



REPORT 1

An Assessment of the Needs of Black Parents in Ontario

**EVALUATION OF THE INNOVATIVE
SUPPORTS FOR BLACK PARENTS
INITIATIVE**

June 2020

Assessment of the Needs of Black Parents in Ontario

© 2020 Turner Consulting Group Inc.

This report is available in French at www.blackparenting.ca.

Suggested Citation:

Turner, T., Boyce, T., & Butler, A. (2020). Assessment of the Needs of Black Parents in Ontario. Toronto, ON: Turner Consulting Group Inc.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people contributed to and supported the development of this report. A heartfelt thank you to them all.

Turner Consulting Group Inc.

Project Team

Tyler Boyce
Dr. Alana Butler
Pamela Campbell
Maame Debrah
Tana Turner

Research Advisory Group

Faiza Ahmed-Hassan
Peter Amponsah
Camille Cato
Selom Chapman-Nyaho
Jacqueline Getfield
Ed Gough Jr.
Jessica Kirk
Debbie Miles-Senior
Dr. Delores Mullings
Michelle Richards

Cover Art: Hans Poppe

French Translation: Sylvain Lortie, Solutions SL

This report was funded by the Province of Ontario, as represented by the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (“the Ministry”). This report represents the position and/or opinion of the authors and is not intended to represent the opinion and/or position of the Ministry. The accuracy of the information in this report has not been verified by the Ministry.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A Note on Terminology

SECTION 1: Background.....1

- 1.1 Overview of the Innovative Supports for Black Parents initiative..... 1
- 1.2 Overview of this project 3
- 1.3 Overview of this report 4

SECTION 2: Demographic Overview6

- 2.1 A growing population 6
- 2.2 Distribution across Ontario 8
- 2.3 An ethnically diverse population..... 9
- 2.4 A large Caribbean population, but growing African population 10
- 2.5 A linguistically diverse population 12
- 2.6 A large immigrant but growing Canadian-born population 12
- 2.7 A young population 14
- 2.8 Family structure 16
- 2.9 Poverty rates 17

SECTION 3: Ecological Framework for Understanding Black Parenting19

SECTION 4: The Issues and Challenges Facing Black Parents27

- 4.1 Black LGBTQ+ parents and parenting LGBTQ+ children and youth.....27
- 4.2 Immigrant and refugee parents.....33
- 4.3 Interacting with the education system45
- 4.4 Mental health53
- 4.5 Maternal health61
- 4.6 Incarcerated parents69
- 4.7 Black fathers.....76

SECTION 5: Conclusion.....86

A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

The terms **African Canadians**, **Black Canadians**, and **Black** are used interchangeably throughout this report to refer to all people of sub-Saharan African ancestry residing in Canada, regardless of whether they have arrived in Canada directly from their ancestral homeland on the continent of Africa or from other parts of the world. These terms include all people of African descent residing in Canada, regardless of their citizenship status.

Anti-Black racism is prejudice, attitudes, beliefs, stereotyping, and discrimination that is directed at people of African descent and is rooted in their unique history and experience of enslavement. Anti-Black racism is deeply entrenched in Canadian institutions, policies and practices, such that anti-Black racism is either functionally normalized or rendered invisible to the larger White society.

Anti-Black racism is manifested in the legacy of the current social, economic, and political marginalization of African Canadians in society such as the lack of opportunities, lower socioeconomic status, higher unemployment, significant poverty rates, and overrepresentation in the criminal justice system.¹

The term **racialized** is used in place of the term “visible minority,” which is used by Statistics Canada and the Government of Canada. This definition includes those who self-identify as South Asian, Chinese, Black, Filipino, Latin American, Arab, Southeast Asian, West Asian, Korean, Japanese, mixed race, and others who identify as non-White and non-Indigenous.

Parent refers to any adult in the role of a primary caregiver to a child. This person may be the child’s biological parent or may be a grandparent, foster parent, or other carer.

LGBTQ+ is a shortened acronym meant to refer to the entirety of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, questioning, intersex, pansexual, two-spirit, asexual communities and their allies, otherwise referred to as LGBTQIP2SAA.

Race is a socially constructed way of judging, classifying and creating difference based on characteristics such as accent or manner of speech, name, clothing, diet, beliefs and practices, leisure preferences, places of origin and so forth. Despite the fact that there

¹ Government of Ontario. (2019, February 27). Data Standards for the Identification and Monitoring of Systemic Racism. Retrieved from <https://www.ontario.ca/document/data-standards-identification-and-monitoring-systemic-racism>

are no biological “races,” the social construction of race is a powerful force with real consequences for individuals.²

Structural racism refers to the ways in which institutions work across society to produce and maintain racial inequality, even in the absence of oppressive intent. It includes the impact of established laws, customs, and practices which systematically reflect and reproduce inequities based on one’s membership in a marginalized group.

Systemic racism occurs within organizations, and includes discriminatory policies and practices, as well as organizational cultures that isolate and marginalize employees or underserves racialized service users.

Interpersonal racism occurs between individuals when they act on their conscious or unconscious biases. Interpersonal oppression includes a range of comments or behaviours including jokes, physical assault, harassment, discrimination, threats, and microaggressions.



² Ontario Human Rights Commission. Racial discrimination, race and racism (fact sheet). Retrieved from <http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/racial-discrimination-race-and-racism-fact-sheet>



SECTION 1: Background

1.1 Overview of the Innovative Supports for Black Parents initiative

Ontario introduced the Black Youth Action Plan (BYAP) in March 2017 with the goal of reducing disparities for Black children, youth, and families. Funded by the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, when fully implemented, BYAP is intended to increase access to supports and opportunities for 10,800 Ontario Black children, youth, and their families across life stages, from early childhood to their transition to school and/or work.

All BYAP initiatives were developed with input from an External Implementation Steering Committee made up of members of the Black community from across the province. With feedback from community engagement sessions, the Steering Committee informed the design and implementation of BYAP initiatives to ensure that they are responsive to the needs of Ontario's Black children, youth, and families.

In 2017, the BYAP provided 3-year funding to seven programs and three centres under the Innovative Supports for Black Parents (ISBP) initiative. In the call for proposals from community agencies, the Ministry acknowledged that the research demonstrates that culturally relevant and responsive parenting supports can lead to positive outcomes for Black children as well as parents and/or caregivers. In particular, parenting supports that are culturally relevant and responsive have been found to promote resilience in parents and children and reduce early development of anti-social behaviours in children (e.g., acting out at school or at home).³ Research has also identified a need for spaces for Black families to gather and access culturally relevant information and supports, with a focus on developing healthy relationships as well as parenting and problem-solving skills within families.⁴

The overall goals of the ISBP initiative are to enhance the availability of effective, culturally relevant, and culturally responsive parenting supports for Black parents and/or caregivers and to improve outcomes for Black children, youth, and their families. The ISBP initiative funded 10 applicants to develop and implement community-based, culturally relevant, and culturally responsive supports for Black parents and/or caregivers⁵ and families using a collective impact and cultural identity (CI²) approach.

There are two streams of programming under this initiative:

- Program Stream — Innovative, culturally relevant Black parenting programs that are designed and delivered by grassroots groups, collaboratives, or local organizations to pre-determined target communities or populations. This may include virtual or mobile parenting supports provided outside of permanent physical program sites (e.g., through an online service), and
- Centre Stream — Culturally focused community-based family centres (permanent physical sites), targeted to Black children, youth, and families, offering programs designed and delivered by community-based groups or organizations.

³ Coard, S.I., Foy-Watson, S., Zimmer, C., Wallace, A. (2007). Considering culturally relevant parenting practices in intervention development and adaptation: A randomized controlled trial of the Black Parenting Strengths and Strategies (BPSS) Program. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 35, 797-820.

⁴ McCready, L., James, C., Chavannes, V., Foster, N., Tewelde, Y., Kellen, A., Hay, B., Eugene, C. (2013). Gathering our voices: The lived experiences of Black fathers in the city of Toronto. *The Black Daddies Club*.

⁵ Throughout this report, when we refer to parents, we also include caregivers, which could include grandparents, older siblings, aunts/uncles, etc.

1.2 Overview of this project

Recognizing the need to evaluate the relevance, effectiveness, and outcomes of the ISBP initiative, the Ministry contracted with Turner Consulting Group Inc. in July 2018 to conduct an evaluation to:

1. Assess whether the overall ISBP initiative goals were met, including the effectiveness of the CI2 framework
2. Assess the outcomes and impacts, lessons learned, and best practices found through the delivery of the initiative that can be applied to enhance programs that target and/or serve Black children, youth, and families and more broadly through mainstream programs (e.g., accessibility, physical space improvements, outreach and engagement approaches, pathways to services, pedagogy, etc.), and
3. Create public documents that synthesize findings and make recommendations to the ISBP programs, government, and other relevant funders and sectors (i.e., early years, public health, etc.) for the programs to be improved, replicated, and/or scaled-up in the future.

To determine whether the funded programs meet the needs of the Black community, we must first understand those needs, which other programs and services are being offered, and existing promising practices in the field. To meet these objectives, this project will produce four reports.

This report, the first report in the series — *Assessment of the Needs of Black Parents in Ontario* — explores the unique challenges experienced by Black parents. This research helps expand our understanding of the need for culturally relevant and responsive parenting programs and the types of issues they can support Black parents to address if they are to improve the outcomes for Black children and youth.

The second report — *Jurisdictional Scan: Programs and Services for Black Parents in Ontario* — provides an overview of the existing programs and services in Ontario and analyzes the gaps in services.

The third report in the series — *Review of Promising Practices: Supports for Black Parents* — focuses on promising practices that may be used to improve outcomes for Black children and youth by supporting their parents.

Over the 3-year period, we will work with each of the 10 funded agencies to collect participant and outcome data to enable each agency to evaluate the effectiveness of their program. This data will also contribute to our evaluation of the ISBP initiative, which will be documented in the fourth and final report in this series — *The Evaluation of the ISBP Initiative*.



1.3 Overview of this report

This research report is intended to help expand our understanding of the need for culturally relevant and responsive parenting programs and the types of issues they can support Black parents to address if they are to improve the outcomes for Black children and youth.

This report begins with a demographic overview of the Black population in Ontario, including its growth, geographic distribution, age profile, and ethnicity. The demographic overview focuses on the BYAP communities, namely the Greater Toronto-Hamilton Area (which includes the city of Toronto, Peel Region, York Region, Durham Region, and the city of Hamilton), Windsor, and Ottawa. It is followed by a review of the literature to identify the various issues that impact Black parents in Ontario.

Despite the resilience of Black families and the capacity and strength of Black parents, research indicates that Black parents, children, and youth grapple with multiple

intersecting issues. These issues range from poor mental health, poor educational outcomes in the Canadian public school system, overrepresentation in the child welfare system, and overincarceration, among others. Owing to the extensive list of issues and the limitation of time and space for this report, this report is not intended to be an exhaustive exploration of the multiple issues that impact Black parents. Instead, it is intended to set the context for the types of programs that may be needed as well as the need for culturally relevant and responsive parenting supports for Black parents.

We recognize that there is limited research and data with respect to African Canadians on many of the topics covered in this report. As such, we have supplemented the literature review with telephone interviews with Black service providers, educators, social workers, and others, many of whom are also parents.



SECTION 2: Demographic Overview

2.1 A growing population

Data from the 2016 Census of Canada shows that for the first time the number of African Canadians has surpassed 1 million, representing 3.4% of the country's population. Further examination of the data shows that African Canadians are not evenly distributed across the country, with half residing in Ontario and the majority living in large urban areas. In 2016, 94% of African Canadians lived in Canada's census metropolitan areas, compared with 71% of the country's total population.⁶

As Table 1 shows, just over half of all African Canadians (52%, or 627,715) live in Ontario, comprising 4.7% of the provincial population. In addition, over one-third (37%, or 442,015) live in the Toronto CMA,⁷ comprising 7.5% of the population of this region.

⁶ <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/190227/dq190227d-eng.htm>

⁷ A census metropolitan area (CMA) is defined by Statistics Canada as one or more adjacent municipalities centred on a population centre (known as the core). The Toronto CMA includes the city of Toronto as well as the surrounding municipalities of Ajax, Aurora, Bradford West Gwillimbury, Brampton, Caledon, East Gwillimbury,

Table 1. African Canadian Population, Canada, Ontario, and Toronto CMA (2016).

Region	Total Population	African Canadian Population	% of Total Population	% of African Canadian Population
Canada	35,151,728	1,198,540	3.4%	—
Ontario	13,448,494	627,715	4.7%	52.4%
Toronto CMA	5,928,040	442,015	7.5%	36.9%
Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Canada, 2016.				

An examination of the growth in the African Canadian population since 2001 shows that the Black population in Ontario has grown faster than the population of the province as a whole. Table 2 compares the size and rate of growth of Ontario's African Canadian population in 2001, 2006, 2011, and 2016 with that of the total provincial population.

Table 2. Rate of Growth of African Canadian and Ontario Population, 2001–2016.

Year	African Canadian Population			Ontario Population	
	#	% of Ontario Population	Rate of Growth Since 2001	#	Rate of Growth Since 2001
2001	411,100	3.6%	—	11,410,000	—
2006	473,800	3.9%	15%	12,160,000	7%
2011	539,205	4.3%	31%	12,651,795	11%
2016	627,715	4.7%	53%	13,448,494	18%
Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Canada, 2001, 2006, and 2016; Statistics Canada, National Household Survey, 2011.					

Between 2001 and 2016, the provincial population grew by 18%, from 11.4 million to 13.4 million. Over that same time period, the provincial Black population grew by 53%, from just over 411,000 to almost 628,000. As a result, the Black population grew from 3.6% of the provincial population to 4.7%.

Statistics Canada projects that by the year 2036, the Black population in Canada could increase to between 2 million and 2.5 million people and could represent between 5%

Georgina, Halton Hills, King, Markham, Milton, Mississauga, Mono, New Tecumseth, Newmarket, Oakville, Orangeville, Pickering, Richmond Hill, Uxbridge, Vaughan, and Whitchurch-Stouffville.

and 5.6% of Canada's population.⁸ This means that the Black population in Ontario could increase to between 1.1 and 1.4 million people, and could represent 7% of the provincial population at that time.⁹

2.2 Distribution across Ontario

The distribution of the Black population across Ontario varies greatly and is influenced by immigrant settlement patterns, as newcomers from all backgrounds prefer to settle in communities with other migrants from the same country, religion, and/or ethnic group and where the infrastructure supports their integration, such as community agencies and social networks. The distribution of the Black population across the province also reflects historical migration patterns, which have changed over time.

As Table 3 shows, the city of Toronto has by far the largest number of African Canadians. Since the late 1960s, it has been the primary settlement area for newcomers to Canada, including Black immigrants. Yet while the largest number of Black people live in Toronto, African Canadians represent a larger proportion of a number of other municipalities. While the 239,850 Black people in Toronto make up 8.8% of the city's population, the almost 20,000 Black people in Ajax make up close to 17% of the population, and the 82,000 Black people in Brampton make up 14% of that city's population. By contrast, while the African Canadian population is larger in Ottawa than that in both Durham and York regions, the over 60,000 African Canadians in Ottawa make up only 6% of the city's population.

Table 3. African Canadian Population in Ontario for Select Municipalities (2016).			
Municipality	Municipal Population	African Canadian Population	% of Municipal Population
City of Toronto	2,731,571	239,850	8.8%
Peel Region	1,381,739	131,060	9.5%
Brampton	593,638	82,175	13.8%
Mississauga	721,599	47,005	6.5%
Caledon	66,502	1,880	2.8%
Durham Region	645,862	51,380	8.0%
Ajax	119,677	19,860	16.6%

⁸ Morency, J., Malenfant, E.C., & MacIsaac, S. (2017). Immigration and Diversity: Population Projections for Canada and its Regions, 2011 to 2036. Statistics Canada. Ottawa: Ministry of Industry. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/91-551-x/91-551-x2017001-eng.htm>

⁹ This estimate assumes that 57% of Canada's Black population continues to reside in Ontario.

Table 3. African Canadian Population in Ontario for Select Municipalities (2016).

Municipality	Municipal Population	African Canadian Population	% of Municipal Population
Whitby	128,377	10,085	7.9%
Pickering	91,771	9,810	10.7%
Oshawa	159,458	8,715	5.5%
York Region	1,109,909	27,775	2.5%
Other Municipalities			
Ottawa	934,243	60,205	6.4%
Hamilton	536,917	20,245	3.8%
Halton Region	548,435	15,230	2.8%
Kitchener–Cambridge–Waterloo	523,894	15,110	2.9%
London	383,822	11,325	3.0%
Windsor	217,188	10,675	4.9%
St. Catharines–Niagara	406,074	7,705	1.9%
Barrie	141,434	3,695	2.6%
Guelph	131,794	2,885	2.2%
Ontario	13,448,494	627,715	4.7%
Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Canada, 2016.			

2.3 An ethnically diverse population

With people of African descent coming to Canada from across the world and Black people residing in Canada since the 1600s, there is a great deal of ethnic diversity within the African Canadian community. Table 4 specifies the number of people who identify with a number of ethnicities.

Black Ontarians identified with more than 200 ethnic and cultural origins, with Jamaican being the most frequently reported.¹⁰ The majority identify with Caribbean ethnicities, reflecting immigration patterns. Black immigrants to Canada have come mainly from the Caribbean, but recent immigrants come predominantly from African countries. The 2016 Census shows that more than half (57%) of Black immigrants who came to Canada before 1981 were born in Jamaica and Haiti. Black newcomers now come from 125 different countries, with the top countries for Black immigrants admitted between 2011 and 2016 being Haiti, Nigeria, Jamaica, Cameroon, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

¹⁰ Statistics Canada. (2019, February 27). Diversity of the Black Population in Canada: An overview. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-657-x/89-657-x2019002-eng.htm>

The Census allows Canadians to identify with more than one ethnic origin, with close to 30% of Black Canadians reporting more than one ethnic origin in 2016. As Table 4 shows, the 10 most frequently reported ethnic origins among Black Canadians were: Jamaican, Haitian, Canadian, English, Somali, Nigerian, French, Ethiopian, Scottish, and Trinidadian/Tobagonian.

Table 4. Select Ethnic Origins of African Canadians in Canada. Single and Multiple Responses. (2016).

Ethnic Origin	#
Jamaican	258,350
Haitian	156,915
Canadian	138,650
English	58,345
Somali	57,555
Nigerian	50,410
French	47,890
Ethiopian	41,270
Scottish	40,615
Trinidadian/Tobagonian	38,060
Congolese	37,590
Irish	35,840
Ghanaian	34,460
Other African origins (n.i.e.)	163,590
Other West Indian (n.o.s.)	30,050
Barbadian	29,025

“Other African origins, not included elsewhere” includes mostly general responses (e.g., 'African'), as well as a few more specific African responses (e.g., 'Saharan') that have not been included elsewhere in the ethnic origin classification.

The abbreviation “n.o.s.” means not otherwise specified.

The sum of the ethnic origins is greater than the total population because a person can report more than one ethnic origin in the census questionnaire.

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Canada, 2016.

2.4 A large Caribbean population, but growing African population

With the introduction of the point system to Canada’s immigration policy in the late 1960s, migration from the Caribbean increased dramatically. Before that time, the primary source of Black immigrants was the United States.

From 1946 to 1950, Africans comprised only 0.3% of new immigrants to Canada, rising to 1%–2% over the next 20 years. Since changes to Canada's immigration policy in the 1960s, migration from Africa rose to an average of approximately 2%, "indicating that while the new system was more objective, it was highly selective."¹¹ The limited number of immigration offices in Africa served to limit the number of immigrants from the continent. In 1984, 3,552 immigrants from Africa comprised 4% of Canada's total immigration that year.¹²

The 1976 *Immigration Act* established a new class of migrants — refugees. This enabled Africans who were fleeing their homeland for various reasons to settle in Canada without needing to meet the criteria of an economic migrant. This has added to the diversity of the Black population in Canada. It is important to note that while Canada has taken in refugees from African countries, most notably Ethiopia and Somalia, a large number of refugees from African countries have been non-Black. For example, Canada took in South Asian refugees and migrants from Uganda (1972–1973), as well as Portuguese and British newcomers after Angola (1975), Mozambique (1975), and Zimbabwe (1980) achieved independence. In addition, from 1973 to 1983, some 16,000 South Africans, mainly non-Black, came to Canada.¹³

Before 1960, Africans comprised 1% of Black newcomers to Canada, while those from the Caribbean and Central and South America comprised 72% of Black newcomers. Between 1991 and 2001, those from Africa rose to 48% of Black newcomers to Canada, while those from the Caribbean and Central and South America dropped to 47% of Black newcomers.¹⁴

In 2016, about 44,415 African Canadians in Ontario were newcomers (i.e., arriving between 2011 and 2016) and represented 14.1% of all Black immigrants in Ontario. The top countries of birth for this group were Jamaica, Nigeria, Haiti and Ethiopia.¹⁵

¹¹ Naidoo, J.C. (2010). African Canadians. The Canadian Encyclopedia. <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/Africans>

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Statistics Canada. (2004). Spotlight: Black population. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-002-x/2004/03/07604/4072459-eng.htm>

¹⁵ Statistics Canada. (2019, February 27). Diversity of the Black population in Canada: An overview. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-657-x/89-657-x2019002-eng.htm>

2.5 A linguistically diverse population

Nearly 80% of Black Ontarians reported English as their mother tongue, and close to 6% reported French as their mother tongue. Somali, Akan (Twi), and Amharic were the other most frequently reported mother tongues for Black Ontarians.¹⁶

Black people comprise a large proportion of Francophone newcomers in Ontario. Among the 83,940 immigrants with French as their first official language spoken, 31% were Black. Among newcomers (those arriving between 2011 and 2016), this proportion is 48%.¹⁷

2.6 A large immigrant but growing Canadian-born population

While immigration is a major source of growth for the African Canadian population, given their long history in Canada an increasing proportion are Canadian-born.

