable for children.

To assess discrimination experienced by renters when they were living in a rental unit, participants indicated the following about their current rental home:

1. Selective application of rules, which was indicated by whether or not the renter experienced any of the following: being told that the unit does not allow pets after moving in, whether, after moving in, the renter was told that the unit is not suitable for children, and whether or not the renter was expected to follow rules that the other renters did not have to follow.
2. Cost increases, which was indicated by whether the renter experienced any of the following: landlord increased rent beyond legal limits, and whether the renter was charged for utilities that were not specified on the lease agreement.
3. Unit maintenance, which was the average of how often the landlord completed needed repairs and how often the landlord completed needed repairs in a timely manner (each rated on a scale from 1 = never to 7 = every time).
4. Aggressive behaviour, which was indicated by whether the renter experienced any of the following from their landlord: threats, physical assault, sexual assault, harassment, or verbal assault.

5. Violation of boundaries, which was indicated by whether the renter had experienced any of the following: landlord has ever entered the renter's unit without permission, whether the landlord gives proper notice (at least 24 hours) before entering the unit (reverse coded), whether the landlord asks neighbours about the renter's behaviour, and whether the landlord have ever changed locked without giving the renter notice.

## End Notes

1. See for example: Acolin, Arthur, Raphael Bostic, and Gary Painter. "A field study of rental market discrimination across origins in France." *Journal of Urban Economics* 95 (2016): 49-63; Andersson, Lisa, Niklas Jakobsson, and Andreas Kotsadam. "A field experiment of discrimination in the Norwegian housing market: Gender, class, and ethnicity." *Land Economics* 88, no. 2 (2012): 233-240; Baldini, Massimo, and Marta Federici. "Ethnic discrimination in the Italian rental housing market." *Journal of Housing Economics* 20, no. 1 (2011): 1-14; Block Jr, Ray, Charles Crabtree, John B. Holbein, and J. Quin Monson. "Are Americans less likely to reply to emails from Black people relative to White people?." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 118, no. 52 (2021): e2110347118; Carpusor, Adrian G., and William E. Loges. "Rental discrimination and ethnicity in names 1." *Journal of applied social psychology* 36, no. 4 (2006): 934-952; Hanson, Andrew, and Michael Santas. "Field experiment tests for discrimination against Hispanics in the US rental housing market." *Southern Economic Journal* 81, no. 1 (2014): 135-167; Hogan, Bernie, and Brent Berry. "Racial and ethnic biases in rental housing: An audit study of online apartment listings." *City & community* 10, no. 4 (2011): 351-372.
2. Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation. "Rental Market Survey Data Tables." 2021. [Rental Market Survey Data Tables | CMHC \(cmhc-schl.gc.ca\)](https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/index-eng.cfm)
3. Statistics Canada. "Census of Population 2021," 2021. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/index-eng.cfm>
4. Lower income was defined as the bottom quartile and higher income was defined as the upper quartile.



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