

# Discrimination Experienced by Pakistanis in Finland and their Coping Strategies: Five Case Studies

Master's Thesis in  
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Developmental Psychology  
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## Abstract

**Aim:** The aim of the study was to investigate experienced discrimination against Pakistanis living in Finland's capital Helsinki. Experienced discrimination in different settings as well as the coping strategies of the victims were studied.

**Method:** The study was conducted by interviewing five residents of the Helsinki region who had Pakistan as their country of origin. The respondents were self-selected. The interviews consisted of questions related to discrimination in different settings. The interviews were recorded and later transcribed.

**Results:** The results showed a prevalence of discrimination against the Pakistanis in the sample. The five Pakistanis had experienced discrimination in a variety of settings, such as educational institutes, workplaces, restaurants, and related problems due to irritated neighbors. To cope with discriminatory remarks and actions, the participants commonly used problem-focused coping strategies.

**Conclusions:** Discrimination was found against the Pakistanis in the sample. Different coping styles were used by the participants.

*Key Words:* discrimination, Pakistanis, Finland, minority group, ethnicity, coping strategies, problem-focused coping, emotion focused coping, avoidant coping.

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Aim of the Study

The aim of the study was to investigate the existence of discrimination against Pakistanis living in Finland. Moreover, this study also explored how Pakistanis face discrimination in different domains of life and the possible reasons behind it. Additionally, the coping strategies of the respondents to overcome the discriminatory behaviors of the majority group were also studied.

## 1.2 Background Information

Discrimination leads to the impairment of human dignity, generates as well as sustains hardships, and restricts people from the enjoyment of their rights and civil liberties. In addition, it is also a major obstruction in humans' participation in matters associated with society, economy, and politics. Also, it cultivates conflicts by decreasing social cohesion and harmony (Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR), n.d.). Regrettably, an established dataset illustrates that discrimination and more specifically discrimination against minorities is not uncommon (Peucker, 2009; Shen & Dhanani, 2015; Verkuyten, 2005). Discrimination towards minority groups results in the marginalization and exclusion of these groups. Consequently, it implants unfairness that accompanies cascades of deleterious effects for the discriminated group (OHCHR, n.d.). Discrimination against minority groups on various grounds such as race, religion, language, ideology, political or economic grounds is widespread and its adverse effects can be witnessed in different spheres of life affecting education, employment, housing, as well as public services for minorities (Discrimination against minorities, 2022). Outcomes of negative discriminatory behavior and segregation are vital for determining the economic, socio-anthropological, civil, and political prosperity of settler societies as well as of the immigrants who strive to make a new home in settler societies (Esses, 2021).

When immigrants are exposed to discrimination on a daily basis, they adopt different mechanisms to combat its detrimental ramifications. To cope with discrimination and inequality, those coming from different minority and immigrant backgrounds resort to different coping strategies to overcome discrimination and continue performing efficiently in society (Jacob et al., 2022). Interestingly, active coping strategies, such as problem-solving, are more commonly found to be associated with enduring either subtle or overt discriminatory behavior (Jacob et al., 2022; Murray & Ali, 2017). If segregated groups do not employ these coping strategies to encounter discriminator actions of the majority group, then they are at a greater risk of stress and traumatization that can result in self-destructive behavior and can also pose a threat to the psychological well-being and physical health of marginalized persons (Williams et al, 2021).

Despite the damaging consequences of discrimination against minorities, it is a pervasive phenomenon embedded in European societies (EU-MIDIS II, 2017), American societies (Pérez et al., 2008), and it is incapacitating lives of immigrants (Castles et al., 2014). Considering the impact of discrimination on minority groups and on receiving societies, Europe is working to make and implement legislations to prohibit discrimination so that the rights of ethnic and racial minorities can be protected (Castles et al., 2014). To delve into the thesis, it is important to gain a meticulous understanding of discrimination and coping strategies.

### 1.3 Defining Discrimination and its Types

An unjust and prejudicial action against a person or a particularly disadvantaged group of people, who are treated less favorably and unfairly in comparison to another dominant and advantaged group, is known as discrimination. Moreover, minorities experience discriminatory behavior on the basis of ethnic, racial, age, sexual orientation, cultural, and religious differences (American Psychological Association, 2022). Interestingly, immigrants move to settler countries with high hopes and expectations concerning the safety of their basic human rights and a better future. On the contrary, in settler countries, immigrants are blamed for difficulties and confront discrimination. These problems are faced more by the migrants who are different in looks, behaviors, and beliefs than the majority of residents. Thus, racial, and ethnic diversities are critical dimensions of social differentiation influencing migrants (Castles, 2014).

Ethnicity is defined as a categorization of people who identify with each other on the grounds of shared attributes such as origin, history, culture, and values that differentiate them from others. When migrants experience rejection of cultural heterogeneity, ethnic minorities come into being, but their presence is viewed as undesirable by the majority group. Consequently, ethnic minorities are assigned inferior social positions in society by the dominant group. Some minority groups are the result of racism when individuals are grouped because of social qualities and visible markers of phenotypes such as skin and hair color, features, clothing, and so on. These different physical traits provide a reason to place these groups on a lower rank in the social hierarchy (Castles, 2014). Therefore, race provides a bedrock for social hierarchy by categorizing whiteness as superior to others. In other words, racism means speculating people's behaviors, characters, or capabilities based on their socially constructed physical markers of differentiation (Garner, 2014). In addition to assigning values to the minority groups based on their ethnicity and race, these groups receive unequal access to social services, opportunities, and to power (Harris et al., 2018).

