
A STUDY ON THE BLACK EXECUTIVE COMMUNITY IN THE FEDERAL PUBLIC SERVICE

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FORWARD MESSAGE

Dear Members,

We want to express our sincere gratitude, appreciation and respect to each of you who bravely and courageously came forward to share what was often times very deeply painful and humiliating experiences. We commend you. Your willingness to speak about your experiences has made this report possible, and it is because of your voices that we have a system that is now more sensitive, aware, and poised to address these critical issues.

When we started the federal Black Executives Network (BEN/REN) in 2020, following the murder of George Floyd, it was our way to provide peer-to-peer support to colleagues as we collectively navigated the existence of anti-Black and systemic racism in the federal public service. Additionally, we also sought to support the Deputy community in developing effective solutions to combat these challenges.

As we established BEN/REN, we had two critical meetings. The first was with the late Mr. Ian Shugart, former Clerk of the Privy Council. Mr. Shugart heard our concerns; provided sage advice that guides us to this day; and he encouraged and supported our objectives. We are forever grateful for his guidance and support.

The second critical meeting was with another senior official whom we approached to discuss strategies to increase Black representation at the executive levels. This official shared the perspective that the Black executive community lacked the education, language, and citizenship requirements needed to reach representation at a level that aligned with workforce availability. Considering what we knew of our community of less than 100 Black professionals at that time, we knew deep in our hearts that these were not the barriers facing our community. This exchange highlighted that there may be commonly held misconceptions and a fundamental lack of understanding of the Black executive community.

Inspired by the impact of the [Many Voices One Mind: A Pathway to Reconciliation](#) report, which sought to better understand the challenges and barriers faced by Indigenous Peoples within the federal public service, BEN/REN commissioned a study to examine the Black executive experience.

Throughout this work, a troubling trend began to surface in several interviews conducted by Dr. Zellars. An increasing number of Black executives came forward to share alarming and traumatic disciplinary experiences, particularly concerning the Informal Harassment Complaints processes implemented across federal organizations in response to Bill C-65 (42-1), which amended Part II of the Canada Labour Code (Work Place Harassment and Violence Prevention Regulations). This issue is explored in detail in the second phase of this report.

The *Study of the Black Executive Community in the Federal Public Service* report not only highlights our shared experiences but also lays bare the systemic barriers that disproportionately impact our community. While this report centers the experiences of Black executives, we know the experiences detailed are symptomatic of larger enterprise-wide challenges.

The BEN/REN Steering Committee has worked diligently over the last two years to highlight these concerning patterns to senior leaders. This continued persistence, even in the face of fears of potential career stagnation, has resulted in acknowledgment and a commitment to action from the Clerk of the Privy Council and the Chief Human Resources Officer.

We thank you again for your leadership, courage, strength, resilience, and partnership in driving this essential work forward.

To our BEN/REN members who were not able to come forward to share your experiences as part of this report, know we are here for you, and remain steadfast in our support for you.

Kind regards,

BEN/REN Steering Committee
BEN/REN Secretariat

Disclaimer:

This report addresses challenging topics that may be difficult for some to confront or discuss, including racism, physical violence, sexual harassment, and suicide.

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73

Total number of participants interviewed in the Study

Of the total number of participants interviewed, **63 were current Black executives.**

INTRODUCTION

This Study on Black Executives in the Federal Public Service (Study) constitutes the first of its kind in the century long history of Canada's federal public service: a focused, qualitative and quantitative investigation of the career experiences of the nation's Black leaders in public service.

Since the 1600's, Black people have created communities in the territories that became the federation of Canada. Since the founding of Canada's public service in the early 20th century, the nation's Black population has grown from 17,000 to over 1.5 million. According to Statistics Canada, the Black population is projected to double to more than 3 million by 2041.¹



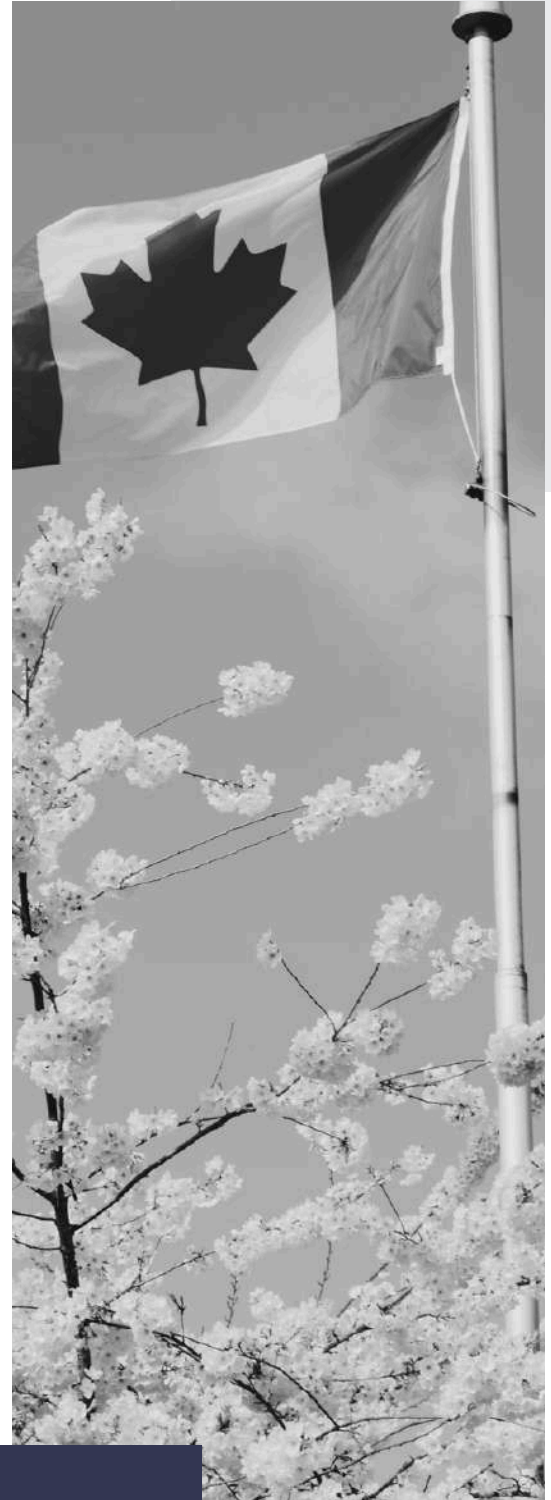
BACKGROUND OF STUDY: PHASE 1 AND PHASE 2

Black EX Study: Phase 1

In July 2020, the Black Executives Network / Le Réseau des exécutifs noirs (BEN/REN) was created as a government-wide network to support and advocate for Black executives in public service, as well as gather data to inform senior leadership and policy decisions that impact the lives of Black federal employees. The organization's missions are three-fold: 1) To promote talent management by supporting, mentoring, and sponsoring Black executives and aspiring executives; 2) to model, outwardly, leadership and changes to lead and transform public service; and 3) to support the mental health and well-being of Black executives.

Since 2020, BEN/REN has supported, co-led, and informed important policy initiatives, including the Mental Health Fund for Black Public Servants and the Clerk's Call to Action on Anti-Racism, Equity, and Inclusion in the Federal Public Service (Call to Action). Although the number of Black executives in the federal public service (FPS) grew from 68 in 2016 to 203 at the end of 2023, Black executives are still significantly underrepresented in senior leadership positions at all levels in core and non-core departments, crown corporations, and special operating agencies across the country.² Black executives make up less than 3% of the entire executive community in FPS and are so underrepresented at the EX-04 and EX-05 levels that these numbers are suppressed in public service reporting.

Undertaken by Dr. Rachel Zellars, an independent researcher, this peer-reviewed Study aims to better understand this persistent underrepresentation and is in conversation with a large body of scholarly research over the last two decades that documents the unique and disproportionate career challenges of Black leaders and executives.³ To date, a study about the career experiences and obstacles of Black public servants in



Canada - the nation's largest employer - has not been undertaken. In addition to demographic data, this Study examines the unique lived experiences of the Black executive community in the FPS, in order to surface systemic barriers to participation and inclusion and to highlight measures to improve working conditions and representation across federal public service. This Study also focuses on how Black executives navigate being in leadership roles and positions of power, while simultaneously navigating antiblack and systemic racism, discrimination, marginalization, and exclusion. The ideas that Black executives "have to work twice as hard" for half the recognition and respect and shoulder enormous pressures to be a "model minority" in the workplace are also explored and challenged.

The final part of this Study uses the experiences and wisdom of Black career public servants who have ascended into the executive cadre to craft recommendations for the creation of a more inclusive and barrier free work environment - and one that supports Black employees' wellbeing and psychological safety. This research is referred to as Phase 1.

Black EX Study: Phase 2, Disproportionate disciplinary measures facing Black executives

During meetings with its members beginning in 2022, BEN/REN began documenting reports of Black executives undergoing investigations as the numbers of Black executives in FPS rose. Continuous reports of Black executives under investigation became a distressing theme in the fall of 2023 as this Study was underway, and during dozens of interviews with Black executives through the winter of 2024, an unexpected finding surfaced: Nearly 30% of all Black executives spoke, unprompted, about recent or ongoing labour management issues that involved formal and informal complaints, individual investigations, grievances, or workplace investigations. These executives also stressed the tremendous personal tolls of these processes on their lives; the detrimental impacts on their career progression; and the fact that they had been subject to lengthy, intrusive investigations that were ultimately deemed to be unfounded. Crucially, Black executives described a procedural mechanism that they understood was being used, inversely, as an apparatus to enact discrimination and harassment. This unexpected research finding was shocking at the onset: The executive community in FPS consistently reports fairly low levels of harassment, as the Association of Professional Executives of the Public Service of Canada (APEX) "2021 Executive Work and Health Study" has documented.⁴ However, exceptionally high levels of harassment through the use of the complaint process offered findings that were not the primary focus of the research and in turn, mandated new avenues of inquiry.

At the conclusion of Phase 1 interviews and reporting, a general call-out was made through BEN/REN's public service-wide network to solicit executives who believed they may have "experienced unfair, biased, and/or racially targeted disciplinary actions within the context of labour relations, human resources, and other departmental grievance processes." The goals for this additional research were: to gain a better picture of how disciplinary actions were being used against Black executives; to ascertain if there is a racial and gender disproportionality compared to available FPS data; to track the outcomes of these processes; and to document the career and health impacts of these processes on Black executives. The findings for this research, referred to as Phase 2, are detailed in the Annex: Disproportionate Disciplinary Measures Facing Black Executives.





As an important note, the narratives and experiences that foreground this Study, particularly those contained in the “Career Barriers” section, are very difficult to read. The topic of suicide is also discussed. Together, these narratives and experiences reveal patterns of antiblack discrimination marked by differential treatment, abuse, cruelty, refusal, and subjugation. While a recent meta-analysis of the efficacy of content warnings reveals that content and trigger warnings have “no effect on affective responses to negative material or on educational outcomes,” it is important upfront to note both the difficulty and urgency in these narratives.⁵ As a researcher who has conducted over a thousand interviews with public servants since 2019, these interviews are collectively the most distressing that I have witnessed and recorded.

It is my great hope that the patterns and data revealed through these career narratives provide affirmation and recognition for career Black public servants whose narratives about racist career experiences have been long dismissed as anecdotal or hysterical when they have reported antiblack abuse. Indeed, this was also a common pattern recorded in the course of these interviews. To those who have trusted me with their stories, I thank you beyond words and from my heart. Thank you for your generosity and each moment of your precious time.

“

There is much more to be done to develop initiatives to help ensure that Black public servants are healthy and supported throughout their careers. We will keep working with Black public servants to address all forms of anti-Black racism and discrimination because a diverse, inclusive, safe, and rewarding public service not only benefits employees, but it also strengthens our organizations and improves our service delivery for Canadians. (February 21, 2024)

The Honourable Anita Anand, President of the Treasury Board and Minister of Transport

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS



The material impacts of antiblack racism

Black executives described a multitude of challenges that evidence a pattern of systemic antiblack discrimination over the course of their career in the FPS.

PHASE 1: CAREER EXPERIENCES OF BLACK EXECUTIVES IN FPS

01. Harassment/Intimidation and Reputational Harm

- **62%** reported direct workplace harassment or intimidation, or the threat of reputational harm from supervisors or senior leaders.
 - Of this cohort, Black women reported the highest rate of harassment and intimidation at **78%**.

02. Undermining Leadership Roles

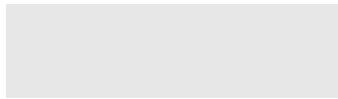
- **47%**: Black female executives reported disrespect, insubordination, refusal of supervision by subordinates, as well as a diminishment of voice and power from colleagues.
 - Amongst the senior most Black female executives who participated in the Study (EX-03 and up), the results are particularly disturbing: **82%** detailed these current challenges.

03. Sponsorship & Coaching

- Only **47%** stated that they had sponsors during their careers.
- Only **42%** stated that they have relied on an executive coach during their careers.

04. Career Stagnation

- **48%** reported a career stagnation period of seven or more years.
 - As a group, all Black career public servants, age 60 and older, experienced very long periods of stagnation of at least ten years, with Black men making up the largest share and enduring the longest stagnation periods.



05. Denial of Language Training

- **42%** of Anglophones spoke extensively about the challenges they encountered in securing language training for advancement.
 - Black women, in particular, reported cases of retaliatory denials from white Quebecoise managers.

06. Unjust Workloads

- **30%** of Black female executives reported shouldering unjust and excessive workloads during their careers.

07. Labour Management Issues

- **28%**: Of 43 female participants in the Study, twelve (12) reported recent or ongoing labour management issues that involved complaints, individual investigations, or workplace investigations. Two Black men mentioned the same.

08. Unequal Punishment

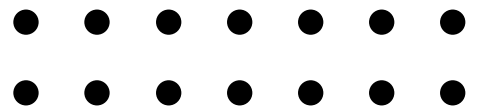
- **27%** shared experiences whereby mistakes made by Black employees were punished disproportionate to white employees, similarly situated.

09. Denial of Career Advancing Opportunities

- **51%** spoke, at length, about ways they were explicitly denied career-advancing opportunities.
- **25%** detailed stories where subjective and/or arbitrary excuses were given to justify the denial of career advancing opportunities.

10. Performance Assessment Issues

- **22%** described experiences with unexpectedly low performance ratings with arbitrary justifications.



PHASE 2: DISPROPORTIONATE DISCIPLINARY MEASURES FACING BLACK EXECUTIVES

01. Unfounded Allegations

- **100%:** While a few Black executives had investigations that were ongoing at the time of their interviews, completed formal and informal investigations concluded all complaint allegations unfounded for all Black male and female executives.

02. Informal/Formal Complaints and Investigations

- **50%:** Half of all Black female executives reported recent or ongoing formal investigations. Of this group, the majority also reported experiences with informal complaints as executives.

- Half of Black male executives interviewed reported being subject to formal complaints and investigations. These men were also subject to informal complaints as executives.
- All Black male executives reported that complaints were made against them with ombuds or through other informal complaint mechanisms in the workplace.

03. Francophone Black Executives

- **50%** of those who experienced targeted complaints were Francophone.

04. Black Executives of African Descent

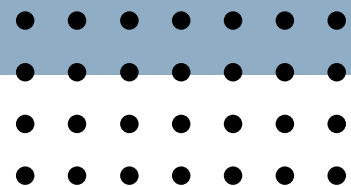
- **39%:** Black executives of African descent made up the largest cultural share of the 26 participants who shared their experiences with recent or ongoing complaint processes at work.

05. Haitian Female Executives

- **27%:** Haitian female executives made up a large share, culturally, of the 26 participants who shared their experiences with recent or ongoing complaint processes at work, and in fact, the largest cultural group of Black female executives impacted.

06. Unfair, Biased, and/or Racially Targeted Disciplinary Actions

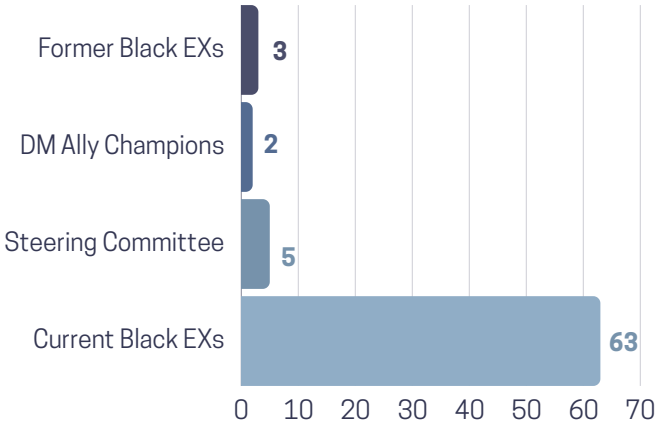
- **48%** of all Black female executives interviewed for the "Study on the Black Executive Community in Federal Public Service" (Phases 1 and 2) described experiences with unfair, biased, and/or racially targeted disciplinary actions as part of informal or formal complaint processes.



PHASE 1: DEMOGRAPHICS OF PARTICIPANTS

Graphic Description

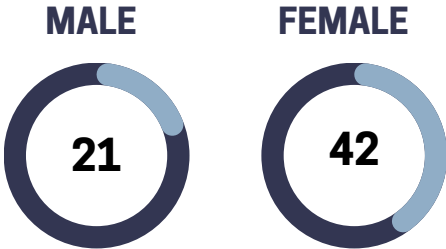
Between October 1, 2023 and February 1, 2024, 73 participants were interviewed for the Study. This sample includes former Black executives (3); deputy minister ally champions (2); and members of the BEN/REN Steering Committee team (5). Sixty-three (63) current Black executives represent one-third of the total Black executive community in FPS. **Combined with the participants in Phase 2 (26), nearly half, or 45%, of all Black executives were interviewed for this Study.**

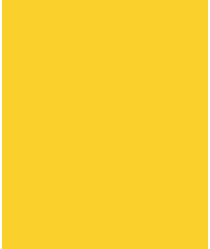


All levels of executives, proportionate to their representation, were evenly divided amongst the 63-person sample. Twenty-one (21) male and forty-two (42) female executives were interviewed. While this division is not representative of the Black executive community as a whole, however, as Black women make up about 58% of the Black executive community, the sample is representative of the diverse Black executive community as a whole. Three participants identified as members of the LGBTQ2S+ community. Participants identified as male and female; none identified as transgender or non-binary. One self-identified as neurodiverse. However, some executives shared diagnoses of depression and ongoing mental health challenges related to traumatic workplace experiences. For participants, racial blackness was the primary location of identity. Gender was a secondary site of identity. However, participants often detailed their experiences from an intersectional location, as detailed in the examples below.


Culturally, executives overwhelmingly were born in Canada and came from first generation immigrant families from two regions in the African diaspora: 1) the Anglophone and Francophone Caribbean and 2) Africa. Four executives identified as African Nova Scotian.⁶ Although

Number of participants interviewed by gender





African Nova Scotians, as a unique cultural group, typically have seven or more generations of kinship in Canada dating to the 17th century, only one such executive has ever entered the senior-most ranks of the executive community in public service over the last century.⁷ Thirty executives are first-language French speakers (Francophone) or were fully bilingual upon entering public service. Thirty-three identified as Anglophone.





Importantly, the sample of current Black executives has high levels of advanced educational attainment. This is not surprising in light of the high levels of educational attainment amongst Black Canadians with parentage from Africa and the Caribbean.⁸ All executives hold bachelor's degrees. Thirty-six or 57% have master's or law degrees. Five hold multiple master's degrees. Four hold doctorate degrees, and two executives are currently completing PhDs. Executives ages ranged from 37 to 66 years old.

METHODOLOGY

The research employed purposeful sampling to target 50-80 Black executives with diverse backgrounds, locations, and career levels, ensuring a representative sample of the total demographic. This Study invited participants that included Black employees holding executive positions at all levels; ensured gender parity in interview design; invited and designed interviews for first language French speakers to meet official language inclusion standards; invited participation from Black executives from varied cultural and religious backgrounds; sought employees who identify as part of the LGBTQ2SIA+ community; and invited employees to speak about their intersecting disabilities and neurodiversity.

