

Research Report: Discrimination in Salem 2021

City of Salem's Human Rights Commission

By Marcos Goodman, Jacob Logan & Joey Parnell for OL 607

Background

The City of Salem has a Human Rights Commission (HRC) to help assess and address human rights for the city. The HRC wants to provide services to those facing discrimination or human rights violations. Starting in 2017, the HRC has partnered with a class of graduate students to conduct a research project to explore and measure the awareness of HRC and the nature of discrimination people experience living and working in Salem. This study, conducted by Western Oregon University Masters of Organizational Leadership students, provides insights and feedback about discrimination in Salem.

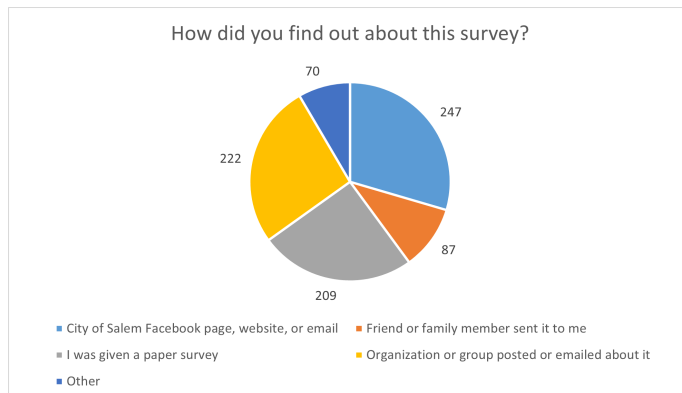
Research Objectives

- To measure how many people in Salem personally experience discrimination here and to identify the grounds for that discrimination
- To measure how many people in Salem observe or witness discrimination against others here and to identify the grounds for that discrimination
- To evaluate how people in Salem rate the level of discrimination in our city
- To measure the awareness of HRC among people who live or work in Salem

Methodology

A self-administered questionnaire (created in Qualtrics) was fielded May 5-21, 2021. 835 respondents completed the survey (981 began the survey so some early questions show more responses). It was distributed in the following ways:

- City of Salem Facebook page and website (n=247)
- Organizations posted the survey link on their Facebook page or website (n=222)
- Friends and family members shared the link (n=87)
- Paper surveys distributed among people experiencing homelessness (n=209)



The result is a non-probability judgment sample. We gathered responses from a diverse group of people. The data in aggregate is not representative of the City of Salem overall.

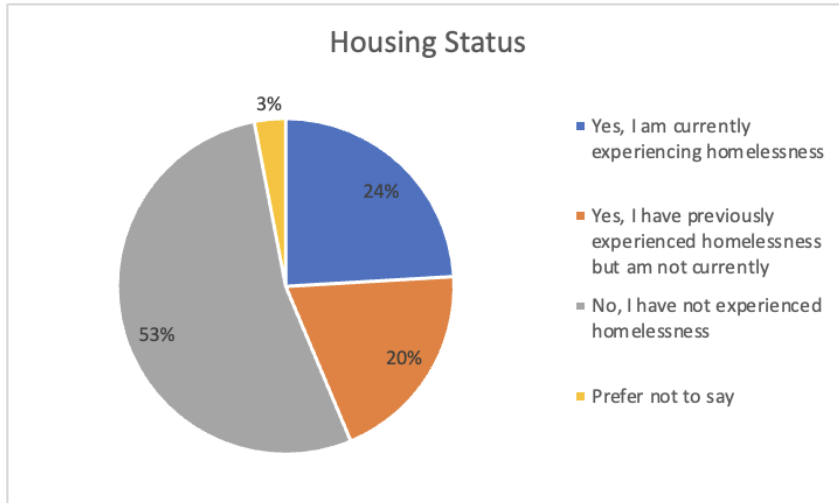
Conclusions

- The Human Rights Commission has an important role as discrimination is a common occurrence. The data gathered from this survey illustrates there is a need and desire for the HRC's services.
- Over half of the respondents have personally experienced discrimination in Salem. About half of those incidents were in the past three months. The most common causes are housing status, gender, and race.
- Most respondents have witnessed or observed discrimination in Salem. Most of those incidents were in the past three months. The most common causes are race and housing status.
- When asked to rate the City of Salem on the level of discrimination, the most common responses were "poor: quite a bit of discrimination" (26%) and "failing: a lot of discrimination" (30%). The highest average ratings were from respondents who are military veterans or age 70+. The lowest average ratings were from respondents who are currently experiencing homelessness, nonbinary gender, or have a disability.
- Awareness of HRC varies across different groups. Among those who found out about the survey on the City of Salem's Facebook page or website, awareness was 51% in 2020 and 62% in 2021.
- When asked what the most beneficial services that HRC provided, the highest selected option among all subgroups was "providing information on possible solutions."
- People experiencing homelessness welcomed the opportunity to share their experiences and opinions by completing the survey. Compared to any other sub-group, those currently experiencing homelessness have the highest rate of personally experiencing discrimination, gave Salem the lowest rating for the level of discrimination, and have the lowest awareness of the HRC. This group stands out in the data set as needing HRC's support.

