



ADAPTING THE SNAP PROGRAM FOR USE IN THE AFRICAN CANADIAN COMMUNITY

REPORT 1: RESEARCH REPORT

April 2018



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PLEASE NOTE: This is a working draft and a living document. We will be piloting this document in the coming year and will be updating it based on feedback from the Black-focused agencies piloting the SNAP® program in the African Canadian community.

SECTION 1: BACKGROUND

1.1 Ontario Black Youth Action Plan

Ontario released the Ontario Black Youth Action Plan (BYAP) in March 2017 with the goal of reducing disparities for Black children, youth, and families. The BYAP, when fully implemented, will support 10,800 Black children, youth, and their families annually.

The BYAP will increase access to supports and opportunities for Black children, youth, and their families¹ in Ontario across life stages, from early childhood to the transition to school and/or work.

All BYAP initiatives have been developed with input from the External Implementation Steering Committee and feedback from community engagement sessions. The External Implementation Steering Committee is made up of Black leaders, including youth from the community who are working together to inform the design and implementation of BYAP initiatives and ensure that the Plan is responsive to the needs of Ontario's Black children, youth, and families.

1.2 The middle years and the Stop Now and Plan (SNAP) program model

The SNAP® program is a made-in-Ontario, family-focused, culturally adaptable program that helps children, and their parents, better understand the child's thoughts, feelings, and actions so that they can come up with effective plans when behaviours cause disruption and concerns. The SNAP® technique is a cognitive behavioural strategy intended to help children stop and think before they act in order to allow them to come up with socially appropriate plans to address their problems.

Emerging research has indicated that experiences in the middle years (i.e., ages 6 to 12) are critical predictors of adolescent adjustment and future success. The period is also a time of heightened risk that includes potential challenges such as disengagement from school, family, and/or peers, and an increase in risky experimentation, greater identity awareness, and the potential emergence of early signs of mental health issues and/or disorders. Interventions during this period support the

¹ The Ontario Black Youth Action Plan uses the definition of Black in its most inclusive sense to reflect the diverse ancestry, origins, and ethnic identities of individuals of African and Caribbean descent. The term is based on self-identification, is not mutually exclusive, and is used by Statistics Canada.

achievement of key developmental milestones, including emotional regulation, self-control, and prosocial behaviour.²

The SNAP® Program is a gender-specific, evidence-based, cost-effective³ program that teaches children with disruptive behavioural problems, and their parents, how to stop and think before they act and make better choices “in the moment”. Developed by the Child Development Institute (CDI), the program helps children between the ages of 6 and 11 learn emotional regulation, self-control, and problem solving skills through a cognitive-behavioural framework; children and their families learn how to stop and think before they act so they can make better choices in the moment. Children who enter the program may have engaged in aggressive, antisocial behaviour and/or have come into contact with authority figures at school or in the community.

1.3 The need for cultural adaptation

Research has shown that culturally relevant and responsive programs can lead to better outcomes for families. Programs that are culturally relevant have been found to promote resilience for parents/caregivers and children and reduce early development of child antisocial behaviours (e.g., acting out at school or at home).⁴

Culturally relevant and responsive programs are rooted in cultural identity, which is the identity or feeling of belonging to a group. It is part of a person’s self-conception / self-perception and is related to nationality, ethnicity, religion, social class, generation (i.e., age), locality, or any kind of social group that has its own distinct culture. Cultural identity is an important promotive factor in the context of normative development and a protective factor against the harmful effects of anti-Black racism.

² Augimeri, L. K., Walsh, M., Donato, A., Blackman, A., & Piquero, A. R. SNAP (Stop Now And Plan): Helping children improve their self-control and externalizing behavior problems. Special Issue - Advances in Research on Self-Control, *Journal of Criminal Justice*. [Printed online, November 2017, DOI: 10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2017.08.010].

³ Farrington, D.P., Koegl, C.J. (2015). Monetary benefits and costs of the Stop Now And Plan program for boys aged 6–11, based on the prevention of later offending. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 31, 263–287.

⁴ 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.

Culturally relevant and responsive programs move beyond surface modifications (e.g., language, racial makeup of frontline staff, visuals used in programming) and include:⁵

- Recognizing culture as a strength and protective factor, and
- Addressing deeper issues of cultural traditions and perspectives.

1.4 Project overview and objectives

Turner Consulting Group was hired to undertake the task of culturally adapting the SNAP® program for use with African Canadian children, youth, and families in collaboration with CDI.

The specific objectives of this project are as follows.

Embed Cultural Adaptation

Develop a culturally relevant and responsive Companion Guide for the SNAP® Program in Black Communities and related SNAP® materials to enhance the SNAP® implementation and service delivery processes. The goal is to focus on the specific needs of the Black community from a cultural identity and anti-Black racism lens.

Enhance Evidence Base and Build Capacity

Building on the research and evidence of the SNAP® program, work with BYAP SNAP® affiliates to embed the concept of cultural identity as a promotive and protective factor for Black children, youth, and their families in the adaptation of the Companion Guide for the SNAP® Program in Black communities and related materials.

1.5 Process for developing the guide

The goal of this project was to develop a guide for implementing a mainstream program in the African Canadian community. The development of the Companion Guide was based on research to enable the consulting team to understand the issues faced by the Black community and identify what needs to be included in the guide to ensure that the program addresses the needs and concerns of the Black community.

As such, two reports were produced. The first report — the Research Report — summarizes the research that guided the development of the Companion Guide. This document — the Companion Guide — will be used with in-class training to support

⁵ Coard, S.I., Herring, M.H., Watkins, M.H., Foy-Watson, S.A., & McCoy, S.Z. (2013). Black Parents Strengths and Strategies (BPSS) Program: A Cultural Adaptation of the Strong-Willed Child Program. In C. Clauss-Ehlers, Z. Serpell, & M. Weist (Eds.), *Handbook of Culturally Responsive School Mental Health*. New York, NY: Springer.

facilitators and clinicians to implement the SNAP® Program in African Canadian communities.

The Research Report provides the rationale for the content of the guide and includes the following.

Demographic overview of African Canadians. An overview of the Black population in Ontario, including its growth, geographic distribution, age profile, and ethnic composition.

Literature review. A review of the literature was conducted to identify the issues that impact Black children and their families, which can result in disruptive behaviours that can lead to their being referred to SNAP®. While this literature is not meant to be exhaustive, it helps to set the context for the issues and challenges experienced by African Canadians, which the Companion Guide will help to address.