Regarding methods, structured virtual interviews were employed, allowing for consistency in questions and the minimization of bias. Participants were sent the questions in advance, both in French and English. During interviews, questions were shortened for time's sake, and participants were invited to respond in fuller detail by email. Ten participants followed up in writing. All responses were coded by theme and integrated into this report. The following, open-ended questions were asked of all participants:

General interview questions

1. *Can you tell me a bit about your background: where you grew up, went to school, and how you found your first job in federal public service (FPS)?*
 2. *Please detail your career experiences and the mentors, sponsors, supports you have had throughout?*
 3. *Can you share a very challenging career experience, and detail how you navigated this experience?*
 4. *What kind of leader are you?*
 5. *What has worked since the Call to Action (CTA), and what does accountability in FPS look like?*
- 
- 



Participants were invited to attend one-on-one interviews in French or English; small group interviews with colleagues at a similar level; or a small group facilitated in French or English.

Interview questions were informed by a wide-ranging body of scholarly literature that has documented the unique challenges of Black leaders in professional settings.⁹ Questions were also designed to collect detailed qualitative data efficiently and accurately, while respecting differing career experiences, levels, and relationships. Prior to the interviews, participants were verbally provided with informed consent details regarding the study's purpose, confidentiality, and their rights. Additionally, they were ensured that reporting would preserve participant anonymity unless explicit permission was given to include identifying details in the Study. Given the very small number of Black executives in senior-most positions (EX-03 and above) and the sensitivity of these positions, senior leaders were interviewed individually, and great care was taken to blind employment levels and other identifying information for this group. Following the structured interviews, five participants attended follow-up interviews due to insufficient data collection under time constraints. Ten participants also forwarded their detailed narratives or information that had been intentionally omitted in group interviews. Interviews were not recorded, but were transcribed real time, thereby ensuring accuracy and the preservation of participant voices.

The qualitative responses were then analyzed using color and thematic content analysis to identify recurring themes related to demographic data, barriers, challenges, career supports, and recommendations. Patterns were clearly noted at this stage and were analyzed alongside the literature reviews prepared for this study. A detailed spreadsheet was also created to assist with the quantification of data. This Study presents both qualitative and quantitative findings, formulating evidence-based recommendations for policy changes and organizational interventions.

In the paragraphs below, "majority" refers to at least 80% of the group. "Most" refers to at least 50%, but less than 80% of the group. "Many" refers to at least one-third of the group. Other numerical descriptors and percentages are provided where relevant.



DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

1. CAREER BARRIERS

Each executive provided multiple examples of career barriers that they encountered during the course of their careers. Career barriers arose in five main patterns during the interviews:



A clear trend of stagnation

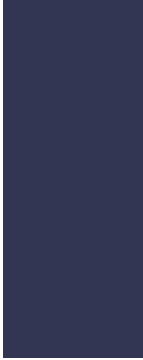
In 2022, Dr. Martin Nicholas began sharing his data research measuring career stagnation, with a focus on Black employees, throughout employee networks and FPS more broadly.¹⁰ As a data scientist, he employed a disproportionality index to identify deviation from a uniform distribution to examine whether employment levels and salaries are evenly spread across equity seeking groups in FPS. His research concluded that Black employees are most disproportionately impacted of all equity seeking groups: Black public servants face the greatest level of overrepresentation in the lowest salary ranges and the greatest level of underrepresentation at the highest salary ranges across the core public administration.¹¹ These findings have also been published by Statistics Canada.¹²

Black executives reported patterns of great career stagnation that fall within three categories: 1) 7-15 years at the EX minus 1 or EX-01 level; 2) prolonged acting periods with persistent denials of substantive opportunities; and 3) long periods remaining in selection pools due to discriminatory appointment practices, where an appointment would have constituted a promotion. Forty-eight percent (48%) of executives experienced a stagnation period of seven or more years. Nine (9) were Francophones.

As a group, all Black career public servants, age 60 and older, experienced very long periods of stagnation of at least ten years, with Black men making up the largest share and enduring the longest stagnation periods. This group reported stagnation after participating in targeted leadership development programs, and stagnation occurred regardless of education level and language. In fact, one of the most significant examples of stagnation in the sample occurred with an executive who is bilingual, has relevant advanced education at the master's level, and spent over 15 years at the EX-01 level before advancing. As one leader who spent 12 years in an EX minus 1 position noted, he felt compelled to conform in order to advance, in ways that conflicted with his cultural and familial upbringing:

"What I found is that I began to realize that I was not comfortable behaving in way that was not really me. I was willing to do this when I was younger - you know, 'play the game.' But this unwillingness to conform was influenced by a pride in where I come from culturally."





One executive captured this dilemma for Black executives in FPS, “I have seen good people contort themselves to do what they think is wanted. You cannot make something or someone do something that it was not meant to do.”

The case of X department

One notable trend arose during the interviews: All eight (8) executives who previously worked in one department reported both long periods of stagnation and an intolerably hostile work environment. Many of these executives have very high levels of education and specialization. As one executive surmised, “The department silenced dissent, was deeply isolating, and has a deep conservatism running through it. There are lots of different ways to tell Black people to ‘stay in your place.’” Another executive described a time when she qualified for an EX minus 1 position but was twice passed over for reasons unrelated to merit: The first time, the executive director “brought in a friend,” and the second time, she was removed from consideration when she told the hiring executive that she “would not tolerate being yelled at” by him. As another former employee shared, “I was devastated that one narcissist could have this much power over people’s careers.”

During interviews, executives spoke openly of the “trail of terror” that a male executive left behind inside the department before becoming promoted to another department. Other non-Black executives and career public servants also shared similar sentiments about this same male executive during the interview process. Black executives described this executive as a case example of inept and abusive leadership that maintains power, commits far-reaching harms, and is still rewarded with promotions. One of the most striking findings regarding the workplace culture inside the department came from two executives who were both interviewed individually: Both shared similar stories of workplace violence that so detrimentally impacted their careers and mental health, that their sponsors advised them to leave the department. These sponsors, senior white executives at other departments, offered this advice because they were intimately aware of the toxic, racist workplace culture and understood it as irreparable.

Career barrier #1: Harassment/intimidation and reputational harm

Most leaders or 62% shared stories during their careers where they experienced direct workplace harassment, intimidation, or the threat of reputational harm from supervisors or senior leaders. Black female executives reported the highest rate of harassment and intimidation at 78%. These numbers supersede general Public Service Employee Survey (PSES) results for question 58b regarding harassment from superiors; for Black women, the rates of harassment are starkly disproportionate related to the last four years of PSES data.¹³ When compared to available aggregated, executive specific data regarding harassment, the disaggregated data for Black executives is shockingly disproportionate and evidences a systemic barrier that is uniquely experienced.¹⁴ Black women also reported unique forms of harassment, including complaints and grievances, and this is detailed further in a separate section (Annex). Examples shared in the course of interviews fell into four key patterns: Executives encountered outright threats; were denied or stripped of their power and responsibilities; were referred to with stereotypical or racist remarks; and were challenged regarding their merit and right to a position.



I was not raised with the notion of throwing people under bus.’ That is not our culture — you just don’t throw people under the bus. That has been hard for me because I am not like that; I don’t do it. It has been very hard to navigate public service with a ‘no kill’ instinct.





Intimidation and reputational harm: Outright threats

Participants reported times during their career when they experienced direct threats to their livelihood and physical well-being, with Black women dominantly reporting such examples. One Black woman who was feeling unchallenged in her job, made a bold career move and accepted a position in another department with a new specialization and classification. “My boss, an ADM, was really angry I was leaving,” she said, “and he said terrible things to me when I announced my decision. He told me that he was ‘going to destroy me.’ It was terrible and terrifying at the same time. I still left, but I was unsure for some time, what would happen to me.” One leader had a long list of grim examples: He was told that he “would never be promoted”; that senior leaders did not want him “to represent the institution”; that white colleagues did not “want to be given responsibility” by him; and that he would “never be an executive.” One supervisor told him that it was “a miracle he was an EX minus 1.” These are just a small sampling of the comments that he suffered.

Black women frequently reported experiences where their behaviours and performance were micromanaged and policed by supervisors. In one instance, a Black female executive shared two experiences during her career where the police – quite literally – were employed to threaten and intimidate her. In the first instance, officers were called to her office after she joined a team in another division to escape a toxic work environment; the police officers told her that they received a “report about a stolen government laptop” – the same laptop she had used in her previous division and believed she could continue to use. She said, “I was so embarrassed when the police arrived in front of me. I did not know how it would impact me, which colleagues saw them or if my manager saw.” Later, as an executive, this same woman was reprimanded because a more senior white male leader, external to her department, complained to her DM that her behaviour in a virtual group meeting had been “so violent that the police would have been called” if the meeting had been in person. She described the impacts on her safety and well-being:

“My name, my reputation, my character, my word, were all called into question by what transpired, and I was not given the benefit of the doubt. That hurt. It hurt a lot. It left me reeling, wondering if I still belong here, if being a Black woman doing this work is more of a distraction than a benefit.”

This is an important statement because Canadian human rights adjudicators have recognized that Black and racialized people are often perceived on a non-conscious level to be unreliable, untrustworthy, or dishonest.¹⁵ As such, it signals the presence of antiblack bias and potentially discrimination.



Black women also reported being threatened when they stood up to their discriminatory treatment. The following example again illustrates the intersectional, discriminatory challenges Black women encounter, as well as the disproportionate precarity they experience when pregnant in public service. One Black female participant challenged her manager's glaring pregnancy discrimination and involved the union. Although she was successful in securing greater job security during her pregnancy, her manager warned her, bluntly, that she should "not to come back if I were you" after she gave birth. "I heard him loud and clear. And so, I didn't," she stated. Another Black woman was erroneously screened out of an EX-01 process. When she rightly challenged the error and was screened back in, she was nonetheless chastised by senior leaders "for unladylike and unprofessional behaviour" for challenging the decision. Although she qualified, she was pulled into a meeting by a RDG and told that she "was not executive material." Later, when this same Black woman was harassed by a colleague, she sought support from her ADM. She explained the negative ripple effect of reporting her own harassment:

"My ADM accused me of 'being sensitive,' asking me 'what do you want me to do about it,' saying 'I don't believe this person would act this way' and 'you are very emotional.' Shortly after this, during my performance discussion, the ADM indicated that he was concerned that I did not have good relationships with my colleagues, that he was concerned about my mental health... and advised me to read the KLCs."

This example is striking because it also aligns with the ways that Black women are stereotyped as dishonest and blamed for their own harm. A number of Black female executives also reported threats of termination while on medical leave or upon returning from medical leave.

Black executives also shared experiences where they were threatened with physical violence during their careers. One woman shared an experience where a colleague, who had served previously as a supervisor, began reporting to her. One day, in anger, he threw something at her. "Now that is harassment, and that is violent. This is a hard thing to deal with when you are a leader; people do not know how much crap you are taking," she said. One former executive shared how a white colleague raised a chair at him and threatened to "beat the ni**er out of him" during a meeting with other participants. Strikingly, no one in the meeting room intervened on his behalf. Black women also shared experiences with sexual harassment from white male supervisors. One woman who experienced sexual advances from her director shared that she did not report because she was already deflated from years of stagnation and losing opportunities to white colleagues. She said, "I never complained. My work was already very hard: I was doing lots of MCs and had Treasury Board files – just the hardest files. Still, every year, I was told that I needed more and more to advance." As another Black executive, who spent over 25 years in public service before being able to enter the executive cadre, surmised, "I have experienced abuse at every level during my career."

Intimidation and reputational harm: Denied power and responsibilities

One trend reported by executives – and again, disproportionately by Black women – is the stripping of power that signals hostility from a supervisor or senior leadership. Black women described this trend as a well-worn sign that is intended to diminish Black women's power and leadership and to signal that it is time to exit a position. One Black woman, hired into a director of diversity position, described her disappointment and awakening when she realized that she was

“not there to advance the Call to Action but to provide a face to an effort that was not going anywhere.” Within a few months of starting her position, her key tasks and responsibilities were handed over to others by her supervisor. She added, “I was being used, but I was also being clearly told that I was not trusted.” Another senior leader shared that “the threats started quickly in my new position. There were unilateral decisions, the removal of my responsibilities, and appointing others in the organization with no discussion. All signs. I could clearly see what was happening. And I knew it was the time to put the job aside and look for another job.”

Black female executives also reported insubordination from employees and a refusal of supervision from non-Black subordinates. One Black woman, who obtained a position coveted by another employee, faced great hostility and resistance when she assumed an already challenging role in a new department. She explained the absence of support from her DG and her ongoing challenges with an angry female subordinate:

“She cried that she did not get the job that I got. When the previous person left, this woman believed that she was in charge. It was terrible. She fought me every day. She blamed me for taking the job. And I was the one who had to meet her to do her performance assessment. But she refused, so I did not do it for this woman. She ended up taking time off systematically; she simply did not want to work for me.”

Another senior leader shared that she has often faced insubordination from white Quebecoise subordinates throughout her executive career. Recently, she also added, a white male colleague left for language training rather than be supervised by her. She added, “It is a very scary place to be. There is a way that subordinates are comfortable talking back to me as a Black woman in leadership. White people are threatened right now. I find my role emotionally and mentally draining honestly.”

Intimidation and reputational harm: Stereotypical and racist remarks

Participants also frequently detailed experiences with stereotypical and racist remarks. Too numerous to share, a few deserve attention. Both men and women reported being called a “ni**er” during their careers – one under the threat of physical violence. A leader of Jamaican parentage was told by a supervisor that he “thought Jamaicans were lazy” until he met this executive. Another Black male executive was told by a senior leader that “Black men are misogynistic” as an explanation for why he could not serve as the face of a departmental diversity initiative. “I left that conversation with my tail between my legs,” he explained. One ADM, when confronted with his racially stereotyping comments, responded to a Black executive, “Well, what is the problem? I did not call anyone a ni**er.”

Intimidation and reputational harm: Challenges to merit

A final pattern that arose in the context of intimidation and reputational harm was the frequent use of merit challenges by non-Black colleagues since the CTA. Colleagues specifically evoked the issue of race to imply that Black leaders obtained opportunities or positions on the basis of their blackness. As described by participants, these instances illuminate the resentment of colleagues and are also intended to sully the reputations of Black leaders. One Black male executive, with a high level of specialization, described his work environment as a “cesspool of racism, where I have to often tell people that I am in my position not because I am Black but because of merit.”



Another Black female executive described the challenges of navigating a recent competition with two white men. During the competition, these men “thought they were a shoo in,” and subsequently were resentful when she was selected for the position. Although her DM explained her rationale to all three candidates - specifically citing the Black woman as “excellent and capable” - both white men still expressed their resentment. The Black woman explained, “One man did not congratulate me, and the other decided to go ‘brush up on his French’ for a few months so he did not have to work under me. He made sure to say loudly, ‘Well, I guess I am out of the running because I am a white guy.’”

One Black female executive took care to extensively detail an executive career marked by tokenization and harassment. Her narrative is both painful and exemplary of the intersectional challenges faced by Black female leaders:

“I was selected as an acting DG. I took the opportunity and made it my own, understanding that my boss was coming back. But I was treated lesser, like a child by the current ADM, a white male. I was regularly tokenised: For example, I had to do all of the equity presentations, black research, etc. but I was not allowed to speak under this ADM.”

Career barrier #2: Denial of career advancing opportunities

Thirty-two current executives, or 51%, spoke at length about ways they were explicitly denied opportunities during their careers. Eleven participants also shared stories about using lateral, at-level opportunities to escape hostile, stagnant, and/or unsupportive work environments. These executives described career barriers that fall into two oft-repeated patterns: 1) acting positions without advancement, and 2) subjective excuses denying opportunities by managers and senior leadership. The examples that follow are important because they are identical to those long identified by human rights tribunals as those that demand heightened scrutiny and signal the presence of antiblack discrimination.¹⁶

Denial of career advancing opportunities: Acting and going nowhere

While participants described the ways that acting opportunities provided rich experiences that prepared them for leadership, they also described numerous ways that acting positions were used to negatively impact their careers and well-being. Participants also had acting opportunities removed to their detriment. For example, one woman was moved back to level with the arrival of new senior leadership to her department. When she asked for an explanation, given that she had been chosen for the opportunity and had already been in the position for many months, she was told that she “needed more experience” before she could act again or be promoted. One executive was removed from an acting position when a complaint was filed against her by a subordinate. The complainant, who had openly expressed desires for her position, was then placed in her acting position. The complaint was ultimately determined to be unfounded by an investigator. Another woman shared a similar experience.

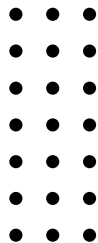
Participants reported losing substantive opportunities to white men, white women, and Asian men. One Black woman lost a promotion opportunity to the wife of the organization's most senior leader, although she competed and won. She added, "this has been a lingering, contentious issue in our office. In fact, we lost an excellent colleague to the province because of this issue." One male executive spoke quietly as he explained numerous acting positions over a five-year period – with each position ultimately being offered to a white colleague with less education and experience. During one instance, he inquired about the selection decision, and he was told that he "did not qualify for the position." In our interview, he quietly added, "I still don't know why I was told that I did not qualify." Later, in an acting EX minus 1 position, he lost a substantive position to a white Quebecoise woman. Although the position was an EX equivalent position, the Quebecoise woman was an EX minus 1 level. He added, "I trained her, and then she became my manager. I worked for an organization that was passionate about bringing in women at the time – and especially white Francophone women at the expense of others."

Another example highlights the mental health impacts that these decisions have on Black employees who are objectively more meritorious for positions that they lose to less qualified white colleagues. One woman, a gifted bilingual executive with niche technical expertise, described working in a challenging senior acting position that for two years. After two years, a white female Anglophone was hired into the substantive position. She stated,

"They chose the white woman who used to report to me! Then they said, 'but don't worry, you were neck in neck' in the competition. This woman does not even speak French, although French is imperative for this role. She is simply a white, blond woman with blue eyes."

Despite expressing her feelings of disregard to senior management, she was soon approached and asked her to undertake a second acting position, identical to the one prior. This permanent position, she was told, was already "reserved for someone else," but she would be an "excellent person to train" the incoming white employee. Further insulted and hurt, she declined. In our follow up interview, she shared that she decided to leave the department. In another example, a Black female executive acted at the EX-01 level for ten years. She described her feelings of defeat: "I would make the pool but was told I was not picked for reasons of 'personal suitability.' I could not progress, but I watched other white colleagues progress."

Participants also discussed the ways that acting opportunities were offered to Black employees who were used to "clean up" and stabilize departments. This trend in organizational behaviour literature is commonly referred to as the "glass cliff."¹⁷ One woman explained that she gained a reputation for being a "fixer, a clean-up woman" early in her career. Although she was allowed to serve in an acting EX-02 position given her much-needed expertise and skills, while in a substantive EX equivalent position for a long period, she was never considered for this position permanently. Another woman describes these experiences similarly: "I was called for 911 situations, but only ever allowed to act. I never once got the positions I acted in."



Denial of career advancing opportunities: Subjective excuses to advancement

A second pattern that arose during the interviews, was the use of subjective excuses citing a generic “lack of experience” or a lack of personal, intimate knowledge of the employee (i.e., “we do not know you”) to justify denials of opportunities or performance assessment ratings greater than succeeded. Although these patterns clearly emerged during interviews, other participants cited additional career barriers, divorced from merit. Some instances were oxymoronic to participants. For example, one woman was reprimanded for being “too ambitious” and told to “peel it back” because she was making her supervisor “look bad” given her drive and high level of competence. Another Black woman was told that her work is “too polished.” Other examples were blatant in their discrimination. One male executive, stellar and objectively meritorious, was told repeatedly during his long career that he would never be a leader in his organization. Senior leaders told him directly, “You are promotable, but will not be promoted.” As a rationale, they explained bluntly, “We do not want you to represent this organization, and we do not want to be given responsibility by you.” He described the detrimental impacts of these routine statements on his well-being:

“I went through coaching, and I sought out healing because I am experiencing racial trauma, you know? For some time, I was always asking myself, ‘why, why, why?’ I looked at my peers being promoted. And my self-confidence was just diminished honestly. You can almost start to believe what is being said to you.”

One-fourth (1/4) of all executives detailed similar stories where subjective and/or arbitrary excuses were given to justify the denial of career advancing opportunities.

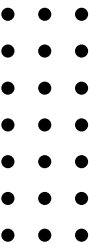


In the first instance (i.e., “lack of experience”), some participants described situations where they approached managers about promotions and were told that they needed to first obtain “more training” or “more experience.” Importantly, these arbitrary responses were used as a pretext to advancement, participants insisted. One man, who spent nine years in a working-level position explained,

“I saw everyone moving up, and I thought ‘what is wrong with me?’ I had opportunities to backfill (act), but others moved by me with permanent opportunities, and I remained acting for years. When I would speak up, I was only told that I needed ‘more grooming.’”