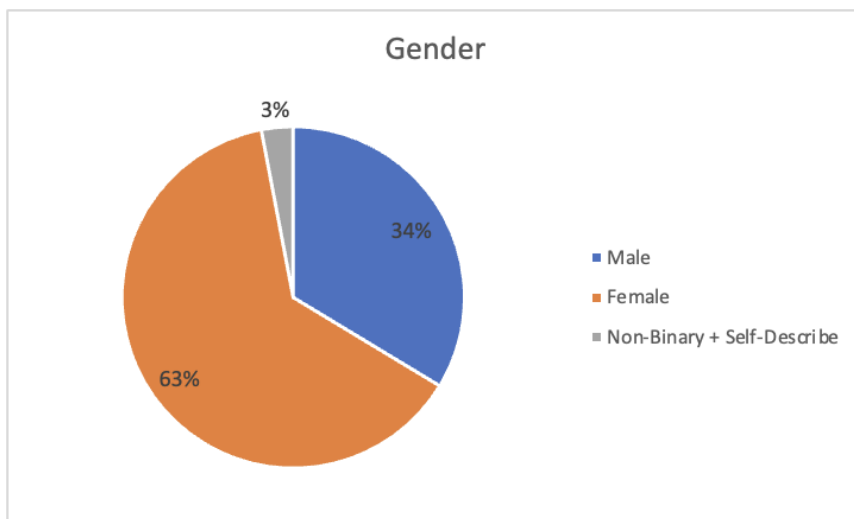
Demographics

Historically marginalized groups are over-represented in this data set. We set out to invite people from all walks of life to respond to this survey. We are pleased to have diversity in the data set, and we think it is important before digging into the findings to understand who did the survey.

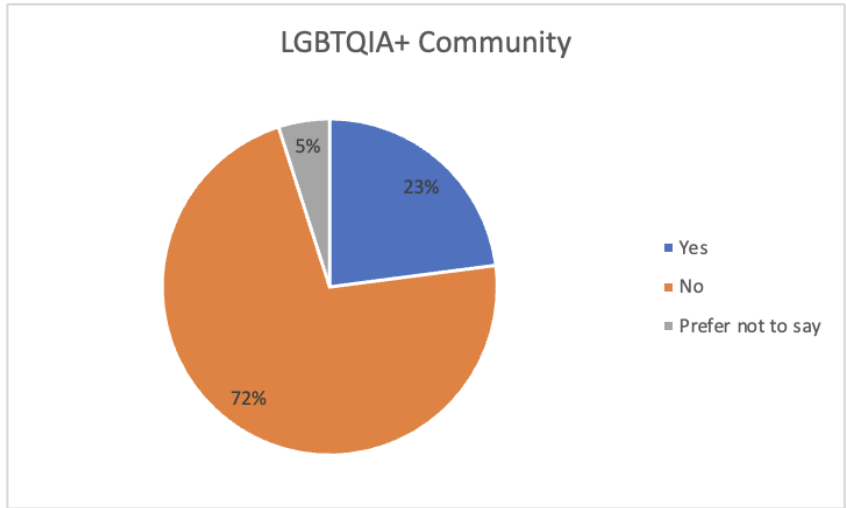
Housing Status: People experiencing homelessness were invited to complete a hard copy questionnaire. 200 out of 831 (24%) respondents indicated that they are "currently experiencing homelessness." HUD data for 12 months ending 5/28/2021 show services were provided to 2,695 people experiencing homelessness in Marion and Polk counties. This is about a half of a percent of the population in those counties. Students in the class and community advocates made a major effort to gather survey responses from people experiencing homelessness and were very successful.



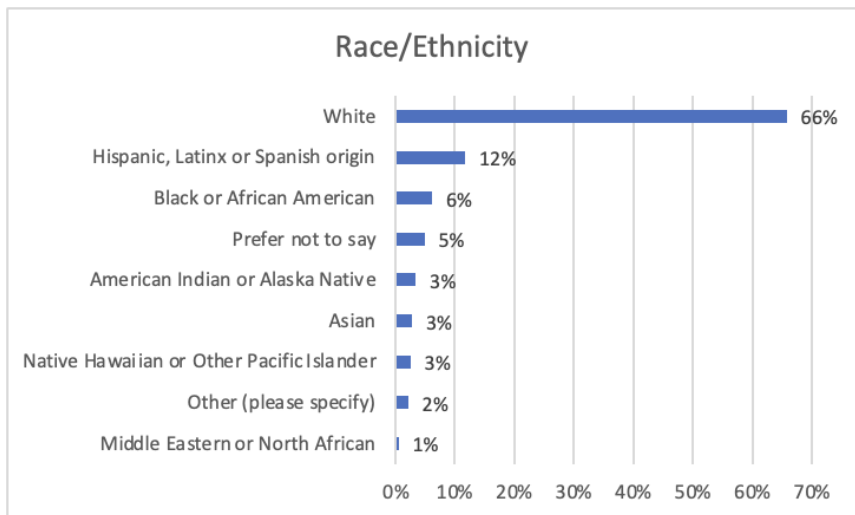
Gender: 508 respondents indicated female (63%), 270 male (34%), and 24 (3%) nonbinary or self-describe. The US Census data reports Salem is 50.2% male and 48.2% female. Of note, the gender split among the paper copy respondents was 46% female, 50% male.