Table 5 breaks down Ontario's Black population by generation and age group. For each age group, the table shows the proportion that is first-generation, second-generation, and three or more generations Canadian.

Table 5. Age and Generational Profile for African Canadians, Ontario (2016).

Age	Total		First Generation		Second Generation		Third + Generation	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
0 to 14	154,340	100%	21,025	14%	106,405	69%	26,900	17%
15 to 24	110,450	100%	32,590	30%	68,170	62%	6,690	6%
25 to 54	255,025	100%	180,095	71%	64,275	25%	10,655	4%
55 to 64	52,560	100%	48,835	93%	1,220	2%	2,510	5%
65 +	55,335	100%	52,490	95%	820	1%	2,030	4%
Total	627,715	100%	335,025	53%	240,895	38%	51,795	8%

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Canada, 2016.

As the table shows, while slightly more than half, 53%, are immigrants (i.e., born outside of Canada), close to half are born in Canada. The majority of Black Ontarians born in Canada (38%) are second-generation Canadian (i.e., born in Canada to at least

¹⁶ Statistics Canada. (2019, February 27). Diversity of the Black Population in Canada: An overview. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-657-x/89-657-x2019002-eng.htm>

¹⁷ Ibid.

one immigrant parent) and 8% are third-generation or more (i.e., born in Canada to Canadian-born parents).

The table also shows that of all age groups, the vast majority of Black Ontarians under age 15 (86%) were born in Canada, with 69% being second-generation and 17% being third-generation Canadian. Conversely, 95% of the Black population aged 65 and over and 93% of those between ages 55 and 64 were born outside of Canada.

This data reflects settlement patterns and the removal of restrictions to immigration for people from non-European countries in Canada's immigration policies in the late 1960s. The changes from a race-based immigration system to the point system (based on education, employment, and official language ability) resulted in a sharp increase in the number of migrants from the Caribbean in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and later increases to immigration from Africa.

The data also reflects the settlement patterns of the long-established Black Canadian population. As Table 6 shows, communities like Windsor that were destination points for the Underground Railroad have a larger proportion of African Canadians that are third generation or more. As the table shows, 28% of Windsor's Black population, the largest proportion of any municipality, has been in Canada for three generations or more. However, the Toronto CMA has the largest number of African Canadians that are three or more generations Canadian.

Table 6. Generational Profile, Select Municipalities (2016).

Municipality	Total		First Generation		Second Generation		Third + Generation	
	#	%	#	% of Municipal Black Population	#	% of Municipal Black Population	#	% of Municipal Black Population
Windsor	12,310	100%	4,885	40%	3,955	32%	3,475	28%
Hamilton	24,270	100%	12,490	51%	8,910	37%	2,870	12%
Ottawa	60,975	100%	36,805	60%	21,240	35%	2,925	5%
Toronto CMA	442,020	100%	241,440	55%	173,835	39%	26,740	6%
London	11,945	100%	5,550	46%	4,360	37%	2,035	17%

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Canada, 2016.

2.7 A young population

The African Canadian population has a younger age profile than the general population. As Table 7 shows, 25% of Black Ontarians are aged 14 and under, compared with 16% of the total population. Similarly, a larger proportion of Ontario's Black population is aged 15 to 24 (18%) compared with the provincial population (13%). In total, 29% of the total provincial population is under age 25 compared with 42% of Black Ontarians.

This younger age profile is also reflected in the median age. The median age for African Canadians in Ontario is 30.6, compared with 39.8 for the total provincial population.

As a result of this younger age profile, African Canadians make up a larger proportion of the younger age groups. For example, while Black people represent 4.7% of the provincial population, they represent 7.0% of those under age 14 and 6.5% of those aged 15 to 24. Conversely, Black people represent only 2.5% of those aged 65 and over.

Table 7. Age Profile, Ontario (2016).

Age	Total Population		African Canadian Population		
	#	% of Total Population	#	% of Total Population	% of Age Group
0 to 14 years	2,207,970	16.4%	154,340	24.6%	7.0%
15 to 24 years	1,706,060	12.7%	110,450	17.6%	6.5%
25 to 54 years	5,447,205	40.5%	255,025	40.6%	4.7%
55 to 64 years	1,835,605	13.6%	52,560	8.4%	2.9%
65 years and over	2,251,655	16.7%	55,335	8.8%	2.5%
Total	13,448,495	100%	627,715	100%	4.7%

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Canada, 2016.

Because of this younger age profile, the African Canadian population has a higher youth dependency ratio than the general population. The youth dependency ratio is the ratio of the combined child and youth population (0 to 24 years) to the working-age population (aged 25 to 64 years). It is expressed as the number of young “dependents” for every 100 “workers” who theoretically provide social and economic support.¹⁸ A

¹⁸ Statistics Canada. (2016). Dependency ratio. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/82-229-x/2009001/demo/dep-eng.htm>

high youth dependency ratio means those of working age face a greater burden in supporting the younger population.

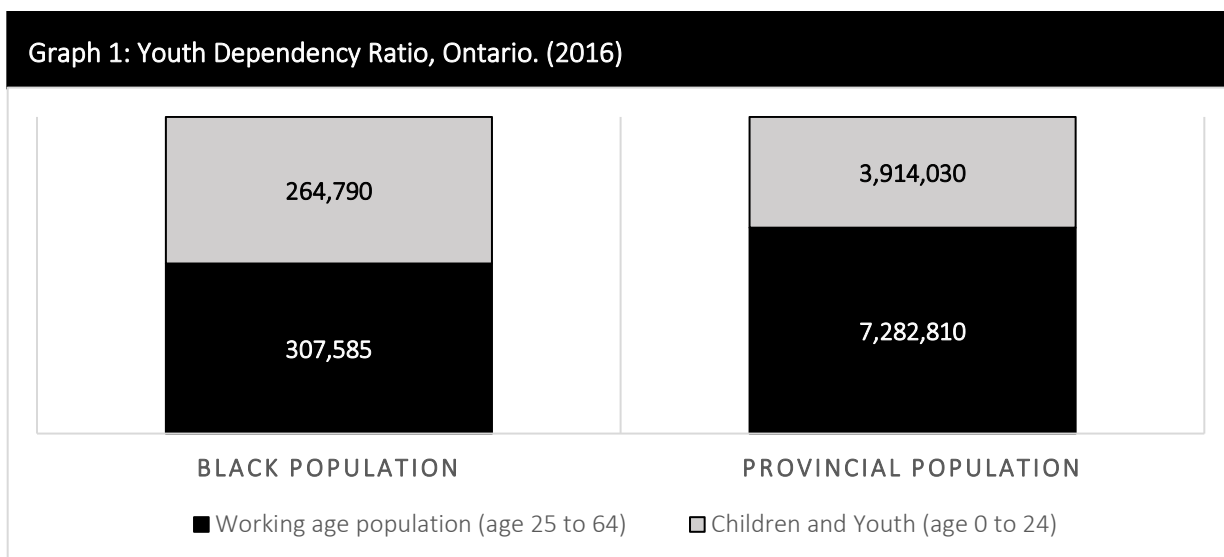
Those over age 65 are not included in this calculation, as they are generally considered to be of retirement age and are not necessarily expected to be part of the workforce. Nor does it account for those under age 25 who may be in the workforce and living on their own or contributing to the household income. As Statistics Canada notes:

The demographic dependency ratio is based on age rather than employment status. It does not account for young people or seniors who are working, nor for working-age people who are unemployed or not in the labour force. It merely reflects population age structure and is not meant to diminish the contributions made by people classified as “dependents.”¹⁹

The ratio is calculated as follows:

$$\text{Youth Dependency Ratio} = \frac{\text{Number of children and youth}}{\text{Population aged 25 to 64}} \times 100\%$$

Graph 1 shows the dependency ratio for both the Black and provincial populations. The total youth dependency ratio for the Black population is 86.1, much higher than the youth dependency ratio for the general population of 53.7. This means that for every



¹⁹ Ibid.

100 Black adults of working age, there are 86 children and youth; for the provincial population, there are 54 children and youth for every 100 adults.

2.8 Family structure

As Table 8 shows, Black people were less likely (37%) than the total provincial population (58%) over age 15 to be married or living common law.

The data suggests that this is not due to marriage breakdown, but that they are less likely to get married. A larger proportion of Black Ontarians has never been married (47% versus 28% for the provincial population), while only a slightly larger proportions are separated (5% versus 3%) and divorced (8% versus 6%). In addition, a slightly smaller proportion is widowed (3% versus 5%).

Table 8. Marital Status, Aged 15 and Over, Ontario				
Marital Status	Total Population		African Canadian Population	
	#	% of Total	#	% of Total
Married or living common law	6,389,705	57.9%	176,190	37.2%
Married	5,484,400	49.7%	149,630	31.6%
Living common law	905,305	8.2%	26,565	5.6%
Not married and not living common law	4,648,735	42.1%	297,185	62.8%
Never married	3,134,700	28.4%	222,270	47.0%
Separated	322,200	2.9%	24,045	5.1%
Divorced	638,330	5.8%	37,940	8.0%
Widowed	553,500	5.0%	12,935	2.7%
Total (Aged 15 and over in private households)	11,038,440	100%	473,380	100%
Source: Statistics Canada, data tables 2016 Census.				

Table 9 compares the type of households that Black children live in compared with all Ontario children. As the table shows, Black children are less likely to live in families with a couple, either married or living common law. Forty-four percent of Black children live in couple census families compared with 69% of all Ontario children.

By contrast, Black children under age 15 are twice as likely as all Ontarians to live in lone-parent households (35% versus 14%, respectively). In addition, other studies have

found that Black children who were Canadian-born were also more likely to live with a single parent than foreign-born Black children.²⁰

Table 9. Household Type, Aged 15 and under, Ontario

Household Type	All children under age 15		African Canadian children under age 15	
	#	% of Total	#	% of Total
Couple census family with children	1,527,360	69.3%	68,110	44.1%
Lone-parent census family	301,205	13.7%	54,655	35.4%
Multigenerational household	245,720	11.2%	17,895	11.6%
Other census family households	129,440	5.9%	13,675	8.9%
Total (Aged 15 and under in private households)	2,203,720	100%	154,340	100%

Source: Statistics Canada, data tables 2016 Census.



²⁰ Statistics Canada. (2004, March 16). Spotlight: Black population. Infomat. 11-002-XIE. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-002-x/2004/03/07604/4072459-eng.htm>

2.9 Poverty rates

Poverty across Canada and among racialized communities is a growing problem. The 2016 Census shows that Ontario's overall poverty rate was 14%. For racialized people, the rate was 21%, and for African Canadians, 24%.²¹

Contributing to higher poverty rates are higher unemployment rates and lower average incomes. In 2016, Black Ontarians experienced an unemployment rate of 12.2% compared with an unemployment rate of 6.7% for non-racialized Ontarians. In addition, while non-racialized men earned \$56,920 in average employment income, Black men earned \$37,817 and Black women earned \$31,900 — 66% and 56%, respectively, of the earnings of non-racialized men.

The 2016 Census shows that the income gap between racialized and non-racialized residents increased from 25% to 26%, with racialized women facing an income gap of 47% compared with non-racialized men.²²

²¹ Statistics Canada. 2016 Census.

²² Ibid.



SECTION 3: Ecological Framework for Understanding Black Parenting

On the face of it, African Canadian parents live and raise their children like other Ontarians. They nurture and love them. They pass on their cultural traditions while starting new ones. They strive to earn a living to provide for their children's needs. They send their children to school in hopes that they will get a good education and pursue a career of their interest, provide for their families, and lead rich and fulfilled lives.

However, while they may have the same hopes and aspirations for their children as other Canadians, Black parents struggle to provide these things for their children because anti-Black racism permeates all aspects of their lives. Anti-Black racism impacts the immigration and refugee systems, determining who is able to enter and stay in the country. It also impacts whether and when one is able to migrate with or send for family members. Black parents must also navigate the interpersonal, systemic, and structural anti-Black racism that impacts their lives and the lives and life chances of their children. They face anti-Black racism in the health care system, even before their child is born, and then in the education system when their children begin school. Black

parents must also teach their children about self-esteem, survival, self-respect, and threats of racist violence by those in positions of authority.²³ They fear the result of encounters with police, and have “the talk”²⁴ in hopes of protecting their children from arrest, physical harm, and even death at the hands of police. Many must also fight with the child welfare system for their right to continue to parent their children.

While parenting is challenging, the work of raising Black children is made all the more difficult in Canada by anti-Black racism. It affects how Black people must parent in order to raise a psychologically healthy child who is able to transition effectively into adulthood. Supporting the healthy development and physical safety of Black children requires that Black parents be constantly vigilant and advocate for their children, and work to change the laws and systems that negatively impact the Black community and Black children. How Black people parent is therefore not simply a function of one’s African ancestry, but also impacted by the Canadian context of anti-Black racism.

For people of African descent, parenting styles have been impacted by a collective trauma that has spanned more than 400 years. In all parts of the world, people of African descent have endured generations of slavery; colonialism; interpersonal, systemic, and structural racism; ideological and cultural racism; and the resulting dislocation from traditional cultures and homelands. Black Canadians continue to experience forced migration, manufactured poverty, destruction of communities, dehumanization, mass incarceration, police brutality, racial profiling, and the separation of families through the immigration, criminal justice, and child welfare systems.

Within this context, the preferred parenting style by Black parents is influenced by Black parents’ perception of their environment. In an environment that is racist and in which Black children are seen as threats by neighbours, teachers, police, and others, they can be easily harmed, killed, or imprisoned simply for behaving in ways that other children do. Historians and anthropologists have found that precolonial West African parenting styles have change significantly because of colonization and slavery:²⁵

²³ Peters, M. F. (2002). Racial socialization of young Black children. In H. P. McAdoo (Ed.), *Black children: Social educational and parental environments* (pp. 57–72). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing.

²⁴ Lopez, G. (2016, August 8). Black parents describe “The Talk” they give to their children about police. Vox. Retrieved from <https://www.vox.com/2016/8/8/12401792/police-black-parents-the-talk>

²⁵ Patton, S. (2017, April). Corporal punishment in black communities: Not an intrinsic cultural tradition but racial trauma. Retrieved from <http://www.apa.org/pi/families/resources/newsletter/2017/04/racial-trauma.aspx>

West Africans believed that children came from the afterlife, that they were gods or reincarnated ancestors who led profoundly spiritual lives and held extraordinary mystical powers that could be harnessed through ritual practice for the good of the community. In fact, it was believed that coercion and hitting a child could scare off their soul. Indigenous people of North America held similar beliefs. As colonization, slavery and genocidal violence made life harsher for these groups, parenting practices also grew harsher.

According to Lalonde et al., Black parenting is unique because of the need to respond to the multiple and complex challenges caused by anti-Black racism, which impacts all aspects of the lives of Black families in North America.²⁶ In an anti-Black racist environment that views Black children as threats, a permissive parenting style “that allows children to see the world as a place to be explored unhindered by rules and regulations is considered by many Black parents as a recipe to get their children killed or imprisoned before they grow into adulthood.”²⁷ This need for Black parents to protect their children is based in part on Black children being treated as older and less innocent than White children. So, what is considered acceptable behaviour by a White child, is often viewed as threatening by a Black child. One study found that Black boys as young as 10 are seen as older and not seen to be as innocent as their White peers.²⁸ As such, many Black children today have a shared experience with generations of Black people in North America: being in a public place and commanded to stay still while White children are allowed to wander around or play without the same restrictions.²⁹ They are also more likely to be suspended and expelled from the school system, detained, arrested, or even shot by police, and to be apprehended by the child welfare system for the same behaviours as their White peers.

Lalonde et al. argue that Black parenting is unique because it involves addressing the multiple and complex challenges of dealing with the daily racism and classism that

²⁶ Lalonde, R. N., Jones, J. M., & Stroink, M. L. (2008). Racial identity, racial attitudes, and race socialization among Black Canadian parents. *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science*, 40(3), 129–139.

²⁷ Adjei, P. B., Mullings, D., Baffoe, M., Quaicoe, L., Abdul-Rahman, L., Shears, V., & Fitzgerald, S. (2017). The “fragility of goodness”: Black parents’ perspective about raising children in Toronto, Winnipeg, and St. John’s of Canada. *Journal of Public Child Welfare*, 12(4), 461–491.

²⁸ Goff, P. A., Jackson, M. C., Di Leone, B. A. L., Culotta, C. M., & DiTomasso, N. A. (2014). The essence of innocence: Consequences of dehumanizing Black children. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 106(4), 526–545.

²⁹ Gruy, J. (2005). *Post traumatic slave syndrome: America’s legacy of enduring injury and healing*. Milwaukie, OR: Uptone Press.

target Black families in North America.³⁰ Hill and Bush note that whereas *authoritarian* and *harsher* parenting styles may imply out-of-control parenting to many White people, many African American and African Canadian parents may see permissive and non-punitive styles of parenting as an abdication of parental responsibilities and one which exposes Black children to harm.³¹ In “The ‘Fragility of Goodness’: Black Parents’ Perspectives about Raising Children in Toronto,” the authors summarize what can be considered the values underlying Black parenting in Canada and how it is seen by those outside the community:

Black parenting practices involve raising Black children [to know] about survival, self-respect, and the threats of racism in society. Black children are taught about how to conduct themselves when interacting with people in authority, such as police, teachers, social workers, and other state-sponsored institutions and agencies, because any act of open resistance can be read as a threat that can result in either imprisonment or shooting to death. Unfortunately, this practice of raising Black children within the confines of “racial rules of engagement” in Canada has often been misunderstood as “bad parenting” practices by child welfare agencies, resulting in a high level of apprehension and placement into care of Black children.³²

The need to be strict in order to protect Black children was reflected throughout our interviews for this report. Dr. Elizabeth Sinclair, retired Superintendent of Education, shared the need for Black parents to protect their children, not just physically but also psychologically, from a hostile world:

We need to do a lot more to protect our children’s hearts from the pain and suffering from experiencing anti-Black racism. Our children are fine when they’re home, but once we have to send them into the outside world we can’t protect them anymore. And the systems that should protect our children don’t, because they don’t see our children as worth protecting.

³⁰ Lalonde, R. N., Jones, J. M., & Stroink, M. L. (2008). Racial identity, racial attitudes, and race socialization among Black Canadian parents. *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science*, 40(3), 129–139.

³¹ Hill, N. E., & Bush, K. R. (2001). Relationships between parenting environment and children’s mental health among African American and European American mothers and children. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 63, 954–966.

³² Adjei, P. B., Mullings, D., Baffoe, M., Quiacoe, L., Abdul-Rahman, L., Shears, V., & Fitzgerald, S. (2017). The “fragility of goodness”: Black parents’ perspective about raising children in Toronto, Winnipeg and St. John’s. *Journal of Public Child Welfare*, 12(4), 461–491.

These negative perceptions of Black parenting can have serious consequences as White individuals and systems may feel the need to intervene in order to protect Black children from their parents. For example, these perceptions may result in teachers, health care workers, and neighbours overreporting Black parents to child welfare agencies, which ultimately results in more Black parents losing their children to the child welfare system. Jean Samuel shared a story about how this impacted her family:

My daughter had a very close White friend in elementary school. But the mother was always speaking to my daughter about us. My house was not as big as their house and so my daughter's room was smaller than her daughter's room. Her daughter had a TV in her room. I did not want my daughter to have a TV in her room because I thought she was just too young and needed to be going to bed at a certain time. She didn't have a computer in her room because I wanted to monitor what my daughter was doing on the internet.

Because of these differences, she tried to steal my daughter. She tried to convince my daughter that her family was more loving, more caring, more giving and us as being strict and overbearing and not allowing my daughter to have freedom.

