

## **African Academics in Norway: Experiences of Inclusion and Exclusion and Impact on Mental Wellbeing**

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This study explored the experiences of inclusion and exclusion of African academics in Norway in various sectors of the society and their participation in these sectors. Using a mixed method research approach, 166 African academics completed a 20-item questionnaire entitled Perceived Exclusion Scale (PES) and two open-ended questions about their mental effects and coping mechanisms of exclusion. Descriptive statistics and qualitative analysis procedures were used to analyze the data. The results showed that the participants experienced exclusion in almost all the sectors of the Norwegian society with concomitant effects of depression and insomnia for most of the participants. Participants mentioned acceptance, confrontational strategy, avoidance strategy, theological group discussion and positive attitudes as key coping mechanisms to exclusion and discrimination. This study could be used as a baseline for future research on the psychological and mental health effects of discrimination of Africans and African-Norwegians. The study is a pointer to the public discourses on the positive sides of immigration in general and the role of migrants' contribution to the Norwegian society.

*Keywords:* Norway, African academics, inclusion and exclusion, mental wellbeing, minorities

### **Introduction**

Social exclusion and discrimination of minorities in different markets is well documented across many countries (Andersson & Rye, 2023; Andersson & Midtbøen, 2022; Andersson, 2022). Social inclusion on the other hand is a process intended to respond to the rights and needs of the diversity of all people in society by increasing their participation, reducing social exclusion from sectors of society including education and employment UNESCO (2013). The opposite of inclusion, social exclusion is characterized by systems and measures that exclude and/or limit participation. And Raaum, Rogstad, Røed, and Westlie (2009) state that social exclusion occurs when a person is outside the structured arenas of social settings such as employment, school, peer group, or is denied access to the essential structures due to being considered “outsider” or marked as different. Social

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exclusion takes several forms and occurs in different arenas of life-education, labor market, housing, access to health and social welfare services, etc.

From a human's rights perspective, exclusion is unacceptable, and governments and societies ought to pursue measures that enhance social inclusion in line with the equality principles of the UN Convention on Political and Civil Rights, and UN Convention on Social Economic and Cultural rights. In this regard, Berry and Sam (2016) called for governmental actions that built values for social inclusion, a measure that supports diversity and multiculturalism (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006, Berry & Sam, 2016).

### **Context and Issue of Study**

Norway is a country built on values of egalitarianism, equity, and acceptance of diversity. Egalitarianism is embedded in the laws and institutions to make it more inclusive for all people. These values and actions allude to the need to entrench human rights and collectively they should lead to the creation of conditions that ensure all citizens, irrespective of racial and cultural backgrounds are able to participate fully in society. However, in practice people from minority backgrounds (minorities) experience exclusion, discrimination and racism which is at odds with the egalitarian foundations of many institutions (Andersson & Rye, 2023; Andersson & Midtbøen, 2022; Andersson, 2022). Statistical trends and research show that some groups experience exclusion and discrimination because of gender, ethnicity, race, religion, and sexual orientation across the world. Exclusion experiences are reported anecdotally and, in some research, to occur in contexts such as work, schools, health care/hospitals, in the transport, among others (Ombud, 2018). People of African descent also experience discrimination and exclusion based on their skin color (Gullestad, 2005; Ibrahim, 2019; Kunst & Phillibert, 2018), which suggests that African people experience more exclusion and discrimination in Norway. Discrimination and exclusion have severe impact on people's wellbeing (Moody, Brown, Mathews & Bromberger, 2014; Lee, Kim, & Neblett 2017). Despite this, there is little research on the exclusion experiences of Africans and their impact in different fields of social engagement. Most of the studies conducted about Africans are generic with no nuances (Fangen, 2006; Fangen, 2010; Ombud, 2018; Svendsen, 2014), usually limited to Somalis in Norway, which is the largest immigrant group from Africa (Statistics Norway, 2018, 2021), and barely covers other African populations. In essence, existing research is limited in exploring the diversity of African experiences and more work is needed in this area, including the impact on wellbeing. This study which focused on the higher education (university) sector is one attempt at closing this knowledge gap. We assumed that as contexts of intellectualism, universities are likely to offer positively different experiences for immigrants from African backgrounds. The study therefore adds to the diverse African voices about the discourse of exclusion and inclusion in Norway and provides information critical to formulating better policies that combat discrimination and exclusion.

**Aim**

The aim of this study was to explore the inclusion and exclusion experiences of Africans in the higher education sector in Norway, the impact of exclusion on mental wellbeing and their strategies to cope with social exclusion.

