



# **Perceptions of personal safety among population groups designated as visible minorities in Canada during the COVID-19 pandemic**

by Loanna Heidinger and Adam Cotter

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## Perceptions of personal safety among population groups designated as visible minorities in Canada during the COVID-19 pandemic

by **Loanna Heidinger** and **Adam Cotter**

This article provides disaggregated data to better understand the impact of COVID-19 on specific groups. Visit the [Gender, Diversity and Inclusion Statistics Hub](#) for more analysis, including disaggregated data on labour, public safety, health and more.



Canada is a multicultural country with a diverse population. According to the 2016 Census, approximately 1 in 5 (22%) Canadians were designated as belonging to the visible minority population (see Notes). Although representing a notable proportion of the Canadian population, visible minorities generally report feeling less safe than the rest of the population. Feeling unsafe can have negative impacts at both the social and the individual level, by reducing social cohesion or resulting in poorer physical or mental health and well-being (Jenson 2019). Furthermore, certain visible minority groups are much more likely to experience discrimination, with those who identified as Arab or Black being most likely to report experiencing discrimination (Simpson 2018).

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, fear and misinformation about the virus may disproportionately impact the sense of personal and community safety of some ethno-cultural groups. For example, in Canada, media outlets and police services have reported an increase in anti-Asian discriminatory behaviours since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic that are reminiscent of reactions to the SARS outbreak of 2003 (Leung 2008). These findings suggest that, in addition to the fear of a global pandemic, some population groups may experience added strain based on their ethno-cultural background.

This article focuses on responses submitted from more than 43,000 Canadians between May 12 and 25, 2020, to a crowdsourcing data collection on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Canadian's perceptions of safety. Understanding perceptions of safety – both in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and in one's community more generally – adds important insight into one way in which the everyday experiences of visible minority groups can differ from the rest of the population. Note that unlike other surveys conducted by Statistics Canada, crowdsourcing data are not collected under a design using probability-based sampling. Therefore, caution should be exercised when interpreting the findings, and no inferences about the overall Canadian population should be made based on these results.

Note that participants did not self-identify as belonging to the visible minority population, but were asked to mark the population group (or groups) to which they belong. The concept of "visible minority" refers to whether a person belongs to the visible minority population as defined by the *Employment Equity Act*.

