

# Deconstructing Socially Constructed Subtle Prejudices During the First Wave of Covid-19 Pandemic Among Immigrant Population in Finland

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The research work is based on random web-based open survey from targeted immigrant's social media groups targeting 30 eligible male and female immigrants living in Finland during the first wave of coronavirus pandemic. The data were collected through online data collection tools to comply with the safety guidelines during the survey period. The analysis of gathered information illuminates the subtle alienation of immigrants through the information and communication channels, and deconstructs the Finnish government interventions in the midst of a pandemic through the socially constructed lenses of inclusion and justice in Finland. The survey reveals the knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions held by and of immigrants by the immigrants towards the authorities in Finland. Grounded theory is applied to qualitatively analyze data. The analysis is anchored on the stereotype content model to reveal the subtle historical and systemic alienation through information and communication channels. The theory of prejudice and the theory of symbolic racism are complementarily used to deconstruct the injustice meted against the immigrants resulting in alienation through official authority practices and socially constructed disguises of inclusivity and justice by the Finnish society.

*Keywords:* theory of prejudice, theory of symbolic racism, stereotype content model, subtle prejudices

## Introduction

Information and communication are key ingredients in the daily lives of all human beings in any society including immigrants, for decision-making, information, knowledge, and entertainment. Technology has accelerated information and communication globally. In the Nordic region, the Nordic countries use their unique languages adopted as the official languages for communication and information sharing. The Nordic countries constitute an ideal area for comparative studies. They are not only geographically connected; they also have a relatively similar population size, many similarities in their historical development, and similar social and political systems, including the structure of academic life and academic institutions (Hovdhaugen, Karlsson, Henriksen, & Sigurd, 2000).

It is against this backdrop that we illuminate the information and communication dissemination during the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic in the Finnish society and deconstruct the subtle prejudices revealed by the systemic impediments through functionalism lenses. Immigrants in the Finnish society decry discrimination and marginalization. In general, discrimination is approached from the perspective of a single basis or reason,

but in practice, people can experience discrimination due to multiple personal characteristics including alienation in information sharing (Ministry of Justice—Finland, 2019).

In Finland, more than 150 different first languages are spoken. The official languages or national languages of Finland are Finnish and Swedish. In addition to Finnish and Swedish, there are other languages in Finland whose users' rights are laid down in law. The Saami languages are the languages of the indigenous population of Finland. Finnish Romani, Finnish sign language, Finland-Swedish sign language, and Karelian are autochthonous languages that have a long history in Finland (Kotimaisten Kielten Keskus, 2020).

Recent developments have seen the introduction of services in English language in some municipalities like Helsinki in 2019. Helsinki is considered as becoming considerably more international and diverse, as about two-thirds of those relocating to the city currently come from places beyond Finland's borders. The municipality acknowledged that in order to sustain the vitality of industry and commerce in Helsinki, the region must be able to attract a substantial amount of additional international skill from abroad. To be able to meet these needs, Helsinki will feel the need to improve its English-language services by 2021, entailing all its divisions<sup>1</sup>. This paints a picture of the existing frustrations and subtle alienation by non-Finnish and Swedish speakers that were not conversant with Finnish and Swedish languages. It will be noted that this has not taken off meaningfully.

Finland is vast and stretches beyond Helsinki municipality and other municipalities in the Uusimaa region. There are many immigrants spread all over and across the rest of the country that stretches all the way up North. This brings to the fore, the level of alienation by the immigrant population in the Finnish society. The Finnish integration program has focused on the Finnish language as the central focus of the program. However, other dynamics that come into play result in inadequate learning of the Finnish language for business and work. This extends the alienation and frustration of the immigrant population in their desire to be fully integrated into the Finnish society and to be at par or well near the same level with the Finnish citizens.

The Covid-19 pandemic situation that resulted in the first wave of infections, triggering major world economies to order lock downs and impose curfew on their citizens illuminates the significance of proper and holistic integration in the Finnish society. Immigrants were alienated from the official communication through the official channels such as the television, print media, and other media platforms where official communication was pinned during the Covid-19 first wave globally, and specifically as experienced in Finland.