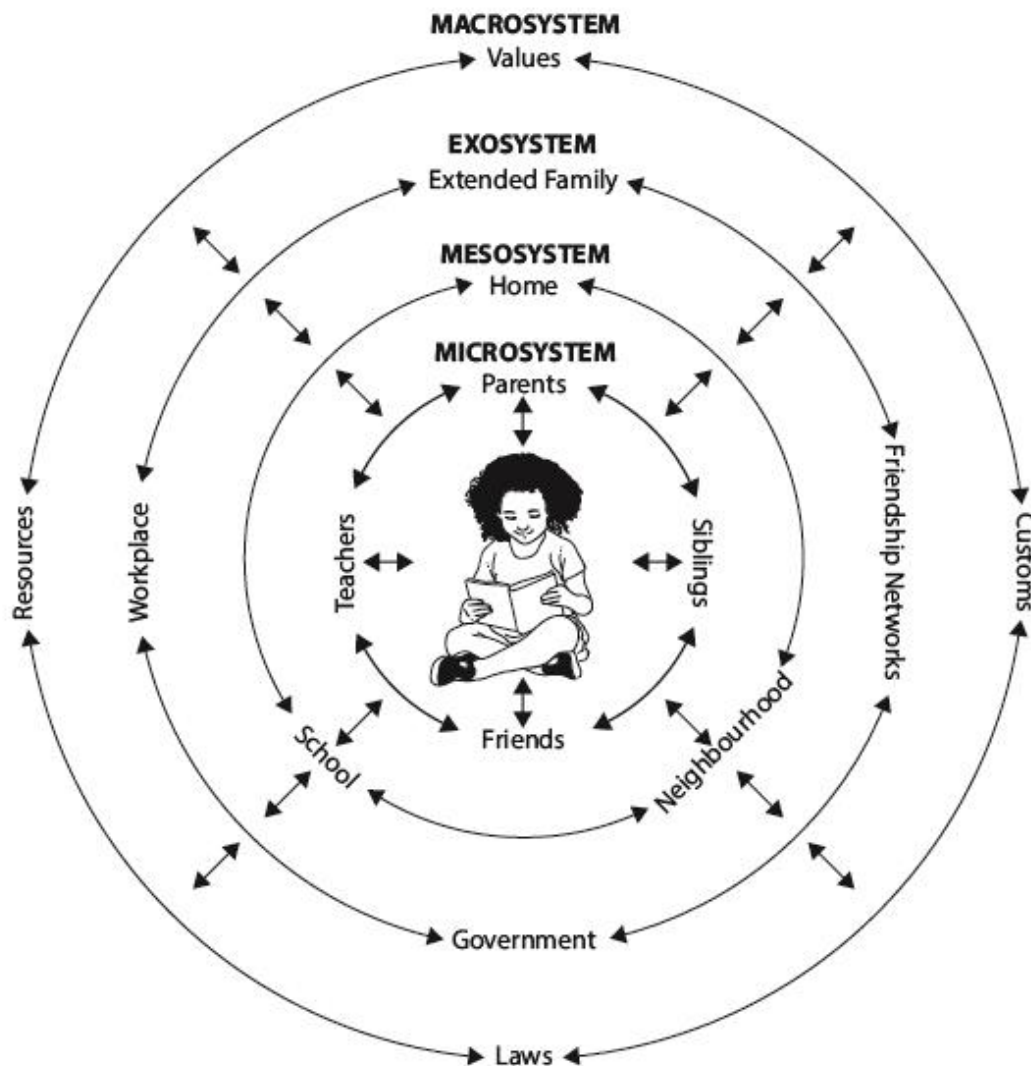
I had to go to that woman's house and tell her 'this is my daughter not yours and she will be abiding by my rules not yours.'

It is interesting how White parents feel about the way that we parent — that we over discipline, that we're too restricting. It might seem that way from a White perspective, but they don't come from a Black experience. And they don't even consider that the Black experience might be different.

Because anti-Black racism permeates all aspects of Black life in Canada, it requires that we use an ecological framework to understand Black parenting and the needs of Black parents. This framework widens our lens from examining what is happening in the household, community, and culture to exploring what is happening in the larger society that impacts parents, their parenting style, and their ability to parent. This approach recognizes that not everything that affects the family are within the control of parents. It acknowledges that outside structural and systemic forces imbued with anti-Black racism impact parents and the lives of their children. In Bronfenbrenner's conceptualization of an ecological framework, he argues that the child interacts with a changing environment, and that this shapes their experiences, identities, and knowledge systems.³³ The child's environment includes the immediate setting as well

³³ Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

as the social and cultural contexts within which the family lives. In the absence of an ecological framework, there is a narrow focus on what is happening within the household, which only results in the pathologizing of Black families.



Source: 2015 Pearson Education Ltd. Figure 2.3 Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model.

In Bronfenbrenner's conceptualization, the child is at the centre. The *microsystem* includes the immediate setting of the home and school, while the *mesosystem* involves the interplay between home, school, and neighbourhood communities. The *exosystem* involves settings in which children do not directly participate but are affected, such as the workplace, extended family, friendship networks, and government systems. Lastly, the *macrosystem* includes laws, customs, values, and resources such as economic,

political, and social. Macrosystems are the ideology and organization of pervasive social institutions of the culture or subculture.

With respect to African Canadian children and families, Ogbu's extension of this model offers some insight into the challenges they face by considering the interplay of anti-Black racism throughout these systems.³⁴ African Canadian children are embedded in the mesosystems of the school environment, which are not always supportive of Black families and the success of Black children. Supportive environments for African Canadian children involve a positive interplay between the school, family, and community environments. If this is lacking, the child may experience negative effects on their academic as well as on their socioemotional well-being. This model also reflects the understanding that the economic and political systems (within the exosystem) that marginalize African Canadian adults also impact African Canadian children. Racism in the workplace, underemployment, and unemployment may impair a parent's ability to provide adequate housing, nutritious food, and other resources to support their children. In addition, anti-Black racism in the labour and housing markets may mean that Black parents have less time to spend with their children as they may face longer commutes because they cannot afford to live close to their workplaces, or must work multiple jobs to financially support their families.

Permeating this system and the present-day experiences of Black families is Canada's long history of anti-Black racism. Contrary to what many Canadians think, the current ecosystem that impacts Black families is not a byproduct of American racism. Instead, it is uniquely Canadian, born out of Canadian attitudes, laws, and policies, including slavery and the use of public systems such as policing, criminal justice, child welfare, and education to control and marginalize African Canadians. These circumstances have created the unique environment in which Black people must parent. While Canada is ranked as one of the best countries in the world with respect to standard of living, African Canadians experience marginalization, discrimination, and a lower standard of living which has been identified as concerning by the United Nations.³⁵ African Canadians experience disproportionate levels of poverty, unemployment, underemployment, and poor housing. African Canadians also experience reduced

³⁴ Ogbu, J. U., & Simons, H. D. (1998). Voluntary and involuntary minorities: A cultural–ecological theory of school performance with some implications for education. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 29(2), 155–188.

³⁵ United Nations General Assembly. (2017, August 16). Report of the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent on its mission to Canada. Retrieved from <https://ansa.novascotia.ca/sites/default/files/files/report-of-the-working-group-of-experts-on-people-of-african-descent-on-its-mission-to-canada.pdf>

access to quality health care, racial profiling by law enforcement, and overincarceration, all of which impact parents' ability and capacity to parent, the family's material circumstances, ultimately impacting outcomes for Black children.

The use of an ecological framework to understand Black families also helps to disrupt the negative portrayal of African Canadian families by the media and social service professionals. Rather than pathologizing parenting styles, an ecological framework helps to place behaviours in the context of the interpersonal, systemic, and structural anti-Black racism experienced by African Canadian children, youth, and families. Within this ecological framework, we see that African Canadian children and their parents are embedded in a complex system of factors that are outside of their control, yet influence the everyday functioning of the family. This broader understanding of the various systems that impact families helps us understand that interventions meant to support African Canadian families must address all levels of interaction with the environment, from the micro to the macro.

Contributing to this pathologizing of Black families is the training given to most social workers, teachers, school psychologists, mental health professionals, and law enforcement professionals. This training is culturally and racially biased from a human development standpoint, as it takes a Eurocentric approach to understanding families. By holding White families as the norm, the training ends up pathologizing Black families. Developmental psychologist Barbara Rogoff argues that human development is a cultural process and that deficit thinking has historically been used to frame racialized communities as "the problem."³⁶ Rogoff defines ethnocentrism as imposing a value judgement about the cultural practices of others without taking the time to learn how those practices make sense within that community. When one holds an ethnocentric bias, it becomes easy to perceive the "other" culture as deficient, immoral, and inferior.

³⁶ Rogoff, B. (2003). *The cultural nature of human development*. New York: Oxford University Press.

SECTION 4: The Issues and Challenges Facing Black Parents



4.1 Black LGBTQ+ parents and parenting LGBTQ+ children and youth

Canada's decriminalization of homosexuality in 1969 led to considerable legal and political advancements for the rights of sexual and gender minorities. Sexual orientation was added to the Ontario *Human Rights Code* as a protected ground in 1986, and gender identity and gender expression were added in 2012. Moreover, in 2002, a Canadian court ruled in favour of legally recognizing same-sex marriage,³⁷ and on November 15, 2016, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced Canada's first Special Advisor on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Two-Spirit (LGBTQ2S)

³⁷ CBC News. (2012, January 12). Timeline: Same-sex rights in Canada. Retrieved from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/timeline-same-sex-rights-in-canada-1.1147516>

issues.³⁸ The following year, Prime Minister Trudeau also issued an apology to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender communities for decades of “state-sponsored, systematic oppression and rejection.”³⁹

Despite these advances, Black Canadians who identify as LGBTQ+ continue to experience profound social, economic, and cultural marginalization compared with the broader LGBTQ+ and African Canadian communities. Anti-Black racism perpetuated in LGBTQ+ communities coupled with homophobia and transphobia within Black communities help to maintain and further this marginalization. One queer Somali-American shared the following about his experiences in the broader LGBTQ+ community while also describing transphobia and homophobia in the Somali-American community as being normal and to be expected:⁴⁰

It has been awful. I should not be surprised that just because we happen to share a sexuality that it would absolve them or cure them of all prejudices that exist.

This intersection of oppressions leaves Black children and youth who identify as LGBTQ+ vulnerable to a myriad of issues within their families, Black communities, and broader communities. Also explored in this section are the barriers to supporting LGBTQ+ children faced by cisgender Black heterosexual parents.

While data is not collected on the number of hate crimes perpetuated against Black people who identify as LGBTQ+, the existing data shows that those who identify as LGBTQ+ and those who identify as Black are increasingly being targeted. In 2017, more than half of all hate crimes based on the victim’s sexual orientation were violent, representing more violent hate crimes than any other group.⁴¹ This is particularly concerning for parents, as it is primarily a phenomenon affecting youth, where both

³⁸ Prime Minister of Canada. (2016, November 15). Prime Minister announces Special Advisor on LGBTQ2 issues. <https://pm.gc.ca/eng/news/2016/11/15/prime-minister-announces-special-advisor-lgbtq2-issues>

³⁹ Harris, K. (2017, November 28). ‘Our collective shame’: Trudeau delivers historic apology to LGBT Canadians. CBC News. Retrieved from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/homosexual-offences-exunge-records-1.4422546>

⁴⁰ Schuessler, R. (2017, August 3). ‘White queers are really good at erasing us’: the lives of LGBTQ Somali-Americans. The Guardian. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/aug/03/lgbtq-somali-americans-minnesota-homophobia-trump>

⁴¹ Statistics Canada. (2018). Police-reported hate crime, 2017. The Daily. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/181129/dq181129a-eng.htm>

the victims and the accused were largely between the ages of 12 and 24.⁴² Similarly, hate crimes against the Black community are the most common type of race- or ethnicity-related hate crime in Canada, at 16%,⁴³ although Black people only account for 3.5% of the overall Canadian population. Troubling still is the fact that the number of hate crimes targeting Black Canadians is increasing — 2017 marked a 50% increase (relative to 2016 figures) in hate crimes targeting Black Canadians.⁴⁴

In addition to increased physical health risks and consequent poor outcomes, social marginalization and discrimination also impact the mental health of Black LGBTQ+ parents, children, and youth. In its 2016 report, *Advancing the Mental Health Strategy for Canada: A Framework for Action*, the Mental Health Commission of Canada asserted that the populations more likely to be exposed to detrimental social determinants of health are also at increased risk of developing mental illnesses.⁴⁵ LGBTQ+ communities in general experience higher rates of depression, anxiety, obsessive-compulsive and phobic disorders, suicidality, self-harm, and substance abuse.⁴⁶ LGBTQ+ youth are approximately 14 times more at risk of suicide and substance abuse than their heterosexual counterparts.⁴⁷ Furthermore, an Ontario-based survey found that 77% of trans respondents had seriously considered suicide and 43% had attempted suicide.⁴⁸ Mental health issues can be further compounded for Black Canadians who also identify as LGBTQ+ because of the added experiences of anti-Black racism.

⁴² Egale. (2012, April 12). Hate crimes targeting LGBT community remain most violent in Canada. Retrieved from <https://egale.ca/hate-crimes-targeting-lgbt-community-remain-most-violent-in-canada/>

⁴³ Statistics Canada. (2018). Police-reported hate crime, 2017. The Daily. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/181129/dq181129a-eng.htm>

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Mental Health Commission of Canada. (2016). *Advancing the mental health strategy for Canada: A framework for action*. (2017–2022). Retrieved from https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/sites/default/files/2016-08/advancing_the_mental_health_strategy_for_canada_a_framework_for_action.pdf

⁴⁶ Diamant, A. L., & Wold, C. (2001.) Sexual orientation and variation in physical and mental health status among women. *Journal of Womens' Health*, 12(1), 41–49.

⁴⁷ Gibson, P. (1989). Gay and lesbian youth suicide. In M. R. Fenleib (Ed.), *Report of the Secretary's Task Force on Youth Suicide. Volume 1: Overview and recommendations*. DHHS Pub. No. (ADM)89-1621. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office; Benibgui, M. (2010). *Mental health challenges and resilience in lesbian, gay and bisexual young adults: Biological and psychological internalization of minority stress and victimization* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Concordia University, Montreal.

⁴⁸ Bauer, G. R., Payne, J., Francino, M. C., & Hammond, R. (2013). Suicidality among trans people in Ontario: Implications for social work and social justice. *Service Social*, 59(1), 35–62.

Within this context, one in four homeless youth in Toronto identify as LGBTQ+.⁴⁹ Research demonstrates that homelessness puts youth at greater risk of poor mental health outcomes.⁵⁰ In *Where Am I Going To*, Abramovich and Shelton determined that LGBTQ+ youth were more likely (51%) than heterosexual cisgender youth (36%) to say that they were homeless or street involved because of an inability to get along with their parents.⁵¹ There is no way of knowing how homophobic or transphobic one's parents or family will be until a youth comes out. In light of these barriers and consequent vulnerabilities, one must reflect on the resources available for Black parents to be in the best position to support and empathize with their queer and trans children. Culturally relevant resources require deep reflection and consideration of the unique social positionality, culture, and history of Ontario's Black community, especially the intergenerational effects of colonialism.

Furthermore, between 2011 and 2012, the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) carried out a student census investigating the intersection of race and sexuality. The census found that Black LGBTQ+ students feel less accepted by their peers (57%) than heterosexual students (80%).⁵² The study also found that Black LGBTQ+ students experience a disproportionate amount of bullying, with 46% of Black LGBTQ+ students reported being victims of verbal insults at school compared with only 31% of their heterosexual counterparts. This has significant implications for Black LGBTQ+ youth, as research consistently demonstrates the far-reaching consequences of being bullied, including social anxiety, loneliness, withdrawal, physical illnesses, and low self-

⁴⁹ Homeless Hub. (2019). Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, queer, questioning and two-Spirit (LGBTQ2S). Retrieved from <https://www.homelesshub.ca/about-homelessness/population-specific/lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgender-transsexual-queer>

⁵⁰ Canadian Population Health Initiative of the Canadian Institute for Health Information, Mental Health, Mental Illness, and Homelessness in Canada. In J. D. Hulchanski, P. Campsie, S. Chau, S. Hwang, & E. Paradis (Eds.), *Finding home: Policy options for addressing homelessness in Canada* (e-book) (chapter 2.3). Toronto: Cities Centre Press, University of Toronto. Retrieved from <https://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/2.3%20CPHI%20Mental%20Health%20Mental%20Illness%20and%20Homelessness.pdf>

⁵¹ Homeless Hub. (2019). About homelessness: Supporting communities to prevent and end homelessness. Retrieved from <https://www.homelesshub.ca/about-homelessness/population-specific/lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgender-transsexual-queer>

⁵² Toronto District School Board. (2017, June). Black LGBTQ Students in the TDSB: Highlighted findings from the 2011–12 Student Census. Retrieved from <https://www.tdsb.on.ca/Portals/research/docs/Census/Census%20-%20Black%20LGBTQ%20Students%20-%20Revised%20June%202030.pdf>

esteem.⁵³ Moreover, research demonstrates the likelihood of victims of bullying subsequently displaying acts of aggression themselves. One study found that when compared with those who had not been bullied, victims of face-to-face bullying were four times more likely to exhibit aggressive behaviours themselves, while victims of cyberbullying were 10 times more likely to exhibit aggressive behaviours.⁵⁴

Responses to being bullied are especially relevant in light of suspension and expulsion rates for Black LGBTQ+ students. Both the Toronto District School Board 2006–2007 and 2011–2012 Caring and Safe Schools Census data indicate higher rates of suspension for LGBTQ+ students.⁵⁵ The rates of suspension and expulsion are even more disproportionate for Black students, prompting the need for further inquiry into the experiences of students who are both LGBTQ+ and Black. TDSB data shows that by the time Black students had finished high school, 42% of them had been suspended at least once, compared with only 18% of White students and 18% of other racialized students.⁵⁶ The Canadian report *The Roots of Youth Violence* makes the connection between exclusion from the education system and increased risk of incarceration later in life, commonly referred to as the school-to-prison pipeline.⁵⁷ Similarly, a UK study echoes the relationship between exclusion from the school system and the increased likelihood of unemployment and involvement in crime.⁵⁸

Many of the obstacles endured by Black LGBTQ+ children and youth, such as anti-Black racism, transphobia, homophobia, and the consequent outcomes of heightened physical and mental health risks, are also experienced by Black LGBTQ+ parents. The context of the social determinants of health is essential for understanding the needs of this community. Social determinants of health are “the broad range of personal, social,

⁵³ Pavri, S. (2015). Loneliness: The cause or consequence of peer victimization in children and youth. *The Open Psychology Journal*, 8(Suppl20M4), 78–84.

⁵⁴ Marcus, M. B. (2016, May 4). The complicated fallout of bullying. CBS News. Retrieved from <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/bullied-kids-may-lash-out-study-finds/>

⁵⁵ Toronto District School Board. (2013, June). Caring and safe schools: Suspension rates by students’ demographic and family background characteristics. Retrieved from <https://www.tdsb.on.ca/Portals/research/docs/reports/CaringSafeSchoolsCensus201112.pdf>

⁵⁶ James, C. E., & Turner, T. (2017). Towards race equity in education: The schooling of Black students in the Greater Toronto Area. Toronto: York University.

⁵⁷ McMurtry, R., & Curling, A. (2008). Review of the roots of youth violence. Volume 1: Findings, analysis and conclusions. Toronto: Queen’s Printer for Ontario. Retrieved from <http://www.rootsofyouthviolence.on.ca>

⁵⁸ Department for Education and Skills. (2006, September). Exclusion of Black pupils: Priority review. Retrieved from <https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/8656/1/exclusion%20of%20black%20pupils%20priority%20review%20getting%20it%20getting%20it%20right.pdf>

economic and environmental factors that determine individual and population health.”⁵⁹ They include socioeconomic status, housing, discrimination such as anti-Black racism, and employment status. LGBTQ+ communities and Black communities are disproportionately impacted by a multitude of social determinants of health.

In addition to this marginalization, Black parents who identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community endure the added layer of parenting within the context of pervasive discrimination, which often includes “inappropriate questions about sexual orientation and gender identity and the politicization of their families.”⁶⁰ The intersecting oppressions also impact them in the education system and then in the labour market, maintaining conditions of poverty. According to an Ontario-based study, half of the trans population was living on less than \$15,000 a year.⁶¹ Furthermore, in 2015 Black people in Ontario had an unemployment rate of 12.2% compared with an unemployment rate of 6.5% for the general population and 7.4% for all racialized people.⁶² Another Ontario study found that 20% of trans people had experienced physical or sexual assault owing to their identities, and 34% were subjected to threats and harassment.⁶³ One U.S. study found that 32% of children raised by gay male Black couples live in poverty compared with 13% of children raised by married heterosexual Black parents and 7% of children raised by married heterosexual White parents.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ Government of Canada. Social determinants of health and health inequalities. Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/health-promotion/population-health/what-determines-health.html>

⁶⁰ Preliminary Analysis of 2010 Social Justice Sexuality Survey. See <http://www.socialjusticesexuality.com>

⁶¹ Tjepkema, M. 2008. Health care use among gay, lesbian and bisexual Canadians. *Health Rep.* 19(1), 53–64. Statistics Canada Catalogue No. 82-003; Bauer, G., Boyce, M., Coleman, T., Kaay, M., Scanlon, K., & Travers, R. 2010. Who are trans people in Ontario? Trans PULSE E-Bulletin No. 1(1).

⁶² Statistics Canada. Data tables, 2016 Census.

⁶³ Bauer, G. R., & Scheim A. I. (2014, October 17). Transgender People in Ontario, Canada: Statistics from the Trans PULSE Project to Inform Human Rights Policy. Trans PULSE Project Team.

⁶⁴ Movement Advancement Project, Family Equality Council & Center for American Progress. (2012, January). LGBT families of color: Facts at a glance. Retrieved from <https://www.lgbtmap.org/file/lgbt-families-of-color-facts-at-a-glance.pdf>



4.2 Immigrant and refugee parents

Canada has a long history of welcoming immigrants and refugees who move to this country to make a better life for themselves and their children. Changes to Canadian immigration policies in the late 1960s — the removal of the preference for immigrants from Europe and the United States — resulted in an increase in the number of Black immigrants from the Caribbean and more recently increases from African countries. With declining birth rates, Canada is increasingly relying on immigration for both population and labour market growth. According to Chris Friesen, Director of Settlement Services at the Canadian Immigrant Settlement Sector Alliance, “Nothing is going to impact this country [more] besides increased automation and technology than immigration will and this impact will grow in response to declining birth rate, aging population and accelerated retirements.”⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Harris, K. (2017, November 28). ‘Our collective shame’: Trudeau delivers historic apology to LGBT Canadians. CBC News. Retrieved from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/homosexual-offences-exunge-records-1.4422546>

Despite Canada's history of welcoming immigrants and refugees, the country continues to struggle with immigrant settlement and integration into society and the labour market. In particular, Black immigrant and refugee parents and children experience a myriad of issues navigating systems and accessing services that are essential to their health, well-being, and self-sufficiency. Given the vast number of issues that impact newcomer parents and their children, this section will explore the immigration process, employment, housing, and social integration. The experiences of newcomer parents in these sectors limit their well-being and social mobility, with dire consequences, including impacts on mental health, child development, and educational outcomes for their children. In addition, the parenting styles of Black newcomers may conflict with Canadian norms and the different rates at which newcomer parents and their children integrate into Canadian society can increase conflict within the household.

