

Visible minorities missing from London, Ontario landscape

October 20 2016, by Angie Wiseman

London falls short when it comes to visible minorities holding senior leadership positions in the non-profit and municipal public sectors, according to a new study led by Western researchers Stelian Medianu and Victoria Esses.

The study was initiated by Pillar Nonprofit Network, in partnership with the Hamilton Centre for Civic Inclusion and Volunteer Ottawa, for a program called DiverseCity onBoard that looks at increasing representation of diverse groups on boards of directors.

"The most useful part is this baseline approach and the fact that, in the future, if someone should replicate this study using a similar methodology, we can make meaningful comparisons between what's going on in London now and where we are at a few years from now," said Medianu, a postdoctoral scholar at Western.

The findings will be disseminated in London, Hamilton and Ottawa and will be used to make the case for the importance of considering representation of different groups when positions are being created.

Using the Statistics Canada definition of visible minorities – "persons who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour and who do not report being Aboriginal" – researchers independently rated publicly available photographs of 2,415 identified sector leaders to assess their visible minority status. Non-profits included the voluntary and education sectors, as well as municipal agencies, boards and commissions. Within

the municipal public sector, municipal executives were examined.

In London, only 7.9 per cent of senior leaders in the non-profit and municipal public sectors were identified as visible minorities, compared to 13.1 per cent of the general London population. In Ottawa, only 11.9 per cent of senior leaders in the studied sectors were visible minorities compared to 19.4 per cent of the general Ottawa population. In contrast, it was found that 13.8 per cent of senior leaders in Hamilton were visible minorities, closely aligned with the 14.3 per cent of the general Hamilton population who are visible minorities.

The analyses also looked specifically at the numbers of visible minority women in leadership positions. Results paralleled those found for visible minorities in general, with London and Ottawa again showing severe under-representation, and Hamilton demonstrating more favourable results.

In London, only 3.1 per cent of senior leaders in the non-profit and municipal public sectors were visible minority women, compared to 6.5 per cent of the London population; in Ottawa, only 4.2 per cent of senior leaders were visible minority women compared to 10 per cent of the Ottawa population. In contrast, Hamilton's representation of visible minority women leaders was a direct match to their overall representation at 7.3 per cent.

At the provincial level, visible minorities and visible minority women were underrepresented in senior leadership positions in Ontario's agencies, boards and commissions, the study found.

"If you look across municipal sectors, senior leadership in city hall does particularly poorly in both visible minority representation and visible minority women," said Esses, a Western Psychology professor. "I was a bit surprised by that across all the cities, although Hamilton does well

overall in terms of representation, they do less well in the municipal public sector and so that's pretty concerning.

"Having evidence is really important because of making the claim that we need increased representation in senior leadership. The study provides data that is useful for that. It's not just anecdotal or speculation. It's hard data."

Dharshi Lacey, diversity and governance manager for Pillar Nonprofit Network, is excited to have data to leverage their outreach programs.

"It's not just me saying it. This is reality," Lacey said. "We had an idea the results would show we weren't up to par but it's nice to have an accredited body like Western to validate what we anecdotally knew."

Pillar is the lead on the DiverseCity onBoard program that encompasses Hamilton, London, Ottawa and Toronto under a provincial umbrella. The program is designed to help non-profits find qualified candidates from underrepresented visible minorities and immigrant groups for their boards.

"Now the scope in terms of what the results are showing is much broader in some respects than the program itself," Lacey said. "It validates where our city is at in terms of the voice of diversity in leadership and where we are not up to par and in some cases not at all up to par, but we have a ways to go."

Esses added, "These results demonstrate that there is still much work to do to ensure the voices of visible minorities, and particularly visible minority women, are heard through their representation in the most senior leadership positions in the non-profit and public sectors."

Provided by University of Western Ontario

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