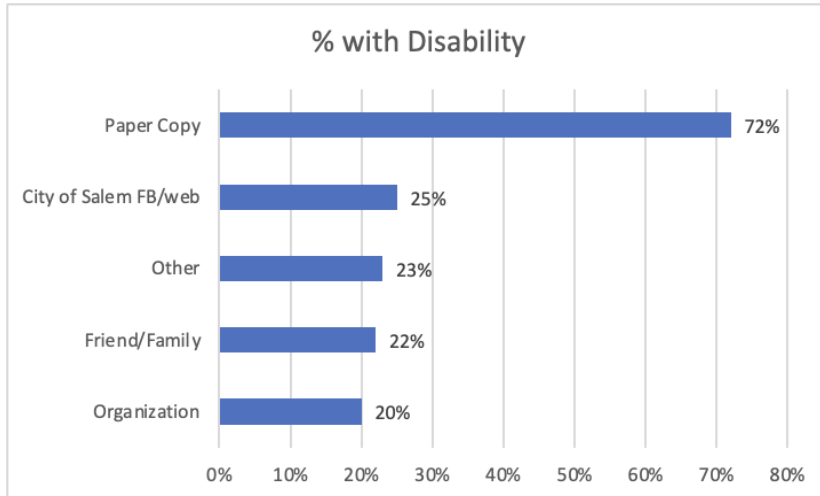
LGBTQIA+: 23% of respondents indicated they identify as a member of the LGBTQIA+ community. 72% of respondents said no, and 5% preferred not to answer. In a 2021 Gallup poll, 5.6% of adults identified as LGBT in the US. Something to note, LGBTQIA+ was lowest among the paper copy respondents and highest among those who found the survey on the City of Salem FB/website.



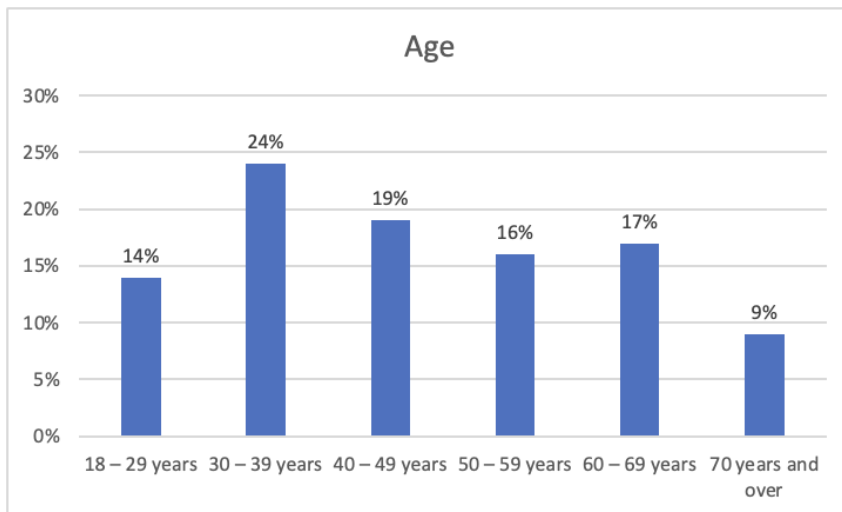
Race/Ethnicity: This group of respondents shows some diversity in terms of race/ethnicity. 66% of respondents selected White as their ethnicity, and about 25% of respondents indicate a BIPOC race or ethnicity. The 2010 US Census data indicates that Salem is 81% White. Of note, the “City of Salem FB/Website” group reported the lowest percentage White (59%) and the highest percentage Black or African American (11%). The “Friends/Family” group had the highest percentage of Hispanic/Latinx respondents (21%).



Disability: In aggregate, 35% of respondents indicated they have a disability. The CDC reports that 26% of Americans have some type of disability. Of note, 72% of respondents who completed a paper survey indicated they have a disability; however, 20-25% of the other groups indicated they have a disability.

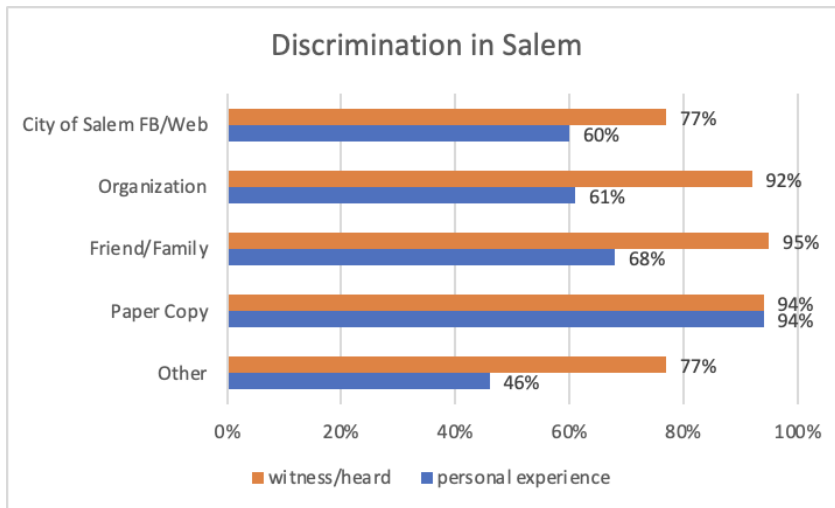


Age: There is a good spread across all ages 18+ with 43% of respondents 30-49 years old.