The immigration process

Under the Harper government, Canada's immigration policy shifted to focus on the admission of economic immigrants rather than family reunification.⁶⁶ This approach focused on the nuclear rather than extended family, to the detriment of newcomers,



⁶⁶ Harris, K., Hall, C., & Zimonjic, P. (2017, November 1). Canada to admit nearly 1 million immigrants over next 3 years. CBC News. Retrieved from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/immigration-canada-2018-1.4371146>

who receive not only mental health and parenting supports from relatives, but also accessible childcare, reflecting a Eurocentric approach to family life and parenting.⁶⁷

Canada's immigration policies favour skilled immigrants with skills and work experience deemed valuable by the Canadian government.⁶⁸ Despite this prioritization, there is limited opportunity for foreign-trained professionals, once they arrive in Canada, to have their credentials recognized in the Canadian labour market and to gain employment commensurate with their skills, abilities, and experiences. An estimated 844,000 Canadians are not getting the jobs they should because their credentials are not being recognized.⁶⁹ This is especially problematic for immigrant parents, as many migrate and leave their children behind with extended family in the hope of establishing themselves economically before bringing their children to Canada. This creates a new family structure — the transnational family — wherein one parent or both parents are located in a different nation state than their children. Immigration policies create the condition for this separation, while poor workforce and development policies lengthen the time of that separation. This context poses challenges for parenting and family reunification in the long term, as reunification is not always a smooth process.⁷⁰ As such, children may be raised by grandparents for long periods of time, who have different parenting styles than their parents. This may create conflict when children are reunited with biological parents. Mazzucato and Schans note that this forced separation may result in some children feeling abandoned by their parents and in some cases emotionally detach from them, which may lead to conflict upon reunification.⁷¹ Other challenges can be caused by parents remarrying and/or having additional children in Canada.

Further, refugee families face unique economic, social, and legal challenges to full integration. Refugee families in many cases have experienced war-related trauma. In

⁶⁷ Statistics Canada. (2017). Immigration and ethnocultural diversity: Key results from the 2016 Census. The Daily. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/171025/dq171025b-eng.htm>

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Conference Board of Canada. (2016, January 26). Canada could gain billions from improvements in recognizing education and skills. Retrieved from https://www.conferenceboard.ca/press/newsrelease/16-01-26/canada_could_gain_billions_from_improvements_in_recognizing_education_and_skills.aspx?AspxAutoDetectCookieSupport=1

⁷⁰ Bernhard, J. K., Landolt, P., & Goldring, L. (2009). Transnationalizing families: Canadian immigration policy and the spatial fragmentation of care-giving among Latin American newcomers. *International Migration*, 47(2), 3–31.

⁷¹ Mazzucato, V., & Schans, D. (2011). Transnational families and the well-being of children: Conceptual and methodological challenges. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 73(4), 704–712.

such cases, family members may be separated for long periods of time, inevitably affecting the parent–child bond. In addition, family members may display traumatic symptoms that are associated with their refugee experiences, and they may not have access to culturally appropriate mental health services.

Refugee parents may also display hypervigilance as a response to previous trauma.⁷² Many refugees develop this hypervigilance and close supervision of their children as a survival strategy in their country of origin, thereby allowing them to keep their children safe. When the family relocates to Canada, the parents may find these habits hard to break within a new and unfamiliar context.

Employment

Integration into the labour market continues to be a significant issue for newcomers. The unemployment rate among recent immigrants aged 15 years and older who arrived in Canada between 2001 and 2006 was 14%, despite the figure being 5.6% for the general population.⁷³ This disparity in the labour market was further compounded when data was disaggregated by gender, with the unemployment rate for recent female immigrants with children at 21% compared with 5.5% for their counterparts in the general population.

If we are to believe that those who participate in the labour market are hired and advance based on merit, these figures would suggest that new immigrants lack the education, expertise, or knowledge to fully integrate into the labour market. However, the data paints a very different picture and suggests that other factors get in the way of immigrants securing jobs commensurate with their education and experience. Skilled immigrants to Canada have higher educational attainment than Canadian-born people; however, in terms of labour force characteristics, immigrants are disproportionately underemployed and unemployed, less likely to be high-wage earners, and overrepresented in service industries when compared with their Canadian-born counterparts.⁷⁴ Although the majority of immigrants arrive as skilled immigrants through the points system, which allocates points for education, skills, language ability,

⁷² Bryant, R. A., Edwards, B., Creamer, M., O'Donnell, M., Forbes, D., Felmingham, K. L., Hadzi-Pavlovic, D. (2018). The effect of post-traumatic stress disorder on refugees' parenting and their children's mental health: a cohort study. *The Lancet Public Health*, 3(5), PE249–E258.

⁷³ Social Planning Council of Ottawa. (2009, June). Immigrants' economic immigration: Successes and challenges. Retrieved from <https://www.spcottawa.on.ca/sites/all/files/pdf/2009/Publications/Final-Immigrant-Report-2009.pdf>

⁷⁴ Statistics Canada, 2016 Census.

and training, many recent immigrants face barriers to the labour market.⁷⁵ Several Canadian studies have shown that foreign-earned credentials are devalued by employers. Skill discounting means that foreign-acquired educational and experience-based skills of immigrants tend to be discounted relative to those of locally trained employees.⁷⁶ In studies where thousands of résumés were submitted with various names signifying various ethnic and racial backgrounds and credentials earned abroad, the evidence shows clear employer bias in favour of Anglo-Saxon names and locally earned credentials.⁷⁷

Black immigrants and refugees face further marginalization in the labour market because of their experience of anti-Black racism. Reviewing national trends, the United Nations' Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent concluded its official visit to Canada in Autumn 2016, identifying trends of anti-Black racism in the labour market in its report. They found a much higher unemployment rate of 11% for Black women compared with 7% for the general Canadian population. They also found that when employed, Black women make 37% less than White men and 15% less than their White female counterparts.⁷⁸ These national trends are echoed provincially. According to the 2016 Census, Black people in Ontario experienced an unemployment rate of 12.2% compared with an unemployment rate of 6.5% for the general population and 7.4% for all racialized people.⁷⁹ The labour market issue is also gendered, with Black women more likely than White women to be unemployed, despite having higher levels of education: 8.8% of Black women with university degrees were unemployed compared with 5.7% of White women with high school diplomas.⁸⁰

It is important to address the conventionally held social belief that all immigrants experience employment discrimination in the same way. The reality is that even among

⁷⁵ Reitz, J. G. (2016). Towards empirical comparison of immigrant integration across nations. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 39(13), 2338–2345.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Oreopoulos, P. (2011). Why do skilled immigrants struggle in the labor market? A field experiment with thirteen thousand resumes. *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*, 3(4), 148–171.

⁷⁸ United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner. (2016, October 21). Statement to the media by the United Nations' Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent, on the conclusion of its official visit to Canada, 17–21 October 2016. Retrieved from <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=20732&LangID=E>

⁷⁹ Statistics Canada, 2016 Census.

⁸⁰ Government of Ontario. (2017). Anti-Black racism strategy. Retrieved from https://files.ontario.ca/ar-2002_anti-black_racism_strategy_en.pdf

immigrants, experiences of employment discrimination are worse for Black immigrants. Although data released by Statistics Canada in 2017 indicates that immigrant unemployment has significantly decreased since 2006, trends of racial disparity have remained the same. Black and other racialized immigrants are still less likely to be hired than European-born immigrants.⁸¹ In addition, a 2018 report by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives found that Black and other “racialized immigrants earn 70 cents for every dollar that non-racialized immigrant men make, and racialized female immigrants make 78 cents for every dollar that white immigrant women make.” They also found that “those gaps persisted for second- and even third-generation immigrants.”⁸² Trends of anti-Black racism in the labour market are palatable in Toronto, Canada’s most diverse city. Black Torontonians have an unemployment rate of 13%, nearly twice the provincial rate,⁸³ while according to the City of Toronto, Black residents are often concentrated in part-time and precarious work that is inadequate to meet their basic needs or leverage their talents.⁸⁴

The impact of unemployment and underemployment goes beyond the financial. Paul and Moser observed that 34% of those who are unemployed experienced psychological problems compared with 16% of those who are employed. They particularly noted unemployed individuals’ experience of distress, depression, anxiety, psychosomatic symptoms, and reduced subjective well-being and self-esteem.⁸⁵ Based on their findings, Paul and Moser assert that unemployment is not only correlated to distress but also has the capacity to cause it. It is important to note here that single parents are less likely to be employed than coupled parents⁸⁶ and also tend to have poorer health

⁸¹ Yssaad, L., & Fields, A. (2018). The Canadian immigrant labour market: Recent trends from 2006 to 2017. The Immigrant Labour Force Analysis Series. Statistics Canada. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/71-606-x/71-606-x2018001-eng.htm>

⁸² Mojtehedzadeh, S. (2018, December 11). Study highlights ‘uncomfortable truth’ about racism in the job market. *Toronto Star*. Retrieved from <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2018/12/11/study-highlights-uncomfortable-truth-about-racism-in-the-job-market.html>

⁸³ Statistics Canada. (2016). Census of population. Statistics Canada Catalogue No. 98-400-X2016211.

⁸⁴ City of Toronto. (2017, November 15). The Toronto action plan to confront anti-Black racism. Retrieved from <https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2017/ex/bgrd/backgroundfile-109126.pdf>

⁸⁵ Browne, D. T., Kumar, A., Puente-Duran, S., Georgiades, K., Leckie, G., & Jenkins, J. (2017). Emotional problems among recent immigrants and parenting status: Findings from a national longitudinal study of immigrants in Canada. *PLoS ONE*, 12(4): e0175023.

⁸⁶ Nieuwenhuis, R., & Maldonado, L. C. (2018). Single-parent families and in-work poverty. In H. Lohmann & I. Marx (Eds.), *Handbook on in-work poverty* (pp. 171–192). Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.

outcomes.⁸⁷ Even when employed, they continue to have poorer health outcomes than coupled parents⁸⁸ and be at greater risk of poverty.⁸⁹ In the *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, Morton Beiser comments on the cyclical relationship between mental health and unemployment. He asserts that losing one's job places an individual at a high risk of depression; a depressed person is also at higher risk than non-depressed people of being laid off from work.⁹⁰

Housing

One implication of the systemic factors noted above is a lower household income for Black immigrants. This financial context limits the neighbourhoods where parents can afford to raise their families, leading to difficult trade-offs. For example, if Black parents value quality schools and low crime rates in a neighbourhood, they may be forced to live in a more expensive area, requiring them to work more, often at multiple jobs, in order to afford this housing. This then means that they are less available to their children and may even prompt another eventual move in search of more affordable housing.⁹¹

Other factors contribute to limited access to housing for recent immigrants and refugees, including limited access to subsidized and public housing; high housing costs; a lack of knowledge about how the housing market functions; a lack of fluency in English or French; and racism and discrimination by landlords, private and public housing agencies, and real estate agents.⁹²

A lack of investment in public housing by the federal and provincial governments means that while seeking employment and establishing themselves in a new country, immigrants and refugees have limited access to affordable public housing. This lack of

⁸⁷ Benzeval, M. (1998). The self-reported health status of lone parents. *Social Science & Medicine*, 46(10), 1337–1353.

⁸⁸ Nieuwenhuis, R., & Maldonado, L. C. (2018). Single-parent families and in-work poverty. In H. Lohmann & I. Marx (Eds.), *Handbook on in-work poverty* (pp. 171–192). Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.

⁸⁹ Tøge, A. G. (2016). Health effects of unemployment in Europe (2008–2011): A longitudinal analysis of income and financial strain as mediating factors. *International Journal for Equity in Health*, 15(1), 1.

⁹⁰ Beiser, M. (2005). The health of immigrants and refugees in Canada. *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, 96, S30–S44.

⁹¹ Newman, S., & Leventhal, T. (2018). The Housing and Children's Healthy Development Study. *Cityscape*, 20(3), 237–244.

⁹² Teixeira, C. (2008). Barriers and outcomes in the housing searches of new immigrants and refugees: A case study of "Black" Africans in Toronto's rental market. *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment*, 23(4), 253–276.

investment has resulted in a growing waitlist for subsidized housing across Ontario, while the housing stock has deteriorated. In some areas, the waitlist is 7 to 10 years,⁹³ placing an enormous stress on shelter systems. Notably, Toronto's shelter system is at capacity and was strained even before the recent influx of asylum seekers from the United States following the 2016 presidential election, with an ongoing occupancy rate of 96%.

The lack of public housing options leaves immigrants and refugees at the mercy of the private housing market in which anti-Black racism is rampant.⁹⁴ Anti-Black racism in the housing market is particularly detrimental for immigrant integration. Scholars have identified securing adequate and affordable housing as one of the most important steps towards the integration of immigrants into a new society. They also identify access to a neighbourhood where the newcomer feels comfortable as critical to the resettlement process.⁹⁵

In a study examining Canadian housing market experiences of Portuguese-speaking African immigrants and refugees, the overwhelming majority of respondents identified racial discrimination and housing costs as the two most significant barriers to securing housing.⁹⁶ The study further found that Black immigrants and refugees with lighter skin tones experienced less racial discrimination than those with darker skin tones,⁹⁷ a phenomenon called colourism. Operationally, study participants claimed that some landlords would not provide full or accurate information about vacancies, utilities, or prices to Black applicants. In other cases, landlords raised the financial requirements by demanding more than first and last month's rent. Other landlords dishonestly claimed that the unit had already been rented.⁹⁸

⁹³ Settlement.Org. (2019, January 8). How long do I have to wait for subsidized housing? Retrieved from <https://settlement.org/ontario/housing/subsidized-housing/subsidized-housing/how-long-do-i-have-to-wait-for-subsidized-housing/>

⁹⁴ Opoku-Dapaah, H. (2006). African immigrants in Canada: Trends, socio-demographic and spatial aspects. In K. Konadu-Agyemang, B. K. Takyi, & J. Arthu (Eds.), *The new African diaspora in North America: Trends, community building, and adaptation* (pp. 69–93). New York: Rowman & Littlefield.

⁹⁵ Murdie, R. A. (2003). Housing affordability and Toronto's rental market: Perspectives from the housing careers of Jamaican, Polish and Somali newcomers. *Housing, Theory and Society*, 20, 183–196.

⁹⁶ Teixeira, C. (2008). Barriers and outcomes in the housing searches of new immigrants and refugees: A case study of "Black" Africans in Toronto's rental market. *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment*, 23(4), 253–276.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

Owing to these barriers, Black immigrant and refugee parents are often funnelled into low-cost private housing.⁹⁹ Not only may this housing put their health and safety at risk, it also puts them at great risk of living in an area undergoing gentrification, which eliminates inner-city working-class neighbourhoods for middle- and upper-class residential, recreational, and other uses.¹⁰⁰ This may explain, in part, why studies see more frequent instances of residential mobility among Black immigrants and refugees, including involuntary relocation.¹⁰¹

Changes in address may also impact children, as housing insecurity creates an additional barrier for the inclusion of Black immigrant and refugee parents in the school system, which may further exacerbate educational disparities for Black children.¹⁰²

Heron Gate in Ottawa provides a case study for the very real impact of gentrification and the forced relocation of immigrants and refugees. On September 30, 2018, more than a hundred families were issued eviction notices in the Heron Gate community to make space for upscale “resort style” apartments.¹⁰³ Heron Gate is one of the city’s most diverse neighbourhoods, home to residents with mostly Somali and Arab backgrounds. Some residents have only ever known their Heron Gate neighbourhood as home since arriving in Canada. A local tenants’ rights group calls the mass evictions the “largest forced displacement in Canada, in recent history.”¹⁰⁴ Once evicted, finding affordable housing is not easy. In Ottawa, 10,000 households are on the centralized waitlist for public housing.¹⁰⁵ In addition, the number of chronically homeless families in Ottawa — meaning those who have been homeless for at least 6 months in the past year — increased between 2016 and 2017, while the length of stay in shelters for those

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Smith, N. (1987). Gentrification and the rent gap. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 77(3), 462–465.

¹⁰¹ Teixeira, C. (2008). Barriers and outcomes in the housing searches of new immigrants and refugees: A case study of “Black” Africans in Toronto’s rental market. *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment*, 23(4), 253–276.

¹⁰² Anderson, S., Leventhal, T., Newman, S., & Dupéré, V. (2014). Residential mobility among children: A framework for child and family policy. *Cityscape*, 16(1), 5–36.

¹⁰³ Osman, L. (2018, May 9). Facing eviction, Heron Gate tenants have nowhere to go. CBC News. Retrieved from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/heron-gate-timbercreek-eviction-townhomes-1.4654164>

¹⁰⁴ Kestler-D’Amours, J. (2018, August 21). Heron Gate mass eviction: ‘We never expected this in Canada’. Al Jazeera. Retrieved from <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/heron-gate-mass-eviction-expected-canada-180817200106463.html>

¹⁰⁵ City of Ottawa. (2019). Housing. Retrieved from <https://ottawa.ca/en/city-hall/accessibility-services/housing>

families also increased. Part of the problem is the lack of affordable housing to accommodate larger families.¹⁰⁶

Housing insecurity and residential mobility can have a lasting effect on a child's development, leading to depression, behavioural problems, risk taking, and deficits in achievement.¹⁰⁷ Some attribute these poor outcomes to the change in context that a child experiences during a move, such as the child's family, neighbourhood, peer group, and school.¹⁰⁸ These factors define a family's residential context and are considered to strongly influence children's development.¹⁰⁹

It is also important to consider the effects of housing insecurity and residential mobility on the health of Black immigrant and refugee parents and children. Historically, the housing–health relationship was analyzed within the conceptual apparatus of physical exposure and dilapidated housing. However, recent research suggests that adverse health outcomes are also linked to housing insecurity, a lack of affordable housing, and neighbourhood quality.¹¹⁰

Social integration

It is also important to analyze the social integration of Black immigrant families into their new social environment, as this process has significant implications for intrafamilial dynamics and highlights the capacity, or lack thereof, of Ontario to welcome and support newcomers.

Black immigrant families enter brand new social, linguistic, and cultural environments — often ones with very different values, norms, and beliefs than those of their country of origin — which requires a certain level of adjustment.¹¹¹ In addition, principles constituting “good parenting” are culturally informed, and as such new immigrants may

¹⁰⁶ Willing, J. (2018, March 17). City records spike in homeless families as it assesses midpoint of 10-year plan. *Ottawa Citizen*. Retrieved from <https://ottawacitizen.com/news/local-news/city-records-spike-in-homeless-families-as-it-assesses-midpoint-of-10-year-plan>

¹⁰⁷ Anderson, S., Leventhal, T., Newman, S., & Dupéré, V. (2014). Residential mobility among children: A framework for child and family policy. *Cityscape*, 16(1), 5–36.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Newman, S., & Leventhal, T. (2018). The Housing and Children's Healthy Development Study. *Cityscape*, 20(3), 237–244.

¹¹⁰ Garrison, V., & Pollack, C. (2018). Guest editors' introduction: The health–housing nexus: New answers to key questions. *Cityscape*, 20(2), 3–6. 3

¹¹¹ Basran, G. S. (1993). Indo-Canadian families: Historical constraints and contemporary contradictions. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 24 (3), 339–52.

conceive of “good parenting” differently which may conflict with the norms of their new country of residence. This difference can not only complicate the process of intercultural understanding and thus social integration, but puts them at risk of losing their children to the child welfare system.

Diana Baumrind classified parenting styles into three categories: authoritative, permissive, and authoritarian.¹¹² These categories have long since framed much of the discourse around parenting styles. However, more recent literature has responded to the need to expand this discourse. Kuczynski explores the bidirectional impact that parents and children have on each other’s behaviours.¹¹³ However, research has been slow to understand parenting within the immigrant context. Instead, there has been a widespread practice of squeezing conceptual understandings of immigrant families into frameworks designed without their consideration. Ochoka and Janzen purport that research must consider the roles of the parent’s culture and new host country in shaping behaviour.¹¹⁴

Opportunities for parents to be socialized into their new country of residence are quite different than those available for their children, which can lead to miscommunication and conflict within the family. Immigrant children are expected to resume their studies as soon as they arrive in Canada, which aids and quickens their integration into Canadian society. Immigrant parents often experience socialization vis-à-vis other avenues, such as navigating social services. School aged children are at an age when they are trying to find themselves and fit in with their peers. So while the children are trying to become more “Canadian”, immigrant parents may have expectations that are informed by their home country and may continue to try and instill traditional beliefs in them. In addition, where English is a new language, immigrant children may develop capacities in English quicker than their parents. Consequently, the child becomes translator and cultural interpreter for their parents within health systems, school systems, and social services, among others. The added responsibility and increased power given to the child in this context, can disrupt the traditional parent-child

¹¹² Baumrind, D. (1971). Current patterns of parental authority. *Developmental Psychology*, 4(1, Pt.2), 1–103.