Summary of community consultations. To ensure that the adaptation of any mainstream program meets the needs of the African Canadian community, it was crucial to hear directly from the community and provide a safe environment for diverse perspectives to be heard. Over the course of 23 days in January and February 2018, 8 community consultations were held in which 135 individuals participated. The consultations were held in the identified Ontario BYAP communities, including the Toronto (sessions were held in both the east and west ends), Durham Region, Peel Region, York Region, Hamilton, Windsor, and Ottawa. Participants came from varied backgrounds, including Black, White, and other racialized parents, advocates, social workers, SNAP® program staff, community organizations, police officers, educators, and mental health practitioners. The consultations were well received by the community, and the resulting conversations provided substantial insight into the early intervention, prevention, and mental health needs of children, youth, and families from communities across southern Ontario.

At each of the community consultations, participants were asked to identify what challenges exist for Black and African Canadian children and families that can cause and/or contribute to disruptive behaviours at home and/or in the community, and to examine whether any gaps in programs, resources, and tools exist for the parents of Black and African Canadian children in addressing and accessing supports for those disruptive behaviours.

The community's feedback was analyzed to identify key themes for this report. Information included in this report was identified by participants as being critical to the

discourse surrounding the complexities of culturally adapting the SNAP® program as an early intervention and prevention strategy for Black and African Canadian children, youth, and families.

In addition, a few individuals also prepared written comments that were shared with the project team by email.

The information included in this report is a summary of what participants expressed; however, it is not a detailed examination of each of the issues raised throughout the community consultations.

Input from the Advisory Committee: A 12-member Advisory Committee was convened to provide input into the community consultations, the Research Report, and the Companion Guide. Members were selected from across the BYAP communities: Ottawa, Durham Region, York Region, Toronto, Peel Region, Hamilton, and Windsor. Members included individuals from the Black community who have broad knowledge and understanding of anti-Black racism, as well as child and family development from a trauma-informed and anti-oppressive practice perspective, and represented a variety of professions, including teachers, social workers, child psychologists, mental health practitioners, youth justice specialists, and early childhood educators.

SECTION 2: DEMOGRAPHIC OVERVIEW OF THE BLACK COMMUNITY

2.1 A growing population

The 2016 Census of Canada shows that the African Canadian population has surpassed 1 million. There are currently 1,198,540 African Canadians in the country, representing 3.4% of the country's population.

Table 1 shows the size of Ontario's African Canadian population in 2001, 2006, 2011, and 2016 and its rate of growth compared with that of the total Ontario population.

Table 1. Rate of Growth of African Canadian Versus 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.					

As the table shows, Ontario's African Canadian population is growing at a faster rate than the overall provincial population. In 2001, just over 411,000 African Canadians lived in Ontario, representing 3.6% of the provincial population. In 2006, this number had grown by 15% to 473,800. By 2011, the African Canadian community had grown by 31% to 539,205 and represented 4.3% of the provincial population.

The most recent census data shows that the Black community has grown to 627,715, representing 4.7% of the provincial population, a growth rate of 53% since 2001.

By contrast, the Ontario population grew by 7% between 2001 and 2006 and by 11% between 2001 and 2011. Recent census figures show that the provincial population has grown by 18% since 2001.

Projections by Statistics Canada estimate that the Black population in Canada could increase to between 1.6 million and 2.0 million people by the year 2031.⁶ This growth

⁶ Statistics Canada. (2015, November 30). Projections of the Diversity of the Canadian Population. 2006 to 2031. Retrieved from <https://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/91-551-x/91-551-x2010001-eng.htm>

means that the provincial African Canadian population could increase to between 896,000 and 1 million people and could represent 6% of the provincial population by the year 2031.⁷

2.2 A population concentrated in urban centres

As Table 2 shows, just over half of all African Canadians (52% or 627,715) live in Ontario, representing 4.7% of the provincial population. The vast majority of the Black population in Ontario (70%) lives in the Toronto Census Metropolitan Area (CMA),⁸ representing 37% of the entire African Canadian population and 7.5% of the population of the Toronto CMA.

Table 2. 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	442,020	7.5%	36.9%
Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Canada, 2016.				

Table 3 shows the number of African Canadians in select municipalities across Ontario and the proportion of the municipal population they represent.

As the table shows, the largest number of African Canadians (239,850) live in the city of Toronto, constituting almost 9% of the population. Peel Region has the next largest number of African Canadians (131,060), constituting 10% of that region's population.

The data also shows that far fewer African Canadians live in each of the five municipalities that make up the Greater Toronto Area (Halton Region, Peel Region, York Region, and Durham Region). Not only are they smaller in number, but they make up a much smaller proportion of the municipal population.

⁷ This assumes that 57% of Canada's African Canadian population continues to reside in Ontario.

⁸ 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, Georgina, Halton Hills, King, Markham, Milton, Mississauga, Mono, New Tecumseth, Newmarket, Oakville, Orangeville, Pickering, Richmond Hill, Uxbridge, Vaughan, and Whitchurch-Stouffville.

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%
Ottawa CMA	934,243	60,205	6.4%
Durham Region	645,862	51,380	8.0%
York Region	1,109,909	27,775	2.5%
Hamilton CMA	747,545	24,275	3.3%
Halton Region	548,435	15,230	2.8%
Kitchener–Cambridge–Waterloo CMA	523,894	15,110	2.9%
Windsor CMA	329,144	12,310	3.7%
London CMA	494,069	11,945	2.4%
St. Catharines–Niagara CMA	406,074	7,705	1.9%
Barrie CMA	197,059	4,460	2.3%
Guelph CMA	151,984	3,035	2.0%
Ontario	13,448,494	627,715	4.7%
Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Canada, 2016.			

2.3 A young population

The African Canadian population has a younger age profile than the general population. As Table 4 shows, 25% of African Canadians 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%).

The younger age profile of the Black population means that African Canadians make up a larger proportion of the younger age groups. For example, 7.6% of the provincial population aged 14 and under is Black, and 6.5% of those aged 15 to 24 are Black, compared with only 2.5% of those aged 65 and over.

Table 4. African Canadian Population by Age, Ontario (2016).

Age Group	Ontario Population		African Canadian Population		
	#	% of Total Population	#	% of Total Population	% of Age Group
0 to 14	2,207,970	16.4%	154,340	24.6%	7.6%
15 to 24	1,706,060	12.7%	110,450	17.6%	6.5%
25 to 54	5,447,205	40.5%	255,025	40.6%	4.7%
55 to 64	1,835,605	13.6%	52,560	8.4%	2.9%
65 and over	2,251,655	16.7%	55,335	8.8%	2.5%
Total Population	13,448,495	100%	627,715	100%	4.7%

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Canada, 2016.

2.4 A large immigrant but growing Canadian-born population

Statistics Canada data shows that immigration is a major source of growth of the African Canadian population. In 2016, over half (53%) of all African Canadians in Ontario were born outside the country.

While immigration continues to add to the growth of the Black Canadian population, the long history of Blacks in Canada means that a large proportion of Black people are also born in the country — in 2011, 47% of all Black Canadians were born in the country, with 9% being three or more generations Canadian, i.e., they were born in Canada to Canadian-born parents.⁹

2.5 An ethnically diverse population

With people of African descent coming to Canada from around the world, there is a great deal of ethnic diversity within the Black population. Table 5 shows the ethnic origins of Black Canadians. It does not include Black Canadians who identified their ethnicity as “Canadian”.