**Research Questions**

The research questions are:

- What are African Norwegians' experiences of exclusion?
- What are the effects of exclusion on their mental wellbeing?
- What strategies are employed to cope with exclusion?

**Literature Review****Exclusion and/or Discrimination in Norway**

Africans in Norway generally form a minority group and contribute to the multicultural diversity of the country. However, exclusion of minorities and immigrants is apparent in the Norwegian society, and 90% of the exclusion occurs in employment. Other areas of exclusion include education, healthcare, and housing sectors (Ibrahim, 2019). In Norway, national statistics trends show labor market exclusion is high at 78% among immigrant populations, with African immigrants alone recording the highest exclusion rate compared with Asian, South and Central Americans (Ombud, 2018). The studies concluded that exclusion is predominant in government agencies where a candidate from the majority background stands a bigger chance of getting jobs with lesser qualification than a person with higher qualification from minority background (Ombud, 2018; Andersson, 2022).

Exclusion occurs also in the education and health sectors. The Universal Declaration and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recognize the right to education and health irrespective of background. Access to education and health care is important for all citizens and broad social development. Health care is human right and nation states should achieve, respect, and protect these rights for their citizens (Cohen & Ezer, 2013).

While this is the principle in Norway, research shows that access is unequal for some groups, including first and second-generation migrant groups or minorities. For example, Ombud (2018) reported that even though the school performance of descendants of migrant has improved, including their involvement in higher education, some are still marginalized. Furthermore, most immigrant groups and people of color still have higher school dropout rates, face difficulties with higher education and employment as they score low points in secondary school and have least chance of getting housing or accommodation (Ombud, 2018).

Housing is another sector of exclusion in national trends. The right to housing is an integral part of Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that

everyone one has the right to housing irrespective of his or her background. Immigrants from Asia, Africa, South and Central America make up a small percentage of the Norwegian population, yet they are the most economically disadvantaged when it comes to the housing sector (Ombud, 2018). Many experience difficulties renting or buying a house in a competitive market due to negative attitudes and economic disadvantage (Ombud, 2018). According to Brekke, Fladmoe, and Wollebæk (2020) lack of integration is due to not only cultural differences but also exclusion. The same authors believed that discrimination against immigrants causes integration problems, and that education, language and work are necessary for integration (Eimhjellen, Bentsen, & Wollebæk, 2020; Brekke, Fladmoe, & Wollebæk, 2020).

### **Impact of Exclusion on Mental Wellbeing**

Social exclusion can induce a range of negative effects on those feeling excluded. The effects range from economic marginalization, psychological distress to feeling of being unwanted (Moody, Brown, Mathews, & Bromberger, 2014). Being unable to meet survival needs, not realizing one's life goals and feeling unwanted are ingredients for the onset of a range of psychological and mental health issues including depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, and anti-social behavior (Lee, Kim, & Neblett, 2017).

Research conducted by Andersson and Midtbøen (2022) showed that some races or ethnicities are more valued than others in Norway irrespective of their educational levels and in that same research 39% said Somalians could never be full Norwegians, due to experiences of being excluded in social and economic settings. Immigrants from Asia, Latin America and Africa are victims of discrimination and exclusion within sectors of employment, education, health care, transportation, and housing (Ombud, 2018). The reality of the matter has become a big un-healing sore for Africans in diaspora who migrated to these advanced countries for a better life. Africans in diaspora are struggling to deal with social stressors of discrimination and exclusion daily.

The impact of a sense of rejection, not wanted, can lead to feelings of less self-worth, depression, anxiety about engaging with others in the immediate environment, workplace, and broader society. These can then lead to isolation and deterioration of wellbeing. When the person feels that he/she has skills, competencies, they feel discrimination, cheated and this can lead to anger, and possible engagement in anti-social behaviors.

### **Strategies for Coping with Exclusion**

Social exclusion of people with its psychological and physical effects on its victims has forced these victims to develop different coping strategies to survive or reduce the side effects of the feeling of not being wanted. Coping strategies as explained by researchers involve the mental effort to reduce damaging effects of exclusion such as low self-esteem and sense of loss and helplessness (Brondolo et al., 2009).