The Covid-19 revealed the need to adopt an inclusive information and communication strategy to keep everyone safe, especially the aging population in Finland. Finland has one of the oldest populations in Europe and is acknowledged to be living in a historical era of four concurrent generations. The Finnish citizen population is rapidly ageing as the Finnish people are living longer<sup>2</sup>. Alienating the immigrant population that comprises young, strong, and mobile workers in the services sector increased the risk of rapidly spreading the coronavirus and endangering the aging population of Finland that they work for through the cleaning services industry, nursing in the elderly homes, cleaning in the public transport and commercial centers among others.

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<sup>1</sup> City of Helsinki. (2019, October 02). *City Executive Office*. Retrieved from City of Helsinki: <https://www.hel.fi/uutiset/en/kaupunginkanslia/better-chance-for-english-speakers-to-get-by-in-helsinki>.

<sup>2</sup> Finnish Institute of Health and Welfare. (2020, October 22). *Ageing policy*. Retrieved from Finnish Institute of Health and Welfare: [https://thl.fi/en/web/ageing/ageing-policy#Finland\\_is\\_rapidly\\_ageing](https://thl.fi/en/web/ageing/ageing-policy#Finland_is_rapidly_ageing).

According to Foreigner.fi<sup>3</sup> article on the Covid-19 pandemic, members of the minority-language communities were taken into consideration as an afterthought, owing to the gravity of the pandemic, a unique action taken under the unique life-threatening circumstance. This outlines the challenges that the immigrant population faces when accessing healthcare services from the health authorities under regular circumstances and in the absence of a pandemic and unique situation. A reported increase in the infection rate among one group of the immigrant community resulted in the production of multilingual instruction videos by the Helsinki-Uusimaa hospital district (HUS). The Helsinki mayor remarked while expressing his concerns that the specified group of immigrants “members may sometimes have a harder time meeting safety guideline”. This generalized remark directed at one group of immigrants may reflect the subtle condescending perception of the authorities on various groups of or generally against immigrants.

This journal article analyzes survey conducted among the immigrant population living in Finland during the first wave of the Covid-19. The research work is based on random web-based open survey from the social media groups for 30 immigrants living in Finland. The data were collected through Survey Monkey online data collection tool. The social media groups targeted were selected based on their affiliation to immigrants’ issues and membership. The social media groups had to have existed for more than two years and also had membership of more than 5,000 male and female members. The social media group had to be active with an estimated five posts in a day on various issues affecting the immigrants in Finland. The groups also needed to have a nationwide outlook of immigrant members, with at least members spread across various regions in Finland. The researcher sought the approval of the group administrators to share the survey instrument with the group members. This was also aimed at compliance to the groups’ community guidelines and rules around research. The respondents voluntarily participated in the research. The data were collected between May 6, 2020 and June 6, 2020. The research data were collected after the lockdown of the Uusimaa region that took place between March 28, 2020 and April 19, 2020. This was important in understanding how the immigrants received, interpreted, and implemented the authority guidelines and safety measures.

The self-administered structured questionnaire comprised 10 questions through which the respondents could express their opinions, rankings, and perceptions on various issues around the sources of information for the immigrants in Finland during the Covid-19 crisis. This analysis also reflects the perception and opinion of immigrants on communication and information by the authorities to immigrants in Finland. Structured data with choices to express opinions, perceptions, ranking, attitudes, and sources by respondents were shared. The data collected yielded deeper understanding of the perception of immigrants about the status of residents in Finland. This approach was effective as it is confidential and the participant self-administers the questionnaire at their own pace. The questionnaire was also made brief to encourage participation by the immigrant population in Finland.

### Literature Review

Migration is undeniably one of the most crucial megatrend issue in Europe in the 21st century. Recently, the political focus has been on the battle against Covid-19, but the long-term challenge remains the same: migration in the 21st century (Helsinki Times, 2020). According to the Member of Parliament in the Finnish Parliament Veikko Vallin, problems used to be pejoratively dismissed as prejudices, but are now discussed

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<sup>3</sup> Foreigner.fi. (2020, April 14). *Coronavirus*. Retrieved from Foreigner.fi: <https://www.foreigner.fi/articulo/coronavirus/increase-in-covid-19-cases-among-the-somali-community-in-helsinki/20200414160549005298.html>.

openly in the streets, parliaments, and academia. The main incentive identified by many scholars for sustainable migration as reported by the Helsinki Times is employment, and that the migrants must be employable.