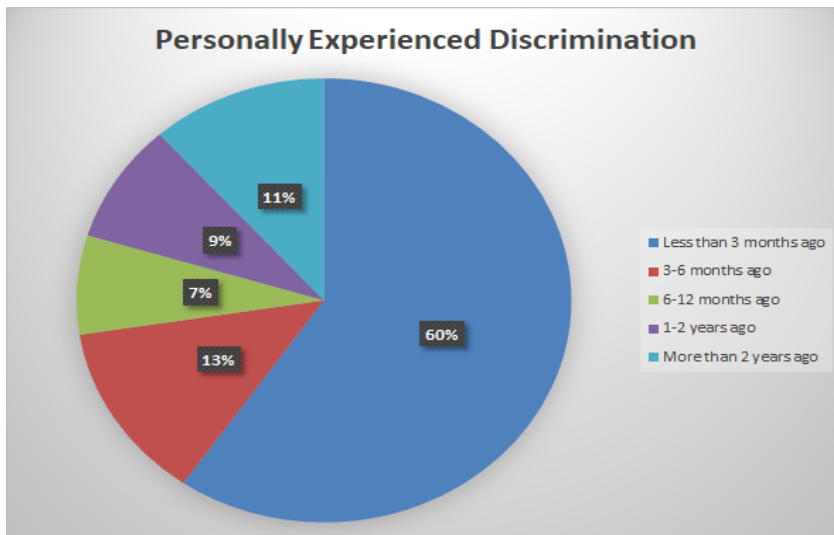


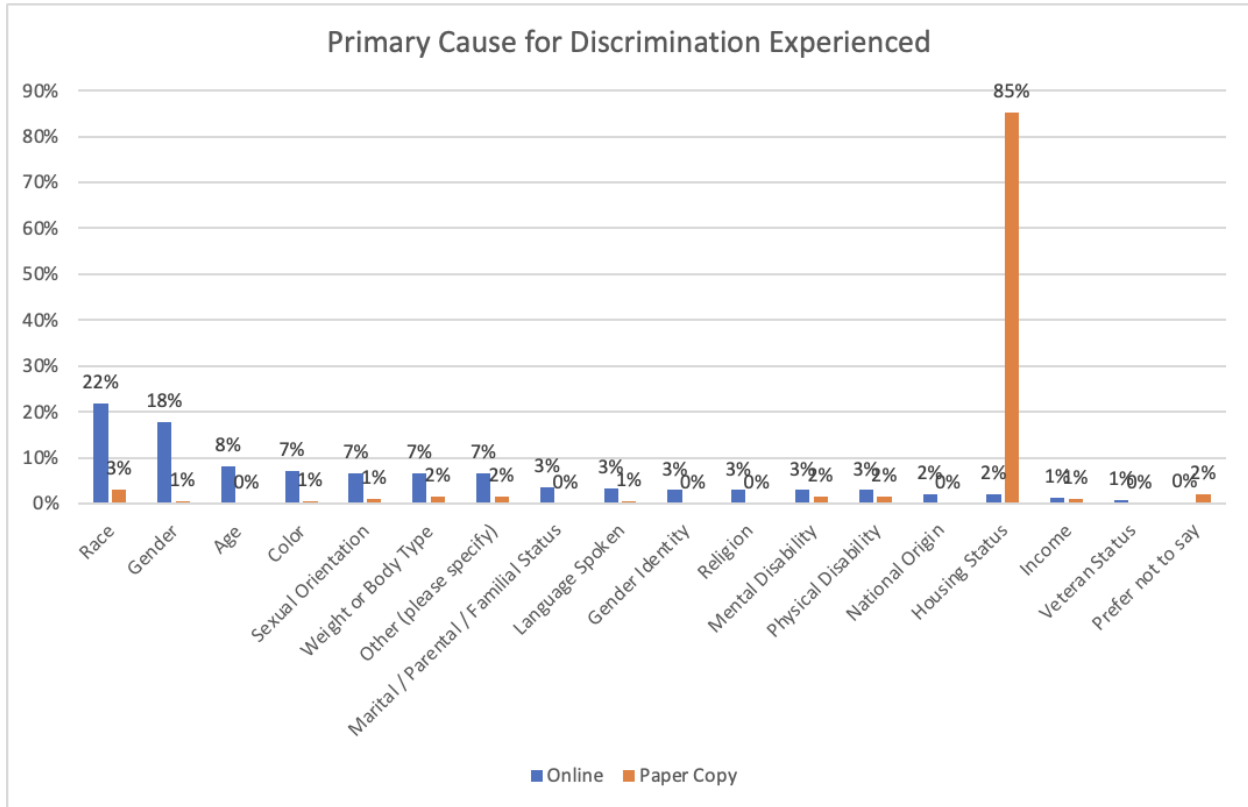
Key Findings

1. **More than half of the respondents (regardless of how they found out about the survey) have both personally experienced discrimination and witnessed/heard about discrimination in Salem.** Those who completed the paper survey almost all have both personally experienced discrimination and witnessed/heard about discrimination. All other groups have a higher % who have witnessed/heard about than have personally experienced.