One woman, an EX minus 1 for seven years, was told that she would need language training and other specialized training to advance:

“I noticed others at my level advancing, but I was actually regressing. So, I went and found information about the trainings I was told that I needed. Then, when I presented them, I was told ‘no, they are too expensive!’ That was a problem because I did all of this stuff they asked and had excellent ratings, but I could not advance.”



One woman was told that she could not receive a succeeded plus rating by her director general (DG). When she inquired, asking for concrete, objective feedback for improvement, he told her that she “needed to strengthen her strategic thinking.” She concluded, “This was not helpful because he could not tell me exactly what was needed for improvement. It was subjective. I needed an exact definition of ‘strategic thinking,’ but of course, he could not provide it when I asked him.”

Black women frequently described careers where “the bar or goal line kept getting raised higher” for promotion over time. One woman, who dreamt of being a leader as a child, detailed a workplace where she experienced both roadblocks to promotion and sexual harassment from her director. Her story is illustrative of the intersecting challenges and walls of resistance Black women in public service face, despite their resilience and a multitude of career strategies:

“Year after year, I was told that I needed more – more training, more experience, etc. The goal post just kept moving higher. Finally, in my fourth year, I got approached and was told about an acting opportunity. There were two, including myself, who qualified. But I was told that the white guy would be getting the opportunity. That was a pivotal moment of awakening for me.”

She continued: “I am a hustler, and I will not take these kind of excuses lightly. When I was brought into the board room and was told about the decision, I said, ‘Fine. This is your decision despite all my hard work, excellence, and awards.’” After many years of stagnation, she then decided to seek out a lateral opportunity. With great distress, she explained how yet another roadblock was placed before her: “I got qualified into a pool and told the director about the pool. But I needed my manager to sign off first. When I approached her, she said that she would not sign off. Yet, I had been repeatedly passed by in my own organization!” As another woman who stagnated in an acting EX1 position for a decade summarized, “I was always told that I was missing something: that I needed to get more training, or that I was missing a competency or skill. But, when there was a competition, I would make the pool. I was told once that I was not chosen for reasons of ‘personal suitability.’ How do you even respond to that?”

A second pattern regarding excuses to advancement that Black executives reported was that they were “not known” to the organization’s leaders. Importantly, this excuse was offered despite objective criteria for merit, competencies, or readiness. As one male leader shared,

“A hiring senior leader once told me that I had glowing references, but ‘not many people know who you are.’ The other candidate was well known to his inner circle, and so I did not get the position that I was qualified for. I have not stopped thinking about that moment since.”

Some participants also shared stories of being denied well-earned succeeded plus ratings because, as they were told, “you are not known to us.” Another woman explained the multitude of excuses she received, despite benefiting from mentorship: “I had good mentors, but no sponsors yet. I also had great performance assessments. I tried to compete and move up. But each time, I was told, ‘You are not ready. You need more experience. Or my favorite: We do not know you.’”



Career barrier #3: Performance review issues

Many executives encountered unexpectedly low performance assessment ratings during their careers. Distinct from narratives of disappointment, these stories are all marked by arbitrariness in decision making, one of the key indicators for the presence of bias. These narratives complement studies on performance assessment disparities that have been undertaken in public service in the last few years and also signal the need for more comparative data on performance assessments across public service.

Performance Management Assessment Disparities Project

For example, a **2021 study led by Jasmine Garcia Larouche** concluded a rating disparity for Black employees. With a data sample of nearly 24,000 employees, the study found that Black employees are given “succeeded minus” and “did not meet” ratings more frequently and are given “succeeded plus” and “surpassed” ratings at a lower rate than any other equity seeking group in FPS.¹⁸

2023

Audit of Systemic Racism

Additionally, a 2023 audit of systemic racism undertaken by Office of the Auditor General (OAG) concluded that, of six audited departments, “none examined performance rating distribution or tenure rates for racialized employees” despite complaints from racialized employees.¹⁹

Through their own assessment, OAG found that performance assessments for racialized employees at the Department of Justice were six percentage points lower than for non-racialized employees in the same categories. Despite clear indicators that racialized employees are rated subjectively and unjustly compared to other employee groups, the OAG study concluded that there still exists a lack of measurable equity, diversity, and inclusion results in executive and non-executive performance agreements, as well as a lack of clear and measurable work objectives, with associated performance measures, for Black employees.

As one executive, who has devoted their long career to performance measurement, and assessments confirmed during our interview,

“The way we assess simply has to be better. The biases are absolutely still there. I have seen throughout my career what is expected by Black people versus what is expected of white employees. Mistakes, of course, are made by both, but Black people are punished more severely and rated lower.”

The negative impacts of low performance assessment ratings are great. As one deputy minister stressed, “A succeeded minus rating comes with negative, multi-year implications for an employee.”



During the interviews, fourteen executives described experiences with unexpectedly low PMA ratings at length. Of the fourteen, ten were Anglophone, and ten were women. Black women often spoke of receiving succeeded ratings while they were shouldering excessive workloads in acting positions. One woman described,

"I had the most difficult projects and largest teams. At the time, I was an acting EX-01, and I was on a project that had three jobs. It was me and the director; everyone else had left. I had to constantly push in three positions, in three directions. At end of year, my rating was not succeeded plus, and it was 'justified' by the comments in my PMA."

Another female participant expressed her frustration with "overperforming and overdelivering," yet receiving only a succeeded rating. She added that she was once rated down in an acting position while handling "two additional jobs."

Black women also described moments in their career where they had received a succeeded or a lowered rating for reasons that were both arbitrary and punitive. One woman was rated down by senior leadership after her direct supervisor gave her excellent performance assessment ratings. He justified this decision by stating that "no one is that perfect," despite her exemplary work during the year and her supervisor's insistence that she deserved the stellar ratings. Another woman was "dinged with a normal succeeded because I could not go on language training – that was the reason given." She added, "But no one allowed me to go 'because of the workload!'" One woman received only a succeeded, as her manager justified, "because I do not really know you. In order to get a higher rating, you would have to be talent managed." She continued: "It was clear that I was not a part of her circle, and therefore I was not getting opportunities as such. At least she was honest." Another woman suffered a serious illness during the year, and her manager rated her down in her performance assessment for a "late annual report," despite her documented medical leave and a debilitating illness.

- • • Black men spoke openly about the humiliation and sadness they felt when they received negative ratings they knew they did not objectively deserve. One male executive was shocked and tearful when his ratings fell greatly from one assessment to the next. He believed that the suddenly poor ratings were being used as a pretext for something more insidious. He explained, "I did not expect such changes between the two reports, and I felt that the feedback was manufactured – that maybe a trap had been created now. And I had to ask myself, 'do I want to play this game?'" He ultimately requested a 360-degree assessment through the Public Service Commission. He explained that, "The results unanimously underscored my competence, stability, and readiness for career advancement, presenting a stark contrast to my supervisor's feedback."

Another male executive detailed a painful time in his career, when he worked for an associate deputy minister (ADM) who expressed animosity towards him. He explained, "I would deliver something, and she would tell me that it was terrible." When he followed up and asked for clarification, she responded that "she did not know what she wanted" but told him that she "would know it when I see it." He added, "It was a terrible time in my career." This male executive detailed the great impacts of this experience on his career and mental health:

"I knew something was happening. I thought, is it me? Something else? Or racism? I eliminated all the other options. With this woman, she treated everyone poorly, but she especially treated me poorly. I always delivered. But she got promoted after two years because she 'managed well to the right people.' She even went on to become a deputy minister. For those two years, my ratings declined. She made sure to write negative notes in my performance assessments."



Another executive, now retired after 25 years, stated bluntly, “I never got a succeeded plus in my entire career.”

Conversations with former Black executives and Black executive coaches illuminated the longstanding problems of in-group bias, discretion, and antiblack racism as related to the performance assessment process. As one former executive explained,

“The system continues to promote many who are simply not qualified to be leaders. Over 50% of my work now is helping employees deal with bullies. You must get rid of discretion in the performance assessment process for both measuring results and assessing key leadership competencies. The process must be definitive. When you win a race, it is definitive. That is the point. And that must be the point for PMAs.”

Career barrier #4: Denial of language training

This theme was extensively discussed by Anglophone participants in the study, including those at the EX minus 1 level and retirees. Of the participant executives who are Anglophones, nearly half – or 42% – spoke extensively about the challenges they encountered in securing language training for advancement throughout their careers. When participants requested language training, they were denied. Five participants shared that they paid for weekend and evening French training themselves. Participants who were denied were commonly told that it was “too expensive” and “not a good investment” for their departments: One woman detailed a story where she was repeatedly denied language training at the EX minus 1 level, then shortly afterwards was asked to act for a white male EX-01 who was taking a leave for language training that her department had approved and paid for.

Black women, notably, detailed instances of language-training denial and hostility from white Quebecoise managers. One Black woman explained that she was forced to prepare and present a business case to her manager in order to obtain her first French levels. Years later, when she was in an acting EX minus 1 position elsewhere and approached her Quebecoise DG for support for her Level C training, the director refused and personalized her explanation. Spitefully, the DG stated that “when she entered public service in the 1970’s, she spoke no English. She told me that when she spoke, other people would even hang up the phone on her.” The same



DG, who also refused a manager’s recommendation for a promotion for this Black woman, responded with a clear intent of retribution, doubly enacted. As a result of this discrimination, the **Black woman’s career languished for 14 years at the EX minus 1 level** – one of the longest stagnation periods reported by all participants in this Study. Her case is illustrative of the ways that Black women experience layers of punishment and career barriers that are clear, intentional, and effective. Career barriers are not uniquely experienced by Anglophone Black women; they are not uniquely enacted by Quebecoise women. Yet, during the study, this pattern was one identified by Anglophone Black women. It is also discussed, at length, in the Annex section.

One of the most emblematic stories of obstruction was shared by a bilingual Black female executive who was similarly mistreated and hindered by a white Anglophone female manager as a young executive. Working in a male-dominated industry and area of a department, this Black woman detailed the intentional neglect she faced from one of the only other women in her department. “I busted my butt working for her and then I thought ‘something has got to give’...My mental health got really bad, and I decided then that I would not let that suffer.” Within a short time, this Black woman surpassed her manager; this remains true today. “Looking back,” she added in a compassionate tone, “I know that she was scared by a determined Black woman who she certainly saw as a threat.”

Another example deserves detail because it illustrates the unique, intersectional pattern of violence – more fully realized in the course of this Study – that Black women encounter in FPS over the course of their careers. These noted instances are explicitly detrimental to career advancing opportunities. As one example, a Black woman shared that her director agreed to her French language training, then left for a position in another department. The replacement, a white Quebecoise woman, cancelled her language training as soon as she arrived. Similar to the previous example, the new Quebecoise director personalized her explanation, stating that she “learned English on her own by reading in English and sleeping with Anglophone men,” thereby suggesting that the Black woman should do the same to learn French at no expense to the department. Similar to the previous example, this Black female executive experienced career stagnation of 10 years at the EX minus 1 level. As one senior executive, who spoke of numerous instances of insubordination from white Quebecoise subordinates, summarized, “I have been very, very cautious about white Quebecoise women from the rural areas because I have had the most difficult time over my career with these women.”

Career barrier #5: Unjust and excessive workloads



What I did was not human. In one department, I created an entire program in eight weeks. In another, we had ten pieces of legislation in one year.

Thirty percent (30%) of executives reported this trend. **Of those reporting, 87% were women.** This pattern deserves care in description and quantification because the notion of “excessive work” may be

dismissed, by some, as subjective or arbitrary. Indeed, some executives shared narratives of working long, off-the-clock hours to complete important, time-sensitive tasks and projects that are normative to an executive role. For example, an executive shared a story of spearheading an



ambitious, large-scale project that normally takes two years to complete. Working closely with their deputy minister, the young executive mapped out a condensed 100-day plan and met all of the project's targets. This kind of project is laborious, but is understood 'within the scope' of executive work expectations from time to time.

However, during the interviews, a distinct and concerning pattern emerged. Many executives described times during their careers when they were given unjust and excessive workloads – commonly during career-stagnating acting assignments – and as a result, both their career and health suffered. Importantly, all of these participants took great care to detail the differential treatment they received, compared to non-Black colleagues who were similarly situated. As one common example, Black women detailed a pattern of shouldering additional, out-of-scope work responsibilities in acting positions that became two or three positions after they departed their role. Despite raising concerns regarding unjust workloads, their complaints were dismissed. Participants were also given large assignments without explanation or guidance, then punished when assignments were completed imperfectly.

"Excessive" was quantified by Black executives in the following ways:

- "In my previous unit, I was replaced by 4 EX-01s."
- "I was acting and doing two additional jobs over four months."
- "I was covering six different EX positions over a year."
- "As an acting EX-01, I was on a project that had three separate jobs."
- "Last year, I was covering six EX positions. It gave me a break down."
- "Out of six EX-02s, I have, by far, the biggest portfolio and the most diverse files."
- "During the pandemic, I managed six different programs while my white colleagues had one each."
- "I moved to the department, where I was an EX-01 managing 11 programs. Every other region had two or three EX-01s managing the same workload."
- "During my career, I have worked in positions where, after I leave, it is two or three people who replace me."
- "Over four years in the job, it just got bigger and bigger. It did not matter when I spoke up. They knew I was done when I went on leave. As soon as I left, they decided to break the position into two jobs."
- "My supervisor made me feel incompetent. I worked from 8 am to midnight daily."
- "I was working 8 am - 9 pm every day for three years and commuting between cities on the weekend."

As a result of excessive workloads of “two or three jobs,” Black executives explained how they suffered lowered performance assessment ratings, great mental and physical health deterioration, and retribution by managers for perceived “poor performance.” One executive, a career public servant nearing retirement, captured the profound impact that unjust labour demands had on their mental health and self-esteem early in their career, where they worked as one of the only Black employees in their department. Their narrative captures the disparate treatment that Black executives both described and quantified in the context of their work assignments, as well as increased hostility they experienced from supervisors related to their excessive workloads:

“On my fourth day on the job, I was asked to write a Treasury Board Submission by my manager.²⁰ I was given the assignment at 4 pm for the next day. I had never done this kind of work before. Still, I spent all night working on it. And of course, what I did was not excellent. But after that, I was ‘written off’ completely with this supervisor. I was given crappy work. I was treated as useless. I was set up to fail. This created a crisis of confidence for me.”

As the executive described, they were “treated as useless” and given unchallenging, laborious work for the next year and a half until they were able to depart for another job opportunity. This same executive shared a similar story that took place later in their career with a supervisor who was “difficult for many people, but especially harsh towards me”; during this time, their performance assessments were negatively impacted. After sharing their career story during our interview in detail, the executive followed up to express the weight of trauma that sharing this memory had evoked years after the experience.

Unjust and excessive workloads: No room for error

Related to the pattern of unjust and excessive labour demands, Black executives also often noted another pattern of differential treatment during interviews: Less margin for error than other colleagues and steeper punishment for normative, good-faith mistakes. Twenty-seven

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Black employees are not forgiven. This is a huge problem in public service.

percent (27%) of all employees shared experiences or observations where mistakes made by Black employees were punished harshly and a different standard of acceptance was applied compared to white employees. This pattern is important because human rights tribunals recognize that differential disciplinary actions, or a deviation from past best practices or policies when dealing with racialized persons signal a heightened scrutiny regarding the presence of racial bias.²¹

Executives described a complex picture of unjust and excessive work responsibilities where they were punished in their performance assessments. One participant described:

“Once they even gave me a bad rating in order to push me out of the department for illegitimate reasons. But the union said, ‘You can’t fault someone for dropping one of 20 balls that are flying while they are acting and doing two additional jobs over four months!’ I grieved the bad rating and won.”

As numerous executives described, mistakes made by Black employees can be career-threatening. One senior leader spoke bluntly: “Mistakes, of course, are made by both, but Black people are simply punished more severely and rated lower than white employees.”





Executives took care to detail instances where they made a mistake and 1) were either refused “the benefit of the doubt” to use the error as a learning opportunity, or 2) were treated disproportionately harshly and punished as a result of their mistakes, as the example citing the Treasury Board submission, above, illustrates. Black executives regularly stated that they felt a standard of perfection “that was only applied to them” – and not to white employees. Black executives, importantly, encountered unforgiving leaders early in their careers and were denied crucial learning opportunities for growth. The same participant above, who was asked to write a Treasury Board submission, was not instructed how to accomplish the task; nor were they instructed after attempting it. In fact, given that it is common knowledge in FPS that such submissions are a complex process that requires weeks or months, the white supervisor’s discriminatory intent is evident. Executives also connected their punishment for mistakes to the detrimental impact on innovation, asking, “How can you innovate without making mistakes?”

Participants described how these experiences diminished their confidence. As one stated, “After my mistake, I set out to change that person’s view of me. So, I spent the next 18 months trying to change their opinion of me. But it was futile: My reputation had been set in my manager’s mind.” This “crisis of confidence” expressed by participants is not confined to pre-EX leadership roles. One stellar senior leader explained the lingering impacts of a career without being afforded “the benefit of the doubt” as a Black public servant. She explained,

“Throughout my career, it was clear that I had little room to make mistakes. If a white colleague did it, it was always ok. Yes, I was encouraged to ask questions, but around the meeting table, my white colleague’s response was always ‘better.’ Now, in my role, I am concerned that I am not commanding presence in the room when I am at the executive table. That is the hardest part – just being in the room – in this leadership role. Now, I often feel like people are defying me.”

This comment is important because Black female executives also frequently discussed working in environments where their authority as a leader was regularly questioned or challenged both by supervisors and subordinates. This is a key finding discussed in the Annex section.

Executives also detailed personal experiences where they noticed that they were treated distinctly and disproportionately for mistakes compared to white employees. One executive stated:

“After I was punished, I watched a white male employee be rewarded for a similar mistake. He was generously allowed to ‘learn from his mistake’ and then was rewarded with a promotion as a result of this ‘learning opportunity’! That is how his promotion was justified and spoken about by senior leadership in the office. The difference was stark.”

Numerous participants noted that, throughout their careers, they had “little room to make mistakes.”

Tellingly, for many leaders, experiencing and witnessing the punishment attached to Black employees' good faith mistakes has directly shaped their personal leadership styles. "As a leader, I empower my team," one said, "and I also give them a safety net when they make mistakes. I expect accountability, but I leave room for mistakes." When describing their leadership development, one participant stressed the importance of errors as integral to the leadership process: "You will be learning, and you will make mistakes. But you have to be allowed to make mistakes in the right environment. And allies and sponsors must make room for it." Another senior leader said, "My team comes first. I try very hard to create an environment where people feel they belong and where they feel they can make a mistake. If you make a mistake, as a leader, I will assume your mistake in good faith." One deputy minister ally spoke openly about this racial differential regarding mistakes and stated that they have learned that "it is better to manage by inspiration than fear. I really do believe that everyone gets a chance to make mistakes."

Black executives who described the disparate punishment they experienced also discussed the negative impacts this had on their well-being. As a scenario that was oft repeated during interviews, the connection between mistakes and workplace reprisal through the complaint process deserves greater attention and detail. The following example illustrates this trend. One Black executive (A) was supporting another Black colleague (B) who was preparing for an upcoming EX-01 competition. A white colleague complained that A was unfairly coaching B, accused A of cheating, and demanded an internal investigation. The investigation concluded that executive A made an innocent mistake in the support process and had no intention to cheat or unfairly advantage B.

Even though executive A was cleared, a second complaint was filed against executive A alleging unethical behaviour within a year. Again, executive A was cleared. Nonetheless, this period created tremendous emotional distress for executive A, which directly led to negative health impacts: increasing chest pain, shortness of breath, depression and anxiety. Eventually, executive A began an antidepressant and took a medical leave due to worsening health impacts that resulted after the complaints. Other Black executives also described the ways that complaints and threats were used to punish them for mistakes. In the course of this Study, an executive reached out to me for support as they were navigating an urgent situation: In their role, they were accused by senior leadership of a serious breach of professional responsibility and threatened with firing. The Black executive – anxious and uncertain where to turn to for support for such a sensitive matter – explained that they had been unfairly accused of wrongdoing and in the context of a good faith mistake, were now fearful that they would lose their job. This situation was greatly compounded by the antiblack harassment this executive had experienced over their long public service career, including witnessing racial harassment that led to the suicide of a Black colleague. As a senior leader, just a few months away from retirement, shared:

"Black employees are simply not forgiven for mistakes. This is huge problem. I had two sponsors who were forgiving in my career, but my supervisors were not. A slight mistake caused a career setback of two or three years, or a mistake could mean you were done for good. There is not enough forgiveness for Black employees, and I have seen this time and time again over my career."