Likewise, discrimination against and negative attitudes towards Muslims based on their perceived religious background is called Islamophobia and is a common practice in the West. Unease, uncertainties, resentments, fear, and even abhorrence of Islam and Muslims have been in a European

tradition for hundreds of years during which Muslims have been and still are considered as objects of aversion, hostility and a threat to employment, culture, and the lifestyle of Europeans (Pickel, 2022). Surveys produced across Europe demonstrate growing hatred against Muslim migrants and other ethnic minorities. One such example of displaying hatred is the killing of 77 people in 2011 by Breivik, who demanded the deportation of all the Muslims from Europe (Garner, 2014).

Even though racial and ethnic discrimination have been disproved and rejected, racism is still a problem in today's Europe, here individuals encounter violations and discrimination due to their race and ethnicity. Consequently, anti-Muslim, as well as ethnic and racial discrimination are depriving a large number of migrants of the rights that they are legally entitled to and that are taken for granted by the masses (Dahlstedt & Neergard, 2015).

#### 1.4 Immigrants' Influx and Prevalence Rates of Discrimination

Migration is a complex global phenomenon that influences multiple aspects of individuals' daily lives including economic, social, and security. Europe has witnessed a large influx of migrants and refugees since 2015 but this influx reached its highest level in 2019 when 120,000 migrants reached Europe. A great number of factors are involved behind people's migration to Europe. People are fleeing to Europe on account of prolonged conflict, terror, human rights violations, and persecution in their home countries. Over one-third escape from war-torn areas such as Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, Venezuela, and West Africa (Europe's Migration Crisis, 2020). In addition, the number of migrants coming from different countries and crossing European borders through unsafe irregular means is also rising (European Commission, 2020).

In the Nordic countries, migration has become a vexed political debate because of a significantly large influx of migrants in recent decades. Migration and integration are extremely controversial topics in political, public, and scientific spheres because of the 60% increase in the number of immigrants in Europe from all over the world, since 1990 (Pyrhönen et al., 2017). However, the number of immigrants varies across the Nordic states, Sweden has 17.6%, Norway 15.1%, Denmark 11.5%, and Finland 6.2% of the total population (McAuliffe & Ruhs, 2017). Increasing ethnic and racial diversity is an inevitable repercussion of migration. An upsurge in migration implies that some states are becoming more multi-ethnic and hence are facing the challenges of integrating those belonging to a variety of cultural, racial, ethnic, linguistic, and religious backgrounds. In addition to the integration issues, a growing number of immigrants is perceived as an increased threat to security and therefore one frequently reads tales of hostility, deportation, and ethnic exclusion of immigrants by individual nation states (UN Refugee Agency, 2001).

Mounting research demonstrates the prevalence of racial discrimination in the United States in almost every sphere of life such as the labor market, housing, education, consumer market, health services, and so on. Almost 30% of minority groups perceive that they are receiving unfair treatment due to their color and ethnic affiliation (Pérez et al., 2008). Results of studies carried out in Europe are in line with previous studies and substantiate the pervasiveness of discrimination on a large scale especially, on the basis of age, ethnicity, color, and gender. According to Eurobarometer (2015), the proportion of racial discrimination was found to be highest in Finland (14%), followed by Ireland and Austria (13%), and next in Luxembourg (11%). In contrast, the lowest proportions were detected in Portugal (2%) and the United Kingdom (3%). Recently, the Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey (EU-MIDIS II) investigated the prevalence of discrimination against minority groups in Europe as European societies are becoming more and more diverse. Results obtained from this survey are in line with the previous dataset suggesting the ubiquity of this phenomenon. Additionally, outcomes of this survey illustrated the incidence rate of discrimination is ranging between 4% to 50% however, Finland demonstrated the highest occurrence rates.

In relation to former research, a recent study revealed different prevalence rates of discrimination among different minority groups in Finland. Rask et al. (2018) explored the occurrence rates of discrimination among Kurds, Somali, and Russian minorities in Finland. Outcomes of their study showed that 29% of the Somali population reported experiences of discrimination and concurrently, Russian and Kurdish populations reported elevated rates i.e., 35%. Moreover, the prevalence of subtle discrimination was higher and was ranging between 22% and 24% compared to overt form of discrimination among above mentioned three minority groups (Rask et al., 2018). Likewise, a meta-analysis done by Pascoe and Richman (2009) demonstrated that even though discrimination against minorities is widespread, its expression has changed from overt to subtle. Interestingly, people show their abhorrence or destitute towards people of different ethnicity and race indirectly rather than directly.

To sum up, it is evident from an established set of empirical data that ethnic, religious, and racial discrimination is a ubiquitous phenomenon around the globe and prevalent almost in all settler societies. It is experienced by immigrants living in Finland in different settings such as in the workplace (Jasinskaja-Lahti et al., 2007); educational institutes, health facilities, and social services (Rask et al., 2018); in restaurants (Min & Joireman, 2021), the private rental or leasing housing markets (Öblom & Antfolk, 2017).



## 1.5 Discrimination at the Workplace

Empirical data support the existence of discrimination in the workplace and in hiring. Landing a good job is a big challenge for minorities and therefore unemployment rates are higher among immigrants compared to native citizens. Consequently, the integration of immigrants into the job market is a serious concern. Despite higher education levels and extensive work experience, minorities are unable to get an equal chance of selection for a job in Finland. Jasinskaja-Lahti et al. (2007) explored the phenomenon of perceived ethnic discrimination in the workplaces and its impact on the mental health of three different immigrant groups from Soviet Union, Russian, and Estonian origin. The results of their study are in congruence with the previous studies and prove the occurrence of discrimination against immigrants in the workplace.

Likewise, people with different names than native Finns also face discrimination in terms of getting shortlisted for a job interview even though they were equal in education and human-capital credentials when compared to white Finns. Surprisingly, the findings of a study demonstrate that discrimination against minorities is prevalent in the Finnish Job market and the prospect to receive a job interview is highly dependent on the name of the job applicant. Therefore, Finns are hired easily and on the other hand, people of minority groups face unemployment (Ahmad, 2019).