¹¹³ Kuczynski, L., & Lollis, S. (2003). Four foundations for a dynamic model of parenting. In J. Gerris (Ed.), *Dynamics of parenting*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

¹¹⁴ Ochoka, J. & Janzen, R. (2008). Immigrant parenting: A new framework of understanding. *Journal of Immigrant and Refugee Studies*, (6)1, 85–111.

relationship and dynamics within the family.¹¹⁵ It is worth adding a note of caution to this narrative, as research studies demonstrate that immigrants maintain a high degree of family cohesion and should not be stereotyped as dysfunctional.¹¹⁶

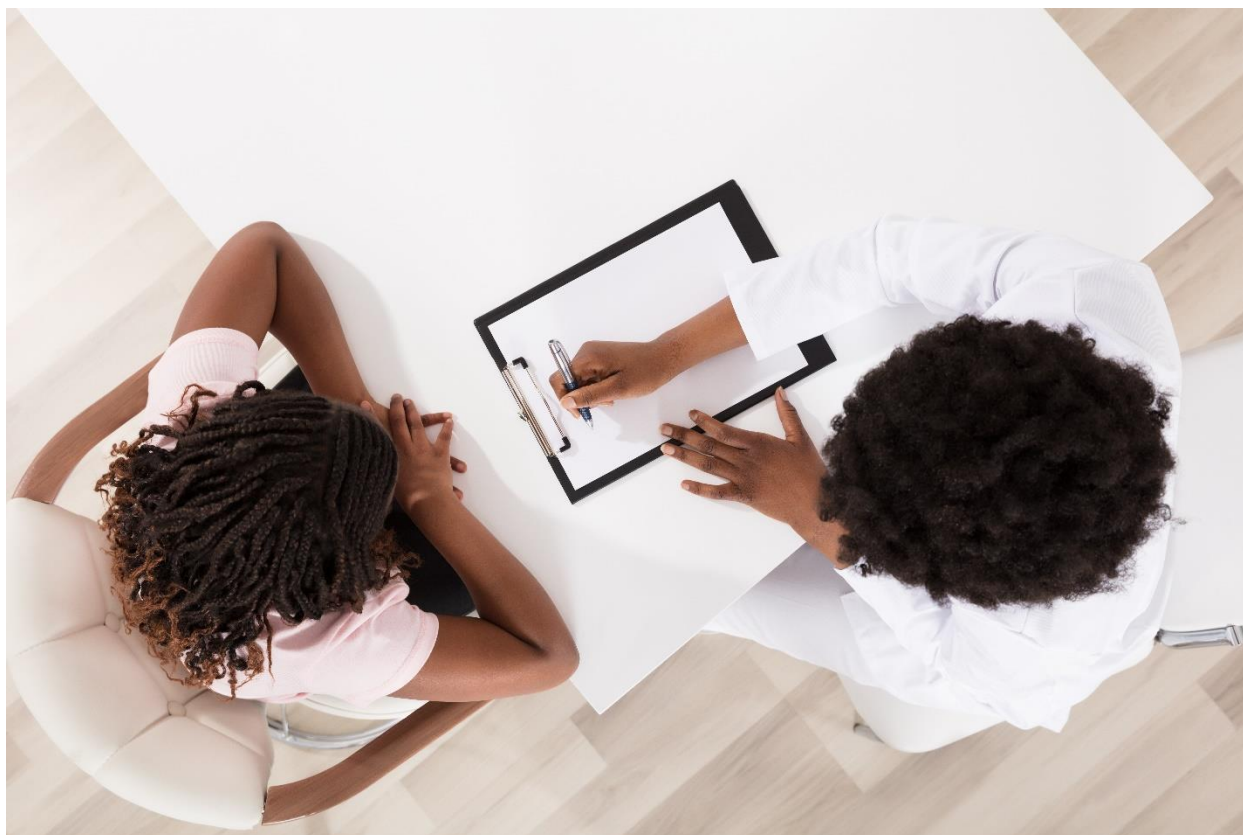
This process of social integration is further complicated for Black newcomer families. A nuanced understanding of this process requires an analysis that addresses the anti-Black racism and lack of cultural competence within Ontario institutions, particularly within the public school system.

Within the education system, “recent immigrants and refugees are at a higher risk to drop out, fail, be suspended or streamed into non-academic courses.”¹¹⁷ Black immigrant parents have an important role to play in mitigating the effects of anti-Black racism on the development and success of their children. This includes advocating for their children as well as maintaining good communication with teachers and school administrators. However, the identity marker of being an immigrant, especially one with limited proficiency in English, exacerbates the ability of Black immigrant parents to protect, nurture, and guide their children through this institution. Further complicating this relationship are the difference in expectations between teachers and Black immigrant parents. Illustrating this challenge is the role of extended family. It may differ from their experiences with White families, educators may be asked to maintain communication with extended family members about matters pertaining to a child’s academic performance and well-being as extended family plays a foundational role in many Black immigrant cultures.

¹¹⁵ Social Planning Council of Ottawa. (2010). Immigrant children, youth and families: A qualitative analysis of the challenges of integration. Retrieved from <https://www.spcottawa.on.ca/sites/all/files/pdf/2010/Publications/Immigrant-Family-Report-English.pdf>

¹¹⁶ Roebuck, M. (2006). Ways that visible and ethnic minority women in Ottawa think about the quality of their lives and social programs: Resulting grassroots indicators of quality of life (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from Library and Archives Canada. (ISBN 978-0-494-16508-9)

¹¹⁷ Tyyskä, V. 2009. Families and violence in Punjabi and Tamil communities in Toronto. The Ontario Metropolis Centre.



4.3 Interacting with the education system

Effective parenting involves supporting the brain, social, and knowledge development of one's children. This includes preparing them for the formal education system; once they begin school, it means engaging with teachers to ensure that children are progressing well and provided with the supports they need.

For Black parents, effective parenting also requires protecting one's children from the impact of the anti-Black racism they may experience in the school system. While Ontario's public school system is supposed to educate all children equally and prepare them to be confident and competent adults, schools are also the sites in which anti-Black racism is reproduced and perpetuated against Black children. As Robyn Maynard writes:¹¹⁸

For many Black students, though, schools are places where they experience degradation, harm, and psychological violence. Even as education environments

¹¹⁸ Maynard, R. (2017, November 29). Canadian education is steeped in anti-Black racism. *The Walrus*. Retrieved from <https://thewalrus.ca/canadian-education-is-steeped-in-anti-black-racism/>

continue to under-serve many communities from different backgrounds, there are unique dimensions to the experiences of Black youth, who experience schools as carceral places characterized by neglect, heightened surveillance, and arbitrary and often extreme punishment for any perceived disobedience. Because Black youth are so often not seen or treated *as children*, schools too often become their first encounter with the organized and systemic devaluation of Blackness present in society at large.

Various studies have confirmed that Black students do not fare as well as their White peers in Ontario's public education system. The report *Towards Race Equity in Education* analyzed the data available from the Toronto District School Board (the only Ontario school board that collected race-based student data at the time). The report conducted quantitative analysis of student achievement data for the 2006–2011 high school cohort and supplemented that analysis with consultations on the experiences and perspectives of teachers, parents, and Black students.¹¹⁹ The Toronto District School Board (TDSB) data showed that:

- Compare with White and other racialized students, a smaller proportion of Black students were enrolled in the Academic program of study, while a larger proportion of Black students were enrolled in the Applied and Essentials programs of study. 53% of Black students, 81% of White students, and 80% of other racialized students were in the Academic program of study. Conversely, Black students were over twice as likely to be enrolled in the Applied program (39% compared with 16% of White and 18% of other racialized students) and three times as likely to be in the Essentials program (9% versus 3% of White and 3% other racialized students).
- At the end of the 5-year period, 84% of White students and 87% of other racialized students had graduated from high school. By contrast, only 69% of their Black peers had graduated from high school during this 5-year period.
- After five years of high school, Black students were twice as likely (11%) as White and other racialized students (both 5%) to be returning to high school the following year and twice as likely to have dropped out (20%) compared with White (11%) and other racialized students (9%).
- Almost half (47%) of the White students in this cohort applied to and were accepted by an Ontario university. A larger proportion of other racialized students (60%) in this cohort applied to and were accepted by an Ontario

¹¹⁹ James, C. E., & Turner, T. (2017). *Towards race equity in education: The schooling of Black students in the Greater Toronto Area*. Toronto: York University.

university. By contrast, only a quarter of Black students (25%) had applied to and were accepted by an Ontario university.

- A greater proportion of Black than White and other racialized students were identified as having non-gifted exceptionalities (14% versus 10% and 4%, respectively) and non-identified special needs and/or an Individual Education Plan (12% versus 6% and 5%, respectively).
- White students are more likely than both Black and other racialized students to be identified as gifted. Of the White students in this cohort, 4% were identified as gifted compared with only 2% of other racialized students and 0.4% of Black students. This means that of the 5,679 TDSB Black high school students in the 2006–2011 cohort, only 23 had been identified as gifted.
- Black students in this cohort were more than twice as likely as their White and other racialized peers to have been suspended at least once during high school. In fact, by the time they finished high school, 42% of all Black students had been suspended at least once compared with only 18% of White students and other racialized students.
- Of the 213 students who were expelled over the 5-year period (2011–2012 to 2015–2016), 48% were Black.

The data show large gaps in the academic outcomes for Black students, created in large part by the stereotypes held by teachers about the abilities of Black children. As the report notes, these stereotypes and the racism of low expectations begins in kindergarten and continues into high school with Black students being streamed into Applied programs of study, special education classes, and even English as a Second Language classes, without appropriate testing to confirm their need for those classes or programs. After the release of the *Towards Race Equity in Education* report, a conversation about streaming began on Twitter using the hashtag #streamedtofail. M. Hyacinth Gaynair, who attended TDSB schools from kindergarten to graduation recognized her own experience in the Twitter conversation. Currently a doctoral student at Rutgers University, she recounts her experience with a guidance counsellor who encouraged her to attend trade school despite having the desire and the grades to attend university, writing:¹²⁰

As I sat down with my guidance counsellor, he told me that trade school would be suitable for my perceived skills. He did not even look at my transcript. I asked

¹²⁰ Gaynair, M. H. (2017, May 23). Learning while Black: I was streamed to fail. Huffpost.com https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/m-hyacinth-gaynair/learning-while-black_b_16706474.html

him which trade, since I did not take any technology courses. He then looked at my file and proceeded to stumble over his words to find something to say. I asked him about the possibility of taking the SATs, and he laughed as though I had just told a joke. I left his office without gaining anything helpful or encouraging about my future. I commiserated with other students who were treated the same; their futures easily dismissed and disrespected. Apparently, most of the students pushed away from university by these counsellors were people of colour.

Camisha Sibblis, a professor of social work who worked for many years in the school system, reflected on the way Black children are seen by teachers, which contributes to streaming and their poor educational outcomes:

Black children are aware of being streamed away from academically focused classes because they are not seen as academically inclined. They are really seen as the athletes. Or they are constructed as misfits or misbehaving and as needing to be controlled. Their experiences are of being watched and disciplined differently than their White counterparts or the other racialized students. Black youth, particularly because identity is so important to them, are very aware of the way that they are constructed, the way White people are constructed, and the way other races are constructed. Black students feel like the outcast of the school system. They don't feel that it's a place for them.

Black teachers and parents who participated in the consultations summarized in the report *Towards Race Equity in Education* noted that parents of Black children need to be vigilant and involved with the education system if their children are to have the same opportunities for learning as other children. Natasha Henry, a historian and certified Ontario teacher, reflected on the added labour that must be expended by Black parents with school aged children. In an interview for this report, she recounted the strategies which she and her husband employed to support their daughter's academic achievement and well-being. She also emphasized her focus on supporting the development of a strong racial identity in her daughter, knowing how she would be negatively impacted by the public school system:

From the moment our daughter was born, we had to be intentional in what she was exposed to in order to help her develop a positive sense of racial pride and racial identity. This meant purchasing and reading books with a lot of Black kids, characters, and representing different Black experiences so that she can positively identify herself as Black. We were very conscious of the representation of Black girls, for example in their physical features and their hair. It's also meant putting her

in programs that include an element of learning about different African cultures and heritages. As well, part of her schooling was spent at the Africentric school, which as parents we felt was something that was beneficial to her.



Yet, even while understanding and learning to navigate the school system is critical for Black parents, they experience a number of barriers to involvement. While they try to engage in their child's education, one common complaint by Black parents is feeling that they are stereotyped by teachers and school administrators as single parents, living in poverty, placing low value on their child's education, and as not engaged parents. They and their concerns are therefore dismissed and their child's education not seen as a priority. Black parents who are teachers themselves are acutely aware of the impact of this stereotype on their child's education. In a study of the experiences of Black educators, a Black teacher shared the following:¹²¹

Even though I have a well-paying job, I'm still dealing with stuff like any other Black parent in Ontario where I make sure my kids look a certain way and when we have

¹²¹ Turner, T. (2015, May 29). Voices of Ontario Black educators: An experiential report. Toronto, ON: Turner Consulting Group and Ontario Alliance for Black School Educators. Retrieved from http://onabse.org/ONABSE_VOICES_OF_BLACK_EDUCATORS_Final_Report.pdf

parent-teacher meetings that both my husband and I go because I don't want to go by myself and have them think that I'm a single Black parent — I'm conscious of that. All Black parents are conscious of that and then of course the kids will be conscious of that. You have to actually learn to navigate the unfairness, the inequity of their schooling because they don't want their teacher to think a certain thing.

Complicating parental engagement with schools is the expectation that they engage with the school system in ways that are consistent with White, middle-class parenting and behavioural norms and in ways that are deferential to the school's agenda.¹²² Dr. Carl James and Selom Chapman-Nayho examined the perception among high school teachers and administrators that “working-class immigrant parents are disinterested and uninvolved in their children’s education.”¹²³ They found a gap between how parents and students perceived parental engagement and institutional expectations. They noted that educators’ understanding of what constitutes parental involvement is likely grounded in privileged middle-class values and expectations of day-to-day involvement in the operation of the school through school councils, volunteering in the classroom, meeting with teachers, or going on school trips. Through their discussions with high school students, they instead found that working-class immigrants who don’t have the luxury of time maintain involvement in their child’s education in the home by setting high expectations and reviewing homework.

Despite its challenges, Black parents must advocate for their children if they are to support the success of their children. While Black parents need to have a level of educational knowledge and awareness — defined as an understanding of the educational process, the education system, and parental rights and pedagogical issues¹²⁴ — this knowledge is not sufficient to ensure positive educational outcomes for their children. Black parents advocating on behalf of their children is not always welcomed by teachers or the school system, even as parents seek to challenge a school system that marginalizes and dehumanizes their children. As Natasha Henry noted:

So while Black parents need to advocate, how is that perceived by teachers in the school? Sometimes it's taken up to be angry Black parents; Black parents are

¹²² Yull, D., Wilson, M., Murray, C., & Parham, L. (2018). Reversing the dehumanization of families of color in schools: Community-based research in a race-conscious parent engagement program. *School Community Journal*, 28(1). Retrieved from <http://www.adi.org/journal/2018ss/YullEtAlSpring2018.pdf>

¹²³ James, C., & Chapman-Nyaho, S. (2018, November 11). Too busy for PTA, but working-class parents care. *The Conversation*. Retrieved from <https://theconversation.com/too-busy-for-the-pta-but-working-class-parents-care-104386>

¹²⁴ Crozier, G. (1996). Black parents and school relationships: a case study. *Educational Review*, 48(3), 253–267.

confrontational. I've heard of cases where parents have been banned from school property because they're advocating for their children.

Camisha Sibblis echoed Natasha Henry's perspective:

Black parents are seen as combative and adversarial when they do want to advocate for their children. At the same time I think that if they do come and advocate, much of what they're saying is dismissed. What happens is flags go up within the school. They know that this is a parent that's going to cause friction, and so they're going to be a little bit more careful about the way that they manage the student in question.

I find that this is what I've experienced, even though I work for the school board, I know how to navigate the system, and I understand the language that the teacher speaks. On a very basic level I'm just seen as "the Black mother," and potentially the "angry Black woman," and discounted in various ways.

Parents can be criminalized by giving them trespassing orders. And it is really disempowering to the parents and the students. When that happens the entire system is alerted. These parents are flagged and that also follows the student and the parent even when they move to other schools. There isn't really an opportunity to have a fresh start. While the order may not be in place at another school, there are those internal notes.

While many Black parents recognize the need to advocate for their children and the potential risks to themselves, they are also concerned about the very real possibility their advocacy could mean that further harm comes to their child. Dr. Elizabeth Sinclair, a retired superintendent of education, shared an experience she had with her son which reflects the dilemma faced by many Black parents:

I remember one incident in particular where the school called me to pick up my son because he had done something in the morning. The teacher put him out of the classroom in the morning and she wouldn't allow him back in the class.

So, I left work and went to the school to find out exactly what went on. Apparently, a young White girl was hitting him and he kept telling her to stop. She kept on, and because I told him not to hit anybody, he pushed her down and sat on her. When I asked him what happened he said, "Mommy you told me not to hit anyone. She wouldn't stop hitting me and I needed to stop her." The teacher was most annoyed when she saw this. But she didn't listen to his side of the story, and only punished him. The little girl didn't get sent out of class, but he did. So I had to raise a bit of a stink. I told them, "Yes what he did was not right. But neither was what she did. And so, if you didn't punish her, why are you punishing him?" I had to threaten to go

public with this and that's when she took him back into the class. She took him back in, but she was not a happy camper.

As I drove away that afternoon, I started to cry, simply because I know that she was now going to hurt him emotionally and spiritually by her actions, words, and deeds. She's not going to say the case is sorted and move on. She will hurt him in some way. But I had no other choice. He has to be in school. But if I had my way, I'd have pulled him out of school and homeschooled him. But the option wasn't there.

For Black parents, their relationship with the school system is further complicated by the power that teachers have to report them to the child welfare system. While all professionals who work with children in Ontario are required by law to report suspected child abuse or neglect, researchers who held consultations with the Black community about their experience with the child welfare system heard that teachers overreport Black children to Children's Aid Societies (CAS) for issues that White and other students aren't, thereby contributing to the overrepresentation of Black children in care.¹²⁵

Some examples of when child welfare has been the first call made include a parent late to pick up their child from school, a student who has multiple absences, a student brings what the teacher deems to be an inadequate lunch, or when a student uses dramatic language such as, "My mom is going to kill me." A further example provided by a participant is that an educator contacted child welfare in anticipation of abuse when a student had poor grades on their report card. In this case, the Jamaican heritage of the student caused sufficient concern on the part of the teacher that child welfare was called on the day report cards were sent home.

Jean Samuel, an equity consultant, reflected on how teachers' lack of understanding of the ways in which anti-Black racism influence Black parenting styles also contributes to the overreporting of Black families to the child welfare system:

Black parenting styles are also why some Black parents get brought to the attention of the child welfare system. We have stricter rules, yes, but that is sometimes needed. They don't realize that our form of discipline might be stricter, but it comes from our historical and current reality. Historically, we needed to ensure that our kids are in the house at certain times, because if they were out on the street at sundown they

¹²⁵ Turner, T. (2016). One Vision One Voice: Changing the child welfare system to better serve African Canadians. Practice Framework Part 1: Research Report. Toronto: Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies. Retrieved from http://www.oacas.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/One-Vision-One-Voice-Part-1_digital_english-May-2019.pdf

would die. They could be lynched or killed by police. That's no different today because our Black kids are still dying at the hands of police and others. So, yes, we have a strict mentality. We want our children to be where they're supposed to be when they're supposed to be there, because it's about keeping them alive.

Teachers and child welfare workers don't understand it. Some of them don't understand the history of the Black experience. They think that we should be parenting like they parent.

Further, some also charge that teachers use the child welfare system as leverage against Black parents. In one case reported in the media, a single Black mother states that her son's school called the Children's Aid Society five times alleging maltreatment. She claims these calls were payback for her advocacy about her son's education and resisting their recommendation that her 7-year old son be placed in a special program usually reserved for suspended and expelled students. As the mother notes in the Toronto Star article:¹²⁶

They say [B]lack parents are not there. Here I am. I'm that active single black mother who's basically not fitting their stereotype but yet I'm being punished for advocating for my child.



¹²⁶ Rankin, J. (2017, February 25). Single black mom battles school over calls to CAS. Toronto Star. Retrieved from <https://www.thestar.com/news/insight/2017/02/25/single-black-mom-battles-school-over-calls-to-cas.html>



4.4 Mental health

Mental health issues can have major implications for families. While the Canadian health care system spends millions of dollars each year to provide services for those with acute and chronic mental illnesses, as well as those battling and coping with addictions, there are still thousands of Canadians waiting for services, and some will struggle for a large part of their life to try and achieve wellness. Mental illnesses are characterized by “alterations in thinking, mood or behaviour (or some combination thereof) associated with significant distress and impaired functioning over an extended period of time.”¹²⁷ According to the Canadian Mental Health Association, 20% of all Canadians will personally experience a mental illness during their lifetime.¹²⁸ An

¹²⁷ Government of Canada. (2015, July 23). Mental illness. Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/chronic-diseases/mental-illness.html>

¹²⁸ Canadian Mental Health Association. (2018). Mental health, mental illness and addiction: Overview of policies and programs in Canada. Retrieved from <https://cmha.ca/documents/mental-health-mental-illness-and-addiction-interim-report>

estimated 1.2 million Canadian children and youth are affected by mental illness, while fewer than 20% will receive appropriate treatment.¹²⁹

The mental health of Black parents is affected by the compounding effects of anti-Black racism, barriers to accessing culturally appropriate mental health services, and the stigma associated with mental health issues. Mental illness affects one's ability to parent and the overall functioning of the family. Naturally, the effect on family functioning depends on the severity of the mental illness and the symptoms presented. Further, the economic viability of a family may be in jeopardy as a result of a mental illness, particularly in low income and sole-support families. Those with limited financial resources may not be able to afford quality mental health care and may have to rely on public services with long wait lists. This is a particular issue for Black Canadians. In a CBC news article, Dr. Kwame McKenzie asserted that "when a mental illness is diagnosed, the wait times for people in black communities to get treatment are double the provincial average — 16 months compared with eight."¹³⁰ Those seeking services may also face transportation barriers when trying to access services outside their communities. Immigrant and refugee families experience heightened risk due to their immigration status and a fear that a mental health diagnosis may put them at risk of deportation. Reluctance to disclose for the above reasons contributes to a deteriorating health condition and enhances the risk of family isolation.