The purpose of this study was to understand Africans and African-Norwegian academics experiences of exclusion/discrimination and exclusion within the various sectors of the society, the effects on their mental health and their coping mechanisms to reduce the adverse psychological effects. The examination of the targeted group in this study is done in the contextual settings of their rights to live in dignity and participation.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theory of human rights is used in this study to provide an analytical view of how Africans and African Norwegians enjoy their basic human rights. In the conceptual framework of United Nations universal human rights perspective this theory was employed to understand and explain the experiences of Africans and African Norwegians inclusion/social exclusion based on how equality and fairness are reflected in the areas of social settings and services. This right embodied in the Universal Declaration included social (or “welfare”) rights that address matters such as education, food, health services, and employment (Nickel, 2018, 2021).

The idea of human rights stemming from natural rights is that each one of us, no matter who we are and where we are born is entitled to the same basic rights and freedom. The declaration is based on the principle that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. It lists 30 articles with the principles of non-discrimination and the right to life and liberty. Many countries in the world including Norway are signatories to the Universal declaration of human rights and makes it important to be used in determining how these countries educate their citizens about social inclusion and to treat ethnic minorities including Africans and people of different culture and religion who live in these countries accordingly. The theory of human rights is employed in this paper because Norway is a democratic egalitarian and welfare state, which believes in human rights and universalism. This encompasses basic civil and political rights, socio-cultural and economic rights. For example, the right to employment, education, health care, housing, and fair treatment in favor of inclusiveness (Nagel, 1995). In view of this it is expected that Norwegians treat and relate with people from different ethnic groups, cultures and minorities on the principles of equality and respect.

### **Methods**

#### **Design**

This study employed quantitative and qualitative procedures to explore experiences of social exclusion, its effects of mental health/wellbeing and strategies employed to cope with experiences of social exclusion. Individual and group interviews were employed to generate qualitative data.

## Participants

The participants were drawn from minorities of African Norwegians working or studying in higher education institutions in Norway. This population is unique in that they are highly educated and/or high-income earners. Since they work in intellectual and more “enlightened” environments, it was assumed that people in these environments act differently and that the study population is likely to provide a uniquely different picture of social exclusion than what operates in the broader Norwegian society.

Participants were recruited by open invitation to participate in an online survey questionnaire, which also included open-ended questions. Consent was assumed if participants completed the online questionnaire. Table 1 provides participants’ background information.

Table 1. Participants Background Information

Participants Background Information	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Gender: Male=1Female = 2	166	1	2	1.40	0.491
Work Experience (1=0-5 years, 2=5-10 years, 3=10 -15 + years)	166	1	3	2.19	0.783
Qualification Bachelor=1, masters=2, PhD = 3	166	1	3	1.53	0.676
Post doc (No = 1, Yes =2)	166	1	2	1.04	0.202
Valid N (Listwise)	166				

In total 166 participants of African background working in various Norwegian institutions completed the survey. There were 100 males and 66 females aged between 35-64 years of age. The participants were all legal immigrants with either permanent residence and or Norwegian citizenship from Egypt, Morocco, Ghana, Somalia, Sudan, Nigeria, Mali and South Africa. Their qualifications range from Bachelors, Masters and PhD and some pursuing postdoctoral work. Majority of participants had been living in Norway for more than five years or longer and working as lecturers, researchers, medical doctors, and psychologists.

## Instrumentation and Data Collection

Two sets of questionnaires generating quantitative data and two open-ended questions yielding qualitative data were used to collect data from the participants. The questionnaires generating quantitative data focused on perceived exclusion and discrimination. The two open-ended questions asked participants about exclusion type, experience, reasons for exclusion and coping strategies.

In qualitative method we employed general reliability criteria (credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability) (Shenton, 2004; Wray, Markovic, & Manderson, 2007) to ensure validity and reliability in both data collection and

analysis. Normally, it is difficult to reach dependability criteria in qualitative research, but sufficient data was provided (see Wray, Markovic, & Manderson, 2007).

Three strategies were employed to ensure the validity and reliability of the qualitative data: 1. Triangulation using both individual interviews, document analysis and focus group interviews. 2 Member checking whereby findings were shared with participants for comments and feedback. This allowed the participants to interpret their own reality of exclusion as they experienced it. In other words, participants constructed their own meanings about exclusion. 3 Peer discussion with co-authors to identify potential biases. The study focused on the following themes: employment, housing, education, health care and transportation. Other themes focusing on coping mechanisms of participants were theological discussions, confrontations, avoidance, and awareness of the existence of discrimination. Each of the five themes had at least three statements. For example, under employment statements or questions were as follows: I have ever been turned down for a job applied for, I Got feedback why I did not get the job. I was always invited for meetings at work. My contributions at meetings were considered. Theme under housing had statements such as; I was turned down for accommodation. I got feedback I did not get the accommodation. I used other channels used to get accommodation. Education: It was easy to get admission into the university for my studies, getting membership in group work was easy for me at the university. My contribution in group discussion was considered by members in the group. I felt isolated. Health care: The health care system treats me fairly; my doctor takes my illness seriously. My doctor has time for me, and I get quick response in case of emergencies. I get the treatment I need anytime I visit the hospital. Transportation: I get access to public transport anytime I need. Train and bus conductors treat me with dignity and respect. I sit anywhere I like on public transport. Other passengers sit by me when there is an empty seat. The statements centered on experiences of inclusion and exclusion within the five main themes.