⁹ Statistics Canada, National Household Survey, 2011.

Table 5. Select Ethnic Origins of African Canadians in Ontario (2016).		
Ethnic Origin	#	% of African Canadian Population
Jamaican	257,060	41.0%
Trinidadian/Tobagonian	59,560	9.5%
Somali	40,995	6.5%
Barbadian	26,625	4.2%
Nigerian	26,560	4.2%
Ghanaian	24,850	4.0%
Ethiopian	22,560	3.6%
South African	19,760	3.1%
Haitian	17,715	2.8%
Grenadian	14,690	2.3%
Cuban	14,490	2.3%
Vincentian/Grenadian	12,155	1.9%
Eritrean	11,870	1.9%
Congolese	10,425	1.7%
Dominican	9,180	1.5%
Sudanese	8,975	1.4%
Other	50,245	8%
Total	627,715	100%
Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census.		

SECTION 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review was conducted to identify some of the issues that impact Black children and their families. These issues may then cause what has been labeled as “disruptive behaviour,” which would lead children to be referred to a SNAP® program.

This literature review provides empirical evidence for the development of a guide to support the adaptation of this mainstream program for use in the African Canadian community in Ontario.

This literature review is guided by the following questions:

1. Why would a mainstream program, specifically the SNAP® program, need to be adapted for use with Black children and their families?
2. What are the specific risk factors that Black children and their communities face in an environment of both explicit and implicit racism?
3. What are important aspects to consider in the development, creation, and implementation of programming that is specific to African Canadian communities?

In addition to this guiding framework, this literature review seeks to cover topics that highlight some of the issues that are salient to Black children and communities Canada, including:

- Parenting and intergenerational trauma and present-day racism
- Structural and systemic racism
- Experiences of Black children in public schools
- Experiences of Black children within the child welfare system
- Experiences of the Black community with police
- Ethno-racial identity, and
- Cultural competence and cultural safety.

In the final section, we will briefly review what can be gleaned from the literature to help us understand which types of programs and services Black people are more receptive to.

3.1 Parenting and intergenerational trauma and present-day racism

Adjei et al. note that there is very little written about Black parenting styles in the Canadian context.¹⁰ Their rich qualitative study is the only one available that provides considerable insights into Black parenting styles in Canada. Intended to examine the issue of racism in the child welfare system, the authors also examine parenting styles, the authors conducted interviews with parents who had immigrated from either Africa or the Caribbean. Drawing from the more numerous U.S. studies while focusing on the few existing findings in the Canadian literature, common themes can be identified that shed light on the uniqueness of Black parenting styles. The authors describe Black parenting styles as gravitating between authoritative — “parents who often make specific demands of their children but set limits...” and authoritarian — parents who “...value domination of their children and punishment tactics in the correction of their children’s behaviour.”¹¹

Diana Baumrind was the first to identify, in 1966, three styles of parenting: authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive parenting. Since then, another type has been added: neglectful.

The “authoritarian” parent is considered to be strict and controlling, with set boundaries, leaving very little room for debate or discussion. The “authoritative” parent “attempts to direct the child’s activities but in a rational, issue-oriented manner. She [the parent] encourages verbal give and take, shares with the child the reasoning behind her policy, and solicits his objection when he refuses to conform.” The “permissive” parent “attempts to behave in a non-punitive, acceptant and affirmative manner towards the child’s impulses, desires, and actions...She allows the child to regulate his own activities as much as possible, avoids the exercise of control, and does not encourage him to obey externally defined standards.”¹²

¹⁰ 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*, DOI: 10.1080/15548732.2017.1401575. p. 20.

¹¹ Baumrind, D. (1967), as cited in Adjei, P. B., et. al: ‘The ‘Fragility of Goodness’: Black Parents’ Perspective about Raising Children in Toronto, Winnipeg, and St. John’s of Canada” (2017).

¹² Baumrind, D. (1966). Effects of Authoritative Parental Control on Child Behavior, *Child Development*, 37(4), 887–907.

The “neglectful” or “uninvolved” parent is “characterized by a lack of responsiveness to child’s needs... [They] make few demands of their children and they are often indifferent, dismissive, or even completely neglectful.”¹³

Viewed through the lens of critical race theory, the research highlights the need to consider the role that racism plays in shaping the parenting styles of Black Canadians.¹⁴ This means considering the impact of intergenerational trauma on parenting styles. This also means considering the ways in which Black people must parent in the context of present-day racism in order to keep their children physically and psychologically safe.

Intergenerational trauma is most easily described as multigenerational trauma experienced by a specific cultural group. It can be experienced by “anyone living in families at one time marked by severe levels of trauma, poverty, dislocation, war, etc., and who are still suffering as a result.”¹⁵ Intergenerational trauma is cumulative and collective. The impact of this type of trauma manifests itself, emotionally and psychologically, in members of different cultural groups.¹⁶

For people of African descent, this collective trauma has spanned over 400 years. Across the globe, people of African descent have endured generations of slavery; colonialism; structural, systemic, and interpersonal racism; ideological and cultural racism; poverty; and the resulting dislocation from traditional cultures and homelands. Across North America, the Caribbean, and Africa, people of African descent have survived enslavement, forced migrations, stolen property, destruction of communities, dehumanization, mass incarceration, torture, medical experimentation, police brutality, racial profiling, lynchings, and mass murder.

Dr. Joy DeGruy coined the term “post traumatic slave syndrome” (PTSS) to describe the collective intergenerational trauma that continues to affect people of African

¹³ Cherry, K. Uninvolved Parenting: Characteristics, Effects, and Causes. Retrieved from <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-uninvolved-parenting-2794958>

¹⁴ 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*, DOI: 10.1080/15548732.2017.1401575. p. 20.