## 1.6 Discrimination at Restaurants

Ethnic and racial discrimination also prevails in the field of hospitality and service industry such as at restaurants. Most frequently it is exhibited in the form of overt degradation of services. Customers receive differential treatment at restaurants that are contingent on their race or ethnicity. Moreover, commonly customers are not satisfied with the services they receive at restaurants. Customers of different ethnicity and race report that they receive poor services at cafes and food points. Service failure was a common factor that was attributed by immigrants to ethnic discrimination. To conclude, the race and ethnicity of a customer influence the treatment and services they get at restaurants (Min & Joireman, 2021).

## 1.7 Discrimination in leasing an Apartment

Ethnicity and race may reduce the chance of receiving a positive response from a landlord when it comes to renting a private apartment in a settler society. Immigrants with Arabic names or Muslim names are segregated when they apply for leasing a house from a private sector. Additionally, the response rate to their queries related to renting an apartment is also low. In Finland, Finnish as well as Swedish people, get an apartment more easily than immigrants with a different ethnic, racial, and

religious background. A survey aimed at investigating the discrimination in leasing a private apartment in Finland showed that people with Islamic names face discrimination. Landlords don't respond to Muslims, and they prefer to rent their house to a man or a woman with Swedish or Finnish background. This survey verifies the existence of ethnic and racial discrimination in leasing a private house in Finland (Öblom, & Antfolk, 2017).

### 1.8 Discrimination in Educational Institutes

Discrimination also prevails in educational institutes and hinders students of different immigrant backgrounds from educational achievements. Teachers discriminate between native and minority students in three potential ways first, regular classroom participation and interaction; second, grading any assignment; and third, evaluation of students' aptitudes or capabilities. Students can see the discouraging behavior of teachers and can attribute them to ethnicity and race (Wenz & Hoenig, 2019). Disappointingly, when students confront discrimination at the hands of other students and teachers, consequently they develop depression, low self-esteem, emotional problems, and poor academic achievements. To sum up, discrimination adversely affects student's mental health and educational attainment (D'hondt, et al., 2021).

### 1.9 Definition of Different Types of Coping Strategies

Woefully, when humans are subjected to everyday discriminatory behaviors, they need various strategies to counter its noxious outcomes and cope with its damaging effects (Harrell, 2000). According to the American Association of Psychology, a coping strategy is either an action or a string of actions or cognitive mechanisms to mitigate stressful or intimidating situations that outstrips an individual's resources. There are different kinds of coping strategies but some of them are common and used by people more often such as problem-solving strategies, emotion-focused strategies, and avoidant coping strategies. Actions, techniques, and efforts directed toward the management of stressful circumstances and modifying or decreasing the stressor is known as a problem-focused coping strategy. Emotion-focused coping strategy aims at regulating the negative emotions linked with the stressor rather than making attempts to solve the problem or eliminate the stressor. When attempts and efforts are made to avoid uncomfortable life situations and involve withdrawal from stressful events, it is termed an avoidant coping strategy.

### 1.10 Minorities' Experience of Discrimination and their Coping strategies

There is a growing concern in identifying the coping strategies used by minority groups in response to discrimination. Empirical evidence shows a variety of strategies used by immigrants to deal with

the discriminatory behavior of receiving societies. One study revealed that avoidant coping and problem-solving coping strategies are more commonly used by black women to cope with racial discrimination in the United States of America (West et al., 2010). Likewise, Murray and Ali (2017) when exploring coping mechanisms of ethnic minorities in the workplace, found that problem-focused was frequently used by minorities to overcome stress in response to exposure to discriminatory behaviors. The same study also revealed that the second common coping strategy among ethnic and racial minorities was found to be emotion focused.

Another systematic review furnishes evidence along the same line by demonstrating that problem-solving, avoidant-coping strategy, and support from social relationships have been repeatedly used by black immigrants to cope with ethnic and racial discrimination. This review investigated the coping mechanisms among the black population on both continents including America and Canada (Jacob et al., 2022). Similarly, results were obtained from a study aimed at investigating the association between perceived discrimination, depression, and coping strategies among the population of Hispanic and Somali origin in the United States. Path analysis disclosed that participants of the study who reported problem-focused strategy as a coping style against discrimination experienced fewer depressive symptoms. Importantly, the commonly used coping style was problem-focused among the victims of discrimination (Forster et al., 2022).

To encapsulate, different coping mechanisms and strategies are used by people of different ethnic and racial background to cope with stress caused by unequal and discriminatory behaviors, acts, and remarks of host societies but growing empirical evidence support problem-focused coping strategy as widely used by minorities.

### 1.11 Research Questions

In the light of former empirical evidence, the following questions are derived to explore the phenomenon of discrimination against the Pakistani population:

Research question 1: Are Pakistani-origin immigrants in Finland confronting discrimination?

Research question 2: Are Pakistani-origin immigrants confronting discrimination in different settings such as education, workplaces, private renting house markets, and restaurants?

Research question 3: What are the common coping strategies used by Pakistanis to cope with discrimination?

## 2. Method

### 2.1 Sample

The sample consisted of five respondents, three females and two males, who were residents of the Helsinki metropolitan region. The respondents were self-selected. To be eligible to participate in the study, participants had to self-identify as Pakistani. The mean age of the participants was 39.8 years ( $SD = 6.0$ ). The participants had diverse professional backgrounds and two of them were unemployed due to medical issues.