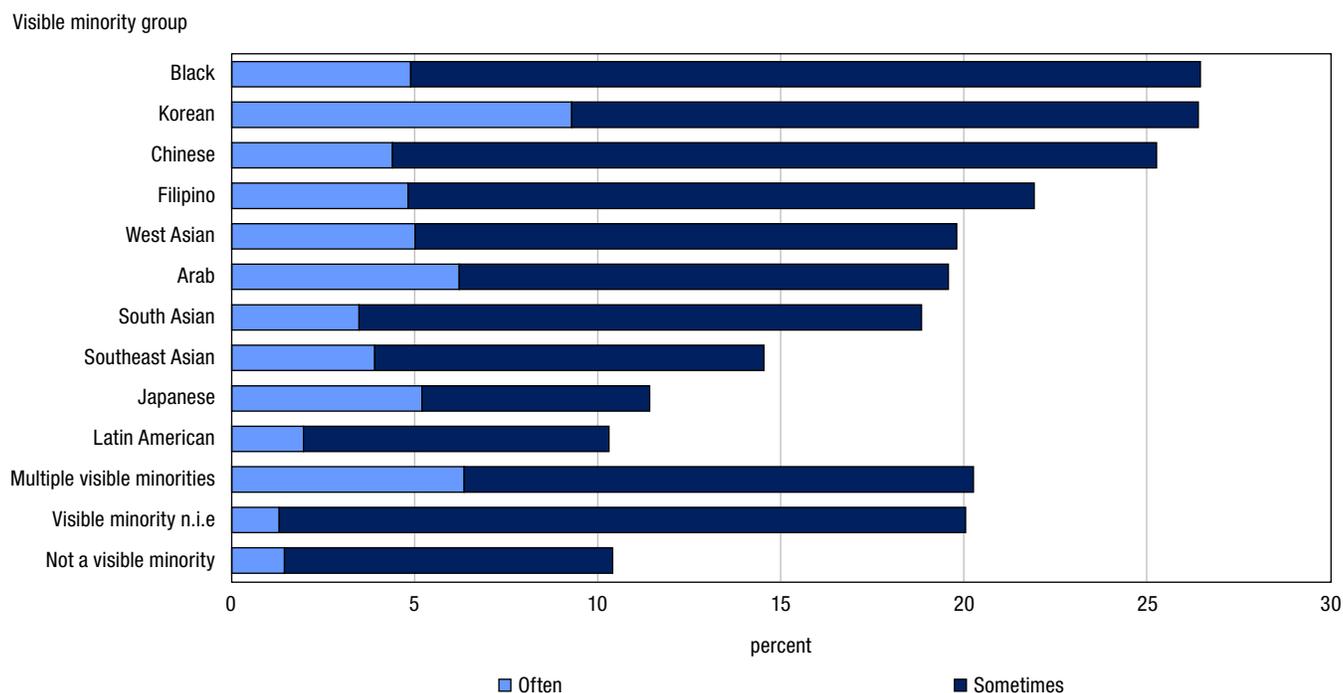


## Visible minorities perceived more frequent race-based harassment or attacks and felt these incidents had increased since the start of COVID-19

Approximately one in five (21%) visible minority participants perceived that harassment or attacks based on race, ethnicity, or skin colour occurred sometimes or often in their neighbourhood, double the proportion among the rest of the population (10%).

Some visible minority groups in Canada perceived that discriminatory incidents in their neighbourhood occurred at higher frequencies. In particular, Black (26%), Korean (26%), Chinese, (25%) and Filipino (22%) participants perceived that these race-based incidents happened sometimes or often.

**Chart 1**  
**Perceived frequency of harassment or attacks based on race, ethnicity, or skin colour in neighbourhood, by visible minority group, Canada, 2020**



n.i.e. not indicated elsewhere

Source: Statistics Canada, Crowdsourcing on perceptions of safety, May 12-25, 2020.

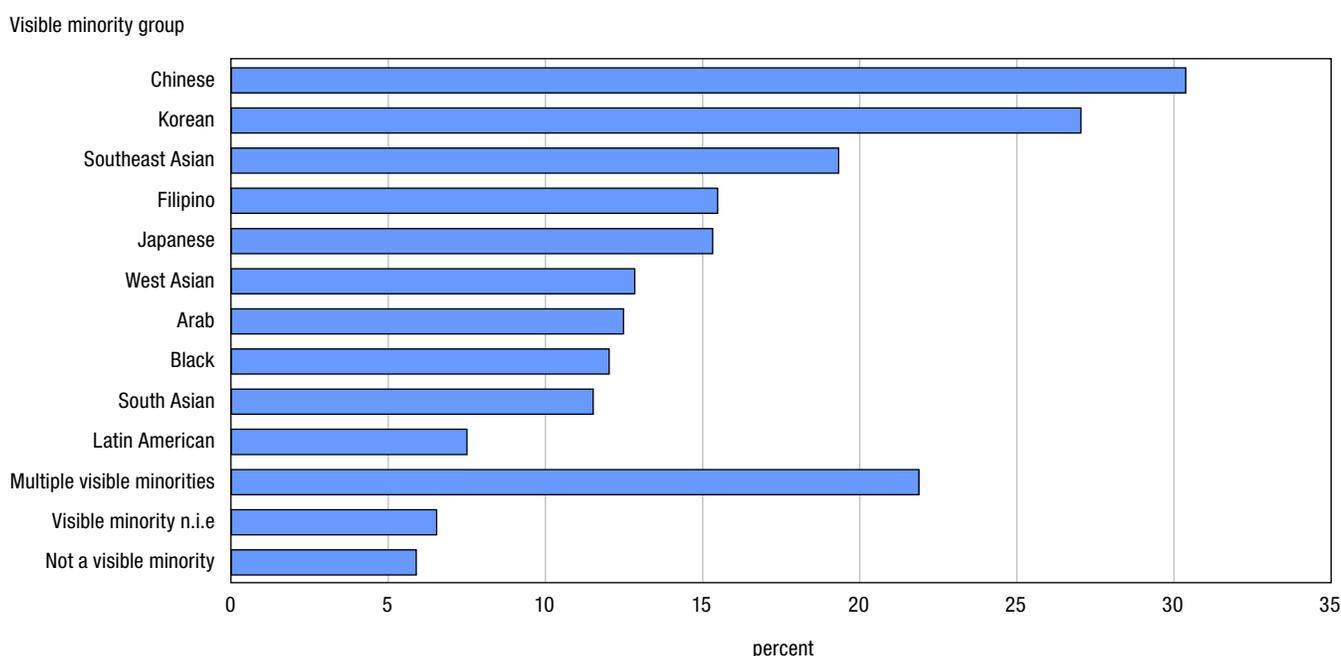
Discriminatory harassment or attacks, which were perceived to occur more frequently by participants designated as visible minorities, represent a way in which perceptions of safety among visible minority groups may be more negatively impacted compared with the rest of the population. Even though participants were not directly asked about their personal experiences of victimization, their awareness or perceptions of discriminatory harassment or attacks occurring in their neighbourhood may contribute to their overall sense of personal and community safety (Perry 2014).