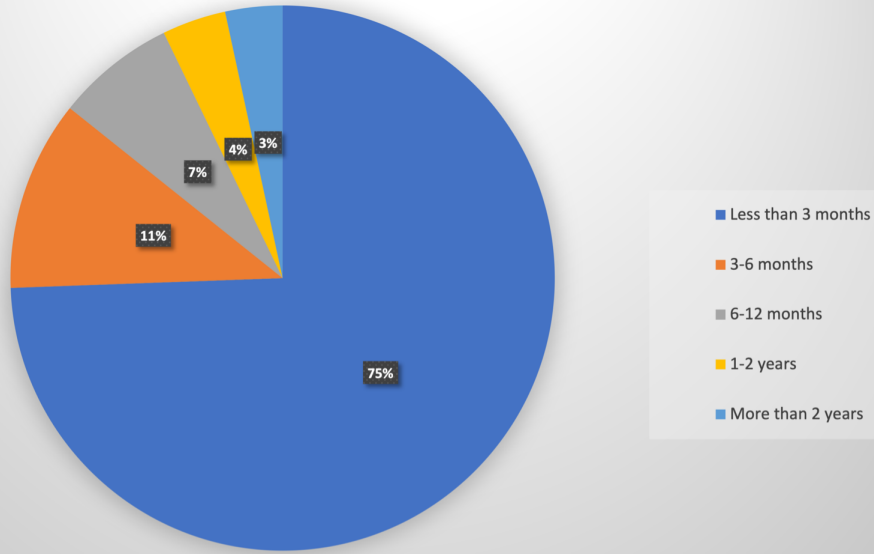
2. **In regards to their personal experiences with discrimination, over half of respondents report the most recent incident occurred in the past 3 months and that the most common grounds for discrimination are housing status (31%), race (15%), and gender (12%).**



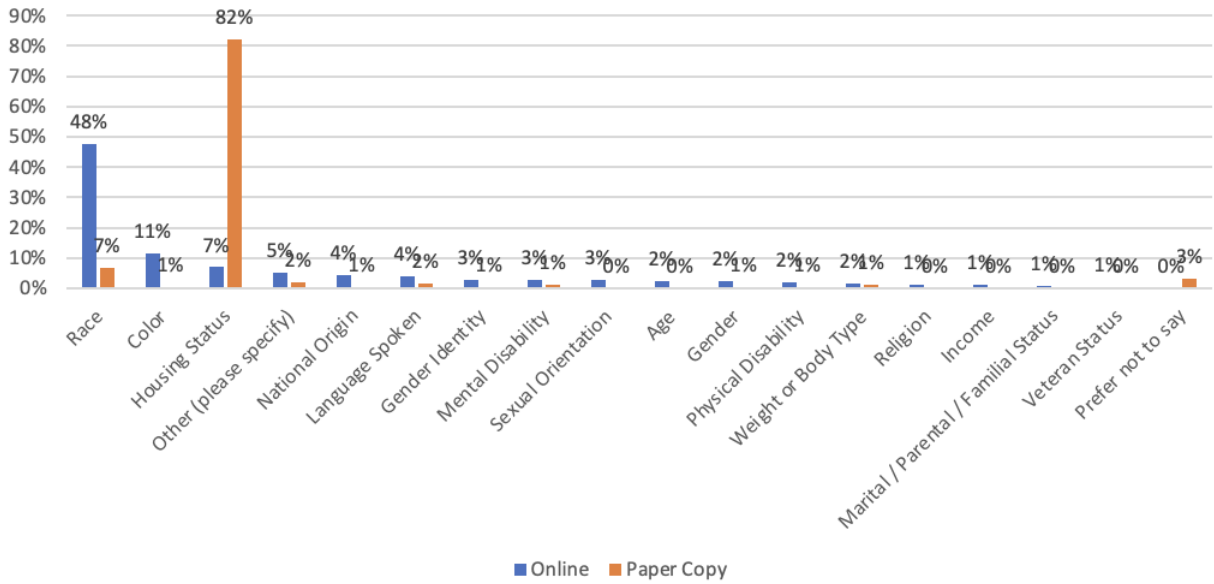


3. **The majority of respondents indicate they have witnessed/heard about discrimination in Salem.** About 75% of those instances have occurred in Salem within the past three months. The rest of those instances (11%) occurred somewhere 3-6 months ago. In regards to the cause for this discrimination, housing status (82%) dominates among paper copy respondents while race (40-50%) dominates among online respondents.

Witnessed or Observed Discrimination (%)