Table 1

*Background Information of the Respondents in the Study (N = 5)*

Respondent number	Sex	Age	Marital status	Profession
1	fem	45	Married	Unemployed
2	male	35	Married	Businessman
3	fem	42	Married	Unemployed
4	fem	45	Widow	Educationist
5	male	32	Unmarried	IT specialist

### 2.2 Instrument

A structured interview, containing 43 questions to explore discrimination at different levels, was used to collect data from the respondents. The second part of the interview was targeted at identifying the coping strategies used by the participants. The interview was concluded by asking questions about the reasons leading to ethnic discrimination in Finland. The interview questions were written in English and translated into Urdu as the interviews were conducted in Urdu. The interview scheme commences with a few questions about the demographic characteristics of the participants including age, education, marital status, and profession. The rest of the questions are listed below:

1. Are you treated with less courtesy than other people are?
2. Are you treated with less respect than other people are?
3. Do people act as if they think you are not smart?
4. Do people act as if they are afraid of you?
5. Do people act as if they think you are dishonest?
6. Do people act as if they are better than you are?

7. Are you being ignored?
8. Have you ever experienced any problem due to your physical appearance/clothing?
9. Are you called names or are you insulted?
10. Are you threatened or harassed?
11. Have you received poorer service than other people at restaurants?
12. Have you received poorer service than other people in stores?
13. Have you ever been unfairly discouraged by a teacher or advisor from continuing your education?
14. Have you ever been unfairly prevented from moving into a neighborhood because the landlord or the realtor refused to sell or rent you a house or an apartment?
15. Have you ever moved into a neighborhood where neighbors made life difficult for you or your family?
16. Have you ever in Finland been unfairly denied a bank loan?
17. Have you ever been followed around in a store? By whom? What do you think was the reason behind it?
18. Have you ever been unfairly stopped, searched, questioned, physically threatened, or abused by the police in Finland?
19. Your opinion was not valued because you are from Pakistan?
20. You have felt that you were ignored or not taken seriously by your boss?
21. You were humiliated in front of others?
22. You were unfairly given a job that no one else wants to do?
23. Others have assumed that you work in a lower status job than you do and treated you as such?
24. A coworker with less experience and fewer qualifications was promoted before you?
25. You have to work twice as hard as others to get the same treatment?
26. Your coworkers have used racial or ethnic insults or jokes?
27. Your supervisor or boss has directed racial or ethnic insults or jokes at you?
28. You were watched more closely than others?
29. You were unfairly denied a promotion in Finland?
30. For unfair reasons, have you never been hired for a job in Finland?
31. You were unfairly fired from a workplace?

#### *Coping Strategies*

32. If any of the things mentioned earlier has happened to you, how did you react and what did you do?
33. Did you take action against the person who victimized you?
34. Did you complain any official about it?
35. If any of the things mentioned earlier has happened to you

36. Did you criticize or blame yourself for the things that has happened?
37. Have you been making jokes about the situation?
38. Have you been turning to work or other activities to take your mind off the things?
39. Have you been saying to myself that this is not real?
40. Have you been refusing to believe that it has happened?
41. Do you try to avoid certain social situations and places?

#### *Reasons for Ethnic Discrimination in Finland*

42. If the above has ever happened to you, what do you think are the reasons?
43. Is there anything else you would like to add to the conversation around discrimination?

## 2.3 Procedure

A WhatsApp group of the Pakistani community was used to obtain potential respondents for the study. An audio message was sent to the group including a brief introduction of the researcher and the purpose of the study, and a request was made to encourage people to take part in it. First, no one responded, and a second message was sent after a week. One female contacted the researcher, and the interview date was decided mutually on a phone call. The interview was conducted on the agreed date on Zoom, and it took one hour and thirty-eight minutes to complete the first interview. The interviewee's consent for recording the interview was obtained beforehand.

Finding a second participant was difficult. The researcher contacted many Facebook groups and some Pakistani friends but none of them were willing to participate and almost all declined to participate by saying that it is a very confidential issue to discuss. After almost a month's struggle, the researcher contacted the administrator of a WhatsApp group and requested her to send a message in the group and assure the group members of confidentiality. Four additional people responded through messages and showed their willingness on volunteering as they all had encountered discrimination in Finland. Once agreed, the participants were contacted individually through phone calls, and were provided with information pertaining to the importance and aims of the study. In addition, dates for the interviews were confirmed to avoid any overlap.

Among the remaining four interviews, two were made through Zoom and two on WhatsApp call. All interviews were recorded with the consent of the interviewees. All respondents were explained their right to anonymity, and they agreed that their names should be kept confidential in the thesis. Ergo, numerals would be used instead of names of research participants to maintain confidentiality.

It took almost four months to conduct all the interviews. Later, all interviews were translated from Urdu into English and transcribed at the same time transcription was done manually. The finished transcripts were then sent to the supervisor for feedback. Finally, the interview transcripts were analysed using qualitative content analysis to identify common themes that emerged repeatedly in the qualitative data. The thematic analysis began with the identification of themes and later division of themes into categories. However, new categories were created for the statements that did not fit into any defined category.

## 2.4 Ethical Considerations

The study is consistent with the principles concerning human research ethics of the Declaration of Helsinki (World Medical Association, 2013), as well as follows the guidelines for the responsible conduct of research of The Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity (2012).

### 3. Results

#### 3.1 Themes

##### 3.1.1 Theme 1: Discourteous and Disrespectful Behavior

All the participants agreed on the discourteous and disrespectful behavior of people towards them. Given the rude conduct of Finnish people, respondents discussed that they face impoliteness in almost every sector of life whether it's an educational institute or a health care center. Furthermore, there were no gender differences as both males and females were experiencing discourteousness and disregard equally. In addition, most of the participants reported that it was more evident through their facial expressions and gestures.