Overall, the proportion of visible minority participants (18%) who perceived an increase in the frequency of harassment or attacks based on race, ethnicity or skin colour was three times larger than the proportion among the rest of the population (6%) since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. This difference was most pronounced among Chinese (30%), Korean (27%), and Southeast Asian (19%) participants. In other words, not only were participants designated as belonging to a visible minority group more likely to perceive discrimination prior to the pandemic, COVID-19 has disproportionately impacted perceived increases in these types of incidents.

## Chart 2

### Perceived increase in harassment or attacks on the basis of race, ethnicity, or skin colour in neighbourhood since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, by visible minority group, Canada, 2020



n.i.e. not indicated elsewhere

Source: Statistics Canada, Crowdsourcing on perceptions of safety, May 12-25, 2020.

The proportion of Black participants who perceived harassment or attacks based on race, ethnicity, or skin colour in their neighbourhood was among the highest, and 12% felt that these discriminatory incidents had increased since the start of the pandemic. This was about twice as high as the proportion among those who were not designated as a visible minority.

It is important to note that, for the most part, those designated as visible minorities already perceived higher levels of these discriminatory incidents occurring prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The 2014 General Social Survey on Canadians' Safety found that 8% of those designated as visible minorities felt that people being attacked or harassed because of their skin colour, ethnic origin, or religion was at least a small problem in their neighbourhood, compared with 6% of the rest of the population, and those designated as visible minorities were more likely to state this was a big problem.



## Visible minority groups more likely to perceive increases in neighbourhood crime and feel unsafe when walking alone at night since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the proportion of participants who perceived an increase in neighbourhood crime was higher among visible minority groups than among the rest of the population (14% versus 11%). Among visible minorities, the proportion was slightly higher among men (15%) than women (13%). Perceptions, however, varied across different visible minority groups. In particular, a larger proportion of Chinese (22%) and Japanese (21%) participants reported feeling crime had increased in their neighbourhood since the start of the pandemic.