2. CAREER SUPPORTS THAT WORK

Sponsorship and Mentorship

Forty-seven percent of all current executives stated that they had sponsors during their careers. Executives agreed that good sponsors are committed allies who “help propel careers” and those who amplify the accomplishments and strengths of Black talent, especially within their cadre of senior leaders.

Nearly all of the senior-most executives in the Study reported having sponsors at crucial moments during their careers. This group constituted the largest proportion, by level (EX-03 and up, and equivalents), that enumerated the impacts of sponsors during their careers. Their sponsors were overwhelmingly white male deputy ministers and on only a few occasions, Clerks who directly sponsored Black employees.



“

It does not matter if you are number one. You have to have someone who believes in you, opens doors for you. To become an executive, you need a sponsor; you need someone to love you.

Notable during the interviews, were the differing ways that Black executives and white executives described their experiences with sponsorship. Most Black participants described early careers, devoid of sponsors, where they faced workplace harassment and a steep learning curve while independently learning the culture and networks embedded within public service. They also spoke about cultivating relationships and gaining reputational value – slowly, over a period of time – that eventually led to sponsorship.

On the other hand, white executives described the early career mentorship and sponsorship they received from senior white leaders, almost seamlessly. One leader described being given “a lot of runway and freedom” as a junior public servant. “My boss took me to meetings with our ADM, took me traveling with him, and made sure I got lots of exposure,” he said. Throughout his pre-executive career and as a young executive, he was mentored and sponsored by numerous deputy ministers and importantly, entrusted with “high visibility” opportunities. “I got lots of pats on the head, lots of encouragement although I was young. But I was always at the table and very much seen as an ‘up and comer,’” he explained. During the interviews, Black executives frequently spoke of these observed and felt differences earlier in their careers. As one senior Black leader summed up, “There is just a huge, a tremendous disconnect between how white leaders move up in public service and how Black people experience public service.”

The negative career impacts of leaders without ardent sponsors became clear during the interviews. For instance, one senior leader spoke openly about the material consequences of navigating a career without mentors and sponsors, as well as noticing the career variances for those with sponsors:

“Some would say, ‘Apply for this program. I’ll put your name forward.’ But it was passive. For many years, I only had passive support. No one came to me to tell me exactly how to build competencies. When it was review time, I got ‘good job,’ but no one opened doors for me. Only encouragement, but you need to get concrete feedback...I had no mentors, no networks, no sponsors. And I saw repeatedly what was being done with other colleagues who had sponsors: People who once worked for me got ADM jobs.”

This executive connected the absence of sponsors and mentors to the great stagnation that he encountered during his career. Another leader, who experienced consistent workplace harassment over a career, connected the absence of sponsorship to their continuous lack of protection in the workplace. He added, “Those who are the ‘chosen ones’ are groomed very early, and it is clear. These are people - white people - who are given lots of additional help, coaching, and are intentionally placed in positions to grow.”

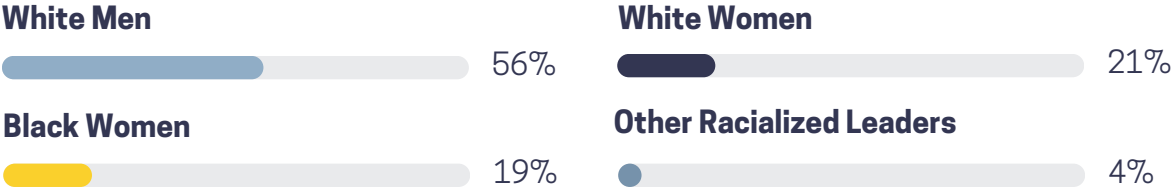
Black executives detailed the key roles of sponsors in the following ways. Sponsors played protective roles for Black executives: They protect, direct, and create new opportunities for Black employees. One Black female executive explained how her white male sponsor “decodes racial violence” in their shared workplace: In a recent meeting, for example, he confronted and chastised another white male colleague who repeatedly interrupted her. Executives also shared times when their sponsors advised them to leave a department or position after recognizing an antiblack pattern of career stagnation and/or discrimination. Black executives repeatedly detailed the ways that sponsors facilitated or created career opportunities for them. One sponsor, a senior deputy minister, worked with another DM to create a position for a Black employee who faced tremendous stagnation over a 20-year career and nonetheless embodied a powerful, influential leadership. Another Black executive shared how his former director pulled him into a manager position, then later offered him his first acting EX-01. “This person still supports me, and he is helpful now as my current DG is putting up roadblocks for me. When you find a good mentor or sponsor, hold onto them,” he stated.

Other executives spoke of how sponsors offered career supports that were not solely position-specific. One Black female executive, for example, shared that her sponsor paid for her graduate studies and master’s degree. Seven (7) participants detailed the ways that chief of staff positions were created with the purpose of providing them with specific career advancing skillsets and then, advancing them into the executive cadre. Sponsors also augmented and amplified Black executives’ reputations by “always talking about them when they are not in the room” with other leaders and key decision makers. In sum, participants explained, sponsors made Black leaders visible in a way that they simply would not otherwise be.

Mentors were described in overlapping, but slightly differing terms by participants. Mentors were often described as early career supporters who “sang the praises” of their mentees, “decoded leadership” so that it was more clearly understood, and helped mentees “understand the public service environment” and “navigate the system.” Mentors, participants agreed, “steer people in the right direction.” One Black female executive explained how her white male mentor once pulled her away from a punitive manager and then “made her report to him directly.”



Regarding sponsors and mentors, 72 were identified by participants during interviews were:



Coaching

Only 28 executives or 42% stated that they have relied on an executive coach during their careers. Only half of the senior most leaders mentioned executive coaching during interviews. Black executives spoke of the importance of Black coaches.

For those with coaches, participants stressed their connection to ensuring the support and well-being of Black executives, especially as they advance up the executive ladder. One senior Black leader stated that “coaches and EAP supports” must always be representative of those they serve. She added,

“If we don’t have representation, then we cannot rely on the processes to support everyone evenly, especially Black and racialized folks and those with unique experiences. We need to make sure that targeted supports are available to ensure consistency in processes for all employees in public service.”



One executive spoke more bluntly: “Black employees need a coach to help them deal with the inherent rigging that exists in the system.”

Coaches served two primary material purposes, as reported by Black executives. First, coaches help Black employees understand and harness leadership qualities, as well as workplace and career strategies. As one example, one executive, who spent large parts of his career without sponsorship or mentorship, shared how his coach helped him sharpen his understanding of the performance assessment process, realize a greater need to initiate expectation conversations with his supervisor, and actualize the value of networking. He explained, “My coach asked me one day what my boss’s assessment of me was. I said, ‘I don’t know.’ And he told me, ‘Well, that is a big problem. If no one knows you, that is a career problem. I thought that was really good, really helpful advice, and that is what I tell the people now I mentor.”

Coaches embodied a second, oft repeated role according to participants: to help executives navigate workplace challenges related to competitions, performance assessments, complaints, and harassment. In sum, coaches help executives strategize and overcome very challenging, health-impacting workplace conflicts. Participants frequently credited coaches with helping them

navigate a situation that they, alone, would not be equipped to handle. As such, they spoke of the value of having coaches with an insider knowledge of public service and lived experience – such as that embodied by former Black executives. As a trend, participants spoke often about using coaches to help them utilize available tools within public service to confront and resolve their workplace challenges. For example, one executive received ratings that dropped significantly from one assessment to the next. Hurt and greatly surprised by this change, the executive said, “I did not expect changes from the two reports, and I felt that the feedback was manufactured.” This executive added:

“My coach had already helped me develop a calm reaction to negative feedback. I was going to be relaxed and communicate that ‘I am receptive to feedback.’ I decided that I was interested in 360-degree feedback. I was asked to provide ten people to give feedback; I found 30! In the end, 17 people responded. The feedback was just the opposite of what I got from my manager.”

With guidance from a coach, this executive also undertook a Hogan Assessment, a comprehensive personality assessment. “I wanted to make my mentors and sponsors as comfortable as possible,” he added. “This assessment tested 11 capabilities, and all of them came back good. I took a risk, and it provided excellent rewards. I felt as though I needed to do this – to take this risk – in order to make my current boss relaxed.”

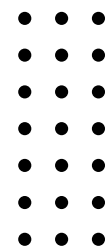
Black women, in particular, detailed the ways that coaches helped them respond to complaints brought against them. One Black female executive, who was recently accused of bullying, credited her coach with helping her keep her “sanity” after she was removed from her acting position during an investigation. She was later cleared. Her coach, who has also supported other Black female executives similarly, advised her to use the legal complaint process to send a strong institutional message to those who “lie and cheat” and weaponize the complaint process against Black women. This coach added,

“The complaints process is just one more tool to cope with the resistance to change inside public service. The system is now seeing us invading their space. People do not want us here, especially not in leadership positions, so they will lie and cheat. And an investigation automatically provides an air of a presumption of wrongdoing.”

In turn, participants shared, these masterful strategists also provide balance and wellness that executives are able to carry into their personal, familial, and intimate relationships outside of work. As one executive, whose partner is also a busy professional, explained, “You need an executive coach to help you in difficult situations in difficult times. You need another voice and someone to talk to, to present your challenges to. Coaching is so important for relationships and marriage. You cannot always have each other. You need other people to talk to.”

Personal resistance strategies

Throughout the interview process, Black executives shared ways that they persisted and succeeded during trying career challenges. Participants spoke often about acquiring strategies to build power and challenge systemic violence and antiblack racism in public service. Key themes entailed challenging performance ratings and complaints directly; challenging exclusion from competitions; understanding and responding to trauma; studying and understanding common Black leadership challenges; and setting clear boundaries in the workplace.



Some Black leaders have become masterful strategists in their quests to survive and thrive in the face of career violence. For example, one Black female executive shared her detailed strategy in response to a vicious, multilateral workplace campaign to remove her from leadership and tarnish her reputation. Her story highlights numerous resistance strategies. She began by explaining the importance of learning clear and early signs of career vulnerability that signal a probable harassment campaign or complaint process. These signs include unilateral decisions by senior leadership and the removal of key responsibilities and tasks, she noted. I asked this leader how she was able to persist during such a difficult career time, and she responded:

"I pick my priorities carefully. First: I have a child, and my child is my top priority. Leadership is always about prioritizing and perspective. I also read a lot about leadership – and I probably read the most about women in leadership. I know exactly what we go through. Another thing: I understand trauma, and I am not using my reptilian, trauma responsive brain anymore as a leader. Finally, our networks matter tremendously. You need likeminded people who you can talk to, and those who will help shape your perspective on where you are and what you are going through."

For this leader, her resistance strategies were both clear and well-worn, as she had harnessed them in the context of prior experiences with workplace violence. Setting firm boundaries and priorities, studying patterns of harassment that impact Black female leaders, and relying on strong networks for decoding and guidance were essential for preserving her wellbeing. As a result, she was able to speak, introspectively, about her integrity and fortitude while an investigation ensued. This clarity provided a psychological shield of protection under duress. She explained, "Look, I have done nothing wrong. I have clean teeth, and my eyes are wide open. If something has been created as a lie, I know that there is nothing there to find."

When questioned about the consequence of lingering reputational harm, she stated that she has support from senior leaders in other departments who are both sponsors and champions. She explained,

"I am moving forward now and out of a contentious position. I believe that others can observe – and they will – but ultimately, they will have to let my track record speak for itself. Right now, I also know that there are deputy ministers who will speak for me, who know my reputation. I have others to vouch for me, as well."



Crucially, this leader emphasized the importance of embodying a trauma-informed approach to self-care while working in public service. As she noted, her refusal to use her “reptilian brain” in a threatening situation not only highlights her knowledge regarding individual flight, fight, freeze, or fawn survival responses under duress, but also illuminates the work she has done to intentionally develop protective trauma-responses to racial violence during her long career in public service. This narrative was an outlier during the interviews.

Leaders also detailed their approaches to challenging the performance assessment process. Of note, Black executives often spoke of challenging ratings they objectively knew were too low. Some verbally communicated their disagreement to their supervisors. For instance, one leader challenged a rating earlier in her career, when her DG gave her a succeeded. She explained,

“I knew I deserved a succeeded plus. So, I challenged her. I asked her to explain why, and I made sure to detail all the work that I did. She acknowledged the work but said that she was ‘tough in her rating.’ She told me that she doesn’t give succeeded plus ratings. In the end, she did not change the rating, but for me, it was an important display of my confidence.”

Others challenged their ratings more formally. As detailed above, participants also requested 360-degree assessments and Hogan Assessments. Another employee shared that she refused to sign her performance assessment because she knew that her rating was objectively unfair, and she had supporting documentation. The outcome, as she explained, was that,

“The director and my manager had to do the meeting with me because my refusal to sign meant that the director would notice, ask questions, and get involved. The director agreed with me, and so my manager had to change the text of my performance assessment – which meant that she was the one embarrassed in front of her boss.”

During interviews, participants communicated differing levels of comfort with direct strategies of resistance, including challenging the complaint process. One leader expressed concerns about the risks of these direct challenges to performance assessment ratings. He explained:

“I have seen white women refuse to sign off on their PMAs, and then they become the ‘problem executive.’ This is the ‘executive that complains’, and it creates an attitude that works against them. This becomes their reputation. I want to be careful with this strategy for Black employees.”

Yet, most participants viewed this form of resistance as important self-advocacy because antiblack racism in public service, they noted, is “like the mythical Hydra of Lerna creature in Greek mythology” – multifaceted, persistent, and highly adaptable. “You have already been blackballed or labeled in your position, at other times during your career,” one executive explained. Challenging ratings legitimately, he added, is an opportunity to get at “what is really the ‘elephant in the room’ – which is, bias or racism. There is also an opportunity to discuss one’s career in general. What can I do at this stage to improve? That is the real issue. And by challenging, you get them to set the table and standard for improvement.” One Black female executive, currently under investigation, shared why she is speaking out about the ways complaints are used to harass Black women in leadership positions. She said, boldly:

“If I don’t use my position and voice to alert the system of what is going on, then am I really being a responsible executive to the public service? And am I showing my commitment to racialized and Indigenous people – as I have touted during my entire career? No. And you know, I just cannot live with that. But I also know that everyone cannot do what I am doing.”



Another executive noted a trend of using complaints to harass and defame Black leaders, which is discussed at length in the Annex section. This trend, he noted, has been especially utilized against Black female executives. He expressed a need for a more direct approach for responding to complaints – “blunt instruments” that counter the abusive use of complaints. He insisted:

“The use of complaints is intentional. If an investigation does not pan out, then you can sue for defamation – for all the money you would lose until retirement. Then you can negotiate. Then you can settle. You can insist that your file is cleared. You set the terms that you want. The system is not designed to help you as an executive, and it will only stop if Black executives sue individuals one by one.”

Finally, Black female executives spoke about the importance of setting clear boundaries in the workplace and unlearning the myth of working “twice as hard,” to obtain “half as good” validation and acknowledgements from white leaders. “For years earlier in my career, I had few boundaries in terms of what to deal within the workplace,” one female executive shared. “In the face of violence or dysfunction, I felt a need to stay and prove myself, and that was wrong. I have had a real evolution in confidence,” she added. Other women shared how they learned to find greater balance and support as working mothers. “As I grew closer to a senior white colleague, I learned that she had a nanny! I had not even considered that before. I also learned how to set boundaries and also how to be efficient – not just hard working.” Leaders spoke of the importance of boundary-building within their teams, as well. One mid-career executive described how her boundaries foster her leadership style, as well as provide a buffer against the harms that Black female leaders often experience. She explained,

“As a leader, I have an open-door policy for my team because I have often felt that leaders were not accessible to me during my career. When my door is closed, my admin team determines who comes in. They form a boundary around me. I lead this way because people will be disrespectful: I am not only a Black woman, but I also look very young.”

Many participants spoke about the ‘myth of merit’ and how this belief directly impacted their sense of self, value system, and commitment to self-advocacy. As one senior leader stated,

“For a long time as a public servant, I did not advocate for myself. I believed, mistakenly, that the value of my hard work would speak for itself. I was raised with a ‘twice as hard’ work ethic, but school and parents are not the public service workplace. Merit was believed by me, until it wasn’t.”

Leadership styles and authenticity

Two patterns arose in response to the question, “What kind of leader are you?” during the Study. First, participants described their leadership values in an uncannily similar fashion and often spoke about the ways that negative experiences with leaders, contrastingly shaped their personal value systems. They also articulated leadership values centered on trust-building, transparency, affirmation, safety, and sponsorship. They spoke confidently about the strengths and talents they offer to public service. As a sampling, Black executives self-described in the following ways:

“

I’m trying to be a good ancestor

- “I open doors.”
- “I affirm and encourage people.”
- “I am a coach—I believe in the power of words and affirmation.”
- “I am always going to empower my team and give them a safety net when they make mistakes.”
- “I am a visionary.”
- “I am humble.”
- “I never think I am the smartest person in the room.”

Secondly, participants connected their leadership values to their cultural and familial upbringing. They also described these two patterns of values as integral to their resilience in public service. One Haitian leader powerfully described the thread running between her familial ethics and her leadership ethics:

“As children, we were taught that we are worth something, that we are entrusted with talent, and the knowledge to do good. When I was young, we traveled across Canada in our station wagon to Vancouver and to the Maritimes. That instilled in us an openness to others and also a knowledge of who you are. So I have always had that, but also confidence and knowing not to settle for less, and having a sense of when you are being taken advantage of. As a girl, I was taught to be curious and to look for information. All of these things have served me well as a leader.”

One participant, a lawyer, spoke about the indelible quality of fairness she acquired from her West Indian parents. “I have trouble letting things go if something is unfair. I did not learn that from examples during my career as a lawyer; I learned that from my parents,” she said. Participants also spoke of their leadership values as a code of honor. After one leader’s parents died, it made him “want to live as authentically as I could.” He added, “It is my way of honoring them; it is also an expression of pride in where I come from.” For this leader, honoring his parents has also meant making intentional career decisions and rejecting advancement opportunities that are not aligned with his value system. Transparently, he explained how this has slowed his career progression, as well:

“I could adapt more, but public service already has a culture that is the norm for all Canadians. It is the norm for white Canadians, especially those who are upper middle class and upper class. Public service has to adapt to build the future. We have to change the environment. It cannot be Black people coming into public service and us changing to fit into the system.”



3. CHALLENGES TO CURRENT LEADERSHIP

During interviews, Black executives spoke about career challenges, as well as current challenges to their leadership. Patterns emerged in four main categories: glass cliff and glass ceiling concerns; a lack of sponsorship/mentorship; the need for coaching; and challenges specific to Black female leaders. Much of the details for these categories has been substantiated above, so this section is more succinct than others to avoid repetition.

Glass cliff and glass ceiling / constrained leadership

The majority of the senior most Black executives reported challenges with the exercise of their current leadership. Together, these leaders shared disappointment with the constraints and experiences of the glass ceiling and glass cliff. For Black women, an increased use of complaints, grievances, and workplace investigations signals a glass cliff strategy that is directly and uniquely harming their leadership. This issue is detailed in the Annex section.

Some Black male leaders were vocal about not remaining in their positions much longer. For example, two Black male executives who faced great career barriers and long periods of stagnation provided precise retirement dates during our interviews. Similarly, they expressed a tenacity and “stubbornness” that caused them to accept their positions after the CTA, rather than retire, as they had previously planned. Another executive took care to explain the limitations placed on his leadership in his department:

“I have always moved up in my career, but now I am seeing the glass ceiling. I loved it when I was learning new things and when I was allowed to be creative, innovative, and an entrepreneur within public service. That is how I made my career! But this has changed; I cannot be this way now. Now, I am tethered to bureaucracy and small ‘p’ politics.”

This same leader, who has consistently received surpassed ratings, expressed disappointment and explained why he is now seeking opportunities in the private sector:

“Look, I know that there are not many of us at this level. But I recently had a conversation with a department for an opportunity and then was met with radio silence. That has been very disappointing. In the private sector, you can obtain new skills sets, new opportunities, and there is not the same insular reliance on relationships. My skills are suited to the private sector. I have had a great time here. The opportunities I got were intense, crazy, suicidal. But I got them all done. There is absolutely no reason that I should be limited now.”

Other senior leaders discussed how the networks they had built over time also proved fallible during times of personal crisis. One said, “How do you create a sense of belonging for all, for everyone? This is my big challenge. Recently, during a period of difficulty, I thought I was safe with a colleague even though we had drinks. But I still encountered betrayal.”