*People do treat me with less courtesy and poorly in some places. As I wear hijab and cover my head that's why people try to stay away from me. I have seen that when I get closer to people, they move away from me. They treat their people more gently and are more welcoming toward them. Respect and honor are distant things; they don't even consider us as a human. If you go somewhere they will ignore you as if you are not present, there (1).*

*Sometimes people try to misbehave and disrespect others, and it happens mostly when foreigners are not aware of their rights and are also uninformed of the local law. When you have knowledge about your rights then you can encounter them (2).*

*Yes, I had experienced many times that people treat me and my community with less courtesy. For example, when I went to the hospital nurse saw me in a hijab then it was problematic. The nurse first perceived me as a foreigner and secondly as a Muslim covering her head then it was just like icing on the cake. She made weird faces after seeing me and I know this is because of the wrong concept of Islam in their heads. She showed through her facial expressions that she did not like me, and her mood got off. During my stay in the hospital when I was going through a kidney transplant, a nurse who was attending to me came to me to take my blood sample. She inserted the needle in my vein brutally and I screamed in pain, and she gave me a burst of mocking laughter and said to the nearby Finnish patient that "look she is doing drama as if she is in pain" and they both started laughing at me. She could not dare to say these words to a white patient. Finnish as well as Europeans are given more respect and are treated more politely compared to us and other Asians (3).*

*My husband was a cancer patient. I visited the hospital almost every day and the medical staff at hospitals were not courteous. They could be more polite to me and my family. It was very difficult for me to manage the household, family, and ill husband and above all the rude behavior of nurses. I had been through emotional*



trauma, and I believe if nurses could have been courteous to me then I had not have suffered from mental stress (4).

*I have experienced many times that people are not courteous with outsiders I mean immigrants, but they are more polite with each other. I can feel the difference when I go outside either in the market or the workplace, people treat us differently. there is a huge difference in the respect we get from these people and natives respect each other. Considering us an out- group and alien, they consider us as not worthy of respect. Although we are working hard here to earn living expenses and serve these people but still there is a lack of respect that we should be given. Mostly it's through facial expressions and gestures, that people will show their likeness or abhorrence (5).*

### 3.1.2 Theme 2: Ignorant and Inferior

Participants shared different instances when they were considered inferior and unknowledgeable. People made participants feel that they are far better than them. In addition, they discussed that people explicitly tell them that they belong to an underdeveloped country and hence are uncivilized and illiterate. People are prejudiced and openly overtly express that they are superior as well as better than us. One of the participants quit his job as he could not tolerate his colleague's taunting behavior of letting him down.

*people make me feel that they are much better than me. This is a common trait among natives. In my office, whenever we are discussing any assignment or issue, and if I try to suggest something, my colleagues overlook it. Sometimes they don't pay attention to my ideas, and I can see they are doing this to show that they are better than me (5).*

*Many times, people say openly that they are far better than us. I had worked in different settings and met people highly prejudiced people. They thought of themselves as perfect humans and expatriates as bogus. I quit the job because I could not bear the unjust behavior of one of my colleagues who were all the time busy letting me down. She spent all her time and energy just to prove that she is the best and I am the worst. She used to make sarcastic comments and kept telling me that you cannot do anything (4).*

*During a conversation with the Finnish community, people said that we (Pakistanis) are the uncivilized nation, and we are illiterate people. Many people said that we are uncivilized and illiterate (3).*

According to one interviewee, the language barrier is the leading cause behind people's thinking of us as inferior and ignorant.

*I think the language barrier is a big problem. People do think they are better than us because they know their Finnish language skills are outstanding. Due to this language barrier, people think they are superior to us. Sometimes, I feel they avoid even communicating just because they think I will not be able to understand them and conversate with them (1).*

### 3.1.3 Theme 3: Problems due to Clothing and Physical Appearance

Among all the five participants three were facing discriminatory behavior of people based on their clothing and physical appearance. Women were judged negatively for covering their heads and wearing a hijab. Likewise, if men wear their national dress (Shalwar and Kameez) they were also facing problems due to their clothing and physical appearance. Participants of the study described that people show their abhorrence towards Islam and Muslims covertly through facial expressions and gestures. One of the participants narrated her experience by saying:

*People do not express their aversion overtly. They always express it covertly. I Wear hijab and people do not like it. So, when I sit next to them, they mostly leave that place to stay away from me. This is also a kind of ignorance and avoidance. Their facial expressions and body language tells a lot of things about how they are feeling about me. This shows their animosity towards me. Through their actions they make us feel that they don't like us (1).*

In addition, different manners of dressing and physical appearance were entailing judgment of participants as extremist or a threat to society, particularly, women wearing hijab were considered troublemakers. For instance, one female told her real-life experience of being considered a thief just because she was covering her head. This depicts how Muslims are being viewed as a rabble-rouser. One respondent reported that:

*Our national dress is different and if we wear it, people think that we are living in the stone age. They judge us on the base of our physical appearance and attire. I wear hijab and people do not like it. They think that I am old fashioned, and I follow an extreme and ancient religion. Once I was with my sister and we visited one hypermarket. When we were exiting the market, we were stopped by a security guard. He said to us that "you stole a cigarette pack from the market" and I was shocked as I was not anticipating that he would blame us. I got angry and asked how he could blame us. He asked us to let him check our bags when he checked he did not find any cigarette pack. Then he said that you were wearing a big hijab I thought you might have hidden the pack in it. He then said sorry and went away. I was wondering that there were many people there, then why he*

*did not stop or suspect anyone else and why only us? Because we both were covering our heads with hijab, and he knew that we were Muslims that's why he did it (3).*

Another respondent told the story where he described how he faced a problem just because he looks different and had a different skin color. He said that:

*I faced several problems just because of my different physical appearance. They think of us as a danger or a threat that's why they behave inhumanely. As I have different skin color which makes me different from others and generates trouble for me. I was working in a restaurant and had to deliver an order to a Finnish customer. I reached the customer's house and parked my car in the parking lot near the customer's car. After delivering the order, I was on my way back to the restaurant when I got a phone call from my boss that the customer had called the restaurant and complained that you hit his car while parking your car there. I was shocked because I parked my car at a big distance from his car and nothing happened there. My boss ordered me to go back to the customer house. I was amazed at how he could do this to me. I reached his home and told him that I did not do anything, but he kept blaming me for hitting his car. I asked him to call the police and let them decide who did this. Police arrived there after more than an hour and after inspection, they declared me innocent and allowed me to go. I still wonder how you could do this to a man just because he looks different and has a different skin color. It's really disheartening and saddening (2).*

#### *3.1.4 Theme 4: Poor Services and Unwelcoming Behavior in Restaurants*

Taking into account the services and behavior of staff at restaurants, participants complained about the attitude of the receptionist as well as the waiter. They were not happy with the discrimination they were facing at restaurants.

