

NEWS RELEASE

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Laurier researchers to study impact of subtle discrimination *Multi-ethnic research aims to help people deal with stress of unintended slights*

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WATERLOO – Researchers at Wilfrid Laurier and Carleton universities are teaming up to study the effects that day-to-day hassles and traumatic events have on the health, well being and quality of life of Canadian social groups. The Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) network is providing \$325,542 over three years for a series of multi-ethnic studies, beginning with an online survey of everyday stressors.

Laurier psychologist Mindi Foster is co-investigator with The Canadian Life Experience Study. The research project will examine the effects of subtle forms of discrimination based on issues that include gender, ethnicity and religion.

“Most people understand the damage that can result from overt forms of discrimination, but are less aware of the subtle forms that we often just chalk up to the way things are in everyday life,” says Foster. “These might involve the fact that a mother, often the primary caregiver, can’t take time off to care for a sick child. Or that Christmas is a paid holiday, but Muslims or Jewish people have to take unpaid time off to celebrate their faith.”

People typically shrug off individual instances, but they can accumulate and have an emotional wearing effect. Eventually, a person may reach the point where one more slight can cause a significant reaction. And exposure to small incidents can also leave a person more vulnerable and less able to cope when faced with a more traumatic event.

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A focus on subtle forms is what distinguishes this research from most other studies of discrimination. The research will also highlight the Canadian context and will try to determine if diversity within a particular group can explain why some members suffer greater effects than others.

People in different communities often differ in how they cope with such incidents and some show greater resilience. The researchers hope to identify the factors that buffer people. The ultimate goal is to assess the effectiveness of various coping strategies, to determine which can and should be used to help people experiencing negative effects from this type of discrimination.

“We know that certain groups in different societies experience stress in different ways, in some cases physically and in others psychologically,” explains Foster. “If we can determine the specifics of the Canadian experience, we can start to develop coping strategies that are most effective to Canada’s highly diverse population groups.”

The researchers are hoping Ontario residents will help with the study by completing a survey found at www.copewell.carleton.ca. The survey is anonymous and all participants are eligible for a draw for \$500. Potential participants seeking more information can e-mail LifeExperiences@wlu.ca or call (519) 884-0710 ext. 2042.