

The State of Discrimination in Salem

A community survey developed by the City of Salem Human Rights Commission in partnership with Western Oregon University students offers insight into Salem residents' experiences of discrimination.

In January 2020, the Human Rights Commission partnered with graduate students in Western Oregon University's Organizational Leadership program to administer a survey to gain insight into residents' experiences of discrimination within the city.

The Commission plans to use these insights to improve outreach to the community and increase understanding of the perceptions of Salem residents. The volunteer members of the commission stand ready to help with experiences of discrimination and to provide feedback to the city and other systems of power. Anyone who is experiencing discrimination may contact 503-540-2371 or humanrights@cityofsalem.net, or visit our webpage at cityofsalem.net/accessibility.

Survey results

218 residents responded to the self-administered online survey posted on the City of Salem website; additionally, 36 hard copies of the questionnaire were collected from unsheltered residents.

The survey indicated majority of Salem residents responding have personally experienced and witnessed discrimination in the city. Of the 254 surveyed, 72% (183) reported they have personally experienced discrimination, and 85% of those incidents occurred in the city of Salem. In addition, 85% (215) said they have witnessed or heard of discrimination happening to someone else; 90% of those incidents occurred in Salem.

Among those who personally experienced discrimination, gender, age, and weight were listed as the primary reasons for discrimination. Those who witnessed discrimination selected race and housing status as the top reasons for the discrimination they witnessed.

When asked to give the city a grade in terms of discrimination, the largest segment—39%—gave the city a “C” grade on a five-point grading scale from A to F. The average grade for all respondents was 2.68 out of 5, which is between a C and D. The city received lower than average grades from residents who identified as unsheltered (1.97), LGBTQ (2.18), and disabled (2.38).

The survey also found that 36% of residents responding were somewhat or very uncomfortable reporting a bias crime to police. Among those who were uncomfortable reporting, the major causes were mistrust of police (49%), fear of retaliation (13%), and fear of reporting to police (7%).

Important notes about the data

While the survey followed a valid process for collecting market research, the Commission notes several important caveats to the data:

- Because the survey responses were collected prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, they don't take into account potential shifts in perceptions of discrimination arising from the pandemic or the recent community concerns about race and policing.
- 73% of survey participants identified as white, and 7.7% identified as Hispanic. According to the 2010 Census, 67% of Salem residents identified as white only, while 23% of Salem residents

identify as Hispanic or Latino. Salem is home to many communities in addition, for whom the survey did not receive responses; it is desired to change this in the future.

- The survey was only available in English and Spanish. According to Portland State University's population research center, 21.2% of Salem's population speaks a language other than English at home.
- The survey invited participants to list the *primary* source of discrimination they experienced, but did not allow them to identify more than one source of discrimination. Some participants chose an "other" category to represent more than one category of discrimination.
- The survey was only published on the City of Salem website and Facebook page.

The Human Rights Commission also asked several questions related to awareness of the Commission, as a follow-up to a similar 2017 survey. The survey found that, while more residents are aware of the commission than in 2017, half of respondents still were not aware of the commission or its role combatting discrimination in the city of Salem.

Looking to the future

The commission hopes to repeat this survey in future years, as well as increase the number of respondents and provide the survey in other languages to get the most accurate data possible. Please watch the City of Salem website and social media pages for the next opportunity to participate in the survey.

Full results of the Human Rights Commission study are available here: click on ["2020 Human Rights Commission Presentation."](#)