Black executives expressed surprise at their inability to transcend racial hostilities in senior leadership positions:

“You have a generation of leaders in public service who grew up with leadership without impunity—completely without impunity. I made a big mistake in thinking that when I became an ADM, I would be free of some of the systemic forces against me as a Black person. But the same hierarchy at the top exists. I am not as welcome as I thought I would be here.”

One woman shared how she has studied other Black women turning down “fast-track opportunities” and promotions since the CTA, and she continues to reflect on this trend. She said:

“There is still not a mature enough conversation about race to help all employees when Black people move into these leadership roles. ‘Why would I do this to myself?’ was my initial thought. My value cannot be about living in your space and feeling unvalued. Now I wonder how we sustain a desire to do this leadership work. I notice that some of us are already self-selecting out of leadership roles.”

Another career public servant, gingerly but honestly, expressed the ongoing constraints she experiences currently in her leadership role:

“A lot of us who succeed are exceedingly solid and excellent – ‘tall poppies’ –, those who are ascending high and those who people try to cut down. That is because Black people can be and are exceptional at what they do – but the team may not be fully behind them. This is one of the challenges we face as leaders and do not fully know how to support.”

Other Black women also referred to the “tall poppy syndrome” – the disdain for high achieving, successful women – and described its impacts on their leadership.²²

Senior leaders also reflected on the ways that public service impacts Black men’s and Black women’s experiences differently. One leader detailed:

“The environment does not allow us to thrive. Is it the same for Black men and Black women? There are so many tropes of aggression and culpability with Black men, that I think it makes it harder for them to ascend in public service. Fear uniquely drives attitudes towards Black men, I think. Our challenges are different, but I feel that as a basic principle, people are insecure about their physical safety in the presence of Black men.”

Another male leader also reflected on the gendered differences of antiblack racism in public service. He said, “I believe that, generally, Black women are seen as less threatening than Black men in the workplace.” Another added that “Black males code-switch often and soften their approach because they are subjected to worse stereotyping and microaggressions” than Black women, but qualified, “in my region, Black males are better received than females.” Leaders also noted that Black men from Africa “take longer to get promoted despite significant levels of education and experience.”

Lack of sponsorship / mentorship

While an interview question about career supports was asked directly, only 47% of executives stated that they had sponsors during their careers. Only 50% of the senior most leaders in the Study mentioned coaching during interviews.

Executives with sponsors spoke repeatedly of the danger of isolation and “not being known.” “Not being known,” as aforementioned, had direct and negative impacts on career advancement and performance assessment ratings. The data regarding sponsorship in the Study evidences that executives with powerful sponsors are ardently supported through career challenges and advancements. Sponsors, as numerous leaders noted, believe in Black leaders when labour management and performance assessment difficulties ensue, and in these particular moments,

sponsors amplify their confidence and trust in them. Sponsors can provide a counternarrative to antiblack racial violence, too: As one Black female executive who recently departed a contentious workplace shared, she was confident and decisive not only because she was certain of her own integrity, but also because she had “deputy ministers who knew what was happening and would speak on my behalf....You are not a leader without people seeing you and speaking on behalf of you.”

At times, sponsors also advised participants to leave untenable positions. At other times, they create opportunities for advancement or create positions for undervalued Black leaders. The “insular reliance on relationships” that is definitive of public service is key to understanding the importance of sponsorship for Black leaders. As one Black executive aptly summarized, “You have to have someone who believes in you, opens doors for you. To become an executive, you need a sponsor; you need someone to love you.”

Lack of coaching

Only 42% of executives stated that they have relied on an executive coach during their careers. Yet, participants described the right coaches as adept emotional and psychological supports and masterful strategists, both with respect to navigating career opportunities and workplace conflicts. Executives who shared that they were navigating workplace conflicts at the time of Study, detailed the value of their coaches and their willingness “to take a call, anytime, day or night.” Two Black female executives, also engaged in recent conflicts, shared how their coaches’ strategies regarding complaints helped them find resolution and also protect their reputation. In one case, the coach supported an executive through a contentious strategy that introduced defamation litigation as a response to workplace harassment – one that she would not have considered without the coach’s savvy and breadth of experience. Coaches, as one executive powerfully summarized, also teach the power of self-actualization: “I too am a coach,” the executive said. “As a leader, I believe in the power of words and affirmation. I deeply believe in this; I want to make people believe that they can be great and do excellent work. I give good advice, and I provide opportunities.”



Challenges to Black women's leadership

Throughout the interview process, clear trends arose as Black female executives spoke about entering the executive cadre and senior leadership positions. To be certain, both Black men and women took care to detail the great impacts of career barriers on their well-being, and **every single participant shared experiences with harassment or racist mistreatment during their careers.**

Yet, Black women captured the desperate, dehumanizing conditions that often exist in their workplaces. These experiences were shared disproportionately during the interviews:

- 47%: 20 of 43 Black female executives reported disrespect, insubordination, refusal of supervision by subordinates, as well as a diminishment of voice and power from colleagues.
 - Amongst the senior most Black female executives who participated in the Study, the results are particularly disturbing: 82% detailed these current challenges.
- 28%: Of 43 female participants in the Study, twelve (12) reported recent or ongoing labour management issues that involved complaints, individual investigations, or workplace investigations. Two Black men mentioned the same.

Importantly, in all cases, the actions were initiated in the context of leaders' normative responsibilities, and leaders were either cleared of wrongdoing or in one instance, accepted a promotion to another department given an irreparable, poisoned work environment. Black women were accused of harassment and violence, illegal or unethical behaviour, and poor leadership for speaking up and challenging clear instances of wrongdoing or discrimination. In at least four cases, Black women were punished for minor, non-material mistakes.

Within this pattern, common stereotypes regarding Black women are illuminated: the belief that Black women are inherently dishonest and violent and thus, incapable of sound leadership.²³ Additionally, the glass cliff was a noted pattern: Black women reported being recruited into leadership positions on the heels of the CTA, thrust into historically challenging or fraught roles, and hired, specifically at times of departmental fragility or large culture change initiatives. Within a short time, these Black female leaders then became the loci of blame or dysfunction, rather than the organization, events that preceded their leadership, or toxic colleagues.

Finally, Black female executives reported suicidal ideations as a result of severe, uninterrupted and at times, repeated workplace harassment. For these participants, feelings of inescapable desperation arose when they were accused, unfairly treated, disbelieved, and then punished regardless of their responses and denials to complaints.²⁴ In a number of instances, Black women described the tremendous burden of facing multiple complaints that, nonetheless, cast doubt on their integrity and minimized their work capacities during an investigation. Crucially, Black women detailed workplace conflicts so severe that they led to chronic depression, the use of antidepressant medications, and suicide attempts. During the interview process, four (4) Black women shared that they attempted suicide as a result of workplace harassment in public service. One Black female executive also shared that she had attempted to take her life twice.



The unique challenges faced by Black female employees and leaders in public service will be detailed in a separate study (see Annex).

A NOTE ON DATA CHALLENGES:

Throughout the completion of this Study, it became clear that tremendous gaps exist in the collection and reporting of data throughout FPS. In sum, as I began identifying data patterns, it was evident that public service data regarding harassment, career stagnation, complaints, and investigations is not collected and shared in a way that is useful for identifying disproportionalities for Black and racialized public servants. One of the most useful – and accountability-facing – documents regarding misconduct and wrongdoing, complaints, and investigations is published by Global Affairs Canada (GAC):²⁵ Combined with disaggregated and intersectional data regarding race, “Addressing Misconduct and Wrongdoing at Global Affairs Canada: Second Annual Report” offers a solid model for all departments in FPS.

ANNEX

DISPROPORTIONATE DISCIPLINARY MEASURES FACING BLACK EXECUTIVES

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

While undertaking 63 interviews with current Black executives (Phase 1), a concerning trend surfaced. During these interviews, nearly 30% reported recent or ongoing labour management issues that involved formal and informal complaints, individual investigations, grievances, or workplace investigations. Executives stressed the tremendous personal tolls of these processes on their lives, their detrimental impacts on their career progression, and the fact that they had been subject to lengthy investigations that were ultimately deemed to be unfounded. Crucially, Black executives described a procedural mechanism that they understood was being used, inversely, as an apparatus to enact discrimination and harassment.

During the Phase 1 interviews, Black female executives reported being impacted by these measures more frequently than Black male executives, and both groups detailed the extreme physical and mental health distress they caused. These impacts included depression, diagnoses of diabetes, elevated blood pressure, and suicidal ideations. During an interview, a Black female executive began detailing her formal complaint experience and investigation, pausing to describe the way she had been “treated like a criminal” when she was investigated for fraud. She explained how, during the process, she “fell sick and was hospitalized” at the same time that she had a disabled child at home to care for. She then made plain the depths of her anguish: “During this time, I tried to commit suicide twice,” she said. Over the next few months, three more Black female executives shared experiences with workplace harassment so grave and demoralizing that they, too, had contemplated or attempted suicide. Of the 14 executives who shared their experiences with labour management issues during Phase 1, 12 were women – thus signaling a doubly disproportionate impact on the lives and careers of Black female executives.



As participants detailed during Phase 1, formal complaint processes entailed the use of Bill C-65 procedures, also known as the “Workplace Harassment and Violence Prevention Regulations,” under the Canada Labour Code, grievances, as well as formal workplace investigations led by both external and internal investigators.²⁶ Informal complaints included verbal and written complaints to ombuds; the use of effective ‘whisper campaigns’ alleging wrongdoing initiated by both superiors and subordinates; verbal and written complaints to an executive’s supervisor or senior-most leader in the organization; and informal complaints made by supervisors about an executive’s performance as a pretext to encourage one to resign or leave a department. Importantly, Black executives during Phase 1 described the ways that workplace investigations had been commonly used as a pretext for individual investigations of Black executives that would be otherwise hard or impossible to substantiate under C-65 processes – or that at the onset, may signal a discriminatory intent.

At the conclusion of Phase 1 interviews and reporting, a general call-out was made through BEN/REN’s public service-wide network to solicit executives who believed they may have “experienced unfair, biased, and/or racially targeted disciplinary actions within the context of labour relations, human resources, and other departmental grievance processes.” The goals for this additional research were: to gain a better picture of how disciplinary actions are being used against Black executives; to ascertain if there is a racial and gender disproportionality compared to available FPS data; to track the outcomes of these processes; and to document the career and health impacts of these processes on Black executives. Although this additional study was initially capped at 20, all respondents who wanted to share their experiences were interviewed. For Phase 2, 26 Black executives were interviewed with attention to labour management issues they experienced once they entered the executive cadre. As the Study was being finalized, ten other executives, who had heard about the study through ‘word of mouth,’ contacted the researcher directly and requested interviews. Four additional interviews were performed; the data is included in the Study for qualitative purposes only. Notably, three of these executives are Francophones.

DEMOGRAPHICS OF PARTICIPANTS

Similar to the demographic make-up of the original Black executive sample in Phase 1, all levels of executives were represented and divided amongst the 26-person sample for Phase 2. Ten participants were EX-1s. Linguistically, the sample was also evenly divided. Thirteen executives were first-language French speakers (Francophone). Thirteen identified as Anglophone. African-Canadian executives (born in Africa) made up the largest category who shared their experiences with targeted complaints, and the majority of these African-Canadian executives (6) were Francophone. Seven participants were Haitian. Eight Black executives identified culturally with the Anglophone Caribbean, and one identified as Black Canadian, with multi-generational ancestry from one of Canada’s historic Black communities.

One of the first striking results from this research is the large number of Black female executives who reported experiencing targeted disciplinary actions: While six men responded to the initial call out and were interviewed, 20 women initially responded. This finding is consistent with the trend identified within the larger, 63-person sample (Phase 1), and it evidences a previously undocumented discriminatory strategy that is negatively impacting Black women’s leadership in FPS. Recent studies focused on Black women leaders also support these findings. For example, a recent large-scale study found that Black female professionals “receive less support and

encouragement from their managers” than white women and other women of colour and are the least likely of all groups of women to be offered or supported in career-advancing opportunities.²⁷ Another recent, targeted study that examined the experiences of Black female leaders in public service concluded, bluntly, that “formal human resource processes and protections often do not work for Black women.”²⁸ These two main findings also surfaced during Phase 2.

While Black female executives made up 77% of participants during the Phase 2 interviews, the smaller number of male participants does not allow for the conclusion that Black male executives do not also suffer widely from discriminatory targeted complaints. Black men make up 42% of all Black executives in FPS, and as their interviews attest, their experiences navigating complaint processes are no less violent, destabilizing, or traumatic. Additionally, given the cultural and gendered attitudinal differences regarding therapy – or spaces perceived as therapeutic, such as the interview format for this Study –, it is important to avoid the immediate conclusion that Black male executives are less impacted, psychologically or numerically, by formal and informal complaint processes than Black female executives in FPS. In sum, more targeted research is needed on the Black male executive community to determine whether larger numbers of Black men are also being impacted by targeted complaint processes.

METHODOLOGY

Similar to Phase 1, Phase 2 research employed purposeful sampling to target Black executives with diverse backgrounds, locations, and career levels, ensuring a representative sample of the total demographic. Phase 2 invited Black employees holding executive positions at all levels; ensured gender parity in interview design; and invited and designed interviews for first language French speakers in order to meet official language inclusion standards. Specifically, the research targeted Black executives who had experienced disciplinary actions. The following information was included as part of the invitation sent to BEN/REN members:

“As part of this study, we are seeking to examine situations where Black EXs experienced unfair, biased, and/or racially targeted disciplinary actions within the context of labour relations, human resources, and other departmental grievance processes. Our reasoning for this additional work is based on the fact that over the last year, BEN/REN has recognized a rise of these discriminatory tactics being used against Black EXs, in particular Black Female EXs which can negatively impact our careers, damage reputations, and erode confidence in our own abilities and contributions, thus resulting in situations of isolation, stress, anxiety, and depression.”

During interviews, the following questions were presented to all participants:

1. Could you tell me your current position and level?
2. As part of this study, I am seeking to examine situations where Black executives experienced unfair, biased, and/or racially targeted disciplinary actions within the context of labour relations, human resources, and other departmental grievance processes. Could you tell me about a time when you experienced something like this?
3. What support did you have, and how did you respond?
4. Could you tell me about the impacts this experience had on your health and well-being?

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- **100%**: While six Black female executives have investigations that were ongoing at the time of their interview, the completed formal and informal investigations have concluded all allegations unfounded for all Black male and female executives.

- **77%**: Black women made up 77% of all participants during the Phase 2 interviews.

- **50%**: Of the 20 women interviewed during Phase 2, 10 reported recent or ongoing formal investigations. Of this group, seven also reported experiences with informal complaints as executives. The remaining 10 female executives had complaints made against them with ombuds or through other informal complaint mechanisms in the workplace.

- Two Black male executives reported being subject to formal investigations. These men were also subject to informal complaints as executives.
- Four Black male executives reported that complaints were made against them with ombuds or through other informal complaint mechanisms in the workplace.

- **48%** of all Black female executives interviewed for the “Study on the Black Executive Community in Federal Public Service” (Phases 1 and 2) described experiences with unfair, biased, and/or racially targeted disciplinary actions as part of informal or formal complaint processes.²⁹

- **50%** of those who experienced targeted complaints or disciplinary actions were Francophone.

- **39%**: Black executives of African descent (10) made up the largest cultural share of the 26 participants who shared their experiences with recent or ongoing complaint processes at work.

- **35%** of all Black female executives stated that complaints were brought by white Quebecois colleagues, managers, or senior leaders. In two examples of very disturbing, persistent harassment, Quebecois senior leaders worked with other Quebecois colleagues to diminish and push Black female executives out of their positions.

- Both Black male executives who shared experiences with formal complaints also detailed racially-targeted processes initiated and led by Quebecois colleagues.

- **30%**: Of the 20 women interviewed in this secondary study, 30% have been removed from their positions to work at home on “special project assignments,” including in instances when formal C-65 procedures were not followed.

- Both men who received formal complaints were removed from their positions to work at home on “special project assignments” during investigations.

- **27%**: Haitian female executives (7) made up a large share, culturally, of the 26 participants who shared their experiences with recent or ongoing complaint processes at work, and in fact, made up the largest cultural group of Black female executives impacted.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

BLACK EXECUTIVES OFTEN ENCOUNTER RACIALLY TARGETED COMPLAINTS

Nearly 50% of all Black female executives interviewed for the “Study on the Black Executive Community in Federal Public Service” (Phase 1 and 2) reported unfair, biased, and/or racially targeted disciplinary actions as part of informal or formal complaints processes. Again, formal complaint processes entail the use of Bill C-65 procedures established under the Canada Labour Code, grievances, as well as formal workplace investigations. Informal complaints that participants described included verbal and written complaints to ombuds; the use of effective ‘whisper campaigns’ alleging executive wrongdoing initiated by both superiors and subordinates; verbal and written complaints to an executive’s supervisor or senior most leader in the organization; and informal complaints made by a supervisor about an executive’s performance as a pretext to encourage one to resign or leave a department. Importantly, during Phase 2, seven Black female executives reported experiences with both formal and informal complaint processes during their executive careers. As one participant described when targeted by multiple colleagues after serving as an executive for a number of years, “I was much better prepared this time. It was not my first rodeo.”

In Phase 2, two Black male executives reported being subject to formal investigations. These men were also subject to informal complaints as executives. Four Black male executives reported that complaints were made against them with ombuds or through other informal complaint mechanisms in the workplace.

FORMAL COMPLAINTS

Of the 20 women interviewed in Phase 2, 10 reported recent or ongoing formal investigations. The complaint allegations dominantly fall into two areas: harassment and bullying, or Code of Values and Ethics breaches. A third pattern reveals the “glass cliff” dynamic, where Black female executives are placed in positions with sector dysfunction, and their ameliorative changes are punished under the pretense of wrongdoing or harm.

Harassment and bullying

Six Black women were accused of harassment and/or bullying. These complaints describe Black female leaders’ behaviour as intentionally “violent,” “rude,” “intimidating,” and “degrading” – adjectives describing a well-worn stereotypical trope that Black women have historically faced in Canada, as well as in the workplace.³⁰ A number of Black female executives were accused of harassment or bullying after they raised their voices in a conversation or meeting. As one woman described,

“I was accused of attacking employees, yelling, and undermining them – and that it was done on purpose, intentional harm. I was accused of undermining the leadership and decision making of others. I was accused of being passive aggressive, two-faced. Being hysterical – not just speaking in a loud voice but behaving in a hysterical manner.”

“

The complaints process is just one more tool to cope with the resistance to change inside of public service. The system is now seeing us invading their space. And people do not want us here, especially not in leadership positions. So, they will happily lie and cheat. And an investigation automatically provides an air of a presumption of wrongdoing

- Former Black executive

Similar to a common challenge shared by other Black female leaders, one leader described a situation where she confronted an employee's ongoing insubordination. In a meeting, this employee "became combative and would repeatedly yell over me" despite the leader's attempts to quell his anger and redirect the meeting agenda. "Repeatedly," she explained, "I had to ask to speak at the meeting." After a few failed attempts, she finally raised her voice over his. For this, she was accused of bullying by the subordinate and removed from her position for months. She was later cleared of all wrongdoing.

Another Black female leader was chastised for raising her voice during a meeting with her supervisor. The complaint is notable given its length and close attention to the Black woman's body language and tone. As the complainant described, the Black leader's tone was not "respectful of authority." Again, through the use of well-worn stereotypes, the Black leader was accused of being "disrespectful," "combative," "reacting poorly" to feedback, and having "a bad attitude," despite receiving accolades from the complainant just a few months earlier.

Another example illuminates the workplace surveillance that Black female leaders regularly encounter. A Black female leader, through a repetitive complaint dozens of pages long, was accused of harassment, bullying, and discrimination. Again, the accuser described the Black female executive's behaviour in stereotypical terms: "rude," "angry," "intimidating," "retaliatory," "degrading," "aggressive," and "passive aggressive." Notably, the complaint reads as a close surveillance of the executive's leadership behaviour, with dozens of 'substantiating examples' that fall squarely within the leader's authority and normative managerial functions. The complaint against the Black female executive also repeats another antiblack trope throughout: The complainant describes the leader as distrustful, given the "power and influence" the leader has over the complaint's career, and states that the leader "intentionally means me harm." The complainant added that they believe their "health and safety are at risk" due to the leader's "harmful" everyday behaviours.