Studies and surveys conducted in Finland on immigrants' welfare and related migration policies and integration legislation have illuminated systemic and structural discrimination and injustice for regular and irregular migrants. The Helsinki municipality is taking independent steps to improve the services for immigrants for example, by regularizing the operations of International House Helsinki that is a joint pilot project of the city's immigrant counseling and several other players. The municipality plans to set up a centralized English-language employment, training and housing counseling service at International House Helsinki since 2019<sup>4</sup>. The Helsinki municipality is taking these measures in its response to the needs assessment that has revealed the need to include English language in support services to accommodate the growing immigrant population. But even with the announcements made, no concrete step has been taken to encompass the English language one year later into the pandemic.

In Finland, legislation governing the language of business is rare. The language act which applies to the national languages, concerns the rights of speakers of Finnish and Swedish in official contexts, and not private business operations (Stickel, 2010). This extends to systemically alienate the immigrant population and leave for the immigrant population the remnants and unwanted careers by the Finnish citizens in the job market. In addition, the challenges are classified as systemic as the challenges emanate from the education system (Zacheus et al., 2019). According to the authors, from the lower secondary level of education and stage of life, an immigrant experiences discrimination, harassment, and racism at school and outside school. This illuminates the subtle systemic building-blocks for alienation that is implanted at an early stage, even for immigrants that are a second generation of immigrants in the Finnish society.

According to a report published in the News Now Finland in 2020, even African-background children in pre-school experience discrimination and racial harassment, which continues through their education and working careers. The study found out that 61% of people do not report their experiences of discrimination to authorities, the most common reason being because they do not believe it will lead to change. The most common experiences of harassment range from seemingly harmless comments and acts—known as micro-aggressions—to violence at the extreme. Lack of information and clear communication through an understandable language by the immigrants creates an impediment in preventing such subtle alienation and injustice to immigrants. In addition, school communication via Wilma interface (an online parents-school interaction interface) is purely in Finnish language for children attending the Finnish public schools that makes up for the majority of immigrant children. This becomes an impediment for parents to participate in surveys and receive comprehensive guidance from the school.

The economic downturn triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic is not a sound excuse for shelving promises to employees, consumers, and suppliers some of whom are immigrants. A public health crisis and a focus on racism make it crucial to keep the pledges for justice, equality, and equity (Gartner, 2020). Clear and comprehensive information communication through proper channels is central to ensuring and breaking structural and systemic barriers and impediments for a level playing field. In Finland, majority of the employers send out official communication in Finnish on the understanding that all employed staff are able to comprehend

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<sup>4</sup> City of Helsinki. (2019, October 02). *City Executive Office*. Retrieved from City of Helsinki: <https://www.hel.fi/uutiset/en/kaupunginkanslia/better-chance-for-english-speakers-to-get-by-in-helsinki>.

all official communication. Immigrant workers had to rely on other channels of information and communication during the pandemic as everyone was advised to follow the ministry guidelines. The ministry guidelines are primarily disseminated in Finnish and Swedish languages.

A recent study report focusing on monitoring of children born in Finland in 1997 with one or both of the parents born abroad illuminated a subtle prejudice depending on the country of origin of the partner born abroad, with an increasing discrimination experienced where both parents were born abroad (THL, 2020). Differences in children's well-being and use of services were found according to whether one or both parents were born abroad and according to the country in which the parents were born. There were differences in, among other things, the financial situation of families, in the education of children, and in the use of social and health services. The report provides much-needed information on the challenges, problems, and areas for development of welfare policy.

Structural functionalism is a framework for building theory that sees society as a complex system whose parts work together to promote solidarity and stability (Maconis, 2011). Functionalism sees society as a structure with interrelated parts designed to meet the biological and social needs of the individuals in that society (Spencer, 1898). Functionalism grew out of the writings of English philosopher and biologist, Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), who saw similarities between society and the human body; he argued that just as the various organs of the body work together to keep the body functioning, the various parts of society work together to keep society functioning (Perrin, 1974).

The stereotype content model (SCM) defines two fundamental dimensions of social perception, "warmth" and "competence", predicted respectively by perceived competition and status. Combinations of warmth and competence generate distinct emotions of admiration, contempt, envy, and pity (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2008).