Data for this study was collected from Viken and Møre and Romsdal counties of Norway in December 2021 by open invitation to people whose addresses were available on university webpages and those already known to the researchers. Using a snowball sampling approach, those who responded, were then asked to identify other people they knew who were likely to respond to the survey. Data collection strategy was to collect a variety of experiences, and consciously search for participants with different backgrounds and who have different positions within the so-called high-status jobs or education in the Norwegian society.

### **Data Analysis**

The quantitative survey data were analyzed using IBM SPSS software version 27. The data was firstly recorded into excel and then transferred to SPSS. Different statistical tests such as descriptive statistics and t-test and ANOVA were run to answer research questions 1 and 2. The data from open-ended question was thematically analyzed to answer research question 3. The questionnaires were numbered, and those number codes are used in reporting the data. Later, we

substituted the numbers with names. The names used in the analysis, therefore, are imaginary. The quantitative data were presented first followed by the qualitative data.

## Findings and Discussion

### Quantitative and Qualitative Results

We present quantitative results.

The survey showed that people experienced exclusion. Overall, they experienced exclusion in health care, education, employment, and housing (see Table 2).

Table 2. Perceptions of Participation & Exclusion Experiences

Participants' Perceptions	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Q4 Health Care	166	2	5	3.84	0.836
Q4 Education	166	2	5	3.72	0.769
Q3 Transportation	166	1	5	3.63	1.124
Q1 Labor market	166	2	5	3.25	0.790
Q2 Housing	166	1	4	2.42	0.986
Valid N (Listwise)	166				

Overall the results (Table 2) show that the participants report more experiences of exclusion in relation with health care (M=3.84, SD=0.83), followed by Labor market and education are modest. There is lower experience of exclusion in housing (M=2.42, SD=0.98) (suggesting that with higher income, they are more likely to afford housing. Students in higher education also access student accommodation and so unlikely to face experiences of housing exclusion.

### Employment

In Table 3, upwards of 44.6% of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with labor market exclusion which indicates a mixed bag of experiences. However, 38% of respondents indicated they experienced exclusion (with 33.7% agreeing and 4.2% strongly agreeing), which shows that exclusion is prevalent (see Table 3).

Table 3. Labor Market Exclusion

Q1 (labor market)		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	7	4.2	4.2	4.2
	Agree	56	33.7	33.7	38.0
	Neither Agree or Disagree	74	44.6	44.6	82.5
	Disagree	29	17.5	17.5	100.0
	Total	166	100.0	100.0	



Access to employment of Africans is often based on the emphasis on what the individual lacks. When the individual has the qualifications required, then experience and or proficiency and knowledge of how the system works is always another issue. It is evident that factors like experience, language proficiency, knowing the Norwegian system and having the right networks, which is probably what immigrants in general lack when they are looking for jobs.

These factors packed in skin color constitute a double barrier for Africans. Many African PhD holders with foreign names have voiced out their frustrations of attending several interviews before getting jobs they sometimes are over qualified for. This finding support the report made by (CERD, 2019), that 25% of job applicants with foreign names stand a lower chance of being invited for a job interview, and so end up in jobs they are over qualified for.

### Housing

More than 59% of respondents disagreed with housing sector exclusion which indicates a mixed bag of experiences. This figure, however, represents participants who have been able to buy their own houses, with only 18.7% reporting that they had experienced housing exclusion (see Table 4).

Table 4. Housing Exclusion

Q2 (Housing)		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Agree	31	18.7	18.7	18.7
	Neither Agree or Disagree	37	22.3	22.3	41.0
	Disagree	69	41.6	41.6	82.5
	Strongly Disagree	29	17.5	17.5	100.0
	Total	166	100.0	100.0	

The issue of getting accommodation in Norway was a problem for most participants especially those who were renting. According to the participants buying a house was better than renting due to a lot of rejections they have had from house owners. It was also found in this study that most Africans live in poor communities, perhaps due to their low economic power. This supports the Ombud 2018 report, which stated that the background of an immigrant mostly determines their chances of owning a house, as houses were cheaper in those areas.