Parents' mental health also affects the mental health of their children, putting them at greater risk of developing mental illness themselves over the course of their lives.¹³¹ Mental health issues among children can be costly to the family, as time and money are spent trying to diagnose and treat the illness. Early treatment for mental illness is critical for children and youth, as healthy emotional and social development early in life lays the foundation for mental health and resilience throughout their lives.

While very little research has been conducted on the mental health of Black Canadians, studies in the United States illustrate the impact of racism on the mental health of people of African descent. These studies have found that experiences of racism have

¹²⁹ Mental Health Commission of Canada. (2019). Children and youth. Retrieved from <https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/English/what-we-do/children-and-youth>

¹³⁰ Lee-Shanock, P. (2018, March 2). \$19M in federal funds for mental wellness in black communities desperately needed, experts say. CBC News. Retrieved from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/19-million-for-mental-health-programs-in-black-communities-sorely-needed-1.4558513>

¹³¹ Mattejat, F., & Remschmidt, H. (2008). The children of mentally ill parents. *Deutsches Arzteblatt International*, 105(23), 413–418.

significant negative effects on both the physical and mental health of African Americans. Some researchers have suggested that the chronic experiences of overt and subtle forms of racism result in “racial battle fatigue,” which includes anxiety and worry, hypervigilance, headaches, increased heart rate and blood pressure, and other physical and psychological symptoms.¹³² When the mind senses a potentially harmful situation, it tells the body to prepare for fight or flight by increasing the heart rate, breathing rate, and blood pressure. Racism evokes a similar stress response.¹³³ When this stress response is repeated frequently over time, it can lead to physical and mental health problems, including depression, anxiety, insomnia, heart disease, skin rashes, and gastrointestinal problems.¹³⁴

The experience of interpersonal, systemic, and structural racism may cause people of African descent to experience more physical and mental health issues than their White counterparts. A review was conducted of 121 studies examining the relationship between reported racial discrimination and child and youth health. It concluded that youth between the ages of 12 and 18 who experienced discrimination were significantly more likely to experience mental health issues such as depression and anxiety compared with those who reported that they did not experience discrimination.¹³⁵ Another review of 66 studies found that African American adults who perceived that they had experienced racism were more likely to experience mental health problems and more likely to report a lower quality of life.¹³⁶

The mental health of Black children is also concerning as recent studies have found that the suicide rates for African American children under age 13 are roughly double

¹³² Smith, W.A, Allen, W.R. & Danley, L.L. (2007, December 1). "Assume the Position...You Fit the Description": Psychosocial Experiences and Racial Battle Fatigue Among African American Male College Students. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 51(4), 551-578; Soto, J. A., Dawson-Andoh, N. A., & BeLue, R. (2011). The relationship between perceived discrimination and generalized anxiety disorder among African Americans, Afro Caribbeans, and non-Hispanic Whites. *Journal of Anxiety Disorders*, 25(2), 258-265.

¹³³ The Bronfenbrenner Center for Translational Research. (2017, October 19). Examining the link between racism and health. Psychology Today. Retrieved from <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/evidence-based-living/201710/examining-the-link-between-racism-and-health>

¹³⁴ Schneiderman, N., Ironson, G., & Siegel, S. D. (2005). Stress and health: psychological, behavioral, and biological determinants. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology*, 1, 607–628.

¹³⁵ Priest, N., Paradies, Y., Trenerry, B., Truong, M., Karlsen, S., & Kelly, Y. (2013). A systematic review of studies examining the relationship between reported racism and health and wellbeing for children and young people. *Social Science and Medicine*, 95, 115–127.

¹³⁶ Pieterse, A. L., Todd, N. R., Neville, H. A., & Carter, R. T. (2012). Perceived racism and mental health among Black American adults: A meta-analytic review. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 59(1), 1–9.

that of White children. While the data does not point to a potential reason for the difference, this is a reversal of the trend that has shown suicide rates in the United States as traditionally being higher among Whites than Blacks across all age groups.¹³⁷ Similar data is not collected by race in Canada, and as such it is unknown whether and to what extent there are racial differences in suicide rates in this country.

In addition, newcomers to Canada have been identified as being at increased risk of mental health issues. A 2017 study examining predictors of emotional problems using a nationally representative sample of recent immigrants in Canada found that by 2 years post-migration, nearly one in three immigrants in Canada reported emotional problems. It found that parents had a higher likelihood of reporting emotional problems than non-parents, with single parents at the greatest risk.¹³⁸ The study also found that Black immigrants had a higher likelihood of experiencing emotional problems than White immigrants; this was further exacerbated by refugee status, gender (women fared worse), and income (poorer outcomes with lower income). The study echoes that the increase may be due to unmet expectations along with racism, discrimination, inequality, and unemployment.

The mental health of Black immigrant and refugee parents is also shaped and informed by their experiences in their countries of origin and any intermediary countries in which they may have lived on their way to settling in Canada. People migrate for a multitude of reasons, including in search of better economic opportunity and fleeing political unrest and natural disaster. Despite the impetus for migrating, migration itself can involve traumatic experiences of loss and separation before, during, and after the journey.¹³⁹ This trauma is important to consider when considering the mental health issues facing immigrant and refugee parents and children. Further, the social and economic marginalization they experience once settled in Canada may exacerbate or create mental health issues for this population.

¹³⁷ Bridge, J. A., Horowitz, L. M., Fontella, C. A., Sheftall, A. H., Greenhouse, J., Kelleher, K. J., & Campo, J. V. (2018) Age-related racial disparity in suicide rates among US youths from 2001 through 2017. *JAMA Pediatrics*, 172(7), 697–699.

¹³⁸ Browne, D. T., Kumar, A., Puente-Duran, S., Georgiades, K., Leckie, G., & Jenkins, J. (2017). Emotional problems among recent immigrants and parenting status: Findings from a national longitudinal study of immigrants in Canada. *PLoS ONE*, 12(4), e0175023.

¹³⁹ Tummala-Narra, P. (2001). Asian trauma survivors: Immigration, identity, loss, and recovery. *Journal of Applied Psychoanalytic Studies*, 3, 243–258.

Victims of trauma may re-experience the traumatic events through recurrent memories or flashbacks that cannot be controlled. Newcomers may also experience survivor guilt. They may avoid situations that remind them of the traumatic event, thereby limiting interactions in the community and their ability to integrate into their new home. The duration is highly variable for sufferers, with symptoms beginning anywhere from 3 months to several years after the traumatic event. If refugees are able to access appropriate treatment, recovery may take 6 months or longer with therapy.¹⁴⁰

Complicating the diagnosis and treatment of mental health issues for people of African descent is lack of culturally appropriate diagnostic tools and treatment, which are essential given that mental health issues may present with different symptoms for people of African descent. Because the tests were designed by and for White people, the diagnostic tests and screening tools may misdiagnose African Canadians. Sean Joe, professor at the Brown School of Social Development at Washington University, argues that many depression screening tests “were developed by studying middle class white women, so the language that was chosen [to describe depression] represents that cultural experience.”¹⁴¹ His observations are confirmed by one study on a widely used depression screening test, known as the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D). The study found that this screening test may fail to diagnose many young Black Americans living in poverty because these youth tend to express their depression differently from other demographic groups, typically through complaints about conflicts with others, as well as physical pain or discomfort.¹⁴² As one of the lead authors of the study, Wenhau Lu, notes, “The way [African Americans] make sense of depression is by saying not just how they feel, but what’s happening in their body and how does it impact them when they interact with the people they love.”¹⁴³

Diagnoses of mental illness may also be impacted by the biases on the part of those doing the diagnosis. One study found that even when African American and White subjects presented with similar symptoms, African Americans received higher ratings

¹⁴⁰ Dharssi, A. (2018, July 19). Canada isn’t doing enough for refugee mental health, advocates say. The Discourse. Retrieved from <https://www.thediscourse.ca/sustainability/canada-isnt-enough-refugee-mental-health-advocates-say>

¹⁴¹ Pandika, M. (2018, February 13). The test we use to detect depression is designed for white people. Vice. Retrieved from https://tonic.vice.com/en_us/article/vbpdym/depression-screening-not-effective-for-black-youth

¹⁴² Lu, W., Lindsey, M.A., Irsheid, S., & Nebbitt, V. (2017). Psychometric properties of the CES-D among Black adolescents in public housing. *Journal of the Society for Social Work and Research*, 8(4), 595–619.

¹⁴³ Pandika, M. (2018, February 13). The test we use to detect depression is designed for white people. Vice. Retrieved from https://tonic.vice.com/en_us/article/vbpdym/depression-screening-not-effective-for-black-youth

of psychosis.¹⁴⁴ Further compounding the diagnosis of mental health issues among people of African descent has been the long history of labelling Black resistance to oppression as a mental health issue. Resistance to oppression has long been viewed by the professions of psychology and psychiatry not as the logical reaction to racism but as something to be pathologized and punished. For example “drapetomania” was the diagnosis applied to the “mental illness” that caused enslaved Africans to run away to escape enslavement.¹⁴⁵ Further, in 1968, at the height of the Black Power era in the United States, two psychiatrists coined the diagnosis “protest psychosis” to describe the Black power movement as a form of “delusional anti-whiteness.”¹⁴⁶

Today, the resistance of Black students to racism in their schools is often labelled as “oppositional defiant disorder.”¹⁴⁷ Others attribute the mistrust, or a “healthy paranoia,” of social systems and a society marked by interpersonal, systemic, and structural anti-Black racism to the over-diagnosis of people of African descent with schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and posttraumatic stress disorder.¹⁴⁸ Rather than seeing some level of mistrust and paranoia as a healthy response to anti-Black racism and oppression and, therefore, as a survival skill for African Canadians, it can be mistaken for a symptom of psychosis.

Barriers such as stigma, socioeconomic status, and lack of access to culturally responsive resources often have a cumulative impact on the treatment of mental health in the African Canadian community. Many African and Caribbean cultures have different interpretations of mental illness and mental health. Mental health challenges may also be attributed to personal failure and the sufferer may face social stigma. There may be a stigma attached to seeking formal treatment outside of religious organizations, family members, or community agencies. However, the notion that Black

¹⁴⁴ Moran, M. (2014, December 29). Overdiagnosis of schizophrenia said to be persistent among black patients. *Psychiatric News*. Retrieved from <https://psychnews.psychiatryonline.org/doi/10.1176/appi.pn.2015.1a17>

¹⁴⁵ Petrella, C., & Gomer, J. (2016, October 5). Black protest, White backlash, and the history of scientific racism. African American Intellectual History Society. Retrieved from <https://www.aaihs.org/black-protest-white-backlash-and-the-history-of-scientific-racism/>

¹⁴⁶ Petrella, C., & Gomer, J. (2016, October 5). Black protest, White backlash, and the history of scientific racism. African American Intellectual History Society. Retrieved from <https://www.aaihs.org/black-protest-white-backlash-and-the-history-of-scientific-racism/>

¹⁴⁷ Grimmatt, M. A., Dunbar, A. S., Williams, T., Clark, C., Prioleau, B., & Miller, J.S. (2016). The process and implications of diagnosing oppositional defiant disorder in African American males. *The Professional Counselor*, 6(2), 147–160.

¹⁴⁸ Moran, M. (2014, December 29). Overdiagnosis of schizophrenia said to be persistent among black patients. *Psychiatric News*. Retrieved from <https://psychnews.psychiatryonline.org/doi/10.1176/appi.pn.2015.1a17>

people do not seek help for mental health issues is questioned by some who argue that lack of access to culturally appropriate mental health services has a greater negative impact than does stigma. Dr. Roberta Timothy writes:¹⁴⁹

The myth that Black people do not seek mental health therapy comes from a falsified notion of “super resiliency” instead of the reality of under-funded and purposely delayed services that prevent health and wellness in our communities. This leads to many community members suffering and seeking services in silence and isolation.

There are few culturally appropriate mental health services for African Canadians, which means that some Black people seek help through other means, such as through their place of worship. Etowa et al. conducted 3-hour interviews with a sample of 50 middle-aged African Canadian women in Nova Scotia.¹⁵⁰ Most of the participants reported experiencing depression and felt the burden of having to maintain functioning to support other family members as well as themselves. The participants identified racism as a factor influencing their depression. Most of the 50 Black women in the study turned to religion and spirituality to cope with their depression. They either confided in their church ministers/pastors or read the Bible themselves and prayed.

In order for African Canadians to receive an accurate diagnosis and appropriate treatment, mental health practitioners must understand the impact of racism on their client’s mental health and be able to provide culturally appropriate mental health services. Mental health practitioners must be able to look beyond the “conventional” pattern of symptoms displayed by White adults as the cost of undiagnosed and untreated mental health issues is significant. It can lead to job loss, loss of housing, and loss of children to the child welfare system. It also puts Black Canadians at risk of violence and suicide, and exposes them to possibly deadly encounters with the police.

¹⁴⁹ Timothy, R. K. (2018, May 2). Racism impacts your health. Toronto.com. Retrieved from <https://www.toronto.com/opinion-story/8559566-racism-impacts-your-health/>

¹⁵⁰ Etowa, J., Keddy, B., Egbeyemi, J., & Eghan, F. (2007). Depression: The invisible grey fog influencing the midlife health of African Canadian women. *International Journal of Mental Health Nursing*, 16(3), 203–213.



4.5 Maternal health

Tennis star Serena Williams' complications after giving birth increased the profile of disparities in maternal health for Black women in the United States. Williams developed potentially life-threatening blood clots and likely would have died if not for her ability to advocate for herself.¹⁵¹ Williams' experience with the health care system as a famous, wealthy Black woman is not unlike the experience of other Black women in the United States and Canada.

Maternal health is defined as the health of women during pregnancy, childbirth, and in the postpartum period.¹⁵² As the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention notes, "The ideal result is a full-term pregnancy without unnecessary interventions, the delivery of a healthy infant, and a healthy postpartum period in a positive environment

¹⁵¹ Rettner, R. (2018, January 12). Serena Williams' blood clot after childbirth: How does it happen? Live Science. Retrieved from <https://www.livescience.com/61411-serena-williams-blood-clot-pregnancy.html>

¹⁵² World Health Organization. (2019). Maternal health. Retrieved from <https://www.who.int/maternal-health/en/>

that supports the physical and emotional needs of the mother, baby, and family.”¹⁵³ Good maternal health supports good infant health, and a child’s healthy growth and development during the first years of life will have lasting benefits. These maternal health supports differ for Black and White women, thereby impacting the outcomes for their children.

African American women are 243% more likely than White women to die from pregnancy or childbirth-related causes.¹⁵⁴ 2011 to 2014 data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reveal that White women experience 12 deaths per 100,000 live births, while African American women experience 40 deaths per 100,000 live births.¹⁵⁵

Maternal death rates are substantially lower in Canada, yet rose from 6 to 11 per 100,000 births between 1990 and 2013, “likely due to an increase in Caesarean sections, IVF births, older mothers, and other health conditions.”¹⁵⁶ Without race-based health data there is no way to determine whether and to what extent there are disparities in maternal death rates for Black and White women. One of the few Canadian studies that explored racial disparities, compared Black–White disparities in preterm births between Canada and the United States concluded that “relative disparities in preterm birth and very preterm birth between non-Hispanic black and white women were similar in magnitude in Canada and the U.S.”¹⁵⁷ The study found that in Canada, 8.9% and 5.9% of infants born to Black and White mothers, respectively, were preterm. That the racial gaps are similar in magnitude, despite greater access to health care in Canada, suggests that Black maternal health is affected by factors other than access to health care.

¹⁵³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2019, April 3). Reproductive health. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/drh/about-us/index.htm>

¹⁵⁴ Martin, N. (2017, December 7). Black mothers keep dying after giving birth. Shalon Irving’s story explains why. NPR. Retrieved from <https://www.npr.org/2017/12/07/568948782/black-mothers-keep-dying-after-giving-birth-shalon-irvings-story-explains-why>

¹⁵⁵ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2019, June 4). Reproductive health: Pregnancy Mortality Surveillance System. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/maternalinfanthealth/pregnancy-mortality-surveillance-system.htm>

¹⁵⁶ Johnson, C. (2018, April 11). The truth about maternal death. *National Post*. Retrieved from <https://nationalpost.com/pmnn/news-pmn/the-truth-about-maternal-death>

¹⁵⁷ McKinnon, B., Yang, S., Kramer, M.S., Bushnik, T., Sheppard, A.J., & Kaufman, J.S. (2015). Comparison of black–white disparities in preterm birth between Canada and the United States. *CMAJ*, 188

In addition to the health care risks associated with being African Canadian, Black women's vulnerability is increased if they are immigrants. Various studies have found that immigrant women experience significantly higher rates of gestational diabetes,¹⁵⁸ low maternal weight gain,¹⁵⁹ genetic anomalies due to a lack of folic-acid intake,¹⁶⁰ and maternal anemia.¹⁶¹ Another study linked being an immigrant with an increased risk of subclinical and major postpartum depression.¹⁶² Contributing to these poor outcomes for immigrants could be the underutilization of health care due to language barriers, difficulties in understanding health care information, experiences of discrimination, and challenges navigating the Canadian health care system.¹⁶³ In addition, the medicalized view of pregnancy promoted by Western medicine may not be consistent with the perspectives of many immigrant women.¹⁶⁴

One study explored the experience of new mothers from Somalia, Eritrea, and Sudan living in Sweden who had undergone female genital cutting (FGC). These women reported feeling vulnerable in their encounters with health care staff because of their memories of the FGC experiences. They also shared their perceptions that the midwives viewed them as powerless victims and held negative attitudes towards them and their husbands.¹⁶⁵ Consequently, many of these women reported that these feelings resulted in avoiding prenatal care. In Canada, Somali women reported that their needs were frequently unmet during pregnancy and birth, and that they were

¹⁵⁸ Renzaho, A., Skouteris, H., & Oldroyd, J. (2010). Preventing gestational diabetes mellitus among migrant women and reducing obesity and type 2 diabetes in their offspring: A call for culturally competent lifestyle interventions in pregnancy. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, 110, 1814–1817.

¹⁵⁹ Hyman, I., & Dussault, G. (2000). Negative consequences of acculturation on health behavior, social support and stress among pregnant Southeast Asian immigrant women in Montreal: an exploratory study. *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, 91, 357–360.

¹⁶⁰ Grewal, S.K., Bhagat, R., & Balneaves, L. G. (2008). Perinatal beliefs and practices of immigrant Punjabi women living in Canada. *Journal of Obstetric, Gynecologic & Neonatal Nursing*, 37, 290–300.

¹⁶¹ Nybo, M., Friis-Hansen, L., Felding, P., & Milman, N. (2007). Higher prevalence of anemia among pregnant immigrant women compared to pregnant ethnic Danish women. *Annals of Hematology*, 86(9), 647–651.

¹⁶² Lanes, A., Kuk, J. L., & Tamim, H. (2011). Prevalence and characteristics of postpartum depression symptomatology among Canadian women: a cross-sectional study. *BMC Public Health*, 11, 302.

¹⁶³ Hyman, I. (2001). Immigration and health. Working Paper 01-05. Ottawa, ON: Health Canada; Reitmanova, S., & Gustafson, D. L. (2008). "They can't understand it": maternity health and care needs of immigrant Muslim women in St. John's, Newfoundland. *Maternal and Child Health Journal*, 12(1), 101–111.

¹⁶⁴ Higginbottom, G. M., Hadziabdic, E., Yohani, S., & Paton, P. (2014). Immigrant women's experience of maternity services in Canada: A meta-ethnography. *Midwifery*, 30(5), 544–559.

¹⁶⁵ Berggren, V., Bergstrom, S., & Edberg, A. (2006). Being different and vulnerable: Experiences of immigrant African women who have been circumcised and sought maternity care in Sweden. *Journal of Transcultural Nursing*, 17(1), 50–57.

dissatisfied with both clinical practice and quality of care.¹⁶⁶ Not receiving high-quality prenatal care may result in women being less prepared for childbirth, and also presenting at childbirth with untreated health conditions, which may result in complications for both the mother and her newborn child.¹⁶⁷

Research studies have also explored how various complications are more likely to lead to death for Black rather than White women. An American study of five common causes of maternal death and injury found that Black women were two to three times more likely to die because of these conditions, despite not having significantly greater prevalence rates than White women.¹⁶⁸ In addition, while an important emergency surgical procedure, some experts are cautioning that Caesarean sections are overused and are also associated with higher rates of maternal mortality.¹⁶⁹ African Americans also have higher rates of Caesarean sections and are more than twice as likely to be readmitted to the hospital following the surgery.