¹⁵ Cutler, M. (n.d.). Multigenerational trauma: Behavior patterns in cultures [PowerPoint slides]. Retrieved from http://edweb.boisestate.edu/instituteforthestudyofaddiction/pp/Historical_Trauma_and_Grief.ppt

¹⁶ Brave Heart, M. Y. H. (2011). Welcome to Takini’s historical trauma. Retrieved from <http://historicaltrauma.com>

descent.¹⁷ Cromwell referred to it as “the psychological trauma affecting enslaved Africans in America and their descendants, thus connecting the legacies of these brutal colonial experiences with current issues of racism and its negative impact on contemporary ‘Black culture’.”¹⁸ Looking to post-traumatic stress disorder as outlined in the DSM-5 as a guide, DeGruy concluded that “Cycles of oppression leave scars on the victims and victors alike, scars that embed themselves in our collective psyches and are passed down through generations, robbing us of our humanity”.¹⁹

DeGruy also discussed the role of parenting in exploring how PTSS is transmitted across generations:

What do you think gets passed down through generations if what was experienced were lifetimes of abuse at the hands of slave masters and other authorities? What do you think the result would be if generation after generation of young men were not allowed the power or authority to parent their own children? ... What do you think the result would be if the primary skills that mothers teach their children are those associated with adapting to a lifetime of torture?²⁰

Some of the parenting practices that were adopted during slavery and colonialism as a means of survival continue to be used today in the Black community, the source of which has not been fully explored. As a result, Black parenting styles are compared to those of Whites without consideration of the impact of slavery, colonialism, or present-day racism. Spanking is one practice that has long been a tradition of Black parenting. In the United States, a 2015 Pew Research study found that Black parents are more than twice as likely as White and Latino parents to use physical discipline on a regular basis, and they are less likely to never spank their children.²¹ However, while spanking may be a common feature of Black parents from the Caribbean and North America, it

¹⁷ DeGruy, J. (2005). *Post traumatic slave syndrome: America's legacy of enduring injury and healing*. Milwaukee, OR: Uptone Press.

¹⁸ Cromwell, A. M. (2012). From slavery to poverty: The racial origins of welfare in New York, 1840–1918 (review). *Enterprise & Society*, 13(1), 204–206.

¹⁹ DeGruy, J. (2005). *Post traumatic slave syndrome: America's legacy of enduring injury and healing*. Milwaukee, OR: Uptone Press. p. 4.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 118.

²¹ Pew Research Center. (2015). Use of spanking differs across racial and education groups. Retrieved from http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2015/12/17/parenting-in-america/st_2015-12-17_parenting-09

is not intrinsic to the parenting styles of African people. Instead, it is a practice that comes from White slave masters.²²

It is well documented that slaves, both adults and children, were beaten by their owners into submission or to death when rules were broken. This beating was a regular occurrence during slavery; after slavery up to and including the present, physical violence against Black people shifted, but continued. Psychological violence was and remains common. This is ingrained in the psyche of Black people. Parallel process can ensue, where one follows what his/her leader does: The slave owner harshly punished the slaves, and the slaves harshly punished their children.²³

In fact, historians and anthropologists have found no evidence that physical discipline of children existed in precolonial West African societies prior to the Atlantic slave trade. The evidence does suggest that West African societies held children in high regard: ²⁴

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... Once in America, slaves as parents were under tremendous pressure to shape their children into docile field workers and to teach them proper deference and demeanor in front of whites. Child deaths, brutal whippings and torture, sexual abuse and being sold away from their relative for the rest of their lives were constant features of plantation life.

After emancipation, with sanctioning from the church, many Black parents continued to use physical discipline to instill obedience. Their reasoning during and after slavery was simple: spanking their children to keep them in line kept them alive. After slavery

²² Patton, S. (2017). *Spare the Kids: Why Whupping Children Won't Save Black America*, chapter 3. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

²³ Wade, C.W. (2017). *Understanding Parenting in the Black Caribbean Population within the Context of Historical Trauma in Toronto* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Toronto: Toronto. p. 51.

²⁴ 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>

ended, Black people throughout the Americas lived with the constant fear of indiscriminate police killings and lynch mobs, which could be the punishment for talking to a White person, looking at a White person, or sitting beside a White person. The trauma and the ensuing racism caused parents to spank their children out of love, protection, and responsible parenting.

In scanning the literature, it becomes clear that present-day Black parenting styles have a uniqueness that is partly born of the racial discrimination encountered by Black families, regardless of origin or country of residence.²⁵ According to Lalonde et al., Black parenting is unique because it involves addressing the multiple and complex challenges of dealing with the daily racism and classism that target Blacks families in North America.²⁶ Peters notes that African American parents must teach their children about self-esteem, survival, self-respect, and the threats of racism in society.²⁷

Present-day parenting styles of Black parents are influenced by their perception of their environment. In an environment that is racist and in which Black children are seen as threats — where they can be easily harmed, killed, or imprisoned for being children — 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.”²⁸ DeGruy relates experiences that span generations: Black children in a public place were commanded to stay in one place where they could be supervised by the parent, unlike White children, who could wander or play around without the same restrictions.²⁹ Similarly, in a recent TED Talk, African American Professor Howard Stevenson speaks

²⁵ 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. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 797–820; Adjei, P. B., Mullings, D., Baffoe, M., Quiacoe, L., Abdul-Rahman, L., Shears, V., & Fitzgerald, S. (2017). The “Fragility of Goodness”; Black Parents’ Perspectives about Raising Children in Toronto, Winnipeg and St. John’s. *Journal of Public Child Welfare*, DOI: 10.1080/15548732.2017.1401575.

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 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.

²⁸ 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 of Canada. *Journal of Public Child Welfare*, DOI: 10.1080/15548732.2017.1401575. p. 20.

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

vividly of his childhood experiences when going to the supermarket with his mother. Before entering the store, his mother would forcefully remind him and his siblings not to touch anything in the store and to be at their best behaviour, even if other children in the store were “bouncing off the walls”. The reason his mother gave these stern lectures was to protect the children from any racially stressful situations that would affect their health.³⁰

Adjei et al. note that an important influence in Black parenting styles is not only how they themselves were parented, but also the need to parent in response to the current realities of racism that Black people continue to experience. Both African and Caribbean immigrants report that it was imperative to adjust their parenting styles after arriving in Canada.³¹

Indeed, Black parenting style is a learning process as many Black parents first learn about parenting from the way they were raised as children. The change comes as they relocate to Canada and become aware of the various legislations around parenting as a well as other forms of parenting style.³²

Further, many of those who come to Canada as refugees have kept their children safe by being hypervigilant and keeping them under close supervision. When they relocate to Canada, these parents find these habits hard to break.

Adjei et al. also found that parenting styles were “tailored to inform and prepare [their] children for the realities in the world.”³³ This includes a number of strategies such as:

- Preparing children for the racial discrimination they will encounter in their lives
- Pushing children harder in order to mitigate the continuous set of low expectations encountered at school, as they do not receive enough encouragement from school personnel

³⁰ Stevenson, H. (2017, November). How to Resolve Racially Stressful Situations. Retrieved from https://www.ted.com/talks/howard_c_stevenson_how_to_resolve_racially_stressful_situations

³¹ Adjei, P. B., Mullings, D., Baffoe, M., Quiacoe, L., Abdul-Rahman, L., Shears, V., & Fitzgerald, S. (2017). The “Fragility of Goodness”; Black Parents’ Perspectives about Raising Children in Toronto, Winnipeg and St. John’s. *Journal of Public Child Welfare*, DOI: 10.1080/15548732.2017.1401575. p. 18–19.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., p. 18–20.

- Emphasizing a respect for authority figures such as the police, in order to protect children from racial profiling and tragic outcomes, and
- Needing to practice “helicopter parenting styles” in order to monitor children’s whereabouts at every juncture.