### Health Care

Most respondents (74%) reported exclusion in the health sector, with only 9% reporting that they had not experienced health exclusion as shown in Table 5. Most of the respondents find health care to be slow and ineffective.

Table 5. Health Care Exclusion

Q4 (Health Care)		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	32	19.3	19.3	19.3
	Agree	91	54.8	54.8	74.1
	Neither Agree or Disagree	28	16.9	16.9	91.0
	Disagree	15	9.0	9.0	100.0
	Total	166	100.0	100.0	

Norway has one of the best health care systems in the world, and when participants were asked about their experiences of the health care system and services, almost all of them had positive experiences of health care services in Norway. Benkert and Peters (2005) however, postulated that, there is evidence of discrimination by health care practitioners which leads to different treatment for the minority.

### Education

Table 6 from the descriptive statistics showed that many respondents (65.7%) reported exclusion in the education sector. Those who neither agreed nor disagreed were (n=46, 27.7%). With 6.6% reporting that they had not experienced educational exclusion. The qualitative responses showed that the reported experiences of exclusion were around the following: group work and group discussion involving the use of the Norwegian language.

Table 6. Education Exclusion

Q5 (Education)		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	21	12.7	12.7	12.7
	Agree	88	53.0	53.0	65.7
	Neither Agree nor Disagree	46	27.7	27.7	93.4
	Disagree	11	6.6	6.0	100.0
	Total	166	100.0	100.0	

Participants suggest that could do better in reducing discrimination in schools. They are key agents in the creation of discrimination awareness to avoid rejection of a particular group of people.

### Transportation Exclusion

Participants reported bad treatment and experiencing exclusion in the public transport system in terms of lack of engagement with mainstream travelers. This perception stems from experiences of being ignored or being avoided when they take public transport. The Norwegian public transport is very effective and well-

structured with full access to all. The seats are also well placed to ensure inclusion. Buses or trains are not always full except during rush hours. Norwegians, however, prefer to sit alone and will do all they can to occupy a whole row of seats for their solitude and peace. Generally, immigrants are represented on public transport because majority of them have no cars. Most Africans who feel excluded may have different and varied interpretation for Norwegian individualized behaviors.

### **Interview Results (Qualitative Data)**

In the individual and group interviews we tried to explore reasons for exclusion/inclusion from various sectors of the Norwegian society. Emerged themes from the interview data were: Education exclusion, Health care exclusion, Employment exclusion, Housing exclusion and Transportation exclusion. Following the analysis of the raw data, various reasons were explored from the field. Reasons mentioned by participants were summarized as language difficulties, lack of understanding of the Norwegian system, religion skin color and ethnicity.

### **Perceptions of Participation & Exclusion Experiences**

When participants were asked to narrate their experiences regarding discrimination and exclusion, varied stories were submitted. These were grouped into major themes and sub-themes.

#### ***Education Exclusion***

The findings under this theme were being excluded from getting a degree, being excluded from promotion, being excluded from teamwork, being excluded from communication. Participants reported that Group work exclusion was a hard one and found this to be painful.

According to the majority of the participants access to education in Norway is easy and free of charge. Learning is also pretty good compared to their countries of origin, which in most cases had rigid school systems. Participants found campus (university) life in Norway to be different and not inclusive.

One participant Khaled from Sudan had this to say:

I felt excluded throughout my master's program at the university, especially during group work and discussions. I was always the last person to get a group of Norwegians to accept me. Sometimes lecturers had to forcefully put me in a group, and this made me sad.

Participants attributed exclusion in the education sector to skin color, since they ended up forming a group of minorities only.

#### ***Health Care***

Findings on this theme show that participants were not satisfied with health care delivery system and the main reason given was that hospitals and medical

practitioners do not take minorities seriously. Form of exclusion ranges from exclusion from fair treatment, exclusion from being taken seriously, exclusion from quick response to emergencies, exclusion from thorough check up by MP.

One of the interviewed participants gave the following comment:

My worse experience in this country is visiting my doctor. I was pregnant and bleeding she never took the time to examine me she said “sorry, you have lost your child but don’t worry you will get pregnant again. My GP never had time for me, so I changed her for an Indian GP he understood me, and we went on well. I think the system is to be blamed since the government is not doing anything about this.