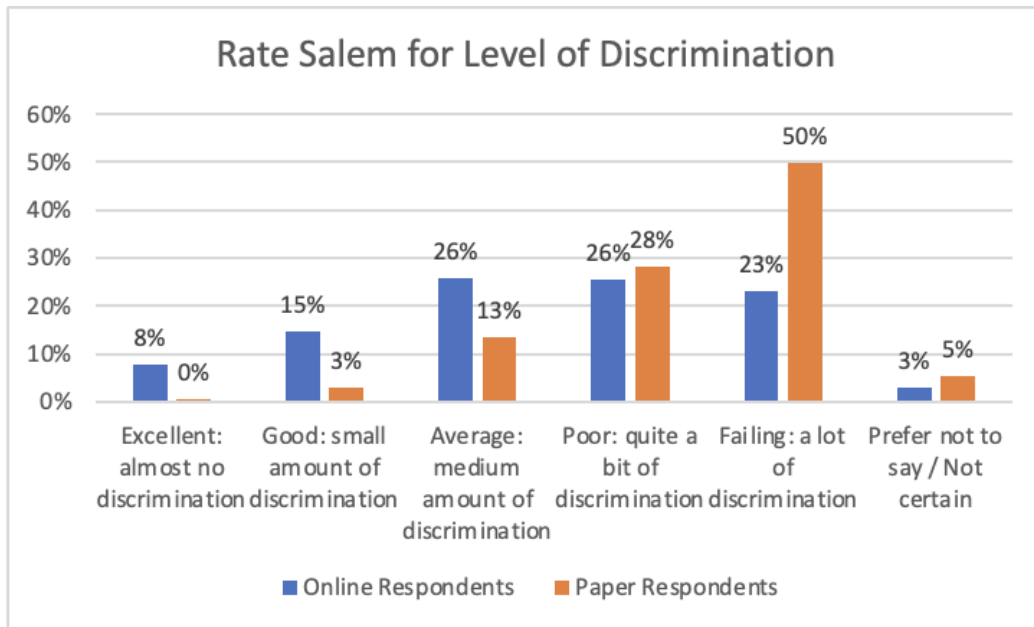


Primary Cause for Discrimination Witnessed/Heard About



4. When asked to rate the City of Salem on the level of discrimination, the most common responses were “poor: quite a bit of discrimination” (26%) and “failing: a lot of discrimination” (30%).

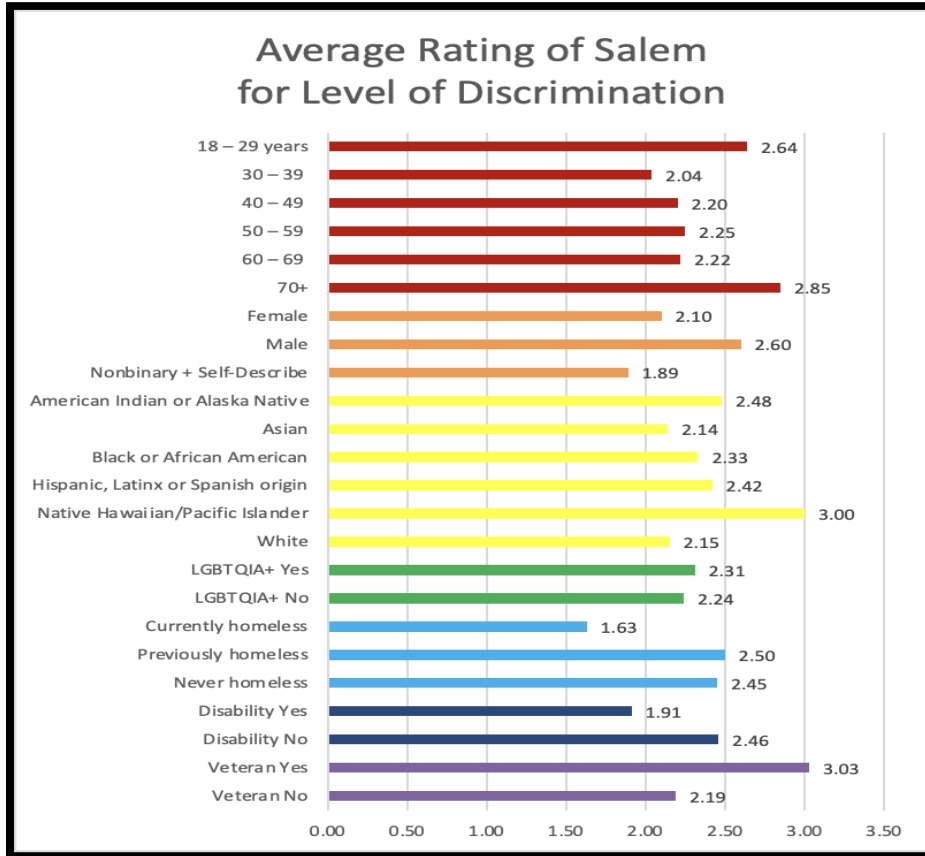
The online respondents gave Salem an average rating of between poor and average. The paper copy respondents gave Salem an average rating of between failing and poor.



We calculated an average rating for various sub-groups by assigning the following values to the response options:

Overall, how would you rate the level of discrimination in Salem?	
Excellent: almost no discrimination	5
Good: small amount of discrimination	4
Average: medium amount of discrimination	3
Poor: quite a bit of discrimination	2
Failing: a lot of discrimination	1

We can compare this average rating across various subgroups. The highest average ratings are among the veterans and 70+. The lowest average ratings are among people experiencing homeless, people with a disability, and people who indicated their gender as nonbinary or prefer to self-describe.



Because the question is worded differently than last year’s rating question (which used a 5-pt scale with grades), it is difficult to compare. But the average rating in 2020 was 2.68 and is most comparable to the City of Salem FB/Web 2021 group at 2.73.

5. Respondent comments explain why they rated Salem as they did. We reviewed over 500 comments in response to the following open-ended questions:

- Please comment on why you marked that rating for the level of discrimination (optional).
- Is there anything else you want to tell us? (optional).