“

White employees do not bring complaints against white executives as a common practice. Over the last two and a half decades, I have not seen this. But I have been subject to this by a subordinate: It was a young white girl. She complained that I became an executive because I am Black.

- Current Black executive

The problem of insubordination

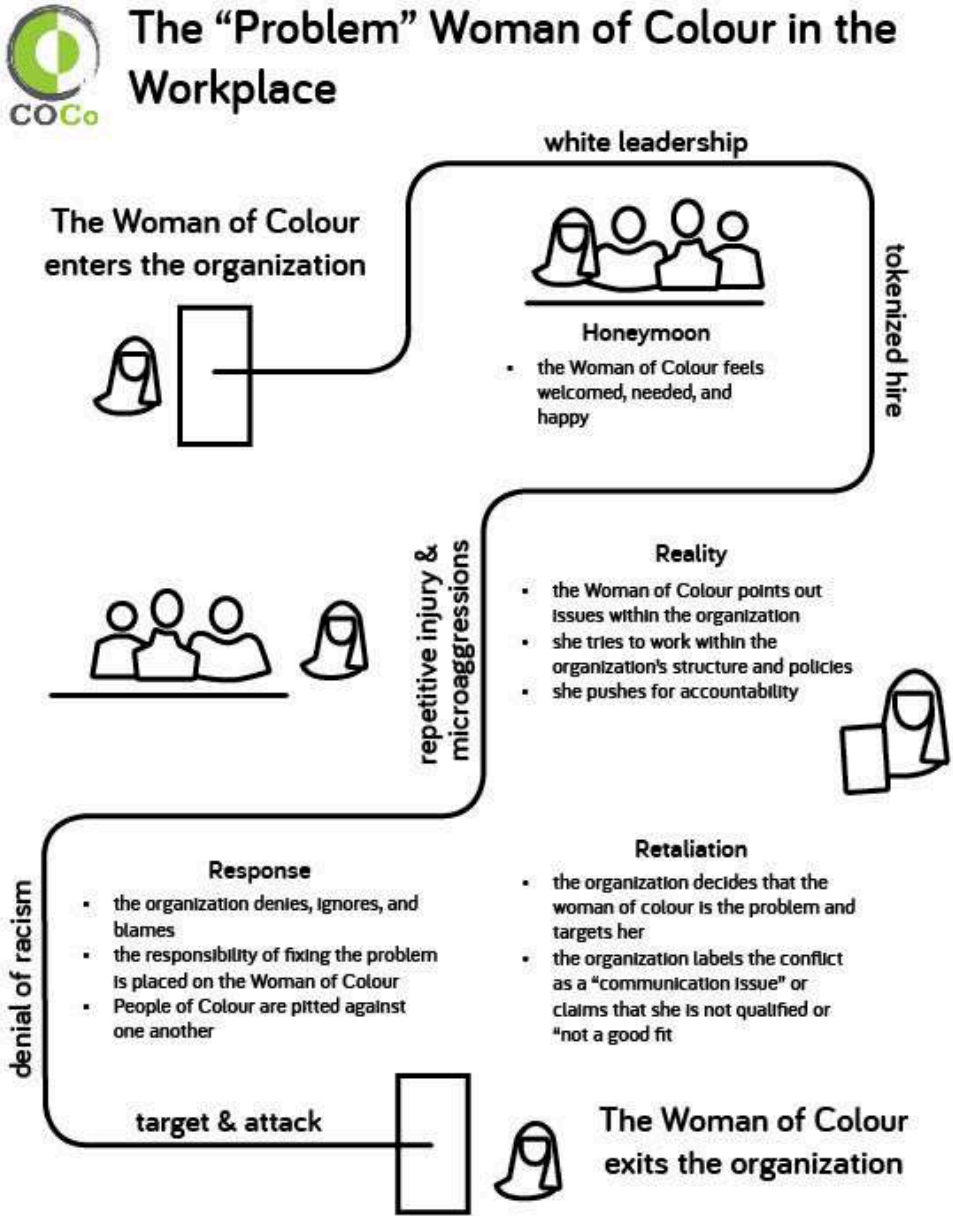
A common theme shared by nearly all Black female leaders who were interviewed, including senior executives, is the tone of disrespect and persistent challenge of insubordination they regularly experience from colleagues and subordinates. In sum, Black female leaders were the only group to express these challenges as normative to their leadership experiences, at all levels, within a hierarchical government system where such behaviours from subordinates is

significantly less common with white executives. As one Black executive explained, "White employees do not bring complaints against white executives as a common practice. Over the last two and a half decades, I have not seen this." Crucially, Black executives also reported these

experiences in departments where a rank-based hierarchy, centralized leadership, strict code of conduct, and chain of command function as institutional norms. In these environments, Black executives described a racially targeted breakdown in these institutional norms.

Navigating the “glass cliff”

The “glass cliff” dynamic was also described by Black female leaders who received formal complaints.³¹ This dynamic is detailed in the chart below, modified to a Canadian context, by an organization in Montreal, COCo: The Centre for Community Organizations.



Adapted from “The Chronicle of the Problem Woman of Color in a Non-Profit” by the Safehouse Progressive Alliance for Nonviolence
www.coco-net.org

Black female leaders reported how they entered executive positions where organizational irregularities and/or resistant/resentful teams met their arrival. Notably, 12 women out of 20 shared that they arrived to supervise teams that immediately questioned their job qualifications or relevance as departmental outsiders. In all cases, Black women detailed how they recognized these challenges soon after their arrival, but believed they had leadership skills – honed over long public service careers and acquired through previous, challenging workplace dynamics – that would mitigate these dynamics. In one case, a Black female leader, quickly noted departmental irregularities pertaining to hiring, merit, and performance. When she properly removed an employee from their position – an employee favored by other senior leaders in the organization – she quickly became a target of both informal and formal complaints.

Black executives also described consulting with human resources, labour relations, and senior leaders for advice before addressing employee insubordination or drafting letters of expectation. However, these measures did not protect Black leaders from retaliation, complaints, and grievances. As a recent study on Black female executives in public service concluded, “formal human resources and processes often do not work for Black women.”³² The study specifically added that Black female leaders in public service described how “they were the target of complaints” when they addressed employees’ poor behaviour. The study also noted how Black women “did not experience the same level of protection afforded to their subordinates and, in some cases, the same subordinates who were targeting them.”³³ In one instance, a Black executive obtained advice and a letter from labour relations before addressing an employee’s request to work from home. When the employee’s request was denied, the employee prepared a Notice of Occurrence for harassment, and the executive was removed for a year and a half during the investigation.

MOBBING

Another related dynamic regularly described by Black female leaders in relation to their complaint experiences, was mobbing.³⁴ In all, 12 Black female leaders out of 20 described targeted complaints, both formal and informal, that involved mobbing. “Mobbing” is a severe workplace dynamic that is distinct from harassment or bullying. As scholars describe,

“The mobbing syndrome is a malicious attempt to force a person out of the workplace through unjustified accusations, humiliation, general harassment, emotional abuse, and/or terror. It is a ‘ganging up’ by the leader(s)—organization, superior, co-worker, or subordinate—who rallies others into systematic and frequent ‘mob-like’ behaviour. Because the organization ignores, condones, or even instigates the behaviour, it can be said that the victim, seemingly helpless against the powerful and many, is indeed ‘mobbed.’ The result is always injury—physical or mental distress or illness and social misery and, most often, expulsion from the workplace.”³⁵

Importantly, a key goal of mobbing behaviour is the removal of a person from their position and workplace:

“Instead of dealing with the situation as workplace bullying, as might be expected...the organization tends to join in with the perpetrators until the target is no longer able to continue in his or her position due at least in part to a diminished sense of power and personal agency.”³⁶

Workplace mobbing is characterized by six key elements. First, employees at any level, including those with less perceived power at more junior levels, are often perpetrators. Second, perpetrators tend to use informal power, including rumors, hearsay, and unfounded accusations to influence other employees and/or management. Thirdly, mobbing includes multiple aggressors.

Fourth, harm is often expressed in covert and indirect ways, such as through procedural mechanisms or complaint processes. Fifth, it is typified by psychological abuse. Finally, its victims are most often female. In sum, to quote journalist, Adam Sewer, “the cruelty is the point” of mobbing: In one striking case, a Black female leader took medical leave after her health suffered due to extreme work demands; she returned after two months, without forewarning, to numerous complaints waiting for her. As she explained, “There were so many complaints. They were so bad, so full of lies. And I thought, ‘These people really hate me.’”

In a number of interviews, Black female executives described the intricacies of mobbing dynamics, with precision, as they shared their stories of workplace harassment. In one example, a woman faced a complaint after a senior leader met with employees, including a friend, and advised the employees to speak to the departmental ombuds in an attempt to substantiate his own personal desire to remove her from her position. After the employees spoke to the ombuds, the ombuds then shared the concerns with a senior leader, who then accused the Black female executive of a serious breach under the Code of Values and Ethics. The allegation was patently false. In another case, three junior employees worked together to spread information about a Black female executive’s “bad behaviour” to more senior leaders in the organization, as well as disparaged her reputation to other employees. The formal complaint against the Black female leader was later determined to be unfounded. In a third example, two senior leaders worked together to usurp power from a Black female executive, refusing collaboration and obstructing her efforts to lead effectively by withholding crucial information and attempting to hamper her key initiatives. Notably, in the three above scenarios, the mobbing was enacted by Quebecois leaders and employees. Similar to experiences reported by Black executives in Phase 1, Black executives in Phase 2 spoke openly about encountering challenging career experiences with Quebecois leaders and subordinates. As one Black female executive, who has frequently worked with Quebecois-dominant teams over the last three decades commented:

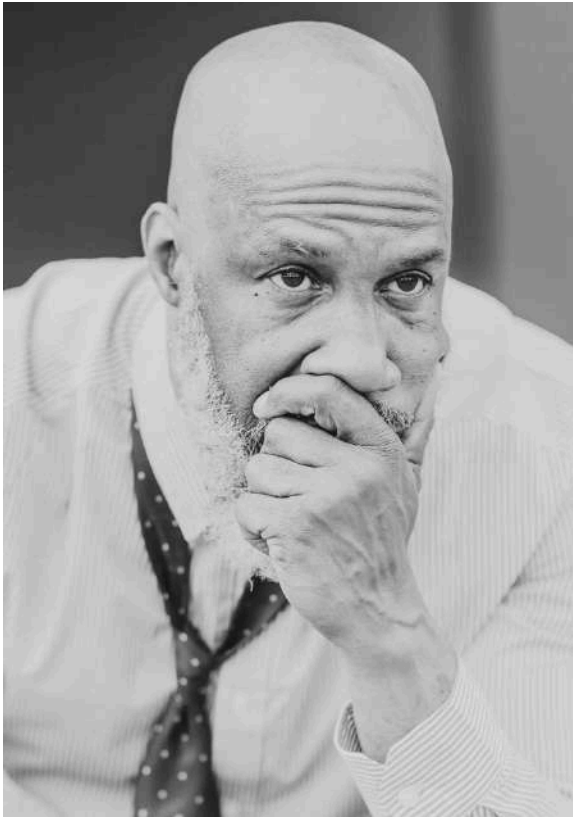
“You know, in my experience, it’s often the Quebecers who complain. I actually think they are more racist because they are the minority. They represent a small portion of Canadians. They have been wanting to be recognized for so many years, so I think they do not want to share with the rest of us.”

Another Black male executive, a Francophone who has spent much of his career working with Quebecois-dominant teams, spoke about the reasons he believes he has been subject to discrimination by “white male French Quebecers” repeatedly:

“Look, you know what it is? We speak French; we don’t cheat the system. We are highly educated and highly motivated to succeed. There is a competing narrative that we present, and someone who uses the language-card to get ahead is therefore threatened. We are often also confident, highly confident. That, of course, also presents a threat...Even if they hire you because they need you, eventually you will become a threat.”

BLACK MEN AND FORMAL COMPLAINTS

Although Black men participated in the Phase 2 interviews in much smaller numbers than Black women, their experiences with targeted formal complaints are no less severe. Two Black male leaders were removed from their positions for extensive periods while their investigations proceeded – one and a half years and two years, respectively. One complaint was filed by a white female employee for harassment; later, her friend also complained of homophobia. In a particularly



egregious example, a complaint was initiated by a senior leader in the organization who directed the Black male executive to engage in illegal behaviour. When the Black executive refused, he was immediately removed from his acting position, and his supervisor launched an administrative investigation against him. In both cases, the Black male executives were cleared for wrongdoing after lengthy, expensive processes. In both cases, the executives also spoke extensively and with great emotion about the tolls of these processes on their health and familial relationships. Both suffered severe, debilitating depression. As one man shared,

"I knew the ADMs - all of them. I had briefed them over the years on their files. All of the people I knew and worked with turned on me. It is a shock to go back through my records, to look at what I had to prove what I was saying because people were lying. They were all lying."

In the second example involving illegality, the senior leader overseeing the administrative complaint took an early retirement.

INFORMAL COMPLAINTS

The remaining 10 female executives had complaints made against them through ombuds or through other informal complaints mechanisms in the workplace. Seven additional women from the first group ("formal complaints") also shared prior experiences as executives with informal complaints. Four Black male executives had complaints made against them with ombuds or through other informal complaint mechanisms in the workplace. While formal complaints through C-65 processes often led to the removal of Black executives from leadership positions, in one case, an executive was placed on a "special project," despite the absence of a Notice of Occurrence or C-65 complaint procedure.

As Black executives detailed in both Phase 1 and Phase 2, informal complaints included verbal and written complaints to ombuds; the use of effective 'whisper campaigns' alleging wrongdoing initiated by both superiors and subordinates; verbal and written complaints to an executive's supervisor or senior most leader in the organization; and informal verbal and written complaints made by supervisors about an executive's performance as a pretext to encourage one to resign or leave a department. Related to this last pattern, unjustified low ratings and negative comments in performance management assessments were described as another way Black executives experienced informal complaints.

Unwelcomed: Poor support, coveted positions, outsider status

As briefly mentioned above, 12 Black women out of 20 shared that they arrived to supervise teams that immediately questioned their job qualifications or relevance as departmental outsiders; six women in these cases shared that the teams they managed were dominantly or fully Quebecois. In this pattern, colleagues ultimately complained to senior management about their leadership and performance.



As one Black female executive explained, "Some colleagues simply do not want to work with a Black woman. These ones, the new teams we inherit, are often not good. The morale is not there. Then, there is also incompetence that we have to deal with." Black women also often spoke about the improper support they received from senior leaders that diminished their leadership when they tried to ameliorate challenging workplace dynamics. A Black female executive elaborated with an example of an employee who disrespected a member of Parliament with a racial slur. When she disciplined the subordinate, he filed a grievance against her. She explained,

"I had had enough. So, I went for strike 1, a disciplinary action. I consulted with HR, labour relations, and my DG before the disciplinary action. I was told to move forward. But the next thing I knew, I was told by my DG to put this aside. I was doing everything the right way, but this was my first time that my leadership was challenged in this way. This man was a white subordinate; he used a racial slur against a member of Parliament! I learned that I cannot afford to trust leaders. They say they have my back, but they do not. They undermine me."

This usurpation of authority was repeated by the same DG when the Black female executive later addressed improper behaviour with another white male subordinate. She shared, "My DG took away my authority and undermined me again." Finally, when this same Black leader addressed sexist behaviours with a third male subordinate, he complained to senior management that he "could not work with a feminist" and quit.

Black women also frequently spoke about the challenges they encountered when they began new roles with colleagues who coveted their position, or teams who resented their outsider status.

One example excellently captures the related challenges that set Black female leaders up for failure. A Black female executive described her quickly deflated joy as she began her first substantive executive position with a team that openly, repeatedly communicated their disinterest in her leadership as soon as she arrived. When I interviewed her, she spoke to me about her workplace frustrations – struggling to fully capture the resentment she was then experiencing every day from her all-male team and crying intermittently as we spoke. She described the demographics of her team:

"I have three managers reporting to me – two Anglophones and one French Quebecker. When I arrived, two were acting – one Anglophone and one Francophone. One man was initially happy and welcoming, and he helped me transition. But I realized that he had no French background and was put in charge of an official languages program – in a long-term acting position. The French manager was doing all his work! He was clearly set up for failure."

Then, there was the Francophone employee with very strong French, and he was reporting to an Anglophone manager when I arrived. I immediately asked why people were in these positions: Why was there a man in a long-term acting position with no language training, no French? And the Francophone manager did not have an undergraduate degree – only a high school diploma. He was also very vocal and frustrated with the direction with his files. He said he did not want to be a manager and that he did not want to act."

As a result of the composition of the team and its dynamics, she described the immediate challenges she faced,

"One white manger, who had been an acting director previously, was honest and told me that he wanted to move up to my level. He said to me, 'I don't know why you were even brought in.' The other white man, from Quebec, was in an acting position, and he was more direct. 'Let's see how long you last'. I understood that as a threat."



She added,

“The team already had issues with him because he would always be absent when there was a deliverable. I raised it at a management meeting; it was known as a pattern. I asked the others why we put up with his behaviour, and the response was, ‘Oh, he has been here a long time, and he is knowledgeable.’ That was the excuse.”

As this Black female leader made changes to normalize her team, including moving the Francophone manager back to his substantive position, she became the primary source of attack from all three men and eventually, the respondent of a union grievance.

Another Black female executive shared her traumatic experience of entering a new department “with lifers” – employees who spend long periods of time or entire careers in a single department. She was immediately seen and treated as an outsider by her all white, male, Quebecois team when she arrived. When a key senior leader left the department – a man who had been enthusiastic and supportive of her hire – she was told, directly, that she was not welcome in the department any longer. She was accused of incompetence and finally, asked to leave the department by the new senior leader.

Punished for hiring

Black executives also shared another pattern that led to their receipt of formal and informal complaints: the hiring of other Black employees and executives, as well as other racialized employees. This theme was also described during the Phase 1 interviews. As one Black female executive described:

“When I was at the Public Service Commission (PSC), I used to sit and listen to Commission cases of staffing complaints. I would just listen and clock the data. The idea is that if something is complaint-based, then certainly someone will find fault, right? The complaints that would come up, a large number involved racialized names.”

In Phase 2, five women and two men shared that the hiring of other Black colleagues and executives were met with suspicion, questioning, and ultimately, complaints. In one case, a Black female executive hired two other Black employees, and a complaint was made to the PSC regarding unfair hiring practices. Soon afterwards, one of the Black employees she hired also received a formal complaint and was investigated. One Black male executive shared a similar experience of facing informal complaints for hiring a Black employee. He said “They made noises after I hired him! One white man was very bold: He came to me and told me that I was hiring a person only for being Black. I told him that anyone saying this is racist. And this will not be allowed as long as I am the DG.”



BLACK MEN AND INFORMAL COMPLAINTS

Black men faced informal complaints alleging a “lack of work ethic” and an “absence of key leadership competencies.” Notably, these criticisms were directed towards Black male executives with high levels of education, multiple advanced degrees, and in the context of otherwise objective leadership excellence. One Black male executive, who worked in a demanding job that required long hours and on-call availability, was criticized for “not working 24-7.” He described:

“I was challenged by senior management every day. I was not talking their language, and I was not working 24-7. But I still had to take care of my mother at the time. You cannot answer 24-7, especially during COVID. Still, I worked seven days a week and the complaint was, ‘You are not reliable; you are always on call.’ It is hard to explain.”

Another Black male executive expressed the ways that “subtle racism” through complaints has been leveraged against him indirectly during his career. As a senior leader with key, large-scale departmental responsibilities, he described,

“The performance management cycle has been hard for me. When I was an EX-3, I found that my achievements were never highlighted by my supervisors. My ratings were always lower than what I thought, than what I knew I deserved. This was very hard for me. As an example, I was asked to serve in an interim role while there was a competition to fill the position. It was a massive operation. And this was in addition to my day-to-day job as a senior director of another division. There was never a conversation about my performance. But when it was time for my PMA, in the comments section, where there is a narrative assessment of my accomplishments, the comment was ‘does not demonstrate a certain key leadership competency.’ I had overseen the whole country! I was so mad; it took me weeks to get over it. When I had to sign the PMA, I took time to write a long response. I called it ‘incoherent nonsense.’ I was offended that the person thought I could not mobilize people! I was so mad.”

Regarding the PMA, he added, “As a Black person, I think they should get rid of it. I think it is really just a reward for their friends. This does not actually work for Black people. There is something systemic about it, and I think that is definitely a problem.”