*There is a difference in their behavior towards us and others. If we go to the restaurant, no one welcomes us but other people are warmly welcomed. Moreover, when food is served there is again a difference in the behavior of the attendant or waiter. When they serve the food to other customers, they greet them politely and on the other hand, when the waiter serves us food, he or she does not greet us and serves the food with a blank face. They do treat people differently (1).*

Another interviewee revealed that:

*People are treated differently at restaurants depending on their ethnicity and nationality. Recently it happened to me too when I went to a restaurant with my family. I ordered the food for dine-in and got the food in packed form for takeaway. I went to the receptionist and complained to her, and she said that the restaurant is going to*

*close within 20 minutes hence I couldn't sit and dine in. I told her that this is her fault, she should not have taken my order if she doesn't have enough time to let me sit and eat my food. She allowed me to sit and have food. After 20 minutes the receptionist came to me and asked me to leave the restaurant as she was closing the door. There were so many other customers sitting there and she did not ask anyone to leave, except me and my family (2).*

In addition to unwelcoming behavior, interviewees were also getting satisfactory services at restaurants.

*I have noticed that native Finns get the best services at restaurants, but we expatriates get just acceptable services. They are greeted warmly, their food will be served very well but, in my case, no one even greets me at the restaurant. They are given special treatment compared to us. Last week, I went to a restaurant, and I was served cold food. I complained to the waitress, and she said that can't help me. I was angry that why I am paying if I cannot get even warm food. I assure you that if the same complaint would have been made by a Finn, then the waitress should have served him warm and fresh food (5).*

### *3.1.5 Theme 5: Discouraging Behavior at Educational Institutions*

Teachers at educational institutions were showing discriminatory behaviors towards Pakistanis by discouraging them and ignoring them. Moreover, teachers were expressing their animosity by giving bad grades to the student.

*One of my teachers has some kind of aversion to me. He was after me and could not be happy with me no matter what. I worked hard to make him happy and did my assignments wholeheartedly, but he gave me bad grades. His behavior discouraged me to pursue my degree, but I stayed determined and completed my degree (5).*

*When I was studying my teacher used to pay attention to Russian students, but we Asians were totally ignored and discouraged by her. She behaved differently with different nationalities. She was polite with white students only and was rude to me. Similarly, I was taking a Finnish language course and the instructor was rude to me only. She used to ask me difficult questions as if I was the only student in the class. If I answered wrong, she got angry at me and made fun of me. All the other students were white, and I was the only Asian, I could feel that she was doing this to discourage me (3).*

*I have witnessed the highly discouraging behavior of teachers towards immigrants. My teacher unjustly failed me in one course because the student needed to pass. I was disheartened and discouraged. Later I took that course from another school and passed the exam. After passing the exam I went back to that teacher to inform*

*her that I successfully passed that course and she sarcastically said to me “Really! you pass the exam”. It showed her abhorrence towards us (Pakistanis/Muslims) (1).*

### 3.1.6 Theme 6: Irritable Neighborhood

Almost all the participants had endured troublesome and irritable neighbors. Neighbors made the life of the interviewees so difficult and compelled them to leave that space. Two respondents had firsthand experience with difficult neighbors.

*Our neighbors had a pet dog, and it was very aggressive. Whenever the dog encountered us, it started growling loudly and one day it was about to bite me, but my neighbor never apologized for it. They used to make faces whenever they saw us. She was quite bossy. It was not easy to live with such kind of neighbors who are trying to control your life. Her behavior was rude to us, she made our life tough, and we were compelled to leave that apartment, therefore we moved to a different place (3).*

*My neighbor is extremely annoying and troublesome. He has made my life hard. He is living on the first floor, and we are living on the second floor. He is so very irritating that he never let us walk in our own homes. If we walk after 10 pm he starts knocking on our door that you people are walking and your footsteps are noisy. Can you imagine that you are not allowed to walk in your own home?. If me and my children talk to each other he complains that he is unable to sleep due to sounds. He has made my life miserable. Finally, I am leaving this apartment and moving to another one as I cannot tolerate such annoying neighbors anymore (4).*

Two of the participants shared experiences of their friends who were forced to leave their apartment due to the annoying neighborhood. Neighbors created trouble just to make the life of Pakistanis hard and eventually, they changed their apartment.

*The Finn neighbors just make the life of Pakistanis difficult and compel them to move away. The same happened to my close friend. He moved to Finland a year ago and got an apartment where most Finns were living. His neighbor was troublesome and quarrelsome. My friend used to come home at 10 pm and as soon as he opened the main door of the building, his neighbor popped out of his apartment and started shouting at him for coming late. He never made any kind of noise even then she used to argue that whenever he opened the door it creates noise and she get disturbed. My friend says it seems as if she is waiting for my entry just to argue and fight. It happened to him every single day and was causing distress. consequently, he left the apartment recently and moved to a different place (2).*

*One of my friends had a very bad experience with neighbors. He was living in a building where mostly native Finns were living. His neighbors did not let him have guests at home. He could not do any social activity at his home. His neighbors started ringing the doorbell and complaining that they are getting disturbed because of his guests. They were very annoying. Once I visited their home and I don't know how his neighbors got to know that I am there, and they started ringing the doorbell and asking my friend don't make noise. I was astonished because I had just arrived at his home. My friend told me that most of the time they are on the balcony and whenever they see anyone visiting me, they just start doing it. My friend changed his apartment just because of those irritating neighbors. They had made his life difficult (5). Recently, I was looking for a new apartment. I contacted a housing company to which I was interested renting an apartment. Their website was showing two vacant apartments and one of them was newly renovated. When I talked to the owner about renting the new apartment, she refused to give it to me after hearing my name and insisted me take the old apartment. I argued with her that I can pay the rent of the new apartment and I am interested in it, but she did not agree. It was obvious that she did not want any immigrant to get that new apartment. This shows how much they discriminate between us and others (5).*

### 3.1.7 Theme 7: Problems at the Workplace

Apart from discrimination at the societal level, participants reported problems at the workplace owing to their different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. At the workplace, interviewees were treated differently in comparison to other European or Finn employees. Commonly described issues were: no importance to the opinions given by them and promotion problems.