We identified key themes and coded comments to identify the prevalence of each. Here are the biggest themes:

Theme	% of comments about that theme
Hate groups (white supremacists, Proud Boys, etc.)	17%
Discrimination against homeless population	16%
City Leadership (negative)	12%
Law Enforcement (negative)	12%
Need for education	12%
Lack of diversity (i.e. "Salem is very white")	9%
Discrimination against LGBTQIA+ population	6%

17% of all respondents who provided comments regarding the basis of their grade mentioned in specific words concerns related to hate groups and white supremacy, or they provided descriptions that alluded to the same. For example, one respondent wrote, “We have a Proud Boys problem. I think many come from out of town to bully and intimidate people who don’t look or think as they do.” Another wrote, "White supremacy, overt and covert, is extremely prevalent in Salem. The area is conservative.”

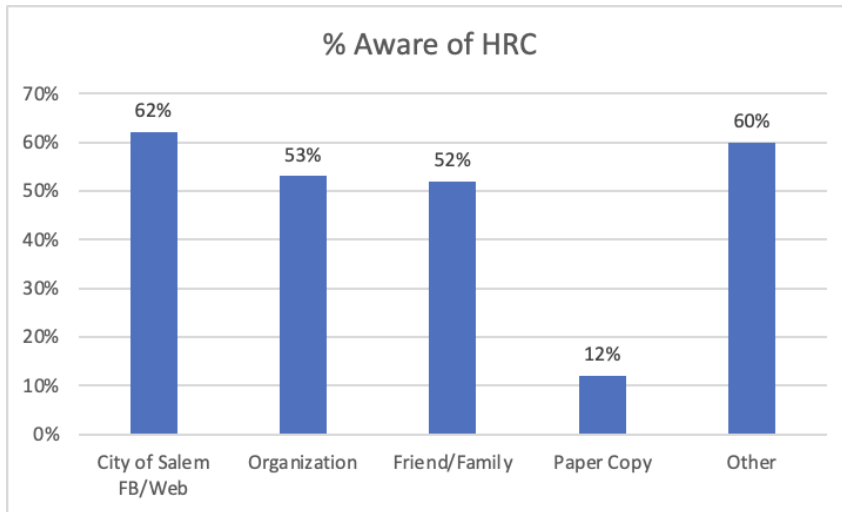
12% of comments negatively pointed to city leadership. Individuals reported having witnessed multiple incidents during city council meetings and through their direct work experience with city leaders. Many people feel our city leaders are simply dismissing and minimizing the very concerns of Salem’s citizens. Two respondents mentioned the unfair hiring of “new police chief” whom they perceive to be less diverse and “unwilling to propel the police force into the 21st century.”

12% of comments referred to law enforcement concerns. These comments highlighted police as either not providing a safe community or actively taking part in discriminatory behaviors. They stated concerns such as, "I routinely see discrimination both what appears intentional and more systemic or unintentional on a race basis by both private sector businesses and city government and local regional governing personnel, including the police." Additionally, another respondent stated they have a "Big concern about police & those in leadership, especially the school board. New to Oregon & shocked at its history of discrimination."

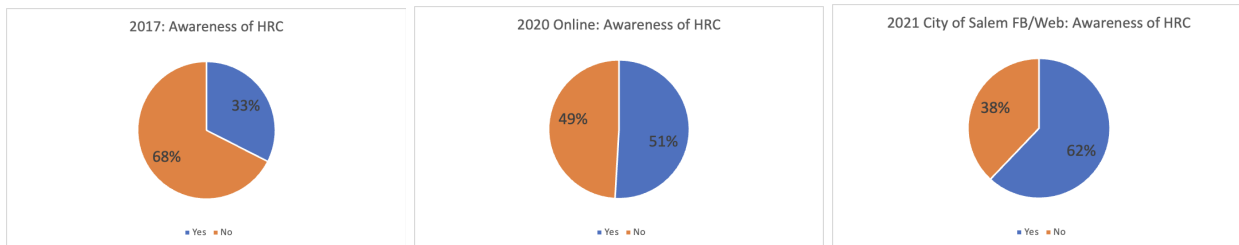
Not all comments made were negative. Though they represent less than 5% of the comments, there were positive comments such as, “I’ve lived in Salem for most of my life and have never personally experienced any kind of discrimination” and “I personally have not experienced

discrimination nor have I observed such in my work or personal interactions. I am personally committed to showing respect for all people.”

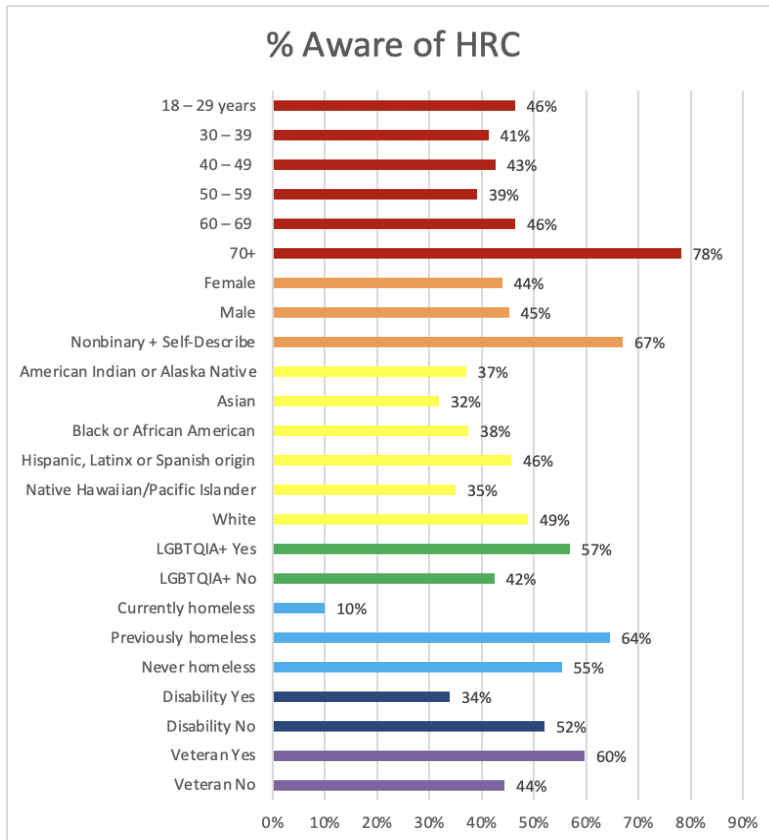
6. **50-60% of online respondents are aware of HRC; 12% of the paper copy respondents are.** The highest awareness is among people who found out about the survey through the City of Salem Facebook or Website. This makes sense since these are people who are following news from our city. On the other hand, people experiencing homelessness are very unlikely to be aware of the HRC.