The theory of prejudice, focusing primarily on interethnic prejudice is a critical theory in understanding and deconstructing prejudices. Prejudice is an unjustified or incorrect attitude (usually negative) towards an individual based solely on the individual's membership of a social group. For example, a person may hold prejudiced views towards a certain race or gender (McLeod, 2008). Fear plays a role in creating prejudice and is further exacerbated by the role played by ignorance and anxiety (W. G. Stephan & C. W. Stephan, 2000). According to McLeod, the prejudicial threats fall into three general types: realistic threat (safety, security, health), symbolic threat (to culture, for example), and economic threat. The threats can illuminate the various incidents and cases where societies and groups have prejudice towards a segment of the society.

Throughout world history, white Americans have singled out Afro-Americans for particularly racist treatment. Of all the many immigrant nationalities that have come to these shores since the seventeenth century, Afro-Americans have consistently attracted the greatest prejudice based on their group membership and have been treated in the most categorically unequal fashion (Sears, 1988). According to Daniel Snyder, owner of the National Football League Team formerly known as the Washington "Redskins", "the name really means honor and respect". For decades, Snyder pointed to polls that suggest majoritarian support among the American public to justify the continued use of the racially contested team moniker (Sharrow, Tarsi, & Nteta, 2020).

Grounded theory is a well-known methodology employed in many research studies. Qualitative and quantitative data generation techniques can be used in a grounded theory study. Grounded theory sets out to discover or construct theory from data, systematically obtained and analyzed using comparative analysis (Chun Tie, Birks, & Francis, 2019). Grounded theory is resourceful for researchers when exploring how to effectively

focus on data collection, and demonstrates how to use data for theorizing and provides complementing guide to researchers that helps through conducting and analyzing interviews in grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014). Situational analysis, as conceived by Adele Clarke, shifts the research methodology of grounded theory from being located within a post-positivist paradigm to a post-modern paradigm. Clarke uses three types of maps during this process: situational, social world and positional, in combination with discourse analysis (Mills, Chapman, Bonner, & Francis, 2007). The use of grounded theory is continuously explored to generate conceptualizations of emergent social patterns in research data. The naming of patterns and their abstraction across time, place, and people, are discussed. The constant comparative method employed in grounded data analysis is offered as a developmental tool for enhancing researchers' abilities to conceptualize and form emergent theories. Conceptual levels, descriptions, power and flawed approaches to analysis are explored at length (Glaser, 2002).

### **Methodology**

This research work is based on random web-based open survey from the social media groups for 30 immigrants living in Finland during the first wave of the coronavirus pandemic. The respondents voluntarily participated in the research after a self-administered consenting process. The data were collected between May 6, 2020 and June 6, 2020. The research data were collected after the lockdown of the Uusimaa region that took place between March 28, 2020 and April 19, 2020. This was important in understanding how the immigrants received, interpreted, and implemented the Finnish authority guidelines and safety measures during the period.

This analysis reflects the knowledge, attitude, and perception of immigrants on communication and information by the authorities to immigrants in Finland in general. Structured data with choices to express opinions, perceptions, ranking, attitudes, and sources by respondents were captured. The data collected yielded deeper understanding of the perception of immigrants about the attitudes and opinions held by immigrant residents in Finland. This approach was effective as it is confidential and the participant self-administers the questionnaire at their own pace. The questionnaire was also made brief to encourage participation by the immigrant population in Finland.

The data are analyzed qualitatively using the content analysis tool MAXQDA. The research extrapolates the views, knowledge level, attitude, and perceptions of the respondents when identifying the credible and preferred sources of information, and assesses the level of confidence that respondents have in the channels and language of communications used for dissemination of important information by the state authorities in the Finnish society. It further explores the extent of use and reliance on digital sources or virtual interfaces considering the hosting of government services through digital or virtual platforms in Finland. Access to and credibility of source of information is analyzed and synthesized in order to draw logical conclusions on the immigrants' perceptions towards the state authorities' treatment of immigrant population and information dissemination to all citizens in Finland.