For exclusion under this theme, participants felt that health service personnel including doctors and nurses could not understand them well and had no patience to listen to their problems. It could mean that there was language barrier creating a lot of misunderstandings.

### ***Employment Exclusion***

The findings reported that many participants were turned down several times for a job they applied for, while others felt that their contributions at workplaces and meetings were not taken into consideration. The critical finding under this theme was excluding colleagues from meetings either willingly or unwillingly. In an interview a young medical doctor had this to say:

After hard work in the university with so many challenges of feeling excluded. I finally became a medical doctor but getting job as a medical practitioner has not been easy. I am now a medical doctor and in the health care service, and it is not all information I get from the administration concerning meetings and other deliberations. I try to draw the attention of the others to issues of being seen as outsider, but nothing happens (Baba).

### ***Housing***

The study findings indicated rental exclusion, buying exclusion, feedback exclusion and dialogue exclusion. Most of the participants who were renting faced rental exclusion and inability for landlords to give feedback. According to interviewees, dialogue was totally lacking.

A participant had this comment:

If you are lucky to get a rented apartment, then it is an apartment that no Norwegian will take. This is also true with jobs. I got tired of searching for rental apartment that I had to stay with a friend for three years. I managed to save some money and bought my own apartment. The sad thing was that I read announcement at Finn.no and found vacant apartment for rent, I went and had a look I really liked the apartment, so I called the owner the following day to show my interest, but she told me that it was let out. However, when my friend’s wife (Norwegian) called she was told the apartment was still vacant. In fact, I was totally broken... I think the Norwegian government should do something about racism issue in this country (Johnny).

Another participant added:

Getting a room or apartment to rent is the worse in this country (.....). Agnes from Nigeria continued.... When you go for a show looking for accommodation the owner of the house will talk to you nicely, but you will never get the accommodation to rent. When I was pregnant, I used three months to get a place to stay, I think I got it because nobody was interested in that apartment.

Most of the participants had mortgages while few had rented apartments. All who had their own houses confirmed that purchasing a house was much easier than finding an apartment to rent. Getting loans to purchase could be difficult if there is only one income and low annual income. Even though the housing system is regulated, and the highest bidder gets the house, the seller or house owner still decides whom to sell the house to. It was found in this study that most Africans live in poor communities, perhaps due to their low economic power. This supports the Ombud 2018 report, which stated that the background of an immigrant mostly determines their chances of owning a house, as houses were cheaper in those areas.

There is no doubt that the narratives of participants, what they have gone through, and experiences shared have affected them in many ways. Social exclusion with its accompanied psychological and mental problems such as issues of low self-esteem, depression, anxiety, and anger has developed ways of battling the menace. Some have visited psychiatric hospitals for help, and some have been sent back home to their countries of origin where social capital is enormous and freely available. Although some are still living in a world of disappointments, others just ignore and move on with their lives.

### ***Transportation***

The study findings indicated distancing of Norwegians on public transport such as trains and buses. Norwegians avoid seats occupied by minorities. Fatou from Gambia had this to say:

When I sit in public transport such as bus or train, I may be sitting alone occupying a double seat row or triple seat row on a train, I noticed that When Norwegians enter the transport, they bypass me to find another seat. In a worst-case scenario when the bus or train is full, I may still be sitting with either one or two empty seats while Norwegians will stand.

A common experience for most Africans was that the first year was always difficult, but things got better after knowing the system. This was the case with Obeng from Ghana:

My experience on a train with controllers was terrible few weeks after being in this country. (.....) and (...) ticket controllers called the police to arrest me on the train because I found myself on the wrong coach and did not have a prepaid ticket. I told them I was a student but they could not listen to me. I was then new in Norway I said I did not know and did not speak Norwegian. The police handcuffed me until one Norwegian man who saw the whole episode intervened. The message the police got

from the controllers to warrant my arrest was that I was an illegal immigrant. I was taken to the dormitory where I showed them where I lived and my ID card. That was really a bad encounter with the transport system (Obeng).

Khaled from Sudan had a different experience but had similar feelings of social exclusion. He finally bought a car to avoid public transport and being singled out among other passengers:

It is hard to look different in Norway and very visible among the lot. Whenever I sit in the public transport and the ticket controllers happen to come on board to check those with valid tickets, they always come to check my tickets first. I felt like terminating my studies the first year in Norway with all the negative attention always on me. On the buses too when I enter they will just look at me and look down without talking. Thank God now I have bought a car and I don't see such things again. Under normal circumstances train conductors don't check tickets when one sits on a prepaid coach, but I have been checked severally not by the ticket control authorities but rather conductors... This is really a racist country (Khaled).