HRC has an Awareness Task Force that has been working to build awareness of HRC in Salem. The data from this survey indicates an increase in awareness. It is difficult to compare across years because the sampling plans were different. In 2017, the survey was distributed through various human rights organizations. In 2020, it was posted to the City of Salem Facebook page and website. We believe the best comparison is to the 2021 respondents who found out about the survey through the City of Salem Facebook page and website.

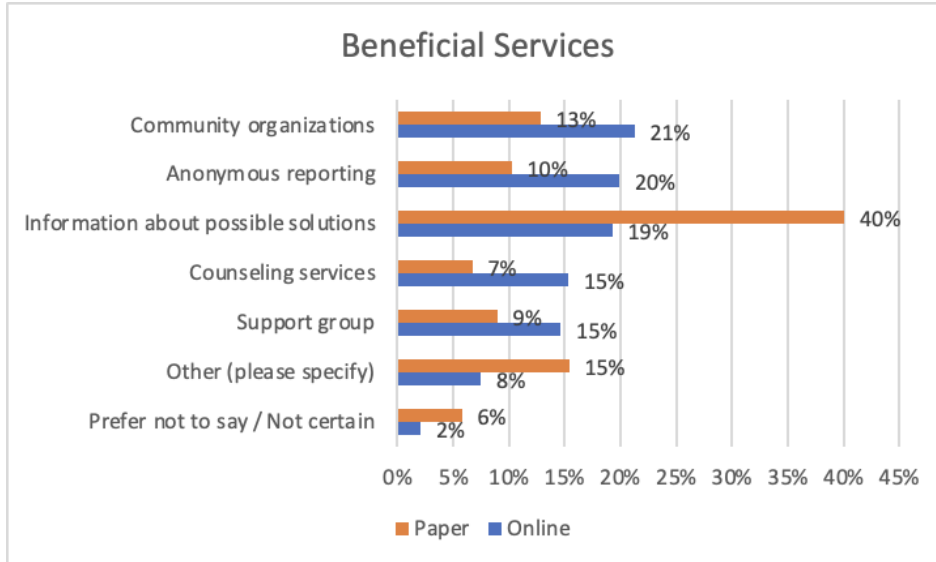


We can compare the awareness of HRC across various subgroups. The highest awareness is among people who are nonbinary or who identify as a member of the LGBTQIA+ community. The lowest awareness is among people experiencing homelessness, people with a disability, Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, and people aged 40-59.



The most common way people (across subgroups) found out about HRC was social media.

7. **When asked what services would be most beneficial to those experiencing discrimination, “Information about possible solutions” was the clear leader among paper survey respondents while “Community Organizations,” “Anonymous Reporting,” and “Information about possible solutions” were the top choices among online respondents.** This question allowed respondents to “check all that apply.” Of note, online respondents marked on average 2-3 options each while paper copy respondents marked on average 1-2 options each.



8. **People experiencing homelessness in Salem need support from HRC.** They are experiencing and witnessing discrimination at a higher rate and frequency than any other subgroup in the survey. 94% of the paper survey respondents indicated they have experienced discrimination in Salem, and 94% of them indicated they have witnessed or heard about discrimination in Salem. Next to the question about “how long ago” did the most recent discrimination incident occur, more than one respondent wrote on the paper survey, “Daily.” One wrote, “Are you kidding? Every day.” They wrote about revving engines and people yelling, “Get a job!” They talked about going into a store with money to spend but getting weird looks from other shoppers and being followed by security guards. They talked about being harassed by citizens and also by the police. They gave the City of Salem the lowest rating for the level of discrimination (1.57) and they have the lowest awareness of HRC (12%). Their stress level is high as they face uncertainty around basic survival needs, and they are facing daily discrimination in our city.

Recommendations:

For future studies:

- Continue to seek survey responses from those experiencing homelessness.
- Consider how to expand survey distribution to include more “average Joes.” Are there business or organization leaders that we could get on board with the study to help with distribution?

For HRC:

- The City of Salem has an opportunity to look inward at its programs and assess its culture and practices. The survey results seem to indicate there may be public perception issues within some of the city agencies, and those negative perceptions will foster mistrust and unrest within the community.
- Focus on social media to continue to build awareness of HRC.
- Develop a plan to decrease discrimination on grounds of homelessness.