*Interviewee laughed out loud and said, "It's very common here". No one considers us here. Sometimes it happens that I am at the workplace and giving some suggestions about something, but no one takes it seriously. They will do only what they want to do, or their Finnish colleagues will suggest. Additionally, I have seen many people who are less qualified but get good jobs and promotions because they are white and are also native Finns. I am highly educated but could not get any job related to my field of education because I am brown, and I am Pakistani (1).*

*It happened to me multiple times. My employer was biased and impolite to me. She never gave importance to my opinions or suggestions. I ever tried to give suggestions about something or provided my opinion regarding anything, but my colleagues just ignored it. My daughter faced the same issue. My daughter applied for a job and had 4 years of relevant experience to that job. She appeared in the interview and got positive feedback that she is very competent. She got an email from the company that the interview was perfect and interested in you. But then she got an email that she was not selected. We got to know that they hired two girls who were not experienced and less educated than my daughter (4).*

*I quit one job just because my suggestions had no value for my colleagues, and it demotivate me. It happened repeatedly that I lost my interest in that job and decided to leave it. It's hard to get promoted even when you are qualified and hard-working. I started my first job and at the same time another White colleague started the job*

*in the same company and designation at the same time. After almost a year he was promoted but I did not. When we were hired at the same time and were having same the job responsibilities then we should both be promoted (5).*

### 3.2 Coping Strategies

Three popular types of coping strategies are emotion focused, problem focused, and avoidant coping strategies. When participants were asked different questions concerning coping strategies, they were employed to overcome discrimination. Interestingly, all interviewees told that they were using problem focused coping strategies. They ascertained that each time they experienced unjust and discriminatory behavior they made complaints against it to the accountable department and official.

### 3.3 Reasons behind Discrimination

Looking at the reasons behind the discriminatory behaviors of people against the Pakistani community, all the interviewees agreed that they were facing aversions and abhorrence just because of their dark skin color, clothing, and different physical appearance. Into the bargain, our cultural values are quite different from Finns and other European and they also lead to destitute. Moreover, negative attitudes towards Islam i.e., Islamophobia also brings about discrimination as people consider Islam as an extreme religion. Although, it's the other way around as Islam preaches peace. The aforementioned factors are playing a vital role in eliciting hatred and prejudice. Consequently, the Pakistani community is confronting racial discrimination.

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1 Summary of the Results

The main objective of the study was to explore the experiences of discrimination, the reasons behind it, and coping strategies employed to endure it among five Pakistanis residing in the Helsinki region in Finland. The findings demonstrate the existence of ethnic discrimination against Pakistanis in the Helsinki area. Furthermore, the results obtained also bring about a perspective and illustrate how Pakistanis cope with ethnic discrimination. It can be deduced from the accounts of the interviewees that some individuals from Pakistan experience racialization in different areas of their lives such as at educational institutes, in restaurants, and at workplaces. Experiences of discrimination were linked to clothing and physical appearance. Moreover, Finns were experienced as being discourteous and disrespectful toward Pakistanis and they considered the latter as being ignorant and inferior.

The results are in line with previous studies that illustrate that ethnic discrimination is a ubiquitous phenomenon around the globe (Pérez et al., 2008; Shao et al., 2023). Although European countries are considered the most equal states globally, a broad base of existing data has revealed that immigrants in Europe encounter a considerable amount of discrimination and racism (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2009). The present study found that white Finns and other Europeans living in Finland had attitudes and behaviors toward Pakistanis that were disrespectful and discourteous. Additionally, the Pakistani population was considered as uncivilized, ignorant, and inferior. Bruneau et al. (2018) found similar results, suggesting that disregard and rudeness toward immigrants and more specifically toward Muslims are not uncommon in European countries. On the contrary, other migrants are considered civilized and consequently, Muslim immigrants feel dejected.

Similarly, the participants experienced discriminatory behaviors of others due to their different physical appearance as well as clothing. This finding is supported by a former study implying that ethnic minorities are assigned inferior social positions in society by the dominant group. Some minority groups are the result of racism when humans are grouped based on social qualities and visible markers of phenotypes such as skin and hair color, features, clothing, and so on. These different physical traits provide a reason to place these groups on a lower status in the social hierarchy (Castles, 2014). Therefore, race provides a bedrock for social hierarchy by categorizing whiteness as superior to other human beings. In other words, racism means speculating about people's behaviors, characters, or capabilities based on their socially constructed physical markers of differentiation (Garner, 2014).

Results emanating from this study also show that at restaurants people of different ethnic backgrounds are treated differently. Regarding the behavior of restaurant staff toward the Pakistani group, this study suggests that the former showed disrespect, and humility, and were unwelcoming



to the target population. Furthermore, participants complained about the poor services they were receiving in comparison to the White population. These findings are supported by the results of a study conducted by Min and Joireman (2020) in United States that revealed that customers encountered poor services at restaurants due to their different ethnic and racial background.