The authors summarize what can be considered the values underlying Black parenting in Canada:

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 high level of apprehension and placement into care of Black children.³⁴

A theme that develops in the research of Adjei et al. is an emphasis on responsibility and household chores in Black families. Adjei et al. reported that study participants emphasized that the assignment of chores contrasted heavily with White parenting practices. The accordance of daily duties is not at all meant to punish children, but rather to teach them responsibility.³⁵ Parenting styles that do not, for example, put an emphasis on responsibility are seen by Black parents as being abdication of parental duty.³⁶

While some studies found Black parenting styles to be more harsh than those of White parents, Ho, Bluestein and Jenkins found that parental harshness in Canada was no

³⁴ Adjei, P. B., Mullings, D., Baffoe, M., Quiacoe, L., Abdul-Rahman, L., Shears, V., & Fitzgerald, S. (2017). The “Fragility of Goodness”; Black Parents’ Perspectives about Raising Children in Toronto, Winnipeg and St. John’s. *Journal of Public Child Welfare*, DOI: 10.1080/15548732.2017.1401575.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 18.

³⁶ Ho, C., Bluestein, D. N., & Jenkins, J. M. (2008). Cultural Differences in the Relationship Between Parenting and Children’s Behaviour. *Developmental Psychology*, 44(2), 507–522.

higher than that amongst Europeans.³⁷ What is interesting in this study is that the relationship between parental harshness and negative behavioural outcomes in children was the weakest in Black families. This would indicate that the meanings of parental harshness differ across cultures.³⁸ In studying the relationship between parental harshness and externalizing behaviours, Deater-Deckard et al. found a strong connection for European children, whereas for African American children the relationship was weaker.³⁹

In an intervention program that aims to involve both parents in treatment, there is some need to address the dangerous stereotypes that Black fatherhood is subjected to in North America.⁴⁰ Fathers are especially important in the lives of Black children. A 1999 U.S. study found that Black children benefit more from close relationships with their father than White children.⁴¹

A more recent study from the United States showed that cohabitating African American fathers were in many aspects more active in their children's lives than white or Hispanic fathers.⁴² A 2014 study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention also counters the myth of the absent Black father. This study found that Black fathers are just as present and involved in the lives of their children as fathers of other races, and in some cases more so. The report found that Black fathers were more likely than fathers of other races to feed and eat meals with children under 5. With children aged 5 to 18, they were significantly more likely to help their children daily with their

³⁷ Ho, P., Tsao, J. C., Bloch, L., & Zeltzer, L. K. (2011). The Impact of Group Drumming on Social-Emotional Behaviour in Low-Income Children. *Evidence-Based Complementary and Alternative Medicine*, 2011. doi:10.1093/ecam/neq072

³⁸ Fagan, J. (2000). African-American and Puerto Rican American Parenting Styles, Paternal Involvement and Head Start Children's Social Competence. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly*, 46(4), 592–612; Woolverton, D.J. (1999). Black Canadian Mothers' Socialization of Children to Respond to Situations Involving Racial Prejudice and Discrimination [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. York University, Toronto; Deater-Deckard, K., Dodge, K., Bates, J. E., & Pettit, G. S. (1996). Physical Discipline Among African American and European Americans. *Developmental Psychology*, 32(6), 1065–1072.

³⁹ Deater-Deckard, K., Dodge, K., Bates, J. E., & Pettit, G. S. (1996). Physical Discipline Among African American and European Americans. *Developmental Psychology*, 32(6), 1065–1072.

⁴⁰ McCready, L., James, C. E., Chavannes, V., Foster, N., Tewelde, Y., Kellen, A., & Eugene, C. (2013). *Gathering Our Voices: The Lived Experiences of Black Fathers in the City of Toronto*. Toronto: Black Daddies Club.

⁴¹ Cited in McCready, et al., 2013.

⁴² Jones, J., & Mosher, W.D. (2013, December 20). *Fathers' Involvement with Their Children: United States, 2006–2010*. National Health Statistics Reports. No. 71.

homework. Further, Black fathers who did not live with their children were more likely than other fathers to see their children at least once a month.⁴³

These studies are important because most research on Black fathers tends to focus on their absence rather than their presence.⁴⁴ While there are many Black fathers who are not present in their children's lives, research that focuses on their absence fails to take into account the racial barriers that Black men face in the employment sector and the family court system.⁴⁵

McCready et al. highlight several insights from their study of Black fathers in the city of Toronto.⁴⁶ The “good father” for their research participants is one who is present in the lives of his children and provides for them financially, while the importance of positive role modelling surfaces as a central theme.⁴⁷ Subjected to the negative stereotypes and racial profiling that occur in every domain, Black men face considerable challenges in fulfilling the role of nurturer and role model.

3.2 Structural, systemic, and everyday racism

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. Structural oppression occurs and is reinforced across multiple institutions and systems. It includes the impact of established laws, customs, and practices that systematically reflect and produce inequities based on one's membership in a marginalized group.

Structural oppression lies underneath, all around, and across society. It includes:

- The history of racial discrimination and racial inequalities, which form the foundation for present-day racism
- Culture that normalizes and replicates racism, and

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ McCready, L., James, C. E., Chavannes, V., Foster, N., Tewelde, Y., Kellen, A., Eugene, C. (2013). *Gathering Our Voices: The Lived Experiences of Black Fathers in the City of Toronto*. Toronto: Black Daddies Club.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

- Interconnected institutions and policies, the key relationships and rules across society providing the legitimacy and reinforcements to maintain and perpetuate oppression.

Systemic racism refers to the ways in which structural policies and practices create different outcomes for various groups of racialized people, including Black people. Systemic racism survives and propagates when the dominant ideology privileging those with power gets embedded within the systems and structures of society, including the labour market, educational institutions, criminal justice system, and child welfare system. Systemic racism also permeates society's laws, legal system, public policy, housing policy, and political structures. In organizations, racialized people experience systemic racism in the form of discriminatory treatment, unfair policies, and inequitable opportunities and impacts.