In theory triangulation, the researcher analyzes the perception by immigrants that they are second-class citizens in Finland on the basis of how they receive state authority information, how user-friendly and comprehensive it is, and whether there is effort by state to build a sense of equality and equity in disseminating critical information to everyone in Finland. The researcher illuminates the most prominent sources perceived as credible by the immigrant population and level of reliance on those sources of information. The research aims to portray the extent to which the immigrants rely on the state for official information and usage of state channels or platforms to circulate information equitably to all citizens and residents across Finland.

Facebook level of engagement in three most active immigrant groups on social media was assessed—the Finland for Foreigners Facebook group with 32,000+ members, Finland IESAF Facebook group with 12,000+ members, and International Jobseekers in Helsinki Facebook group with 22,000+ members. The assessment was carried out during the survey period to determine the frequency of discussion on coronavirus-related communication and general level of engagement on the pandemic situation.

## Data Analysis

### Methodology

The research work is based on random web-based open survey from the social media groups for 30 immigrants living in Finland. The 30 respondents were invited to the survey through a detailed appeal that outlined the strict participation criteria laid out for eligibility to participate. For a respondent to be eligible, he needed to originate from Middle East or Sub-Saharan Africa. These were selected on the basis of being the most disadvantaged group according to International Migration 2017-2018 Report for Finland (Ministry of Interior, 2018). Adult male and female were equally encouraged to participate. In addition, they had to have lived in Finland for a minimum of three years before April 30, 2020. The eligible respondents needed to hold a single nationality from the Middle East or Sub-Saharan Africa on the date of participating in the interview. Other criteria included that they needed to be conversant with the English language and that they were able to express themselves honestly and voluntarily. The participants had to be physically present in Finland when the survey was taken, and must have been resident in Finland with a valid residence permit.

The survey provided an opening consent statement that was followed by a formal request for the eligible participants to give their virtual consent that they understood the survey objective, and that the participation was voluntary and complied with EU GDPR. The data were collected between May 6, 2020 and June 6, 2020 during the first wave of the coronavirus pandemic. This also happened after the lockdown of the Uusimaa region that took place between March 28, 2020 and April 19, 2020. The self-administered questionnaires comprised 10 questions through which the respondents could express their opinions on various subjects around the sources of information for the immigrants in Finland during the Covid-19 lockdown in Finland. In addition, the survey tested their knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions on the communications of key official information from and by the Finnish authorities.

**Gender.** The survey reached 10 male, 19 female, and 1 person that failed to disclose the gender as either male or female. All the respondents were aged 18 years old and above and marked a checkbox to show their voluntary participation in the survey. Women immigrants in Finland form the largest proportion of vulnerable immigrants most at risk of missing out on information as they are engaged in domestic roles and childcare. They mostly rely on their spouses if married, for general information and updates on what is going on. In addition, they rely on social media for general information about general issues and seek the opinions and reviews of social media users through various groups. The risk with reliance on social media as a source of information is that the credibility, accuracy, and authenticity of the response by another social media user is not certain.

**Age distribution.** There were 29 respondents aged between 18 and 54 years old representing 96% of the respondents. This represents the active working and family age range for most populations globally. There was one outlier immigrant that was aged over 65 years old. This number paints a fair picture of the views of immigrants on the sources of information during crisis. Additionally, it relays a representative opinion

regarding the immigrant knowledge, attitude, and perception about the Finnish authority communication and information distribution for all residents in Finland including the immigrants.

**Finnish language proficiency.** An estimated 87% of the male and female respondents interviewed felt that their knowledge of Finnish language was good (31%), fair (24%), or poor (27%). Only 13% of the respondents interviewed had a good command of the Finnish or Swedish language that are the official languages of communication and information by the Finnish authorities. This is critical in understanding the choices of the sources of information on Covid-19 from the authorities and other key agencies that immigrants rely on for credible information on Covid-19. During crisis, the government needs to communicate equitably with all citizens and residents across Finland to ensure that they observe guidelines for public safety, and do not endanger themselves or the public due to lack of comprehensive information through the official communication channels. Whereas the municipality of Helsinki announced the use of English in public services, this is yet to be fully implemented meaningfully and on a wider scale. The Finnish language is an impediment in so many fronts as highlighted by the immigrants through a number of studies including in entrepreneurship (Yeasmin & Koivurova, 2019), discrimination (Ahmad, 2019). Channeling official communication using the Finnish and Swedish languages during the pandemic is a subtle prejudice practice and a subtle way of discrimination of disadvantaged minorities that are locked out in the information distribution through the official communication channels.