A related pattern that can be seen with all Black men who participated in Phase 2, is the use of complaints to emasculate – that is, to encourage an executive to feel less capable by diminishing his power, pride, and confidence. One Black male executive described, in astute detail, the persisting humiliation he has felt over the last decade of his career. When recently passed over for a substantive position he acted in, competently, for two years, he reflected:

“I tried to respectfully chalk this up to the managerial change at first – policy, procedures, etc. But I just felt embarrassment and humiliation. Finally, I realized this is actually inhumane – an act of wielding power thoughtlessly...or God forbid, thoughtfully. These things are done quite deliberately to target, to create fear, and to put one down to size. I took sick leave, and when I came back, I still agonized over this for a long time. I returned to the scene of shame, embarrassment, and humiliation. And when we return to the scene of a crime, it shrinks the places where we can go... People do not know what to do with us.”

During our interview, he also keenly described the ways his race has become ostentatious as a deterrent in the context of career advancement, yet weaponized at the intersection of his disability in the service of his department:

“In addition to my Blackness, there is another hierarchy that is being created. My disability is used as the organization’s ability to check yet another box. I am actively filtered out.... until I am usable by the system. Their tension, their angst, dissipates when they see me. It reduces the threat of my Blackness. This has helped me understand, most clearly, that people are making decisions in a targeted manner – not an unconscious manner.”



During Phase 2, one Black male executive shared the complaints he received over a greatly stalled career:

"I was given so many reasons for not moving up: My accent was too strong. I need to polish my communication. I was told, 'You are not strategic enough as other colleagues. Be more succinct. Learn to debrief in 120 seconds. You talk too much. You only fit in the role of an EX-1.' But all of my other colleagues were moving up, of course."



Through a harrowing story, this same Black executive also shared a story of being assaulted by a senior leader as a young executive:

"This senior leader actually took my tie and grabbed me by my tie. He pulled my collar very tight. I did not know what I did. What did I do? I still don't know. He was just angry with me, and he put his hands on me. He grabbed me like a dog."

He then explained why he never complained or told anyone about this assault:

"As an executive, you do not have support as other employees do. Where do you even go for help with something like this? I also believed that a complaint would be career limiting. And the last thing I wanted is to be blacklisted."

THE IMPACTS OF TARGETED COMPLAINTS AND INVESTIGATIONS

Emotional and Psychological Impacts

All participants in Phase 2 took great care to describe the impacts of formal and informal complaint processes on their health, as well as their closest relationships. One Black male executive captured the harmful impacts of a complaint process on his life, as two personal tragedies simultaneously occurred over the year and a half long investigation. He declared, "I started therapy regularly, and then a light went off in my head: They really tried to kill me. But I am not dead. I realized that I knew my self-worth. And that they did not kill me."

Anxiety

Nearly all participants spoke, intimately, about the impacts of complaint processes on their mental health. The most commonly used descriptor by executives was "anxiety," and executives described it in relation to panic attacks and detrimental impacts on their self-esteem. Many described the complaint process as "traumatic." Black female executives also discussed their resulting post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), marked by lasting severe and debilitating anxiety. Black executives spoke about the increased anxiety they experienced when they received notices of complaints; while alone at home on "special project assignments;" and after investigations were completed. Black women took care to draw a causal relationship between complaint processes and their anxiety. As one Black female executive explained,

"This affected me so much, on all levels possible. I started developing anxiety, and I am naturally not an anxious person. I started having panic attacks, and I cried a lot. I doubted myself and my work for the first time in my career."



Another female executive described the ways that the novel experience of anxiety, caused by the complaint, has compounded during the investigation. She explained,

"It has taken me a long time to deal with this process. I have had to pull together all of my correspondences to deal with the complainant, and because of our close working relationship, there is so much work to do. I am not overly emotional, but this has caused me anxiety. Additional requests and correspondences about the file cause me anxiety. And every time the Notice of Occurrences get updated, that also causes me anxiety."

Another executive explained how her anxiety has left her feeling "humiliated." She explained, "I have lost my confidence. I work in a constant state of fear. If things are not perfect, I am terrified of being berated. I shelter my staff a lot. But that comes at a cost to me."

Black executives also described their long-term experiences with anxiety after complaint processes and investigations ended. One female executive shared that she has "severe anxiety now." Another female executive described the consequences of her lingering PTSD:

"I am anxious now a lot. How do I know? I am distrustful. I am afraid that people are not coming to me with the right intentions. I am crying a lot, and that is not me. Recently, when they started talking about going back to work in person for four days, my anxiety went through the roof as I was thinking about meeting people, seeing faces, and having to socialize. I became an overthinker: When someone asks me a question at work, my mind goes into a defence mode, and I start over-analyzing why the person asked me a question – and it could be something so innocent."

Sadness, depression, and anger

Black executives spoke about the sadness and depression caused by complaint processes and investigations, as well as taking medical leaves. Many executives cried as they relayed the grief they felt due to recent or ongoing complaint processes. They also discussed beginning antidepressant prescriptions for the first time in their lives. One Black female executive, who was later diagnosed with a serious medical condition during the investigation, explained, "I went on sick leave for a few months. I was struggling with bad anxiety and so, I started taking antidepressants during that time." Black executives also spoke about depression, both directly and indirectly. This was especially true for Black men, who often spoke with sadness or anger – but without always referencing the term "depression." Executives described a loss of interest in favorite or pleasurable activities, extreme fatigue, feelings of hopelessness, and irritability. As one Black female executive captured, "I stopped going out with friends, and I really like to spend time with friends. I stopped reading, talking on phone, and going out. Time stopped. It was bizarre; it felt like I was always waiting on it to be done." During Phase 2, one Black male executive openly shared his recent thoughts of suicide.

Another Black male executive first spoke impassively as he described his investigation in detail, then devoted most of our interview to discussing his depression and its impacts on his immediate and extended family. This was another common theme during the Phase 2 interviews: Black executives not only spoke about the detrimental health impacts on their partners and children, but also on their parents and siblings. His words are included, with some detail, because they capture the rich, often ignored nuances of experiencing depression within a Black or African cultural family context; of identifying and treating depression; and of navigating changing familial bonds while undergoing treatment. When I asked this Black male executive to describe the impacts the investigation had on his health and well-being, he first narrativized his identity and experience as an African immigrant:



“There is a pride in doing the work that I do. I was sent here from Africa, and they grabbed us and charmed us into staying here with promises of opportunity and success. My older brother is my best friend, and he is also a public servant. We were raised to work hard and do quality work—that is how we were all raised. We were not raised to be suspicious. We also avoid drama, and we do not want any drama in our lives.”

He described how his wife first tried to intervene regarding his depression by naming the changes she witnessed in him:

“It was my wife who caught my depression and confronted me one day. She saw me snapping at everyone, my family, and behaving differently than I had ever behaved before. She said to me, ‘You are darker. You barely laugh anymore. You are absent, even when we are all together.’ I realized that I had started to fall asleep when we watched family movies because that was the only time I truly felt safe – when I was around my family. But, of course, I still did not want to listen to her.”

His wife finally turned to his best friend – his older brother. He explained:

“My wife went to my brother because he is the only one person that I always listen to, and she knew that. One day, my brother called me and said, ‘Let’s go. We are going to the gym.’ We went out together. He was driving for about 45 minutes. Then, as he started driving, it all came out.”

At this point in the interview, he began to cry when he explained how his “full blown depression” severed his symbiotic relationship with another sibling – albeit temporarily – and also caused his daughter, who he shares a close bond with, to suffer health challenges that required medical intervention and support, as well. He explained:

“We are five siblings, and two are doctors. My sister lives abroad. My routine is always the same: I get up at 4:30 AM. I pray and read my Bible. Afterwards, I call my kid sister. We almost always spoke during her lunch, when she had a block of time for me. But now, I am talking to her as a doctor and not just as my sister. It became too much for her. And we had to stop talking. EAP is not the same as talking to your family.”

For this African male executive, severing a quotidian, life-sustaining bond that occurred through daily check-ins with his “kid sister” caused him additional distress, as he realized that his depression required a boundary that had not previously existed in their sibling relationship. It also surfaced an additional, extraordinary feeling of loss.

In one interview, a Black male executive shared that he “had suicidal thoughts last year after years of abuse and mistreatment from my time in the public service, at the hands of white supervisors and false claims from white colleagues and employees.” Although his investigation had “cleared him of all 53 allegations” set forth in the complaint, “preparing the six binders, 675 pages total” and the intrusive investigation experience resulted in ongoing feelings of dejection and anguish.

Humiliation

Executives often spoke of the initial feeling of humiliation when they received formal and informal complaints. Some, including those who spoke of multiple experiences with complaints, described a process that they had come to understand as intentionally humiliating for Black executives. As one woman said, “The process is so isolating. It is designed to break you, to leave you alone and ashamed.” Other executives described the disappointment they felt from colleagues. One executive angrily explained his return to work after a medical leave, “When I came back, people were trying to come speak to me in order to absolve themselves. But I told them, directly, ‘You stood by and watched my shame and did nothing.’”

The sentiment of intentional humiliation was often described in the context of stories of insubordination, or narratives of disrespect Black executives experienced from much more junior employees. One Black female executive described the disrespectful language and behaviour she encountered a few days into her new position. She stated, incredulously, “Within my first few days, I had an AS-01 directly challenging me about my ability to do my work! Can you believe it?” Another Black female executive described the humiliation and rejection she felt when she returned from medical leave to a disorientating environment where “it is not clear that I have a job.” During our interview, she struggled to capture what was happening to her, real-time, in her department:

“I came back to the reality that my department is reorganizing my sector, and it is not clear that I have a job. Within a little over a week, my EA is being given to someone else. I am sitting here, humiliated, at meetings, not understanding what is happening. Clearly, in the last month, something has happened, but I have not been privy to it. No one is telling me. I have learned to read writing on the wall. I have a team of people relying on me, and I want to help them figure out how to pull all this together. But I do not know if I am even needed here. It is all really humiliating, and that is what I am struggling with: The humiliation.”

Another Black female executive described how it felt being sent home on a “special project” during a lengthy investigation. “It was a walk of shame out of this executive position,” she described.

Diminished confidence and distrust

Relatedly, Black executives spoke of the impacts on their confidence, as well as the pervasive distrust generated by complaint processes. One Black male executive took care to explain how his confidence initially made him a target in his department. He explained:

“I do give people pause when I come into a room: I am an athlete, Black, African, tall, and I exude confidence and competence. It is not okay that I am seen negatively this way, but I have learned to deal with it...This was evident as I became an executive: I was clearly not welcome.”

Later, he described how his debilitating depression during the investigation had “shrunk him down to size” and diminished his confidence. A Black female executive described the crippling, long-term impacts of the complaint process on her:

“It has shaped the way that I try to communicate now, for sure. My confidence has been torn. I do not think I perform as well as I should. I am good at speaking off the cuff, but I won’t. I am still working on my confidence.”

In addition to the common theme of confidence, Black executives spoke extensively of the resulting distrust they embody after complaint processes:

“I am hypervigilant. I have been careful about cultivating friendships. I do not share a lot because I have had too many people use it against me. My relationships at work, I have not acculturated because I simply do not trust people.”

Another Black executive explained that they have learned “to keep my frustration inside. I don’t trust the organization. It is the first time in my life that I felt this way.”

Physical and familial impacts

Finally, Black executives took great care to also detail the physical impacts of targeted complaint processes on their physical health and well-being of their families. In fact, Black executives seldom discussed the impacts of their complaint processes without talking about their partners, children, parents, and siblings. As one Black female executive captured in painful detail:



"There has been an impact on the whole family unit. My husband went to see our family doctor, and when the doctor went to check his blood pressure, he was in a very dangerous range such that he thought my husband had a heart attack! I am left with PTSD. We are now looking to meet with our financial advisor because I am ready to leave, to retire early if I can. In the end, I need to be healthy for a long time, and I don't believe it is possible for me working any longer."

Black executives also often spoke about the impacts of the complaint processes on their parenting, especially when their deteriorating mental health manifested as anger or irritability. One female executive described, remorsefully:

"I was angry at my daughter a lot. My children had to suffer my anger and my stress. My children had to witness me at my lowest, and unfortunately my babies had to pay the price. What is most important for me is my family and my work, and both were impacted."

Some spoke of how their own emotional withdrawal and unavailability led to a health deterioration in their own children. One Black male executive shared that his daughter was treated for her mental health deterioration during his long and stressful investigation. Another female executive became visibly emotional when she spoke of the impacts of her investigation on her older parents:

"I am a product of my father and my mother and my family. When I told my father what was happening, he cried. I am fighting back now because how dare you say those things about me! I am a product of them. So, if you are saying these horrible things about me, then you are saying those things about my parents."

Finally, throughout our interviews, Black women itemized the physical impacts of complaint processes on their physical health. Two Black women were diagnosed with chronic illnesses during formal complaint processes. Black women spoke of weight gain, extreme weight loss, and facing unmanaged Type-2 diabetes for the first time in their lives. Black women also spoke of needing new medications to manage chronic conditions, as well as beginning antidepressants. Both men and women described chest pain, increases in blood pressure, and insomnia during complaint processes.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PHASE 1 AND 2

IMMEDIATE:

- 1. Acknowledgment from the Clerk:** Provide a formal statement of acknowledgment of the findings in this Study and a commitment to immediate implementation of the recommendations.
- 2. Data stewardship for equity:** Collect, share, and better employ data regarding Black public servants and executives to drive the Call to Action, as well as explain and support targeted initiatives for Black executives.
 - Data includes this Study; “Report 5: Inclusion in the Workplace for Racialized Employees” (Report 5);³⁷ the disproportionality index from Dr. Martin Nicholas that evidences clear, disaggregated, stark adverse outcomes for Black public servants at all levels and a continuing underrepresentation of Black executives across public service; data collected by TBS including “Distribution of Black Executives by Level, Region, Age Band, Sex, and Department.” Additionally, as the President of the Treasury Board, Anita Anand, recently noted, stagnation of Black public servants in the lower salary ranges is an issue of pay equity.³⁸
 - Mandate public-facing, annual reporting regarding race, gender, complaints, and investigations for each department, similar to GAC’s “Addressing Misconduct and Wrongdoing at Global Affairs Canada: Second Annual Report.”
 - Regarding targeted initiatives and a focus on Black executives and employees, data sets must be combined with an understanding of the law: Leaders must amplify the message that employment equity is the law, and “employment equity means substantive equality in action in the workplace.”³⁹ Substantive equality is a legal principle that refers to the achievement of true equality in outcomes. Thus, differential adverse outcomes for Black executives and employees as reflected in this Study mandates action and amelioration by leaders.
 - **BEN/REN:** Create a detailed, public-facing archive with data sets related to Black public servants and executives, updated annually.



3. Zero tolerance for antiblack harassment: Clear messaging about the prevalence of antiblack workplace harassment from the top, led by deputies and the Clerk and based on the Study findings and other supportive data, is essential and must be central to the Clerk's commitment to values and ethics reforms.

- Antiblack workplace harassment patterns (see below) must be identified and shared within executive teams.
- Antiblack workplace harassment must be integral to all departmental work regarding values and ethics.
- Deputies must send message that antiblack harassment behaviours will not be tolerated and senior leaders will be subject to consequential accountability through performance assessments.

4. Employment equity: Implement targeted appointment and retention initiatives for Black executives at all levels of the organization.

- Increase representation of Black executives across all levels.
- Use projected workforce availability estimates (WFAs) and labour market availability (LMA) and disproportionality index values for Black employees in support of these actions. These measures can be taken under the current Employment Equity Act.
- Fast track the implementation of the Employment Equity Act amendments.

5. Addressing and redressing antiblack discrimination: As part of their departmental EDI strategies, deputies and executives must mandate conversations and trainings from qualified external professionals and human rights experts⁴⁰ on identified antiblack workplace behavioural patterns in public service that signal a likelihood of antiblack discrimination. Alongside these patterns, behaviours should be aligned with specific equity and inclusion outcome indicators and performance measurement frameworks. Dominant antiblack patterns identified in FPS include:

- Denial of mentoring, sponsorship, leadership training, or other developmental opportunities such as secondments, acting opportunities, and language training support where such opportunities were offered to non-Black executives.
- Differential management practices, such as excessive monitoring and documentation, or deviation from written policies or standard practices when managing with a Black employee.
- Disproportionate blame of a Black employee for an incident or mistake; failure to give the "benefit of the doubt" for good faith mistakes.
- Assignment of Black employees to less desirable positions or job duties, or the removal of job responsibilities without material and legitimate justification.
- Tasking Black female executives with excessive work that is disproportionate to other non-Black colleagues, similarly situated.
- Treating normal differences of opinion (including in the context of legal advocacy or litigation strategy for Black lawyers) as confrontational or insubordinate when involving Black employees.

- Characterizing normal communication or self-advocacy from Black employees as rude or aggressive, especially when concerning racial discrimination.
- Excluding Black employees from formal or informal networks, including invitations to leaders' homes or after-hour social events.
- Faulting or penalizing a Black employee for failing to get along with someone else (e.g. a co-worker or manager), when one of the reasons for the tension is the racially discriminatory attitude or behaviour of the co-worker or manager.

6. Training with demonstrable learning

across all levels: Mandate inclusive leadership, cultural competency, and anti-racism/bias trainings, real-time, for leadership teams and managers. Trainings must be: interactive, rely on good science, relevant to departmental needs/gaps, action-centered, and measurable in impact. Importantly, learning opportunities should be regular (i.e. concrete milestones per reporting cycle), and built into departmental values and culture.



7. Address failures of Bill C-65:

An urgent and immediate review of all labour relations cases involving Black executives is imperative. A review of Bill C-65 procedures, informal complaint mechanisms, and mandatory training for all managers, supervisors, and ombuds is necessary in light of the high number of reports of the improper, discriminatory use of complaints against Black executives, particularly Black female executives.⁴¹

- Immediately deploy a "Fairness Monitor" to oversee disciplinary processes initiated against Black executives in the federal public service.
- Mandatory training must review and clarify the Canada Labour Code definition of harassment and identify patterns of improper uses of complaints against Black executives and employees.⁴²
- Training must state that stricter scrutiny will be applied to complaints against Black employees where common antiblack harassment patterns and stereotypes are centered in a Notice of Occurrence.
- Once received by a supervisor, all Notice of Occurrences against Black employees must also be reviewed by an expert in discrimination and antiblack racism before an initial determination of harassment or violence is made.
- Deputies must state and enforce consequences for employees who file Notice of Occurrences as a pretext for antiblack harassment.



- **BEN/REN:** Create a support portal for Black executives undergoing labour management issues. Portal should provide simple flow charts on complaints procedures for executives and employees in FPS; resources for and descriptions of antiblack pretexts in the complaints process; case examples in FPS; strategic case examples; and resources for coaches, Black therapists and psychologists, and lawyers who specialize in antiblack racism and workplace harassment. Consider the creation of a peer-to-peer support network to destigmatize labour management processes and to provide accessible, immediate support to Black executives.
- **BEN/REN:** Work closely with Health Canada and Employee Assistance Program's Black-centric Mental Health Enhancements Initiative to share data and best practices.

8. Accountability for equity, diversity, and inclusion goals that extends to all executives and managers: Hold deputy heads accountable by setting clear equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) and anti-racism goals and metrics in performance management agreements for ADMs, DGs, executives, and managers. As also recommended in OAG's Report 5, leaders must establish expected behaviours needed for an anti-racist and inclusive work environment and against which performance should be assessed for all employees. These behaviours must be aligned with specific equity and inclusion outcome indicators and performance measurement frameworks.

- Define consequential accountability for senior leaders through the Executive Talent Management System.
- In light of the high reporting of arbitrary justifications for the failure to receive succeeded plus or above ratings where objectively earned by Black executives, deputies must communicate this concerning trend to their executive team and remind ADMs, DGs and managers of obligations set forth in the Directive on Performance and Talent Management for Executives and Directive on Performance Management.⁴³
- **BEN/REN:** collect and share data on bias, disproportionality, and adverse outcomes of performance assessment ratings for Black employees and executives. Advocate for 360-degree assessments as the norm.

9. Corporate culture: Host "Get to know your Black executives" gatherings. Deputies and ADMs host a once-a-year, closed meeting to meet with and receive feedback from Black executives. Take extra steps for increasing the comfort level of Black female executives.

10. Special measures to address inequitable outcomes⁴⁴: In light of the acknowledgement of antiblack and systemic racism in federal institutions, leaders must prioritize and offer professional development, coaching, and training opportunities for Black executives to enhance their skills, capabilities, and leadership competencies. Make these services widely known to all Black executives and employees in an organization; advertise individualized assessment, counselling, and coaching services through the Public Service Commission (PSC). Where absent, establish mentorship and sponsorship programs to support the career development and advancement of aspiring Black executives.