From the perspective of critical race theory, structural and systemic racism uphold the status quo of White privilege that is embedded in the histories and laws of the White majority.⁴⁸ The inequitable distribution of resources that give the White majority a competitive advantage in every domain of societal life is upheld through the shaping of laws and policies.⁴⁹

Maynard adds that racial inequality is maintained through the over-surveillance of Black people in every arena of society and is reinforced by constant media portrayals of Black people as dangerous. On a daily basis, Black men, women, and children are disproportionately subjected to state violence, with incarceration and death being the tragic consequences.⁵⁰

Over-surveillance and racial profiling have particular ramifications for Black children and youth, as it impacts their experience and achievement in the education system and increases the likelihood that they will have contact with the police and the child welfare system. In Toronto, African Canadians make up 8.5% of the population but

⁴⁸ Warde, B. (2013). Black Male Disproportionality in the Criminal Justice Systems of the USA, Canada and England: A Comparative Analysis of Incarceration. *Journal of African American Studies*, 17, 461–479.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Maynard, R. (2017). *Policing Black Lives: State Violence in Canada from Slavery to the Present*. Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing.

represent 40.8% of children in care of the Children's Aid Society of Toronto.⁵¹ In the youth justice system, Black male youth are over-represented by four times compared with their representation among the general population.⁵² Meanwhile, in the Toronto District School Board, Black students accounted for 48% of all school expulsions while representing only 12% of the student population.⁵³

Over-surveillance and racial profiling also negatively affect the well-being of Black children and youth.⁵⁴ Many participants in the Ontario Human Rights Commission's recent study reported psychological impacts that included anger and low self-esteem. Research participants have also voiced the impact that racial profiling has on parenting strategies — parents feel the need to be overprotective of their children to prevent their harm at the hands of authority.⁵⁵

"The talk" is a sobering discussion that many Black parents have with their children in response to the realities of growing up Black in North America. This is the moment in which the parent or caregiver "reveals the stakes for [people of African descent] in our country in an attempt to shield them from the effects of institutional racism by explaining and preparing them for it."⁵⁶ This includes explaining the realities of racism in the education system and in policing, and the ways in which Black children must conduct themselves in an effort to remain safe. Having "the talk" with young children is considered vital by parents, given that many studies report that Black people are frequently perceived as larger, scarier, and more prone to criminality than people of other races. One study found that White male police officers held unconscious

⁵¹ Ontario Human Rights Commission. (2017). Under Suspicion: Research and Consultation Report on Racial Profiling in Ontario. Retrieved from <http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/under-suspicion-research-and-consultation-report-racial-profiling-ontario>.

⁵² Ibid., p. 49.

⁵³ James, C. E. & Turner, T. (2017). Towards Race Equity in Education: The Schooling of Black Students in the Greater Toronto Area. Toronto: York University.

⁵⁴ McMurtry, R., & Curling, A. (2008). The Review of the Roots of Youth Violence. Queen's Printer for Ontario. Retrieved from http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/professionals/oyap/roots/volume1/chapter01_intro.aspx

Ontario Human Rights Commission. (2017). Under Suspicion: Research and Consultation Report on Racial Profiling in Ontario. Retrieved from <http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/under-suspicion-research-and-consultation-report-racial-profiling-ontario>

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Bell, G. (2017, July 25). Moving ad captures "The Talk" every black parent has with their kids. Salon. Retrieved from <https://www.salon.com/2017/07/25/moving-ad-captures-the-talk-every-black-parent-has-with-their-kids/>

“dehumanization bias” against Black people. The same study found that White female college students tended to perceive Black children ages 10 and older as “significantly less innocent” than their White counterparts.⁵⁷ As the author of the study notes, “Our research found that black boys can be seen as responsible for their actions at an age when white boys still benefit from the assumption that children are essentially innocent.”⁵⁸

Acting on these negative perceptions about Black people often comes in the form of microaggressions. The term “microaggressions” was first coined in the 1970s by Dr. Chester Pierce, a professor of education and psychiatry at Harvard University. He described microaggressions as common, subtle, seemingly innocuous, conscious, or automatic slights that can cause psychological harm. Dr. Derald Wing Sue, a psychologist at Columbia University, has since expanded on Dr. Pierce’s original definition. He describes microaggressions as verbal comments and nonverbal behaviours that communicate negative, hostile, and derogatory messages rooted in conscious and unconscious bias against people based on their membership in marginalized groups.⁵⁹

Recent U.S. studies have examined the health effects of racial microaggressions on Black communities.⁶⁰ Sue, Capodilupo, and Holder posit that these subtle forms of racism are much more common today than overt incidents of racism.⁶¹ Racial microaggressions are defined as “brief, commonplace, and daily, verbal, behavioural, and environmental slights and indignities directed at Black Americans, often automatically and unintentionally.”⁶²

⁵⁷ Goff, P. A., Jackson, M. C., Di Leone, B., Culotta, C. M. & Ditomasso, N. A. (2014). The Essence of Innocence: Consequences of Dehumanizing Black Children. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 106. 10.1037/a0035663.

⁵⁸ Goff, P. A. (2014, March 6). Black Boys Viewed as Older, Less Innocent Than Whites, Research Finds. Retrieved from www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2014/03/black-boys-older.aspx

⁵⁹ Sue, D. W. (2010). Racial Microaggressions in Everyday Life. *Psychology Today*. Retrieved from <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/microaggressions-in-everyday-life/201010/racial-microaggressions-in-everyday-life>

⁶⁰ Sue, D. W., Capodilupo, C. M., & Holder, A. M. B. (2008). Racial Microaggressions in the Life Experience of Black Americans. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 39(3), 329–336; Nadal, K. L., Griffin, K. E., Wong, Y., Hamit, S., & Rasmus, M. (2014). The Impact of Racial Microaggressions on Mental Health: Counselling Implications for Clients of Colour. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 92, 57–66.

⁶¹ Sue, D. W., Capodilupo, C. M. & Holder, A. M. B. (2008). Racial Microaggressions in the Life Experience of Black Americans. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 39(3), 329–336.

⁶² Ibid., p. 329.

Microaggressions can range from subtle inferences by a classroom teacher to being ignored when standing at the check-out counter in a store. Microaggressions convey messages such as “You do not belong,” “You are not normal,” “You are intellectually inferior,” “You are untrustworthy,” and “You are all the same.”⁶³ Microaggressions instill in the victim feelings of powerlessness, invisibility (having to work harder to prove one’s worth), forced compliance, loss of integrity and pressure to represent an entire social group.⁶⁴

The mental health effects are cumulative partly because victims are constantly having to navigate their reactions by analyzing the intent of the perpetrator.⁶⁵ One ramification is psychological distress, because victims often feel that they have not dealt effectively with the event. As microaggressions take place on a daily basis, the coping process is psychologically exhausting. One important coping mechanism is what is labeled as “sanity checks”.⁶⁶ Because it is not always possible for the victim to confront the perpetrator, individuals turn to support persons to analyze the incident. Sanity checks are particularly important for Black children, as this process allows them to understand or validate what they are experiencing and helps them avoid internalizing their experiences.

Microaggressions can be particularly harmful because they can go unrecognized by the perpetrator. The receiver of these messages may also be confused and feel powerless to address them. By the time a Black person comes into contact with a social worker or mental health practitioner, they have endured many daily forms of oppression, including microaggressions, which have a compounding effect on them.