Researchers at California's Black Women Birthing Justice Collective explored Black maternal health by recording narratives and surveying 100 Black women who had given birth in California or who had lost one or more pregnancy during the previous 5 years. Their findings, published in the book *Battling Over Birth*, revealed that the relationship between pregnant Black women and their health care providers was often a source of stress, anger, and distress, noting "These incidents included refusal to listen to women's wisdom about their bodies, disrespecting women's physical autonomy, stereotyping based on race, class, age, sexual orientation and marital status, and suppressing advocacy and self-advocacy."¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁶ Chalmers, B., & Omer-Hashi, K. (2002). What Somali women say about giving birth in Canada. *Journal of Reproductive and Infant Psychology*, 20, 267–282; Chalmers, B., & Omer-Hashi, K. (2000). Somali women's birth experiences in Canada after earlier female genital mutilation. *Birth*, 27, 227–234.

¹⁶⁷ Higginbottom, G. M., Hadziabdic, E., Yohani, S., & Paton, P. (2014). Immigrant women's experience of maternity services in Canada: A meta-ethnography. *Midwifery*, 30(5), 544–559.

¹⁶⁸ Tucker, M. J., Berg, C. J., Callaghan, W. M., & Hsia, J. (2007). The Black–White disparity in pregnancy-related mortality from 5 conditions: differences in prevalence and case-fatality rates. *American Journal of Public Health*, 97(2), 247–251.

¹⁶⁹ Rice, S., (2015, December 1). C-section overuse adds to maternal, infant deaths. Modern Healthcare. Retrieved from <https://www.modernhealthcare.com/article/20151201/NEWS/151209985>

¹⁷⁰ Allers, K. S. (2018, April 12). Ending the doom & gloom: Shifting the narrative about Black maternal health. Women's eNews. Retrieved from <https://womensenews.org/2018/04/ending-the-doom-gloom-shifting-the-narrative-about-black-maternal-health/>

Given the racism that they face in the mainstream health care system, Black women tend to have better outcomes when turning to non-traditional settings such as birthing centres and while under the care of midwives and doulas. Doula-assisted mothers are less likely to have low-birthweight babies, less likely to have a birth complication, and more likely to start breastfeeding. Midwife-attended births have lower rates of Caesarean section, a medical intervention that increases complications and death rates. In addition, the Black Women Birthing Justice study found that none of the Black women working with midwives felt disempowered.¹⁷¹

Various research studies show that the maternal health of Black women is also negatively impacted by their daily experience of anti-Black racism and their experience of fighting anti-Black racism for their children. There is already a large body of research that identifies everyday racism as a chronic source of stress, linking it to various physiological consequences, including disturbed sleep, unhealthy weight, high blood pressure, and cardiovascular disease.¹⁷² Chronic stress induced by racism has been identified as the primary factor in accelerated biological aging of African Americans and racial disparities in maternal health. Arline Geronimus, a professor at the University of Michigan School of Public Health, coined the term “weathering” for stress-induced wear and tear on the body.¹⁷³ In addition to accelerating aging at the molecular level, Geronimus found that weathering causes vulnerabilities to various health conditions and also to early onset of chronic diseases, especially hypertension and diabetes.¹⁷⁴ One recent study included 1,574 Baltimore residents, of which 20% reported that they had experienced “a lot” of racial discrimination. This group had higher systolic blood

¹⁷¹ Allers, K. S. (2018, April 12). Ending the doom and gloom: Shifting the narrative about Black maternal health. Women’s eNews. Retrieved from <https://womensenews.org/2018/04/ending-the-doom-gloom-shifting-the-narrative-about-black-maternal-health/>

¹⁷² Grandner, M. A., Jackson, N., Patel, N. P., Gooneratne, N. S., & Troxel, W. M. (2012). Perceived racial discrimination as an independent predictor of sleep disturbance and daytime fatigue. *Behavioral Sleep Medicine*, 10(4), 235–249; Cunningham, T. J., Berkman, L. F., Kawachi, I., Jacobs, D. R. Jr., Seeman, T. E., Kiefe, C. I., & Gortmaker, S. L. (2013). Changes in waist circumference and body mass index in the US CARDIA cohort: fixed-effects associations with self-reported experiences of racial/ethnic discrimination. *Journal of Biosocial Science*, 45(2), 67–78; Lewis, T. T., Everson-Rose, S. A., Powell, L. H., Matthews, K. A., Brown, C., Karavolos, K., Wesley, D. Chronic exposure to everyday discrimination and coronary artery calcification in African-American women: The SWAN Heart Study. *Psychosomatic Medicine*, 68(3), 362–368.

¹⁷³ Martin, N. (2017, December 7). Black mothers keep dying after giving birth. Shalon Irving’s story explains why. NPR. Retrieved from <https://www.npr.org/2017/12/07/568948782/black-mothers-keep-dying-after-giving-birth-shalon-irvings-story-explains-why>

¹⁷⁴ Geronimus, A. T., Hicken, M. T., Pearson, J. A., Seashols, S. J., Brown, K. L., & Cruz, T. D. (2010). Do US Black women experience stress-related accelerated biological aging? A novel theory and first population-based test of Black–white differences in telomere length. *Human Nature*, 21(1): 19–38.

pressure than those who perceived very little racial discrimination. Further, over a 5-year period, the group that felt they had been discriminated against “a lot” had higher declines in kidney function.¹⁷⁵

Weathering also has serious implications for pregnancy as stress is linked to preterm birth, one of the most common and consequential pregnancy complications. The result is that in the United States, Black women are 49% more likely than White women to deliver prematurely.¹⁷⁶ Weathering also puts Black women at risk for age-related complications at an earlier age than their White counterparts. Michael Lu, a disparities researcher, notes, “If that happens in the 40s for white women, it actually starts to happen for African-American women in their 30s.”¹⁷⁷

In addition, anti-Black racism impacts Black women’s maternal health by the many ways in which it keeps them in poverty. Because African Canadians are more likely to live in poverty because of racism, sexism, and other systemic barriers in the labour market, they have less money to support themselves and their families. As such, many face challenges to pay for essential resources such as housing, utilities, and healthy food. In the United States, Black women also face greater financial barriers to accessing health care when they need it¹⁷⁸ and are less likely to access prenatal care.¹⁷⁹ The result is that Black women experience higher rates of many preventable diseases and chronic health conditions, including diabetes, hypertension, and cardiovascular disease.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁵ Oaklander, M. (2014, November 15). Racism could negatively impact your health, study finds. *Time*. Retrieved from <http://time.com/3586323/kidneys-health-racism-discrimination/>

¹⁷⁶ March of Dimes. (2016). Premature birth report card. Retrieved from <https://www.marchofdimes.org/materials/premature-birth-report-card-united-states.pdf>

¹⁷⁷ Martin, N. (2017, December 7). Black mothers keep dying after giving birth. Shalon Irving’s story explains why. NPR. Retrieved from <https://www.npr.org/2017/12/07/568948782/black-mothers-keep-dying-after-giving-birth-shalon-irvings-story-explains-why>

¹⁷⁸ The Commonwealth Fund. (2017, February). *Biennial health insurance survey, 2003–2016*. Retrieved from https://www.commonwealthfund.org/publications/surveys/2017/feb/biennial-health-insurance-survey-2003-2016?redirect_source=/interactives-and-data/surveys/biennial-health-insurance-survey/2017/biennial-explorer

¹⁷⁹ Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. (2012, October). *Disparities in health care quality among minority women. Selected findings from the 2011 National Healthcare Quality and Disparities Reports*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved from <https://archive.ahrq.gov/research/findings/nhqrdr/nhqrdr11/minority-women.html#maternal>

¹⁸⁰ Office of Minority Health. (2017, May). *Profile: Black/African Americans*. Retrieved from <https://www.minorityhealth.hhs.gov/omh/browse.aspx?lvl=3&lvlid=61>

When Black women become pregnant, these health conditions influence both maternal and infant health outcomes.¹⁸¹

The negative impact of poverty is amplified by race and gender biases, which affect the quality of care received by Black women, including not being taken seriously, not receiving proper treatment, or being misdiagnosed.¹⁸² Compounding these issues is a biased understanding of the pain experienced by Black people, a phenomenon studied by various researchers, who have found that pain is often undertreated in Black patients for conditions from appendicitis to cancer. A 2016 study by University of Virginia researchers found that “White medical students and residents often believed biological myths about racial differences in patients, including that Black patients have less-sensitive nerve endings and thicker skin than their White counterparts.”¹⁸³

While deep, persistent inequality — such as lack of access to safe neighbourhoods, disparities in educational outcomes, and lack of access to healthy foods — also play a part in maternal health, the data shows that in the United States both the maternal death rate and the infant mortality rate is more than twice that for Blacks as for Whites across all income levels.¹⁸⁴ Even middle-class Black women die at higher rates than lower-income White women. A 2016 analysis of 5 years of data found that Black college-educated mothers were more likely to suffer severe complications during pregnancy or childbirth than White women who had never graduated from high school.¹⁸⁵ To break it down further:

Black women who live in affluent neighborhoods, receive prenatal care in the first trimester, are normal weight, and have advanced degrees are still more

¹⁸¹ National Partnership. (2018, April). Black Women’s maternal health: A multifaceted approach to addressing persistent and dire health disparities. Retrieved from <http://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/health/reports/black-womens-maternal-health.html>

¹⁸² National Women’s Health Network. (2018, April 12). Why is the maternal mortality rate so high for Black women? Retrieved from <https://nwhn.org/9318-2/>

¹⁸³ Hoffman, K. M., Trawalter, S., Axt, J. R., & Oliver, M. N. (2016). Racial bias in pain assessment and treatment recommendations, and false beliefs about biological differences between blacks and whites. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences U.S.A.*, 113(16), 4296–4301.

¹⁸⁴ Jackson, D. (2018, June). A frustrating year of reporting on Black maternal health. Longreads. Retrieved from <https://longreads.com/2018/06/13/a-frustrating-year-of-reporting-on-black-maternal-health/>

¹⁸⁵ New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. (2016). Severe maternal morbidity in New York City, 2008–2012. Retrieved from <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/data/maternal-morbidity-report-08-12.pdf>

likely to die or have their baby die than white women in poor neighborhoods, with no prenatal care, who are obese, and don't have a high school diploma.¹⁸⁶

Commenting on the death of her close friend Shalon Irving — who died 3 weeks after giving birth — Raegan McDonald-Mosley, the chief medical director for the Planned Parenthood Federation of America, commented, “It tells you that you can’t educate your way out of this problem. You can’t health care-access your way out of this problem. There’s something inherently wrong with the system that’s not valuing the lives of black women equally to white women.”¹⁸⁷

The Black Mamas Matter Alliance founded Black Maternal Health Week in the United States in 2018 to start a national public conversation addressing maternal mortality. As one writer noted about the need to educate Black women about maternal health:

When we mystify black maternal mortality, it perpetuates an insidious perception that pregnancy and childbirth is dangerous for us when, in fact, birth is not a medical event. It therefore creates a culture of fear that leaves black women vulnerable to control and coercion by others. Black women then begin to feel helpless and hopeless, as if we have no agency in our childbirth experience and are simply subject to all the doom and gloom. And those of us who do survive often leave the hospital traumatized and disempowered, but still feel “lucky to be alive,” so we remain silent.¹⁸⁸

With all the focus on Black maternal health, Joia Crear-Perry, founder of the National Birth Equity Collaborative, reminds us that race is not the problem, racism is. “We — in health, advocacy, and media — need to stop saying and teaching that being Black is a risk factor for illness and death... Instead, we need to start telling the truth: It’s exposure to racism that is the risk factor.”¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁶ Crear-Perry, J. (2018, April 11). Race isn’t a risk factor in maternal health. Racism is. Rewire News. Retrieved from <https://rewire.news/article/2018/04/11/maternal-health-replace-race-with-racism/>

¹⁸⁷ Martin, N. (2017, December 7). Black mothers keep dying after giving birth: Shalon Irving’s story explains why. NPR. Retrieved from <https://www.npr.org/2017/12/07/568948782/black-mothers-keep-dying-after-giving-birth-shalon-irvings-story-explains-why>

¹⁸⁸ Allers, K. S. (2018, April 12). Ending the doom and gloom: Shifting the narrative about Black maternal health. Women’s eNews. Retrieved from <https://womensenews.org/2018/04/ending-the-doom-gloom-shifting-the-narrative-about-black-maternal-health/>

¹⁸⁹ Crear-Perry, J. (2018, April 11). Race isn’t a risk factor in maternal health. Racism is. Rewire News. Retrieved from <https://rewire.news/article/2018/04/11/maternal-health-replace-race-with-racism/>



4.6 Incarcerated parents

The overincarceration of people of African descent in both the federal and provincial prison systems is well documented. The reasons for this overincarceration are also well documented in a number of studies, from the 1994 Commission on Systemic Racism in the Ontario Criminal Justice System¹⁹⁰ to more recent examinations of racial profiling by the Ontario *Human Rights Commission*.¹⁹¹

As Table 10 shows, both Black women and men experience incarceration rates that are much greater than those of their White counterparts. Black women are incarcerated in the federal prison system at three times the rate of White women, while Black men are incarcerated at close to four times the rate of White men. These higher rates of

¹⁹⁰ Gittens, M., & Cole, D. (1995). Report of the Commission on Systemic Racism in the Ontario Criminal Justice System. Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario.

¹⁹¹ Ontario Human Rights Commission. (2017, April). Under suspicion: Research and consultation report on racial profiling in Ontario. Retrieved from http://www.ohrc.on.ca/sites/default/files/Under%20suspicion_research%20and%20consultation%20report%20on%20racial%20profiling%20in%20Ontario_2017.pdf

incarceration mean that, in 2016, African Canadians made up 8.4% of the Canadian federal prison population but only 3.4% of the Canadian population.

Table 10: Black and White Incarceration Rates, Canada and Ontario		
	Whites	Blacks
CANADA		
Total population (2016)	26,785,480	1,198,540
Incarcerated population*	7,326	1,179
Incarceration rate (inmates per 100,000)	27	98
MEN		
Total population (2016)	13,246,485	580,070
Incarcerated population*	7,019	1,141
Incarceration rate (inmates per 100,000)	53	197
WOMEN		
Total population (2016)	13,539,000	618,475
Incarcerated population*	307	38
Incarceration rate (inmates per 100,000)	2	6
ONTARIO — Pretrial Detention		
Total population (2016)	9,356,575	627,715
Incarcerated population**	26,000	6,000
Incarceration rate (inmates per 100,000)	277	955
* April 2017 to March 2018. The Office of the Correctional Investigator, April 8, 2018. ** April 2015 to March 2016. Paperny, A.M., (2017, October 20). Black people awaiting trial in Ontario jails spend longer in custody than white people. CBC, Retrieved from https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/race-ontario-jails-wait-trial-disparity-1.4364796		

Rates of incarceration for African Canadians have increased while Canada has been experiencing an overall decline in the police-reported crime rate for more than 20 years¹⁹² and while the White offender population has also been decreasing. In the 2012–2013 Annual Report of the Office of the Correctional Investigator, this increase is broken down by race.¹⁹³

All new net growth in the offender population can be accounted for by increases in Aboriginal (+793), Black (+585), Asian (+337) and other visible minority groups.

¹⁹² Statistics Canada. Canada's crime rate: Two decades of decline. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-630-x/11-630-x2015001-eng.htm>

¹⁹³ Office of the Correctional Investigator. (2013). Annual report of the Office of the Correctional Investigator 2012–2013. Retrieved from <http://www.oci-bec.gc.ca/cnt/rpt/annrpt/annrpt20122013-eng.aspx>

By contrast, during the same time period, the total Caucasian offender population decreased (-466 or 3%).

In this report, the correctional investigator noted that he has seen an increase in the number of Black inmates in each of his 10 years on the job.¹⁹⁴ The report noted that African Canadians represent the fastest growing group in federal prisons, with an overall increase of 69% over his tenure. In his 2014 case study of the experience of Black inmates, the correctional investigator pointed out that “despite being rated as a population having a lower risk to re-offend and lower need overall, Black inmates are more likely to be placed in maximum security institutions.”¹⁹⁵

Since the correctional investigator noted the increase in Black inmates over the ten years leading up to 2013, there has been a decline in the Black inmate population. The 2016–2017 annual report notes that the number of Black inmates had decreased by 9% since 2013, with a corresponding decline of the overall inmate population of 6.3%. The decline was even more significant for federally incarcerated Black women, with a decrease of nearly 30% (from 55 in 2013 to 39 in 2017).

Data obtained by Reuters paints a similarly troubling picture of overincarceration within Ontario’s correctional facilities.¹⁹⁶ Reuters reports that there were approximately 6,000 African Canadians remanded to pretrial detention, almost five times the number of those incarcerated federally. Table 10 shows that Black people are incarcerated in pretrial detention in the provincial prison system at rates far higher than for their White counterparts — White people are incarcerated at a rate of 277 people per 100,000, while the Black population is incarcerated at a rate of 955 people per 100,000; a rate three times higher than Whites. Reuters’ analysis of the data also shows that African Canadians spent more time in Ontario jails on average than White people charged with the same crime in 11 of the 16 offence categories examined. Further, the data also showed that “[B]lack people arrested and held in custody between 2011 and 2016 were more likely than white people to spend more than a year in pretrial detention.”¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Paperny, A. M. (2017, October 20). Black people awaiting trial in Ontario jails spend longer in custody than white people. CBC News. Retrieved from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/race-ontario-jails-wait-trial-disparity-1.4364796>

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

While the focus tends to be on the overincarceration of African Canadian men, as Table 10 shows, African Canadian women are also incarcerated at three times the rate of White women. In his 2014 case study of the experience of Black inmates, the correctional investigator found that just over half (53%) of Black women were incarcerated for drug offences. In interviews with some of these women, he learned that many women carried drugs across international borders, primarily in an attempt to rise out of poverty, while some reported being forced to do so following threats of violence to their children and/or families. In addition, most of the Black women interviewed were not Canadian citizens and consequently were at risk of deportation once their sentence is complete. If they have Canadian-born children, these women will have to make the decision to leave their children in Canada or to take their children with them when they are deported. Further, if they are the sole caregiver, without family to care for their them, these children have likely entered the child welfare system.

While overincarceration has been noted as an issue facing African Canadians, what has been given far less attention is the ripple effect of incarceration on families. Involvement with the criminal justice system reverberates throughout not only an individual's life, but also the lives of their children and family, introducing significant stress into a child's life and negatively affecting their physical and mental health. Children with an incarcerated parent face numerous threats to their emotional, physical, educational, and financial well-being as well as the risk of psychological strain, disruptive behaviours, suspension or expulsion from school, economic hardship, and criminal activity.¹⁹⁸ While this type of child-parent separation is classified as an adverse childhood experience (ACE), it is different from other ACEs because of the unique combination of trauma, shame, and stigma it carries.

A study by sociologist Kristin Turney analyzed data from the 2011–2012 National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH) to determine the impact of having a parent in jail or prison.¹⁹⁹ The study found that children with incarcerated parents were three times more likely to suffer from depression or behavioural problems as well as developmental delays. In addition, these children were more likely to experience a

¹⁹⁸ Martin, E. (2017). Hidden consequences: The impact of incarceration on dependent children. *NIJ Journal*, 278. Retrieved from <https://www.nij.gov/journals/278/Pages/impact-of-incarceration-on-dependent-children.aspx>

¹⁹⁹ Turney, K. (2014, August 19). Stress proliferation across generations? Examining the relationship between parental incarceration and childhood health. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*. 55(3): 302-319.

range of physical conditions, including higher levels of asthma, obesity, speech problems, and overall poor physical health.

The incarceration of a parent can also affect children indirectly, through destabilizing of family finances, relationships, and other elements of daily life.²⁰⁰ The financial strain can be particularly devastating for families already living in poverty, as many of those affected by incarceration are. While the family may have lost a caregiver and/or a source of income, they also have the added expense of phoning and visiting the incarcerated parent, particularly as the parent may be incarcerated at a great distance from their home.

The impact is made worse by a lack of policies to address children's needs to maintain contact with an incarcerated parent. For instance, Ontario's provincial facilities, which house most of the incarcerated African Canadian population, do not permit physical contact between incarcerated parents and their children. One lawyer identified the physical structure of provincial correctional facilities as particularly harmful to children when their parents are incarcerated:²⁰¹

In federal prison you can apply for what is called a trailer visit. You can spend time privately with your family. You can have your kids come in, you can hug them and hold them, change the baby's diapers, and maintain some semblance of a normal family relationship, which is so important not only for the person in custody, but for those kids and their mental health.

Provincially, not only does that option not exist, but you can't even hold the hand of your parent when they are in custody. When we look at disproportionate rates of incarceration along racial lines, there is an adverse and disproportionate impact on the Black community as a result of this. We have parents, both men and women who while they are in custody, and they could be in custody awaiting trial for two years, can't communicate physically with their loved ones. If a baby is born they can't hold that baby. They can't hug their child. They can't even sit down together and hold hands. They have to be behind glass the entire time. What we think is that this not just violates the rights of the inmate but also the rights of the child along the lines of

²⁰⁰ Quandt, K.R. (2014, August 26). Charts: Kids are paying the price for America's prison binge. *Mother Jones*. Retrieved from <https://www.motherjones.com/crime-justice/2014/08/incarcerated-parents-childrens-mental-physical-health/>

²⁰¹ Turner, T. (2019). Assessment of the legal needs of African Canadians. Toronto: Black Legal Action Centre. (Unpublished).

family status by not allowing them to have this essential, necessary contact with their parent while they are incarcerated.