- **BEN/REN:** Work with PSC and CSPPS to share coaching best practices, share coaching needs and feedback from Black executives, and locate coaches who offer integrative coaching through an antiracist framework.
- **BEN/REN:** Create resource portal for Black executives and employees for coaches, departmental initiatives, and funding for coaching and training.

11. Regular employment systems reviews and audits focused on Black employees: Conduct regular reviews of HR policies, procedures, and practices to identify and address systemic barriers and biases (in recruitment, performance evaluation, and promotion processes) that may impede the advancement of Black executives.

MEDIUM - LONG TERM

12. Accountability for prevention of antiblack workplace harassment and violence:

Create greater accountability regarding widespread antiblack workplace harassment and violence for senior leadership through the Performance Management Program for Deputy Ministers and Associate Deputy Ministers. This priority should be specified, annually, within corporate priorities under the section, “Advance Anti-Racism, Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility in the Public Service.”

- Senior leaders are champions who often serve as powerful allies and sponsors to Black executives in public service. Yet, during the interviews, disturbing trends were noted:
 - Senior leaders, external to departments, knew about the reputations and actions of abusive and discriminatory colleagues and advised those they sponsored to “leave positions” rather than address a colleague’s poor behavior.
 - Senior leaders failed to intervene when employees filed Notice of Occurrences against Black executives that were racially motivated or lacked merit.
 - Senior leaders failed to follow the procedures of C-65 complaints clearly and timely, leading to heightened distress for Black executive respondents.
 - Senior leaders engaged in or supported dishonest campaigns to remove Black executives from their positions.
 - Senior leaders behaved punitively against Black executives by calling for “workplace investigations” that were racially motivated or meritless.
 - Senior leaders failed to intervene when managers behaved outside of their managerial norms and acted abusively and disproportionately towards Black executives.
 - Senior leaders failed to acknowledge and challenge managers’ antiblack treatment towards Black executives.



- The high occurrence and patterns of antiblack violence detailed in the Study and the documented senior leadership behaviours, above, together reflect a failure to implement the forward direction of the Call to Action and its focus on accountability. These serious patterns and behaviours must be addressed in the context of executive performance and talent management processes. They will not be altered through discussions regarding values and ethics; rather, their existence will impede and diminish this work.

13. Black Equity Commissioner: The creation of a Black Equity Commissioner is necessary in light of the persistence of antiblack racism since the Call to Action, including for the senior-most Black executives, and the widespread lack of expertise regarding antiblack racism across FPS. In this role, the Commissioner will act as a legal and social “expert on anti-Black racism, who would evaluate federal public service systems, policies, and practices through a diversity, inclusion, equity, and anti-Black racism lens.”⁴⁵ This role directly reports to the Clerk, Parliament, and issues necessary recommendations.

14. Psychological health, safety, and well-being:

- **BEN/REN:** Build an online portal focused on “Thriving as an Executive in Public Service” that shares resources focused on wellness, embodied leadership,⁴⁶ wellbeing, peer-to-peer best practices, knowledge-building resources, and mental health supports for Black executives based on Study findings and other relevant data. A Black-centered understanding of trauma, trauma responses, and healing from racial trauma must be integral to this support.⁴⁷
- Work closely with Health Canada and Employee Assistance Program’s Blackcentric Mental Health Enhancements Initiative to share data and best practices.
- Take steps to add anti-racism as a 14th factor of the National Standard for Psychological Health & Safety in the Workplace.

15. Leadership competency: Create a Key Leadership Competency (KLC) focused on racial and cultural competencies, specifically anti-racism and reconciliation. Pilot its use as soon as possible in advance of formal changes to the KLCs.

RESEARCH BIOGRAPHY

DR. RACHEL ZELLARS MA, JD, PHD



Dr. Zellars is a lawyer, Senior Research Fellow, and Associate Professor at Saint Mary's University in the Department of Social Justice & Community Studies. Her research focuses on the history of Black Canada beginning with the American Revolution; the lives of enslaved women in the Maritimes; and Black public servants. In addition to her legal background, Dr. Zellars also holds a master's degree in Africana Studies from Cornell University and a doctorate in education from McGill University. She received her BA in philosophy and political science from Howard University.

In 2021, Dr. Zellars was named as the inaugural visiting scholar at the Canada School of Public Service through the Jocelyne Bourgeon Visiting Scholar Initiative. In this role, she helped to shape the learning curriculum offered to federal public servants on topics such as unconscious bias, structural racism, and anti-Black racism, reaching over 15,000 public servants during her tenure. She continues to work on a number of departmental and public service-wide projects focused on the Call to Action and serves as a special advisor to a number of leaders in public service. Since 2019, she has interviewed and documented the experiences of hundreds of Black and racialized public servants.



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2. Government of Canada, Statistics Canada, "Employment Equity in the Public Service of Canada for Fiscal Year 2022-2023," accessed September 1, 2024, https://www.canada.ca/en/government/publicservice/wellness-inclusion-diversity-public-service/diversity-inclusion-public-service/employment-equity-annual-reports/employment-equity-public-service-canada-2022-2023.html#ToC4_5.
3. See note 7, below. This Study has undergone an independent assessment by experts who similarly conduct research and are subject matter experts on structural racism in Canada.
4. Association of Professional Executives of the Public Service of Canada, "2021 Executive Work and Health Study," accessed September 1, 2024, <https://apex.gc.ca/resources/executive-work-and-health-survey/#1622479851375-2f461c2b-4e94>. As the report notes, of 4,000 participants in the 2021 survey, only 12% reported harassment. Importantly, the report noted a drop in harassment in the executive community. Consistent data is contained in Government of Canada, "2022 Public Service Employee Survey Results: Executives," accessed September 1, 2024, <https://www.canada.ca/en/treasury-board-secretariat/services/innovation/public-service-employee-survey/2022-23/2022-results-by-employee-groups/executives.html>.
5. Victoria ME Bridgland, Payton J. Jones, and Benjamin W. Bellet, "A Meta-Analysis of the Efficacy of Trigger Warnings, Content Warnings, and Content Notes," *Clinical Psychological Science* (2022).
6. African Nova Scotians / Indigenous Blacks are a distinct people who descend from free and enslaved Black Planters, Black Loyalists, Black Refugees, Maroons, and other Black people who inhabited the original 52 landbased Black communities in that part of Mi'kma'ki known as Nova Scotia. See Dalhousie University, African Nova Scotian Strategy Advisory Council, "African Nova Scotian Strategy Overview and Recommendations," accessed February 20, 2024, [https://cdn.dal.ca/content/dam/dalhousie/pdf/dalnews/ANS-Strategy%20\(1\).pdf](https://cdn.dal.ca/content/dam/dalhousie/pdf/dalnews/ANS-Strategy%20(1).pdf)
7. Assistant Deputy Minister, equivalent, or above.
8. Government of Canada, Statistics Canada, "Black History Month 2024...by the Numbers," accessed February 20, 2024, https://www.statcan.gc.ca/en/dai/smr08/2024/smr08_278.
9. As a few examples: Albury, C., Vongdara, B., Kanji, S. & Nicholas, M. (2023), Exploring Career Stagnation in Employment Equity Groups Amongst Canadian Public Servants, accessed March 20, 2024, https://www.isi2023.org/media/abstracts/ottawa-2023_a4304726a4ffc04552129532cf656303.pdf; Daphna Motro, "The 'Angry Black Woman' Stereotype at Work," Harvard Business Review, January 31, 2022, <https://hbr.org/2022/01/the-angry-black-woman-stereotype-at-work>; Daphna Motro et al., "Race and Reactions to Women's Expressions of Anger at Work: Examining the Effects of the 'Angry Black Woman' Stereotype," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 107, no. 1 (January 1, 2022): 142-52, <https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000884>; Hunt, Vivian, Dennis Layton, and Sara Prince, "Diversity Matters," McKinsey & Company 1, no. 1 (2015): 15-29; Linos, Elizabeth, Sanaz Mobasseri, and Nina Roussille, "Asymmetric Peer Effects at Work: The Effect of White Coworkers on Black Women's Careers." (2023).
10. C. Albury, Vongdara, B., Kanji, S. & Nicholas, M. (2023), "Exploring Career Stagnation in Employment Equity Groups Amongst Canadian Public Servants," accessed March 1, 2024, https://www.isi2023.org/media/abstracts/ottawa-2023_a4304726a4ffc04552129532cf656303.pdf.
11. Ibid
12. Government of Canada, Statistics Canada, "Employment Equity in the Public Service of Canada for Fiscal Year 2022-2023," Figure 21, accessed September 1, 2024, https://www.canada.ca/en/government/publicservice/wellness-inclusion-diversity-public-service/diversity-inclusion-public-service/employment-equity-annual-reports/employment-equity-public-service-canada-2022-2023.html#ToC4_5.
13. Government of Canada, "2022 Public Service Employee Survey Results by Theme for the Public Service," accessed September 1, 2024, <https://www.tbs-sct.canada.ca/pSES-saff/2022/results-resultats/en/bt-pt/org/00#i4-s16>. Importantly, these figures pertain to FPS as a whole and do not disaggregate the executive community.
14. Government of Canada, "2022 Public Service Employee Survey Results: Executives," accessed September 1, 2024, <https://www.canada.ca/en/treasury-board-secretariat/services/innovation/public-service-employee-survey/2022-23/2022-results-by-employee-groups/executives.html>. Here, the reported rates are low at 8-10% between 2020 and 2022. These figures are comparable to the aggregated figures reported APEX's "2021 Executive Work and Health Study."



15. See page 18 of the Ontario Human Rights Commission, "Policy and Guidelines on Racism and Racial Discrimination," (2005) accessed March 1, 2024, https://www.ohrc.on.ca/sites/default/files/attachments/Policy_and_guidelines_on_racism_and_racial_discrimination.pdf; Also Turner v Canada Border Services Agency, [2020] CHRD No 1, para 50.
16. Ontario Human Rights Commission, "Policy and Guidelines on Racism and Racial Discrimination," p. 21. The report, in fact, lists patterns identical to the findings in this Study: "exclusion from formal or informal networks; denial of mentoring or developmental opportunities such as secondments and training which were made available to others; differential management practices such as excessive monitoring and documentation or deviation from written policies or standard practices when dealing with a racialized person; disproportionate blame for an incident; and assignment to less desirable positions or job."
17. In this leadership trend, shortly after accepting a new leadership position within organizations that are in crisis or in need of stabilization, Black women are accused of being poor, mercurial leaders and accused of fostering harmful work conditions. For more details, see Rachel Zellars, "The Glass Cliff: Tamara Thermitus and Quebec's Human Rights Commission," Ricochet, December 14, 2018, <https://ricochet.media/en/2460/the-glass-cliff-tamara-thermitus-and-quebecs-human-rights-commission>; Martin Patriquin, "How Quebec's Human Rights Commission Drove Out Its First Black Female President," The Walrus, October 25, 2022, <https://thewalrus.ca/how-quebecs-human-rights-commission-drove-out-its-firstblackfemale-president>.
18. "Performance Management Assessment Disparities Project," project lead: jasmine.garcialarouche@hrsdcrhdcc.gc.ca.
19. Government of Canada, Office of the Auditor General of Canada, "Report 5, Inclusion in the Workplace for Racialized Employees," accessed February 20, 2024, https://www.oagbvg.gc.ca/internet/English/parl_oag_202310_05_e_44338.html
20. This is an intricate, demanding process that requires research, precision, collaboration and normally takes weeks or months to complete. For more detail on Treasury Board Submissions, see <https://www.canada.ca/en/treasuryboard-secretariat/services/treasury-board-submissions.html>.
21. For example, Symonds v Halifax Regional Police, 2021 CanLii 37128 (NS HRC)[Symonds]; Campbell v Vancouver Police Board (No 4), 2019 BCHRT 275, para 132-40[Campbell].
22. Rumeet Billan. "The Tallest Poppy: How the Workforce is Cutting Ambitious Women Down," accessed February 20, 2024, <https://www.womenofinfluence.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/tp-whitepaper.pdf>.
23. For an excellent discussion of these longstanding stereotypes, see David Pilgrim, "The Sapphire Caricature," Jim Crow Museum, accessed July 3, 2023, <https://www.ferris.edu/HTMLS/news/jimcrow/antiblack/sapphire.htm>, as well as his writings on the Jezebel and Mammy stereotypes.
24. As aforementioned, human rights adjudicators have recognized that Black people are often stereotyped as unreliable, untrustworthy, or dishonest, and these patterns signal discriminatory treatment in the application of human rights law.
25. Government of Canada, Global Affairs Canada, "Addressing Misconduct and Wrongdoing at Global Affairs Canada: Second Annual Report," accessed September 1, 2024, <https://www.international.gc.ca/transparency-transparence/misconduct-wrongdoing-inconduite-mefait/misconduct-wrongdoing-report-rapport-inconduite-mefait-2023-24.aspx?lang=eng>.
26. Government of Canada, "Workplace Harassment and Violence Prevention," accessed August 1, 2024, <https://laws-ois.justice.gc.ca/eng/Regulations/SOR-2020-130/index.html>.
27. Lean In and McKinsey & Company, "Lean In: The State of Black women in Corporate America," accessed August 1, 2024, <https://leanin.org/research/state-of-black-women-in-corporate-america/introduction>. Although a total number is not named, this study relied on data from 900 companies and a 475,000-person sample, disaggregating findings for Black female participants in the large-scale study.
28. Maisha Inaya Giles, "The Impact of Racism: Experience of Black Women Leaders in the Public Sector," (PhD.diss.), Hamline University, (2023), 64.
29. It is certain that the actual percentage is higher given the limiting inquiry focus and narrow interview questions utilized during the Phase 1 interviews, as well as ongoing requests for interviews received during the drafting of this Study.
30. As a few examples: Albury, C., Vongdara, B., Kanji, S. & Nicholas, M. (2023), Exploring Career Stagnation in Employment Equity Groups Amongst Canadian Public Servants, accessed March 20, 2024, https://www.isi2023.org/media/abstracts/ottawa-2023_a4304726a4ffc04552129532cf656303.pdf; Daphna Motro, "The 'Angry Black Woman' Stereotype at Work," Harvard Business Review, January 31, 2022, <https://hbr.org/2022/01/the-angry-black-woman-stereotype-at-work>; Daphna Motro et al., "Race and Reactions to Women's Expressions of Anger at Work: Examining the Effects of the 'Angry Black Woman' Stereotype," Journal of Applied Psychology 107, no. 1 (January 1, 2022): 142-52, <https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000884>; Hunt, Vivian, Dennis Layton, and Sara Prince, "Diversity Matters," McKinsey & Company 1, no. 1 (2015): 15-29; Linos, Elizabeth, Sanaz Mobasserri, and Nina Roussille, "Asymmetric Peer Effects at Work: The Effect of White Coworkers on Black Women's Careers." (2023).



31. In this trend, shortly after accepting a new leadership position, Black women are accused of being poor, mercurial leaders and accused of fostering harmful work conditions. Importantly, the accusations are often a pretext for motives that are harmful or deceitful. For more details, see Rachel Zellars, "The Glass Cliff: Tamara Thermitus and Quebec's Human Rights Commission," Ricochet, December 14, 2018, <https://ricochet.media/en/2460/the-glass-cliff-tamara-thermitus-and-quebecs-human-rights-commission>; Martin Patriquin, "How Quebec's Human Rights Commission Drove Out Its First Black Female President," The Walrus, October 25, 2022, <https://thewalrus.ca/how-quebecs-human-rights-commission-drove-out-its-first-blackfemale-president/>.
32. Giles, "The Impact of Racism," 64.
33. Ibid.
34. Linda Shallcross, Sheryl Ramsay, and Michelle Barker "Severe Workplace Conflict: The Experience of Mobbing," *Negotiation and Conflict Management Research* 6, no. 3 (2013): 191-213.
35. Shallcross, Ramsay, and Barker, "Severe Workplace Conflict," 197.
36. Ibid.
37. Office of the Auditor General of Canada, "Report 5: Inclusion in the Workplace for Racialized Employees," Office of the Auditor General of Canada, accessed March 5, 2024, https://www.oagbvg.gc.ca/internet/English/parl_oag_202310_05_e_44338.html. While Report 5 did not generally disaggregate Black employees in the study, it did for certain sections in order to highlight the unique experiences of Black public servants. As one example: "An analysis of the 2020 and 2022 surveys showed that in the 6 organizations, a greater percentage of racialized respondents than non-racialized respondents indicated that they did not feel free to speak about racism in the workplace without fear of reprisal. A further disaggregated examination of the results for the 3 largest racialized subgroups also revealed differences between results, with respondents identifying as Black reporting the most negative results."
38. "Treasury Board President Anita Anand Announces Career Development Programs for Black Public Servants," YouTube, accessed March 20, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KyzBUIx5IOE>.
39. Adelle Blackett, "Framework to Achieve and Sustain Employment Equity: Report of the Employment Equity Act Review Task Force," Employment and Social Development Canada, accessed March 20, 2024, <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/corporate/portfolio/labour/programs/employmentequity/reports/act-review-task-force.html>, p. 11. Substantive equality is a constitutional principle in Canada, found in Section 15 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. For more detail, see Government of Canada, "Jordan's Principle: Substantive Equality Principles," accessed March 5, 2024, <https://www.sacisc.gc.ca/eng/1583698429175/1583698455266>.
40. Within a Canadian human rights framework, the following patterns are essential considerations for determining antiblack discrimination: 1) an actor's shifting or inconsistent explanations for named antiblack behaviour; 2) an actor's failure to afford a Black person the benefit of the doubt in confusing or unclear situations, or where good faith mistakes are made; 3) an actor's excessive response to a situation that was or would have been handled differently involving a white person; 4) stereotyping of the Black person as dishonest and untrustworthy; and 5) an actor's differential treatment of a Black person, compared to others similarly situated.
41. While clearly identified in the Study (see Phase 2), this urgent trend was previously identified by BEN/REN and detailed in a letter to Deputy Jacqueline Bogden (TBS) on December 4, 2023.
42. Harassment is defined as "any action, conduct or comment, including of a sexual nature, that can reasonably be expected to cause offence, humiliation or other physical or psychological injury or illness to an employee, including any prescribed action, conduct or comment." For details on C-65, see Government of Canada, "Workplace Harassment and Violence Prevention Regulations: Frequently Asked Questions," accessed March 20, 2024, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/benefits-military/conflict-misconduct/newworkplace-harassment-and-violence-prevention-regulations-for-defence-team-public-servants-bill-c65/bill-c-65-42-1-questions-answers.html>.
43. Performance agreements in the core public administration must include clear and measurable work objectives, with associated performance measures, that are linked to the priorities of the organization and of the Government of Canada; observable and measurable expected behaviours; and a learning and development plan.
44. As set forth in Canadian Human Rights Act (R.S.C., 1985, c. H-6), section 16.1: "It is not a discriminatory practice for a person to adopt or carry out a special program, plan or arrangement designed to prevent disadvantages that are likely to be suffered by, or to eliminate or reduce disadvantages that are suffered by, any group of individuals when those disadvantages would be based on or related to the prohibited grounds of discrimination, by improving opportunities respecting goods, services, facilities, accommodation or employment in relation to that group."

45. This position was detailed in the December 2023 report, Senate Canada, “Anti-Black Racism, Sexism and Systemic Discrimination in the Canadian Human Rights Commission,” last accessed March 20, 2024, https://sencanada.ca/content/sen/committee/441/RIDR/Reports/Report_SS-1_CHRC_e.pdf. In the Senate report, the Commissioner also provides “a concrete review and assessment of domestic policies and practices in a way to identify the barriers, identify what solutions have been implemented or not, and make concrete recommendations, just as the Auditor General does.” Crucially, this position must be filled by an expert who has the requisite lived experience, scholarly knowledge, and professional experience related to the realities of systemic antiracism in a Canadian context, as well as an understanding of antiracism from a Canadian legal and human rights perspective.
46. Embodied leadership, such as that offered through the Strozzi Institute <https://strozziinstitute.com/embodiedleadership-trainings/>.
47. See, in particular, the work of Prentis Hemphill at The Embodiment Institute, <https://www.theembodimentinstitute.org/about> and the work of Resmaa Menakem, *My grandmother's hands: Racialized trauma and the pathway to mending our hearts and bodies*, Penguin UK, 2021.

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