The reason for exclusion on public transport may stem from various factors including historical, cultural, and social dynamics. For Africans stereotypes and biases such as associating Africans with poverty and crime may be some of the reasons. Also, public transport authorities or fellow passengers might engage in racial or ethnic profiling, whereby Africans are singled out because of their appearance and ethnic background.

Even though human rights laws in Norway are working certain individuals take the laws into their hands and do whatever they feel is right. When on top of all these one is not fluent in the Norwegian language and there is an issue nobody listens. It might, however, be said that participants experience of bad treatment of Norwegians were based on individual attitudes but not on the system level.

### ***What Strategies are employed to cope with Exclusion?***

To answer research question 3 the participants were required to mention key mechanisms they employed to cope with exclusion. It was suggested participants name maximum of 3 strategies. Some participants mentioned one key coping mechanism, while others mentioned two or more coping mechanisms, they considered effective. There were four themes regarding coping mechanisms of discrimination: 1) positive reappraisal, 2) mindfulness, 3) control and power 4) avoidance and confrontation to a less extent. Table 7 shows the frequencies of response types, indicating that Positive appraisal, Mindfulness, Control and power as most effective.

*Table 7. Coping Mechanisms of Exclusion*

<b>Mechanisms</b>	<b>Number</b>
<i>Positive reappraisal</i>	62
<i>Mindfulness</i>	51
<i>Control and power</i>	39
<i>confrontation</i>	14

The top key coping mechanisms identified by participants was not acceptance, confrontational strategy, avoidance strategy, theological group discussion and positive attitudes. Though some used confrontation strategy without being angry they all recommended the use of positive reappraisal, mindfulness and control and power coping mechanisms.

## **Discussion**

This study aimed to explore the inclusion and exclusion experiences of African academics in Norway and impact on mental wellbeing. Framed by the theory of human rights we used questionnaires requiring responses to Likert-type scale rating, and open-end questions.

The results showed that respondents experienced exclusion in areas such as health care, employment, and education. The descriptive results and interviews also showed that African academics were excluded in employment and housing but to a lesser extent. The study findings depart from a similar study (Ibrahim, 2019) where Africans felt more excluded in housing and employment than the rest of the sectors. Exclusion types include isolation/ignoring of colleagues at work, not getting jobs qualified for, denial of rental accommodation and not being taken seriously within the health care service.

The finding on educational exclusion towards Africans is surprising, as Norwegian schools do not lack cultural diversity and there is free access to education. However, the qualitative data showed exclusion on university campus and lecture theatres. Participants found campus (university) life in Norway to be different and not inclusive. This may come from their peers, or university staffs. Lecturers may use favoritism towards a student of their own race to discriminate or exclude students of different races. The same might be said of school administrators who in one way or the other may exhibit differential treatment on black students or staff. Interestingly, there were some nuances in the qualitative finding where Norwegian born Africans experience less exclusion at the universities. This may, perhaps be explained by their fluency in the Norwegian language and more abreast with the Norwegian culture. On the other hand, non- Norwegian born Africans may prefer to speak their first languages with their African counterparts, making exclusion an issue of choice.

These findings are similar to previous research pointing out that there is bullying of immigrants in Norwegian schools/universities and at workplaces (Ida, 2014; Svendsen, 2014; Ibrahim, 2019). These authors reported that exclusion and discrimination of people based on the color of their skin or ethnicity are not only on the streets, but it is also an issue in Norwegian institutions and housing.

Again, the finding on health care services with as much as (74%) reported exclusion in the health sector is a contentious finding. Since there is universal health access, we wonder whether respondents are talking about individual perceptions of discrimination in their encounter with health service workers or real exclusion from health care. The qualitative responses showed that the reported experiences were around mental or psychological sickness. The issue here is that a

lot of time is used in the diagnosis of mental sickness which most immigrants find to be cumbersome. In many cases respondents reported that they gave up on their MDs and had to call their MDs in their home countries for medical help.