Due to the rapid spread of the coronavirus among the immigrants of Somali community<sup>5</sup>, the city of Helsinki reproduced the English language, Somali language, and other identified languages to address the communication gaps in official guidelines<sup>6</sup>. This is a reactive response to a systemic alienation of immigrants from the mainstream communication channel. This illuminates the inequitable distribution of information in the Finnish society that puts the immigrants in a disadvantaged position on critical issues and general information.

**Sources of information for immigrants.** The most popular and meaningfully accessible sources of information by the respondents during the coronavirus pandemic, especially the period during the lockdown experienced in the first wave, were the social network of friends in Finland and outside Finland mentioned by 63% of respondents interviewed. This was followed closely by the social media networks such as Facebook and Twitter that was mentioned by 60% of the respondents interviewed. Whereas the respondents were at liberty to mention as many sources of information that they used during the pandemic period including during the first wave-triggered lockdown, social networks comprising of friends in Finland and social media formed the most utilized sources of news and information regarding Covid-19.

The newspaper and healthcare facilities received the third most and fourth most mentions respectively with 43% and 40%. Whereas the data collection method did not give room to probe further the use of newspaper as a source of information, it is assumed that the reference to the newspapers was linked to the online e-newspapers that can be auto-translated from Finnish to English. This follows the language comprehension data where 87% of the respondents rated their languages skills between good and poor. Healthcare provided basic but trusted useful information especially for immigrants that needed the healthcare services. Television was mentioned by

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<sup>5</sup> Foreigners.FI. (2020, April 14). *Coronavirus*. Retrieved from Foreigners.FI: <https://www.foreigner.fi/articulo/coronavirus/increase-in-covid-19-cases-among-the-somali-community-in-helsinki/20200414160549005298.html>.

<sup>6</sup> City of Helsinki. (2020, Nov 12). *Coronavirus*. Retrieved from City of Helsinki: <https://www.hel.fi/helsinki/coronavirus-en/information/in-different-languages/>.



33% of the respondents and this could reflect the respondents that are good or fluent in the Finnish language comprehension skills.

Triangulating the respondents preferred sources of information on Covid-19 in theory may hold the assumption that Finnish-savvy friends disseminated the public guidelines to their immigrant networks, and they shared the safety guidelines through available platforms and media including WhatsApp groups and corporate emails. In addition, social groups such as the associations to its immigrant members and other social networks outside the country shared the information with their members. Social media was the second highest mentioned channel of communication used by immigrants to receive information and news. Research institutions and scientific journals were also mentioned as sources of reliable news and information.

***Most trusted source of information on Covid-19.*** Healthcare facilities were rated by 26% of respondents as the most trusted and reliable source of information during the Covid-19 period in Finland. The newspaper followed at 20% and social media at 16%. This underpins the critical nature of the Covid-19 pandemic and how much credibility is given from the healthcare professionals by the respondents. The newspaper came in second, showing the faith in the information unpacked by the journalists from the healthcare experts and policy makers into a newspaper article. Social media was third and this shows how much immigrants rely on the social media as a source of verification and for interaction where they can seek clarity, ask questions that are not clear and engage in constructive discourse regarding authority announcements.

***Use of social media.*** The use of social media was occasional amongst the respondents with 43% of the respondents reporting occasional use. The 16% of the respondents however admitted to use the social media all the time with another 13% using social media often. The 16% of the respondents rarely used the social media whereas 10% never used social media for Covid-19 related information. This illuminates the reliance of other credible sources for accurate information communicated by the authorities, and use of social media for interactive engagement and for verification of information.

***Most used social media platform as a source of information on Covid-19.*** The respondents were asked about their most used social media platform from the dominant platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and any other for accessing information regarding Covid-19. Facebook was reportedly the most visited social media with 57% of respondents using Facebook for Covid-19 news and information. The 88% of the social media users interviewed felt that it was easier to navigate and find news and guidelines on Covid-19 on social media platforms that they used. The 86% of the respondents felt that social media was somewhat, very or extremely useful as a platform for communication used by immigrants. The respondents however also acknowledged that the social media platform had risks of credibility with 36% feeling that social media was a very or extremely risky source of news.

