

The Banyan Project



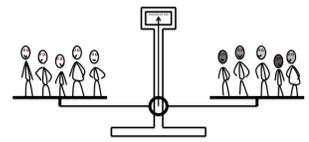
Initiated by an Indian volunteer in BDB e.V. who, herself, had faced racism and other forms of discrimination in Germany, the Banyan Project was developed with two main aims: first, to provide Indian, Pakistani, Bengali and Nepali communities with practical and emotional support in their native language when they face racism and other forms of discrimination; and second, to create a space for these communities to discuss these experiences, since they do not appear to be discussed openly in these communities in Berlin and in society more generally.

From May until August 2018 BDB's activist volunteer team carried out a survey in order to better understand these communities' experiences and needs concerning these issues as well as their knowledge in terms of counseling services. This analysis was meant to guide BDB's development of a counseling and empowerment project which would fit these communities' situation. The survey was carried out online (including data security considerations) and advertised in social media forums. In addition, volunteer interviewers also made personal contact with people and groups, especially in places where they expected these communities to be found, and held interviews in person. A total of 85 people took this survey. The survey was offered in Hindi, Urdu, Bangla and Nepali. The following survey analysis represents the combined analysis of the online and person-to-person surveys.

Analysis

Who took the survey?

Almost all of the participants were adults in the age groups 18 to 30 (45 participants) or 31 to 65 (40 participants). 52 of the participants said they are male, 34 said they are female and none said they were transgender or other. The overwhelming majority of the group was living in Berlin (73), but was not born in Germany (84) and just over half had been living in Germany for 4



years or less (46). Most of them were either in Germany as students or as workers (33 and 42 respectively). They usually held a student visa, employment permits for Germany or EU Blue Cards (27, 18 and 17 respectively). Participants' nationalities in the survey were Indian (53), Pakistani (18), Nepali (7), Bangladesh (6) or citizens of another country (4, none of Germany).

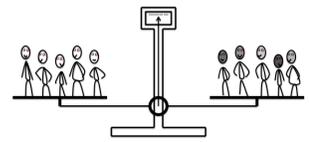
Experiences of racism or other forms of discrimination

Only 73 participants answered the questions on whether they had been discriminated against in Germany: 47 said they had, and 12 said they were not sure. These 47 participants reported that they had mainly experienced discrimination with regard to their skin color (42), nationality (30) or language (23). The places where they experienced discrimination were most often administrative offices (24), in the workplace/ during their job search (23), by individuals in public (31) or while trying to gain housing (25). Of the 73 people who answered the question on who had discriminated against them, 57 said they had been discriminated by Germans. The majority said that they have felt discriminated against in Germany only once / a few times or every once in a while (29 and 23 respectively).

Reactions to racism or other forms of discrimination

The participants' initial emotional reactions after facing discrimination were feelings of isolation, anger and sadness/depression (28, 30 and 34 respectively). On a practical level most of the participants preferred to deal with the discrimination by keeping it to themselves and moving on (47) instead of confronting the person directly (15), complaining to a higher-level supervisor or boss of the place (5) or even asking for support in an organized community group (7) or asking advice from a lawyer (0) or counseling office (0). On an emotional level they usually dealt with it by either talking to their family or friends about it (41 participants) or avoiding those people/groups who may discriminate against them again (34).

Experience with filing an official complaint



46 of 58 participants said that they had never filed an official complaint with the authorities (supervisors, complaint structures in their workplace, police, state complaint offices), mainly because it takes too much time and energy to file and pursue a complaint (24 participants), but also because they didn't know where to file a complaint (25) and because of language barriers (29).

Only three survey participants said that they had been to an independent antidiscrimination counseling office before. 58 participants said that they had never been to one, 40 because they didn't know that such offices exist and 12 did not believe they could communicate in a language they feel comfortable in. Only 4 said that they find the support they need elsewhere, for instance with through friends and family.

Conclusion

Our survey shows that people from the linguistically- and culturally-connected region of India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Nepal are a group that have indeed been facing discrimination in Berlin. Although this had led to negative emotional effects (sadness/depression, anger, feelings of isolation, shock and feeling afraid or unsafe), they usually kept it to themselves, only rarely asking for support from organized community groups, NGOs or from government offices. As they often did not know that antidiscrimination counseling services exist, it seems clear that more networking and outreach work on anti-racism and anti-discrimination is necessary to increase awareness of support offers among these communities. This outreach work and the counseling services, themselves, should ideally be offered in their native language, or at least one of the languages from this region, since they can understand each other. There is also a clear need to develop spaces where this community can communicate and exchange more with each other in how to deal with discrimination – and even on how to work together to fight it.