By the time clients come to the attention of social workers, they have experienced “a thousand little cuts” — compounded emotional wounds, physical wounds, and psychological wounds. The manifestation of those is what often brings the client to the attention of a social service agency; people with many “cuts” who may now be acting out in a way that is harmful to self and others,

⁶³ Ibid., p.333.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Sue, D. W., Capodilupo, C. M., & Holder, A. M. B. (2008). Racial Microaggressions in the Life Experience of Black Americans. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 39(3): 329–336.

dysfunction in their family roles, and unacceptable behavior according to cultural norm.⁶⁷

3.3 Experiences of Black children in public schools

Racism is a subtle, invisible, and insidious reality in our social fabric. The school system is no exception. Racism is systemic and institutionalized to the extent that Whiteness is the norm.⁶⁸

Anti-Black racism was named for the first time in a government report in 1992 when Stephen Lewis examined race relations in Ontario in the aftermath of the “Yonge Street Riot.” In his report, Lewis lamented the lack of progress in addressing anti-Black racism within the education system:

Undoubtedly, some progress has been made. But often, as I listened to students of all ages and all backgrounds speak out at the many gatherings we had, it was as though we were back to square one. The lack of real progress is shocking. And I believe it signals the most intractable dilemma, around race relations, in contemporary education: How do you get the best of policies and programs into the individual classrooms? It raises searching questions of communications and accountability.⁶⁹

The prevalence of anti-Black racism in schools is well documented and researched in Canada as well as the in United States and United Kingdom. Maynard highlights how, in the Canadian school system, Black students have been policed, subjected to surveillance, and disciplined more harshly for breaking minor rules such as coming late to school. For this author, the school system represents a dangerous venue where children are first confronted with the daily realities of anti-Black racism. School is a “carceral experience for Black, Indigenous and other racialized students, in terms of both the general environment and disciplinary practice.”⁷⁰ Black students are “not only treated as if they are inferior, but they are also treated as if they are a threat inside

⁶⁷ Hunn, V., Harley, D., Elliott, W., & Canfield, J. P. (2015). Microaggression and the mitigation of psychological harm: Four social workers’ exposition for care of clients, students, and faculty who suffer ‘a thousand little cuts.’ *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, 7(9), 41–54.

⁶⁸ Dei, G. S. (2008). Schooling as Community: Race, Schooling, and the Education of African Youth. *Journal of Black Studies*, 38(3), 346–366.

⁶⁹ Lewis, S. (1992, June). Racism in Ontario: Report to the Premier by Stephen Lewis. p. 20. Retrieved from https://www.siu.on.ca/pdfs/report_of_the_advisor_on_race_relations_to_the_premier_of_ontario_bob_rae.pdf

⁷⁰ Maynard, R. (2017). Policing Black Lives: State Violence in Canada from Slavery to the Present. Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing. p. 217

of education settings.”⁷¹ In Ontario, zero-tolerance policies initiated in the 1990s have had the effect of pathologizing Black males in the school system.⁷² Community consultations in Peel Region have confirmed that Black students feel that they are punished more severely than their White counterparts.⁷³ Toronto District School Board data shows that Black high school students were more than twice as likely as their White and other racialized peers to have been suspended at least once during high school. 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 18% of other racialized students.⁷⁴

A recent study, *Towards Race Equity in Education*, found that Black students are under-represented in academic streams and gifted programs and overrepresented in special education and applied programs of study.⁷⁵ The report shared concerns from parents that biases lead educators to over-diagnose Black children with learning disabilities. In the United States, studies show that teachers often misinterpret Black students’ behaviours when conducting assessments using standardized scales for ADHD that do not reflect the ratings of parents or students themselves.⁷⁶ As Woolverton also notes, research has shown that the cultural styles of Black children’s expressions are consistently misinterpreted by teachers.⁷⁷

A common theme that emerges in much of the literature on racism in the educational system is that of the low expectations that Black students feel they are subjected to

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Dei, G. S. (2008). Schooling as Community: Race, Schooling, and the Education of African Youth. *Journal of Black Studies*, 38(3), 346–366.

⁷³ James, C. E., & Turner, T. (2015). Fighting an Uphill Battle: Report on the Consultations into the Well-Being of Black Youth in Peel Region. Retrieved from <http://www.unitedwaypeel.org/faces/images/fighting-an-uphill-battle-sm.pdf>

⁷⁴ James, C. E., & Turner, T. (2017). *Towards Race Equity in Education: The Schooling of Black Students in the G.T.A.* Toronto: York University.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Serpell, Z., Hayling, C. C., Stevenson, H., & Kern, L. (2009). Cultural Considerations in the Development of School-Based Interventions for African-American Boys with Emotional and Behavioural Disorders. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 78(3), 321–332.

⁷⁷ Woolverton, D.J. (1999). *Black Canadian Mothers’ Socialization of Children to Respond to Situations Involving Racial Prejudice and Discrimination* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. York University: Toronto.

from teachers.⁷⁸ Iruka notes that low expectations undermine children's sense of competency while leading to a sense of helplessness.⁷⁹ James and Turner note that when entering the education system, Black kindergarten students are as motivated to succeed as others, but this positive school attitude is gradually eroded through the continuous low expectations set by teachers and guidance counsellors. Black students are encouraged for their athleticism but much less for academic achievement, often regardless of high academic achievement.⁸⁰

While this data only examines the experiences of high school students, studies out of the United States show that in the 2013–2014 school year, Black pre-schoolers were suspended 3.6 times more than their White peers.⁸¹ A recent study by Yale University's Child Study Center attributed some of this racial disparity to discriminatory practices:

Regardless of the nature of the underlying biases, the tendency to observe more closely classroom behaviors based on the sex and race of the child may contribute to greater levels of identification of challenging behaviors with Black preschoolers and especially Black boys, which perhaps contributes to the documented sex and race disparities in preschool expulsions and suspensions.⁸²

⁷⁸ Livingstone, A.-M., Celemencki, J., & Calixte, M. (2014). Youth Participatory Action Research and School Improvement: The Missing Black Voices of Montreal. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 37(1), 283–307.

Maynard, R. (2017). *Policing Black Lives: State Violence in Canada from Slavery to the Present*. Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing.

Graham, R. (2004, May). "The Silent Catastrophe": Institutional Racism in the British Educational System and the Underachievement of Black Boys. *Journal of Black Studies*, 34(5), 653–671.

⁷⁹ Iruka, I., & Porter, F. (2013). The Black Family: Reimaging Support and Engagement. In B.C. Institute, *Being Black is not a Risk Factor: A Strengths-Based Look at the State of the Black Child* (pp. 18–23). Chapel Hill: National Black Child Development Institute. p. 22.

⁸⁰ James, C. E., & Turner, T. (2017). *Towards Race Equity in Education: The Schooling of Black Students in the Greater Toronto Area*. Toronto: York University.