***Ease of finding information on Covid-19 through social media.*** An estimated 34% of the respondents felt that it was extremely easy to navigate and find information regarding Covid-19 on Facebook and other social media platforms. An estimated 21% and 34% also felt that it was easy or somewhat easy to navigate and find information regarding Covid-19 through social media. Only 7% felt that it was not easy to find information regarding Covid-19 through social media.

***Usefulness of social media as a source of information on Covid-19 among immigrants.*** An estimated 77% of the respondents interviewed felt that the social media platforms were somewhat useful to extremely useful as a source of information regarding Covid-19 among the immigrants. This illuminates the subtle prejudices and perception of being alienated through the mainstream authority communication channels among the immigrants.

A critical analysis of the government communication reveals that the official information is mostly transmitted in the Finnish and Swedish languages. The immigrants feel that the English is an afterthought language and thus excluded in most of the official communication especially as one leaves the Uusimaa region in the Southern Finland area. This creates the perception of a subtle alienation and discrimination of the immigrant population, majority of whom do not speak Finnish and Swedish languages and have to rely on Google translation and other translation apps that do not translate the messages accurately some of the times.

***Level of risk of social media as a source of information on Covid-19 among immigrants.*** Majority of the respondents interviewed felt that social media was a risky source of information on Covid-19 among the immigrants with 73% of the respondents expressing some concerns on the level of risk involved. The 13% of the respondents interviewed felt that it was extremely risky considering that there was fake news and conspiracy theories in social media. In addition, there are no controls and safeguards for what is shared through social media thus one can receive completely false information. This was considered to be a very risky move during a pandemic. The 10% of the respondents interviewed felt that social media was not risky at all.

There was at least one discussion every single day about the pandemic during the survey period on the most populous Facebook in Finland. This shows that extent to which the immigrants that speak English were interested in the information and news regarding Covid-19 in Finland. It goes on to demonstrate the reliance on social media for information and interpretation of official Finnish authority announcements, general knowledge about the coronavirus, desire to understand the clinical trial progress and other information relating to search for job opportunities due to loss of jobs following the laying off as a result of the pandemic or sectoral closures.

***Wilma education and other official communication channels.*** The official education's communication interface—Wilma, circulated communication on Covid-19 including surveys in Finnish language. This excluded the non-Finnish speaking parents on the guidelines and instructions for their children's education. The use of Google translation distorted some news or information some of the time and this resulted in non-compliance to general directives and guidelines circulated through the schools.

## **Results and discussion**

The survey reached 10 male, 19 female, and 1 person that did not identify as either male or female. The respondents were aged 18 years old and above. This was in compliance with ethical guidelines for consenting. Immigrant women form the largest proportion of vulnerable immigrants most at risk of missing out on information as they are engaged in domestic roles and childcare that keep them away from the mainstream information channels. Research has demonstrated that there is underlying gaps in integration and that married women were more affected by the gaps than men as they seldom participated in economic activity and missed out on information and news (Yeasmin & Koivurova, 2019). There are no decent jobs for such women, especially if they have not mastered the Finnish language. This creates a perception among the immigrants that they fit in the second class tier of citizenship.

Whereas Finland is seen as the third most gender equal society (World Economic Forum, 2017) and a top ranking country to be a woman (Save the Children, 2016), immigrants do not feel the same way including the Finnish citizens with immigrant background (Sievert, 2017). Immigrants continue to feel alienated and discriminated against in many areas including in transmission of official information. The respondents felt that the Finnish society practised historical and systemic subtle prejudices. The exclusion of disadvantaged minority from the communication channel posed a risk during the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic in Finland. The

theory of prejudice and theory of symbolic racism are illuminated by the respondents through their perception on systemic exclusion and injustice.