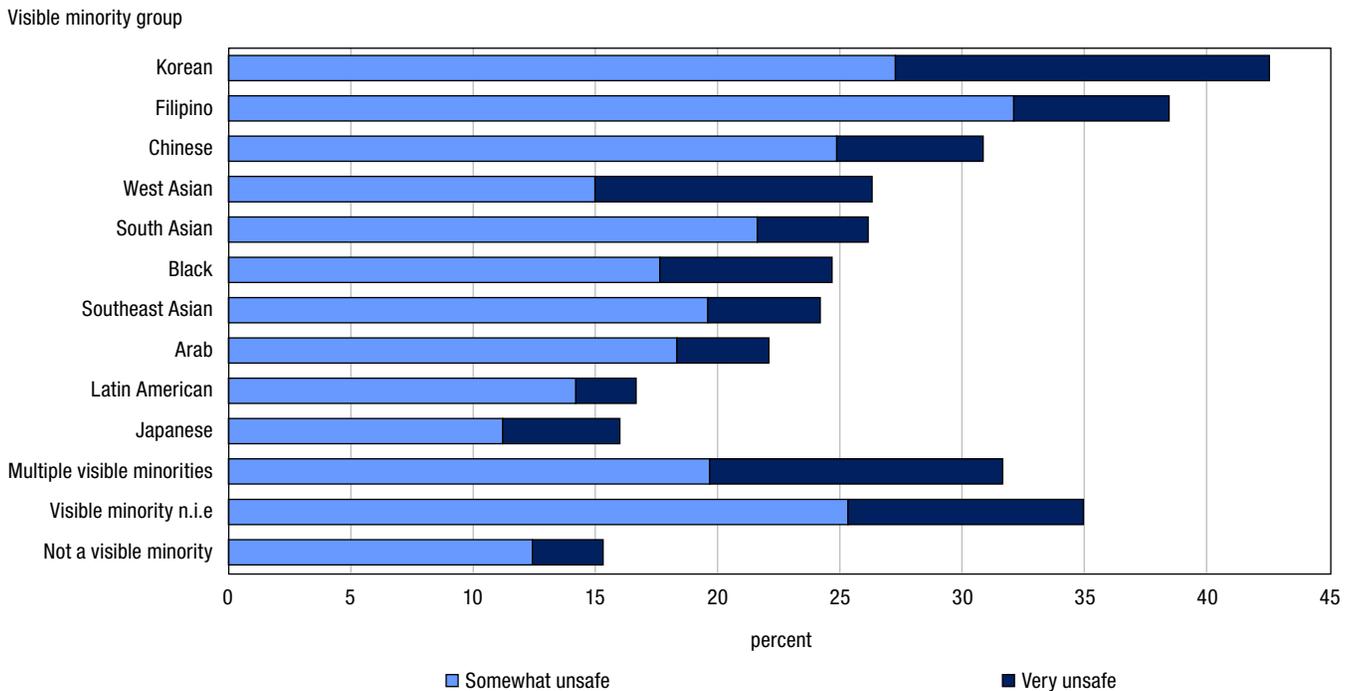
Previous research has shown that visible minority groups tend to feel less safe than the rest of the population when walking alone in their neighbourhood after dark (Perreault 2017). Similarly, in the context of the pandemic, 27% of participants designated as visible minorities reported feeling very or somewhat unsafe from crime when walking alone in their neighbourhood after dark compared with 15% of the rest of the population. Among those designated as visible minorities, more than one third (36%) of women participants felt unsafe when walking alone after dark compared with one in five (22%) men.

In particular, the proportion of those who felt unsafe when walking alone at night was highest among Korean (43%), Filipino (38%), and Chinese (31%) participants. Notably, these are the same visible minority groups that most often perceived an increase in discriminatory harassment or attacks in their neighbourhood since the start of the pandemic.



**Chart 3**

**Perceptions of safety from crime when walking alone in neighbourhood after dark, by visible minority group, Canada, 2020**



n.i.e. not indicated elsewhere

**Note:** Percent calculations exclude those who said they do not walk alone after dark in their neighbourhood.

**Source:** Statistics Canada, Crowdsourcing on perceptions of safety, May 12-25, 2020.

Victim services may be an important point of contact and assistance for those who are victimized or affected by crime or violence during the COVID-19 pandemic. Overall, a larger proportion of visible minority participants (13%) than the rest of the population (9%) contacted a victim support service due to crime in their area since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Black (18%) and Latin American (16%) participants reported the highest proportions of contacting victim support services such as counsellors and psychologists, community and cultural centers, and other support groups. A notable proportion of Filipino (15%), Korean (14%), and Chinese (13%) participants also reported contacting victim services.

Statistics Canada continues to monitor the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Canadians, drawing on existing data and continuing to collect timely and relevant information from Canadians through crowdsourcing initiatives and representative web panel surveys. Additional analysis on perceptions of safety since the start of the pandemic is also forthcoming, with articles focusing on immigrant participants and geographical differences under way.



## Notes

Crowdsourcing data on the impacts of COVID-19 on Canadians' perceptions of safety was collected online from May 12 to 25, 2020 and was completed by over 43,000 Canadians. Crowdsourcing data provides a unique opportunity to collect information from a large number of participants during a short period of time; however, data collected using crowdsourcing does not rely on probability based sampling and as such cannot be generalized to the Canadian population.

Participants did not self-identify as belonging to the visible minority population, but were asked to mark the population group (or groups) to which they belong. For that reason, the term "designated as a visible minority" is sometimes used to reflect the fact that the concept of "visible minority" refers to whether a person belongs to the visible minority population as defined by the *Employment Equity Act*. The *Employment Equity Act* defines visible minorities as "persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour". The visible minority population consists mainly of the following groups: South Asian, Chinese, Black, Filipino, Latin American, Arab, Southeast Asian, West Asian, Korean and Japanese. Inasmuch as possible, these groups are disaggregated in the presentation of the results so as to account for the specific experiences and heterogeneity of the population groups designated as visible minorities.

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