Participants reported that exclusion had impact on their mental wellbeing such as inferiority complex, stress, anxiety, loneliness, and depression. Participants experiencing exclusion or discrimination in the universities, could impact their ways of getting a proper education. This finding is consistent with the study of Erdal's (2021) stating that, discrimination and exclusion experience of any type or form can create a lack of belonging for an individual and can restrict individual's ability to participate in their communities, workplaces, and schools. Indeed, experience of discrimination, exclusion and racism could also undermine human rights of a person or a group (Migration Policy Institute's Report, 2015). Participants used strategies such as confrontation, distancing, awareness creation and facing the negativity of exclusion with positive attitudes. Here participants had less desire for vengeance to cope with these negative experiences. The study also found that human rights education could be used in the formation of positive attitudes through tolerance, and that knowledge about human rights and other cultures could create room for more inclusiveness within education, employment, health care and housing. The most effective coping mechanism according to participants was the formation of immigrant group network where they rely on professional legitimacy and to speak out.

Participants face the negativity of exclusion with positive attitudes with less desire for vengeance. Positive reappraisal, which has proven to be effective in reducing aggressiveness, is an emotion regulation strategy that consists of reframing a negative situation in positive terms. The victim of social exclusion uses this strategy as an occasion of learning and personal growth (Timeo, Riva, & Paladino, 2019).

Another coping mechanism participants found important was mindfulness. Some of the participants mentioned that they are used to the fact that not all people like them, so they are mindful of incidence of social exclusion. A study on coping with exclusion showed that awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose in the present moment of the event diminishes negative emotions and foster recovery after rejection (Jones, Wirth, Ramsey, & Wynsma, 2019).

With control and power, it is natural to prefer to behave aggressively when one feels excluded and loses control, however aggressive confrontation might yield the opposite effect. According to research control and power strategy helps to restore the sense of control people feel to have on events, which has been threatened by social exclusion (Jones, Wirth, Ramsey, & Wynsma, 2019). Aggressive behavior and response depict a powerless situation and may increase more rejection. Overall, acting on the sense of power and control may help to break this vicious circle, thus lessening the negative impact of social exclusion.

Few participants said they used mechanism of acceptance of discrimination as a form of modern racism. Theological discussions were also organized in small groups in search for social connections for comfort and reflections to better prepare them the next time they were discriminated against. Religious and spiritual support helped participants focus on their strength in social exclusion.



These findings indicate that despite human rights being used as a framework for Norwegian institutions, it is evident that minorities are protected from exclusion. And policy makers should reframe processes that allow for more inclusion of migrant groups.

### **Conclusion & Recommendations**

In this paper, we have discussed the experiences and understanding of Africans and African Norwegians on social exclusion and inclusion in Norway. The study found that, most of the participants had experienced social exclusion within the transport, health care, education, housing, and labor market sectors, with damaging psychological consequences. Social exclusion in the labor market was among colleagues and the exclusion in the employment market was the fact that most qualified Africans were not being called for interviews and not getting the jobs they are qualified for.

The experiences of social exclusion at institutions (universities and schools) were also observed, among colleagues. The participants expressed how their Norwegian classmates isolated them in group work and even sometimes not getting the chance to join a group with the perception that Africans had nothing to offer or contribute. On many occasions forming groups ended up with only Africans and other minorities in a group, with participants sending a clear message to school authorities with the responsibility of creating a congenial and friendly school environment for all. Participants agreed that lecturers should be directly involved in deciding membership in a group.

Social exclusion and discrimination of Africans and African Norwegians was minimal in the health sector but was very high in housing especially renting of accommodation where Africans were never on the priority list of securing rental apartment. Participants were of the view that buying a house was much easier if one could afford as it saved them the frustrations of constant rejection in the rental market. This study has shown that African academics in diaspora experience significant exclusion in various aspects of the Norwegian society with significant negative consequences.

Majority of the participants used strategies like positive reappraisal, mindfulness and control and power to reduce the effects of social exclusion. Few participants used the strategy of avoidance and confrontation. However, all agreed that solution to discrimination in the country should be done both at national, group and individual level. A pointer to participants as discussed was knowledge of the human rights laws and a good knowledge of the Norwegian language and how the system operates as area that they should consider seriously. It was also suggested that there should be a group representing African and African Norwegians interest in the society.

These findings provide a pointer to the role of media, which could be a powerful tool in portraying good image of Africa. A bigger study of this nature is recommended to examine the psychological and mental health effects of discrimination of Africans and African Norwegians. The analysis also draws

attention to the fact that the public discourses on the positive sides of immigration in general and the role of migrants' contribution to the Norwegian society be stressed by the Norwegian authorities. The major limitations are that the study focused only on Africans and African Norwegians with university education and did not include those without. A further study is recommended to include all categories of Africans. Again, the current study could not answer "why" Africans and African Norwegians are at the bottom line of exclusion in all sectors of the Norwegian society, so a study to examine their exclusion will be appropriate.

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