There were 29 respondents aged between 18 and 54 years old representing 96% of the respondents. This represents the active working and family age for most populations globally and in Finland. There was one outlier immigrant that was aged over 65 years. The number of useful participants paints a fair picture of the views of immigrants on the sources of information during crisis and the tier of citizenship that they feel associated with. More than 80% of the respondents felt that their knowledge of Finnish language was good, fair, or poor. The remaining 20% felt that their Finnish language skills are very good or extremely good. This was critical in understanding the choices of the sources of information on Covid-19 and general state authority guidelines communicated by the authorities and other key agencies. During crisis, the government needs to communicate with all citizens and residents across Finland to ensure that they observe guidelines for public safety, and do not endanger themselves or the public due to lack of comprehensive information. Finland uses Finnish and Swedish as official languages. Whereas the municipality of Helsinki announced the use of English in public services, this is yet to be fully implemented. Thus immigrants continue to feel excluded in a subtle manner by the state. This reveals the systemic exclusion and injustice targeting the disadvantaged minority. The theory of prejudice and theory of symbolic racism lay bare the systemic prejudice in the Finnish society.

The most popular sources of information by the respondents were the social networks in and outside Finland. This brings out the social nature of majority of the immigrants and illuminates the effectiveness of social approaches that can work in integrating the immigrants. This also underpins the ineffectiveness of written communication in Finnish or Swedish language for majority of immigrants, drawing the line between the citizens and immigrants as second-tier citizens. Triangulating this using grounded theory may hold the assumption that Finnish language-savvy friends disseminated the public guidelines to their immigrant networks, and they shared the safety guidelines, social groups such as the associations to its immigrant members. The immigrants also relied on other social networks outside Finland. Social media was the second highest mentioned channel of communication used by immigrants to receive information and news. Other channels mentioned include healthcare service providers during visits or their channels of communication, newspaper, television, from affiliate institutions such as universities, employer and church in that order. Research institutions and scientific journals were also mentioned as sources of news and information.

Healthcare facilities were however rated by 26% of immigrants as the most trusted and reliable source of information during the Covid-19 period in Finland. The newspaper followed at 20% and social media at 16%. The level of trust in the healthcare information can be linked to the translation of healthcare information and educational materials into English, Somali, and Arab languages. This shows how the language can be used to improve the perception of immigrants from a second-class tier to the equal citizens' tier. The process of changing attitudes, behavior, and perception of immigrants from the second-tier membership level requires integrated approaches including the language that is comprehended by majority of immigrants—English. This illuminates the role of language and communication in deconstructing the inclusion and justice, social constructs among immigrant population.

Use of social media was occasional amongst the respondents with 43% of the respondents reporting occasional use. The 16% of the respondents however admitted to use the social media all the time with another 13% using social media often. The 16% of the respondents rarely used the social media whereas 10% never used social media. Social media provides a perceived safe space and peer counseling ground for immigrants as

they freely share their frustrations and lessons. Social media is also used to seek clarity on critical issues that other immigrants may have experienced, in order to draw lessons from other immigrants' experiences. Facebook was reportedly the most visited social media with 57% of respondents using Facebook for Covid-19 news and general information. The 88% of the social media users felt that it was easier to navigate and find news and guidelines on Covid-19 on social media platforms that they used. The 86% of the respondents felt that social media was somewhat, very or extremely useful as a platform for communication used by immigrants. The respondents however also acknowledged that the social media platform had risks of credibility with 36% feeling that social media was a very or extremely risky source of news.

### Conclusions

In a pandemic situation, information on issues regarding the pandemic such as Covid-19 needs to reach everyone at the same time and in the language that they are likely to comprehend the announcements easily and fastest. This is because the risk that exclusion may cause could be catastrophic and fatal. Majority of the immigrants work in the services sector, and work in more than one place thus moving around for the various work in the different duty stations. Lack of adequate information among the immigrant population may result in rapid spread of the coronavirus as they use the trains from one point to another, and at their work stations that are usually commercial buildings used by many people that potentially form crowds and used regularly for commercial activities. Many of the immigrants in the workforce are young and potentially asymptomatic thus potentially super-spreaders in a Finnish society that has fair number of elderly people. Excluding any disadvantaged group including vulnerable, marginalized, and minority groups is a potential threat to the health and well-being of the Finnish society. The price that the Finnish society may pay for systemic and historical exclusion and injustice through the authority communication channels during a pandemic, can be fatal and disastrous. Preventive measures need to be taken in the Finnish society to prevent rapid spread of the coronavirus in the event of a second wave.

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