

TORONTO STAR

Ontario facing ‘epidemic of Islamophobia’ survey finds

While many respondents had favourable views of immigrants, three-quarters of respondents said we need to focus on caring for people “here” instead of spending resources on refugees.

By Nicholas Keung
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While Canada rides a wave of global praise for welcoming Syrian refugees, a new poll suggests we’re also facing a wave of something sinister — Islamophobia. The survey by polling firm MARU/VCR&C measured public perceptions of ethnicity and immigration in Ontario in the wake of the recent influx of thousands of Syrian refugees — almost 12,000 to this province alone.

“There is an epidemic of Islamophobia in Ontario. Only a third of Ontarians have a positive impression of the religion and more than half feel its mainstream doctrines promote violence (an anomaly compared to other religions),” said the 51-page survey to be released this week by the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants and advocacy group Mass Minority. “These sentiments are echoed with Syrian refugees in Ontario where acceptance often coincides with acceptance of Islam.”

Ontario has seen a number of recent incidents targeting Muslims. A woman wearing a hijab was attacked at a supermarket in London in June and a Western University student from Iran was beaten by two men who taunted him and told him to go back to his country. Also, in June, an anti-immigrant group rooted in Germany held an anti-Muslim protest in Toronto.

While the survey’s respondents agreed that immigrants play a valuable role in society (72 per cent) and are an important part of our cultural identity (71 per cent), three-quarters of the survey participants said we need to focus on taking care of the people “here” instead of spending resources on refugees.

“Taken together, this suggests that Ontarians see non-immigrants as more *entitled* to social care. This entitlement is, in some ways, a contradiction given the inherent value