Moreover, it is also revealed through this research that apart from discriminatory and inequitable behavior at restaurants, the Pakistani population also tolerates discouraging behavior of teachers at educational institutions. The grades that students receive are of paramount importance for their academic and professional career. A great number of studies validate that ethnicity may cause teachers' differential treatment that consequently disheartens and discourages students (Dee, 2005). One of the participants in this study criticized a teacher who gave him poor grades based on his different ethnic background. This is in accordance with the former study that showed a sizeable discrimination effect on the low scores of high school students due to their different foreign backgrounds (Hinnerich et al., 2011).

Findings indicate unfair denial of the lease of an apartment by the owner based solely on ethnic discrimination. This chronicle agrees with previous research depicting significant discrimination between natives and migrants in terms of housing outcomes. This difference is linked to the house's condition. Migrants receive unfair treatment when they are searching for an appropriate and well-located apartment, due to their relationship with different ethnic groups and races. Such housing market discrimination is evident globally including in European countries e.g., Spain, Germany, and Sweden (Pager & Shepherd, 2008). Andersen et al. (2013), found that immigrant and minority groups face a disadvantage in the housing market of Nordic countries due to their faulty housing policies. They are mostly confined to the least sought-after private apartments or public houses in the inner cities or bordering suburbs. Moreover, access to an apartment is also dependent on administrative figures making decisions of housing, therefore, the chances of agentic discrimination are also higher.

In a study conducted in Finland, 30% of the immigrants in the sample reported discrimination in apartment seeking practices specifically, those having Islamic names receive a low response rate when they inquire about an apartment compared to those with Swedish and Finnish names (Öblom & Antfolk, 2017). In line with prior research, a survey conducted by ARA (Housing Finance and Development Centre) of Finland showed that in 2021, of the total number of individuals facing homelessness, 18% were immigrants. Migrants experience discrimination in the housing sector due to being a member of a non-European countries or ethnic group. All these attributes lead to low response rate to immigrants who are hunting for a house and an unequal chance to acquire accommodation ("Immigrants encounter", 2022). Additionally, it is also evident from the results that White Finns proved to be difficult neighbors. They were troublesome, irritable, bossy, and annoying

neighbors who tried to control their Pakistani neighbors. Finns were criticizing their activities and their bad behaviors were compelling Pakistanis to move into a different apartment.

Concurrent with the experience of ethnic discrimination, this study also identified coping strategies of the sample to manage stress. Interestingly, everyone in the group of the research sample reported the use of problem-solving coping strategies to mitigate the negative effect of discrimination. These findings are supported by earlier research that suggests that Mexican immigrants in the United States cope with the discriminatory behavior of American Indians by using problem solving strategy. Mexican families help their youth to overcome the deleterious effects of discrimination by complaining to the authorities and trying to resolve the issue (Martin et al., 2022).

At the workplace, Pakistanis tolerated differential behavior of colleagues based on discrimination due to belonging to a different ethnic group. In addition, co-workers did not place importance on the opinions of the persons having different skin color and culture, and their suggestions were overlooked by the White Finns. Such discouraging behavior leads to demotivation and results in quitting a job. Furthermore, job promotions were also denied in cases of Pakistani employees. These findings are strongly supported by those of a study suggesting that people from immigrant backgrounds for instance from the former Soviet Union, Russia, Estonia encountered discriminatory behaviors of their colleagues in the workplace (Jasinskaja-Lahti et al., 2007).

Consistent with the previous research, the findings of this study also suggest that subtle discrimination is more prevalent in Finland compared to overt discrimination. Rask et al. (2018) found that among ethnic minorities including Kurds, Somalis, and Russians residing in Finland, the experience of subtle racial discrimination is more than the overt expression of racialization. Ergo, the results of this study are in line with this research as the Pakistani-origin population also faces discrimination stealthily. Nearly all the participants of the current study narrated that they ascertained prejudiced behavior through body language, facial expressions, and gestures. Henceforth, subtle ethnic discrimination is more prevalent in Finland.

Interestingly, almost all the research interviewees complimented Finland by saying that despite the existence of discrimination in different domains of life, it is one of the best countries to live in. They all praised the social security system where health care and education are free for all. Above all, they reported that they all feel safe in Finland and appreciate the government for making efforts to make society more equal.

## 4.2 Limitations of the Study

In order to interpret the findings of this study, it is substantial to mention some limitations. The sample of the study was a self-selected convenient one, with a smaller number of participants than initially

planned due to people's refusal to talk about and share their personal experiences of ethnic discrimination. All the participant except one volunteered their participation in the study due to their discrimination experiences in everyday life. Additionally, the sample was considerably small and henceforth insufficient to represent the general Pakistani population in Finland. Owing to a restricted number of interviewees, cautions are needed when extrapolating the findings of this study as well as drawing any conclusion.

#### 4.3 Implications of the Study and Suggestions for Future Research

The main aim of the study, to explore ethnic discrimination and their coping strategies to overcome racialization in Pakistani population of the Helsinki region was attained. This is the first attempt to discover experiences of discrimination in the Pakistanis inhabiting Finland and previous research has attempted to investigate this phenomenon in other minority groups including Russian, Somali, and Kurdish. Furthermore, findings obtained from this study can be employed as a guide to enlighten the gravity of the situation and to shape intervention as well as prevention programs against ethnic discrimination. Finally, this study is significant in terms of crafting social policies to promote equality among different minority populations in Finland and combat racism. These initiatives will not only encounter discrimination but will also nurture social cohesion and a sense of shared belonging among the diverse ethnic populations.

Concerning overcoming the limitation of this study, a better understanding of the perspective of ethnic discrimination and coping strategies, and generalization of results, it is beneficial to interview a large sample group. Likewise, a quantitative study using a big anonymous group of participants could yield more extensive data and can also extrapolate conclusions to the Pakistani population in Finland. Furthermore, future research in this field can investigate the mental well-being of people facing discrimination. This could aid the development of action plans towards measures fostering increased psychological well-being of victims in Finland.

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