This lawyer observed that the situation is made even worse in some provincial facilities which no longer allow in-person visits. Instead, visits occur through computer systems:²⁰²

In some institutions they break down the family bonds even more because you are not just behind glass, you have to go into a room at the jail and look at them through a computer monitor. It draws the inmate and their family farther and farther apart, destroys those relationships, and truly harms the kids. I hear it over and over again from the partners of my clients about the stress that these kids go through. The provincial jails have the capability to allow families to visit and touch. It's not that there is no possibility, there is an unwillingness to do it.

The observations by this lawyer was reflect in the Ontario Human Rights Commission's *Report on Conditions of Confinement at Toronto South Detention Centre*, in which it found that prisoners face systemic challenges to maintaining family and community contact because the institution:²⁰³

- Prioritizes video visits over in-person visits
- Uses in-person visits as a reward for good behaviour and revokes visits as a sanction for behaviour that falls short of misconduct
- Cancels visits during frequent lockdowns
- Requires prisoners to place collect telephone calls and limits their ability to call cellular phones.

It is difficult to predict how a child will fare when a parent is intermittently or continually incarcerated. The effect of parental incarceration is complex and depends on the relationship prior to incarceration.²⁰⁴ However, the research suggests that the strength of the parent-child bond and the quality of the child and family's social support system play significant roles in the child's ability to overcome challenges and

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Ontario Human Rights Commission. (2020). Report on conditions of confinement at Toronto South Detention Centre. Retrieved from <http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/report-conditions-confinement-toronto-south-detention-centre>

²⁰⁴ Tasca, M. (2015, February). 'It's Not All Cupcakes and Lollipops': An Investigation of Predictors and Effects of Prison Visitation for Children During Maternal and Parental Incarceration: Final report to the National Institute of Justice. Retrieved from <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/248650.pdf>

succeed in life.²⁰⁵ Programs in the prison and community to support the maintenance and strengthening of the parent-child bond and successful re-entry of the incarcerated parent has positive short-term impacts as it helps to reduce recidivism for the person incarcerated²⁰⁶ and also helps reduce the risk factors facing their children. Children of incarcerated parents continue to love and need their parents, and they want and need to maintain contact and have a relationship with them.

²⁰⁵ Shlafer, R., Gerrity, E., Ruhland, E., Wheeler, M., & Michaels, C. (2013). *Children with Incarcerated Parents — Considering Children's Outcomes in the Context of Family Experiences*. St. Paul, MN: University of Minnesota Extension, Children, Youth and Family Consortium. Retrieved from <https://conservancy.umn.edu/bitstream/handle/11299/151818/ChildrenwithIncarceratedParentsJune2013ereview.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

²⁰⁶ Cochran, J. The Ties that Bind or Break: Examining the Relationship between Visitation and Prisoner Misconduct. *Journal of Criminal Justice*. 40(2012): 433-448.



4.7 Black fathers

While Black parents face challenges to parenting, additional challenges are created by the stereotypes associated with Black fathers. Psychotherapist and consultant Dr. Vidoll Regisford describes the various stereotypes associated with both Black parents and fathers:

There are many stereotypes with Black parents. They are seen as neglectful and unengaged. They are seen as lacking any supervisory skills of their children, lacking good parenting skills, and lacking coaching skills.

In addition, Black fathers are seen as irresponsible and uninvolved. They are seen as having multiple children with various partners, and not being involved with them, but also not providing for or caring for them.

Ed Gough Jr., Program Manager at Young and Potential Fathers, reflects on the stereotypes of Black fathers:

I think that Black fathers are seen as irresponsible, non-committal, and unable to love their children. They are seen as lacking love, not only for the child but also for their

partner. They are also seen as lacking commitment, being emotionally unstable, and being selfish.

Ed Gough Jr. reflects on the various types of fathers he sees in his parenting program, all of whom, despite their challenges, are committed and loving parents:

In reality, yes, there are good and bad Black fathers. But the fathers that we serve in our programs all love their children. They're not perfect, absolutely they're not perfect, but they love their children and they want to be involved in their lives.

Dr. Regisford echoes how different the reality is from the stereotypes of Black fathers:

In reality, there is a spectrum of Black fathers. I think we have Black fathers who, at one point or another, may have had challenges or experienced difficulties with their partners and children, who are struggling to be involved. They want to be involved but there are systemic barriers that prevent them from being involved... At the other extreme, there are Black men who are involved in the lives of their children. They are caring parents, they are involved in activities, and they proudly do so.

Dr. Regisford went on to discuss the barriers erected by society that limits the ability of Black fathers to be engaged in their children's lives. He stated that while they are trying to be good parents, the ability of Black fathers to participate in the lives of their children is often undermined by the myth of the missing Black father, one of the most pervasive negative stereotypes about both African Canadian and African American men. He argues that systemic racism, rather than an unwillingness to be involved in their children's lives, creates uninvolved Black fathers; this lack of involvement then reinforces the stereotypes about Black fathers:

The systemic barriers limit the ability of Black fathers to participate in their child's life, and the outcome is used to reinforce the stereotypes. So the systemic barriers are the initial triggers that create the uninvolved. For example, the father may be restricted from going to a school because of a legal matter with a former spouse or partner. The perception or the stereotype is that he's not involved or not engaged, that he doesn't care, but there are legal pillars that prevent him from doing what he may desire to do. The reality is the Black father who is uninvolved or unengaged is the exception not the rule.

The notion that most Black fathers have very little, if any, contact with their children coupled with the notion that it is this fatherlessness that is responsible for the ills of the Black community is perpetuated by both the news and entertainment media. Research studies have shown that in the images used by local news, national news, and commentary across all U.S. media, Black fathers were shown spending time with their

children almost half as often as White fathers.²⁰⁷ In addition, the lack of Black fathers has been linked by the news media to everything from poverty to crime. For example, these myths are perpetuated in the following news article and opinion piece in Canadian newspapers:

- “Where are the men?” *Toronto Star*, August 19, 2007
- “The many fatherless boys in black families.” *The Globe and Mail*, November 26, 2005

The *Toronto Star* article connects violence in public housing to the prevalence of single women raising children.²⁰⁸

The theme of single mothers runs like a backbeat through reports about murder victims who grew up fatherless or were “baby fathers” themselves. A man shot dead behind a public housing complex two years ago left seven children with several women. Another found guilty of murder was the second child of a single mother of seven who had her first baby at 17.

Moreover, the scores of single mothers who shared their stories with the *Star* are themselves evidence of absent-dad syndrome. Men seem to whistle through their lives like night trains, leaving babies and smashed self-esteem in their wake.

The narrative this news article presents is, “We are single black mothers working two or three jobs to keep bread on the table, and [the fathers] don’t care. The fathers aren’t helping, and the kids are turning to crime.” Even the fathers who have died are blamed for their children’s fatherlessness.

The Globe and Mail opinion piece also blames fatherlessness for youth being engaged in violence, opening with this paragraph:²⁰⁹

Who is doing the killing and who is being killed in the wave of reckless public violence that has struck Toronto? Black boys and young men with no fathers in their homes. Yet as politicians at all three levels and black community leaders

²⁰⁷ AJ+. (2018, February 18). The myth of the absent black father. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9-nYUUhigTU>

²⁰⁸ Diebel, L. (2007, August 19). Where are the men? *Toronto Star*. Retrieved from https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2007/08/19/where_are_the_men.html

²⁰⁹ *The Globe and Mail*. (2005, November 26). The many fatherless boys in black families. Retrieved from <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/the-many-fatherless-boys-in-black-families/article1331802/>

scramble for answers to the anarchy, no one has dared talk about the crisis of fatherlessness in the black community.

The opinion piece references those within the Black community who also blame poverty and violence on the inability of Black men to take responsibility for raising their children. The piece ends with the following:

The “survival unit,” the black family, is being fatally weakened by the lack of fathers. No matter how helpful social programs, additional police or tougher gun laws may be, they are not the heart of the problem. Reuniting fathers and children should be the top priority. Where are the black fathers, and where are all those who should be calling them to their duty?

In both cases, the focus is on the Black men, while the writers and the women quoted in the story ignore the structural racism that keeps these men, single mothers, and children living in poverty, in underserved and dangerous neighbourhoods. Structural racism limits their opportunities for employment, limits their educational attainment, and negatively affects their mental health.

In an opinion piece for *The Washington Post*, Mychal Denzel Smith explores the myth of the missing Black father and the assumption that “every major problem in black America can be solved if we addressed the problem of missing fathers”:²¹⁰

The thinking goes like this: The high rates of poverty and incarceration and low levels of educational achievement in black communities can be traced in part back to the high number of black babies born out of wedlock and subsequently raised in single-mother homes. It’s a patriarchal twist on the mythological magical Negro. Black fathers could supposedly stem the devastating effects of oppression imposed from the classroom to the workplace to the court system. If black men just showed up in the homes of their children — acted like men instead of boys — black families and communities would fortify themselves and our long-held problems would simply wither away.

Another problem with the stereotype of the missing Black father is that they rely on family structure to tell a story about parental involvement. The assumption is that if a father isn’t married to his child’s mother, then he is absent from the child’s life. The type of data collected by Statistics Canada adds to a misleading picture of the

²¹⁰ Smith, M. D. (2017, January 10). The dangerous myth of the ‘missing black father.’ *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2017/01/10/the-dangerous-myth-of-the-missing-black-father/?utm_term=.6b6d78b17a13

involvement of Black fathers. For example, Statistics Canada data shows a rise in unmarried women giving birth and a high proportion of Black lone-parent households. However, Statistics Canada does not collect data on the extent to which fathers are involved in the raising of their children. The data is used to paint a picture of never-married Black mothers raising children on their own without the involvement and support of the father. The stereotypes about Black fathers also rely on the assumption that they live separately from the mothers of their children because of irresponsibility or cultural dysfunction. Rarely do these interpretations of the data consider structural anti-Black racism, including social and economic inequality.²¹¹

While the stereotype of the missing Black father is so engrained in both Canadian and American society, a number of research studies have found it to be false. A recent report published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that when compared with White or Hispanic fathers, Black fathers with a child under age 5 were more likely to be involved in their child's life in almost every way. Black fathers were more likely to have bathed, diapered, or dressed their children, eaten a meal with them, played with them, helped them with their homework, and taken them to and from activities. Much of this involvement held true even when the father didn't live with their children.²¹² Further, Pew Research Center study found that Black fathers not living with their children showed greater desire than White or Latino fathers to provide financially for their children.²¹³ Many studies have also found that fathers have a positive impact on the lives of their children. Studies have found that girls and Black children are more positively affected by relationships with their fathers.²¹⁴

The extent to which African Canadian fathers are actually involved in their children's lives has not been studied. However, Keyshawn Anderson, a Toronto-based lawyer, shared his experience of Black fathers who want to be involved in their children's lives but are impeded by stereotypes which impact not only decision-makers but the Black fathers themselves:

²¹¹ Dixon, T. L. (2017, January). A dangerous distortion of our families: Representations of families, by race, in news and opinion media. Color of Change. Retrieved from <https://colorofchange.org/dangerousdistortion/>

²¹² AJ+. (2018, February 18). The myth of the absent black father. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9-nYUUhigTU>

²¹³ Pew Research Centre. (2013, June 14). The new American father. Retrieved from <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2013/06/14/the-new-american-father/>

²¹⁴ Coley, R. L. (1998). Children's socialization experiences and functioning in single-mother households: The importance of fathers and other men. *Child Development*, 69(1), 291–330.

The myth of the absent father is an issue. But Black fathers are no more absent than any other demographic, and in my view they are less so. It's a false narrative with real impact... Because these perceptions are real and Black fathers know about it, they tend to be less trusting of the justice system generally and not as engaged; they take a fatalistic sort of approach. "No matter what I do I'm going to be judged. So why engage in the process?" There's a general level of scrutiny of fathers across the board, but then Black fathers are more heavily scrutinized.



In his *Washington Post* opinion piece, Smith also notes that the focus on “the missing Black father” also sends the message that other family formations are inherently deficient. This is problematic for Black children being raised by single mothers, but also those raised by same-sex female and gender non-conforming parents. It says that without a father in the home the child has no one capable of providing adequate love and moral guidance. Smith argues that this assumption is deeply rooted in sexism and homophobia. First, it upholds stereotypical understandings of single Black mothers as having numerous kids and relying on social assistance. This stereotype is simply not true. Single Black mothers have raised and continue to raise upstanding adults while furthering their own professional development. For example, the Institute for Women’s Policy Research at George Washington University reports that over a quarter of all undergraduate students are raising dependent children, with 70% of such students

being single mothers.²¹⁵ Second, Smith argues that blaming the supposed absence of Black fathers for the ills of the Black community while paradoxically designating their presence as the one-size-fits-all solution to those same ills is also rooted in homophobia. Same-sex female and/or gender non-conforming parents are capable of nurturing, encouraging, and guiding their children towards being productive members of society, just as they are capable of failing to do so. Further, emphasis on this myth sends the message to Black children who are not living with their father that there is something wrong with them and their lives, thereby promoting conditions for dysfunction. It also overlooks the fact that in Black communities there is an extended network of aunts and uncles, grandmothers and grandfathers, and family friends and cousins that love, care, and advocate for Black children.

Emphasis on the myth of the absent Black father and the “crumbling family structure” detracts from the very real systemic racism faced by the Black community and blames the victim of systemic and structural racism, and not the oppressive systems themselves, for the poor life chances of Black children and youth. The marital status of the Black child’s parents becomes the reason why they live in poor housing, the reason why they do poorly in school, the reason why they turn to gangs, the reason why they are overpoliced. It then becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy as politicians, teachers, police, and others use the marital status of the Black child’s family as the reason for treating Black children more harshly or not investing in poor communities.

This narrow focus also ignores the impact of structural racism on the lives of children — how the immigration system splits up families, how racism in the labour market lowers incomes for both Black fathers and mothers, how racism in the education system undermines the success of Black children, how teachers over-report Black families to the child welfare system, and how overpolicing and overincarceration of Black men removes them from their families and communities. In the absence of this analysis, policymakers, researchers, and others point to the individual failings of Black people as the cause of issues in the Black community. While the involvement of both parents in the lives of children is important, it does not fully shield children from anti-Black racism. As Smith writes:²¹⁶

²¹⁵ Cruse, L. R., Holtzman, T., Gault, B., Croom, D., & Polk, P. (2019, April 11). Parents in college by the numbers. Washington, D.C.: Institute for Women’s Policy Research.

²¹⁶ Smith, M. D. (2017, January 10). The dangerous myth of the ‘missing black father.’ *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2017/01/10/the-dangerous-myth-of-the-missing-black-father/?utm_term=.6b6d78b17a13

However, responsible fatherhood only goes so far in a world plagued by institutionalized oppression. For black children, the presence of fathers would not alter racist drug laws, prosecutorial protection of police officers who kill, mass school closures or the poisoning of their water. By focusing on the supposed absence of black fathers, we allow ourselves to pretend this oppression is not real, while also further scapegoating black men for America's societal ills.

The stereotypes of the missing Black father permeate the minds of teachers, child welfare professionals, lawyers, family court judges and others who can influence whether Black men can remain in their children's lives. These stereotypes are then used to undermine the ability of Black fathers to be involved in their children's lives. Child welfare workers, for example, may not consider Black fathers as suitable caregivers when they remove a child from the care of their mother. In addition, these stereotypes impact how Black men are treated in family court by the judge and lawyers, based on the assumption that they do not care about their children and are ill equipped to raise them.

As shared by family lawyer Keyshawn Anderson, although Black men desperately want to be good fathers, the system doesn't always allow them to be. When Black men step up, the lawyer noted, the court process and the related costs can result in the men being pushed out of their children's lives:

So it's not that they don't care, or are not engaged. More than any demographic I have seen, Black fathers want to remain in their children's lives, but the court system and how they're treated disengages them from the process. It's a combination of factors. Not being heard, not being properly represented, the inherent bias towards mothers, and their feeling that the case is not moving forward. They're putting in the work, they're doing what's asked of them, but they're not seeing the rewards. There are also financial barriers to the process that many can't afford. So they show up to the first two or three court appearances and then they just stop showing up.

Pursuing their right to maintain a relationship with their children is particularly problematic for low-income Black fathers, who face the decision of spending money on a lawyer and taking time off work to seek access to or custody of their children when the system is so clearly against them. Instead, these men are punished by these stereotypes and "for their financial insecurity that is largely born of acute racial and

economic injustice.”²¹⁷ Ed Gough Jr. shared his experience of the barriers created by how Black men are treated by the family court system, along with the cost of pursuing access, which then limits their involvement in the lives of their children:

Their experience in family court is a challenging one, because they don't know the system and there's been a number of occasions where I've seen fathers agree to things, that if they had proper legal advice, they wouldn't have. Because they have no representation and they're frustrated, and they just want to get it over with, they agree to various things that are not reasonable. And these decisions come back to haunt them later.

They end up on the margins of their children's lives. They end up with limited access to the children maybe a few hours a week, if at all. For many on the lower end of the socioeconomic scale, their focus is trying to see their children and getting by every day. That's their main challenge. Day-to-day survival and getting more access to their children.

A study conducted in Toronto noted the negative experiences of Black fathers in the Ontario family court system. Fathers who have been involved with the family courts overwhelmingly felt that the system favoured mothers over fathers, with men who were participating in the community forums counselling other men to avoid Ontario Family Court if at all possible. The report states that, “Aside from the prohibitive costs associated with the family court process, these fathers felt that the system was biased and participated in precluding them from being with their children.”²¹⁸

As Ed Gough Jr. noted, Black fathers often experience anti-Black racism within the various organizations that are designed to help them see their children:

We also do supervised visits. It's particularly important to do them in a culturally responsive environment. This is particularly true for Black fathers in mixed-race relationships. We do some supervised visits for a number of fathers who have children with women [from a particular racial group] because they have had a difficult time doing supervised visits at [the centre serving the mother's community]. One father said he experienced racism, he was treated like garbage, and he couldn't go there

²¹⁷ Harris, K. E. (2018, June 17). Low-income black fathers want to be good dads. The system won't let them. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/jun/17/black-fathers-parenting-child-support-policy-flaws>

²¹⁸ McCready, L., James, C., Chavannes, V., Foster, N., Tewelde, Y., Kellen, A., Hay, B., & Eugene, C. (2014). Gathering our voices: The lived experiences of Black fathers in the city of Toronto. Black Daddies Club. Retrieved from <http://theblackdaddiesclub.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Gathering-Our-Voices-BDC-Research-Project.pdf>

anymore because of the way that they're treating him. He felt he was being treated like a second-class citizen because he was Black.

The three men interviewed for this section also agreed that there are far too few services for Black fathers. Family lawyer Keyshawn Anderson notes that there is a definite need for conflict resolution centres to avoid the use of the family court system:

One of the biggest factors to maintaining the father in the child's life is the relationship between the parents. It would be useful to have more conflict resolution centres in our community, led by us, that focus on healing those relationships. In a lot of these cases, particularly with the younger generation, the fathers want to be involved in the child's life, but the system can be so adversarial. The feelings of both parties need to be acknowledged and they need to get past the hurt and the acrimony and be more child focused, because the more the family members are involved, the more the parents are involved, the better the child does.

Psychotherapist Dr. Regisford added:

There are not enough programs in the Black community for Black fathers, and I think there are a number who've given up on Black fathers. We've forgotten the importance of the father not only in the child's life but in the family unit. It's basically come to the point where we don't care. And that's what a lot of Black fathers are feeling. At the end of the day people don't care if they're in their children's lives. So we need to not only provide more services, relevant services, but we need to shift the narrative both inside and outside of the Black community.



SECTION 5: Conclusion

“The well-being of children is inseparable from the well-being of all the critical adults in their lives.” — Stuart Shanker

Parenting is one of the most challenging and rewarding experiences an individual will have in their lifetime. The added layer of anti-Black racism makes this experience even more challenging for Black parents. Black parents must navigate and resist anti-Black racism in all aspects of their lives while trying to shield their children from this harsh and unjust social ill.

Anti-Black racism is not only about employment discrimination experienced by adults, but also about Black parents’ opportunity to materially provide for their children; it is not only about Black parents facing health care discrimination, but also about a denial of the care necessary for parents to be physically and mentally healthy to support their children; it is not only about an inherently anti-Black immigration system, but also about the consequent separation of parent and child; it is not only about the overrepresentation of Black Canadians in the criminal justice system, but also about the perpetuation of trauma and the breakdown of the family unit.

However, it does not need to be this way. Anti-Black racism and its disastrous consequences will not be defeated with colour blindness or a refusal to acknowledge the issue. Eradicating anti-Black racism requires the courage of Black Canadians to confess its impact on them and a commitment to supporting those bearing the brunt of it. It demands that we consider the impact of anti-Black racism beyond the immediate experience of adults and examine the impact on the life chances of their children. That is why, if we care about producing better outcomes for Black children and youth, we need to also pay attention to the impact of anti-Black racism on Black parents and caregivers.

By funding the Innovative Supports for Black Parents initiative, the Government of Ontario has taken steps to pay attention to the needs and challenges of Black parents. It is with this optimism that the ISBP-funded initiatives are implemented, in the hope that Ontario will be celebrated not only for its diversity, but also for its commitment to equity, justice, and truly being “a place to grow.”