⁸¹ Schott Foundation. (2016, October 24). The school-to-prison pipeline starts in preschool. Retrieved from <http://schottfoundation.org/blog/2016/10/24/school-prison-pipeline-starts-preschool>

⁸² Gilliam, W. S., Maupin, A. N., Reyes, C. R., Accavitti, M., & Shic, F. (2016). A research study brief. Do early educators' implicit biases regarding sex and race relate to behavior expectations and recommendations of preschool expulsions and suspensions? Yale Child Study Center. Retrieved from http://ziglercenter.yale.edu/publications/Preschool%20Implicit%20Bias%20Policy%20Brief_final_9_26_276766_5379.pdf

A recent study conducted in the United States indicates that implicit bias towards Black children is present from pre-school onwards.⁸³ Black children, especially Black boys, are more closely observed and monitored for problem behaviours than their non-Black peers. When presented with a series of vignettes, educators participating in the study focused their attention on Black boys who were behaving no differently than in the vignettes with White children. These findings may help to explain the disproportionate number of expulsions and suspensions of Black children at such an early stage.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children is challenging the use of suspensions for young children, consistent with research findings that suspensions are an ineffective intervention for inappropriate behaviours, particularly for young children. The Association issued a policy statement to this effect:

A child's early years set the trajectory for the relationships and successes they will experience for the rest of their lives, making it crucial that children's earliest experiences truly foster—and never harm—their development. As such, expulsion and suspension practices in early childhood settings, two stressful and negative experiences young children and their families may encounter in early childhood programs, should be prevented, severely limited, and eventually eliminated. High-quality early childhood programs provide the positive experiences that nurture positive learning and development.⁸⁴

The policy statement goes on to state that suspensions remove children from learning environments — which are important for healthy development and academic success — and hinder a child's social-emotional and behavioural development.

Other studies show that the issues highlighted in *Towards Race Equity in Education* are not unique to Toronto. In 2015 a study examined the social well-being of Black youth in Peel Region using demographic and socio-economic data. This study also included interviews with service providers, adults who work with youth, and Black youth themselves to identify their concerns and experiences. The report, *Fighting an Uphill Battle*, found that Black youth in Peel schools were dealing with low expectations from teachers and administrators; stereotypes about their educational commitments and

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Department of Education. *Policy statement on expulsion and suspension policies in early childhood settings*. Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/school-discipline/policy-statement-ece-expulsions-suspensions.pdf>

intellectual abilities; more severe discipline compared with their White peers; and feelings of exclusion from their school, as well as school programs, curricular materials, and a teacher population that is not reflective of them.⁸⁵

The presence of police officers in schools has been identified as an issue for Black students. The Toronto District School Board recently decided to end a program that placed police officers in schools. The practice of having a school resource officer (SRO) program in schools, which was introduced partly as a result of the shooting death of Jordan Manners, was seen as a source of intimidation, particularly towards Black students.

Prior to its decision to discontinue the program, the school board authorized a review of the program, which included surveys and focus groups with the students. In recommending the end of the program, the reviewer wrote:

Over the course of this Review, we also heard from thousands of individual students who told us that the presence of an SRO within their school has made them feel less safe, less welcome and less engaged in learning. These students have told us that they see themselves and their friends as the targets of overt systemic discriminations, which has a negative impact on their achievement, well-being, and ability to be successful in their future lives.⁸⁶

3.4 Experiences of Black children and families with the child welfare system

For decades, African Canadians, advocates, service users, community partners, and the media have raised concerns about the overrepresentation of African Canadian children and youth in Ontario's child welfare system. In both 2012 and 2016 the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child raised concerns about the significant overrepresentation of African Canadians, along with Indigenous children, in this country's child welfare system. In 2016 the committee recommended that Canada "take effective

⁸⁵ James, C. E., & Turner, T. (2015). Fighting an uphill battle: Report on the consultations into the well-being of black youth in Peel Region. Mississauga, Ontario: F.A.C.E.S. of Peel Collaborative. Retrieved from <http://www.unitedwaypeel.org/faces/images/fighting-an-uphill-battle-sm.pdf>

⁸⁶ Toronto District School Board. (2017). School Resource Officer Program Review. Report No. 11-17-3269. Retrieved from <http://www.tdsb.on.ca/Leadership/Boardroom/Agenda-Minutes/Type/A?Folder=Agenda%2F20171115&Filename=171115+School+Resource+Off+3269+FINAL.pdf>

measures to address the root causes of overrepresentation of African Canadian children in care institutions.”⁸⁷

What was long dismissed as a perception was validated with the release of data by the Children’s Aid Society of Toronto in 2013. While 2011 Statistics Canada data show that 8.5% of Toronto’s population is African Canadian, the Children’s Aid Society of Toronto reported that 40.8% of the children and youth in care as of September 23, 2013, were African Canadian.

In response to the data and concerns of Indigenous and Black families, the Ontario Human Rights Commission launched a public interest inquiry to examine the involvement of Indigenous and racialized children and youth in the child welfare system. The inquiry found that Indigenous and Black children were disproportionately overrepresented in admission into care, not only in Toronto, but across the province.⁸⁸

The One Vision One Voice project was initiated in 2016 and funded by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services to examine how the child welfare system interacts with the Black community. The goal of the project was to develop a practice framework to support child welfare agencies to address disproportionality and better serve the African Canadian community. To inform the development of the practice framework, community consultations were held across the province. In these consultations, participants noted that child welfare agencies rely on referrals of suspected child abuse and neglect from professionals such as teachers, police, and medical practitioners. As such, the disproportionality in child welfare reflects, in part, the biases in these other systems.⁸⁹ Throughout the consultations, participants shared their concerns and experiences of the over-reporting of Black children and families to child welfare for issues such as bringing roti to school for lunch, children forgetting their lunches, parents being late to pick up their child from school, or younger children walking home from school with a sibling.

⁸⁷ 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. United Nations Human Rights. Retrieved from <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=20732>

⁸⁸ Ontario Human Rights Commission. (2018, February). Interrupted childhoods: Over-representation of Indigenous and Black children in Ontario child welfare. Retrieved from <http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/interrupted-childhoods>

⁸⁹ Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Societies. (2016). One Vision One Voice: Changing the Ontario Child Welfare System to Better Serve African Canadians (Research Report) (p. iv). Retrieved from http://www.oacas.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/One-Vision-One-Voice-Part-1_digital_english.pdf

The One Vision One Voice project also documents the impact on Black children and families, notably the child-parent relationship, when children are placed in care. The report also shared concerns about the experiences of Black children once they are in the care of the child welfare system. Of particular concern is the significant number of Black children in care who are growing up in White homes, in White communities, and attending White schools without positive Black role models. While the data does not show positive outcomes for children who age out of care, the report suggests that Black youth fare even worse when it comes to their self-esteem and racial identity. The report stated:

The community members and youth involved with the child welfare system in particular named anti-Black racism as a significant issue within the child welfare system, and also within the communities and foster homes in which youth are placed. They shared concerns that the child welfare system prioritizes their physical well-being over their cultural, emotional, and mental well-being. So while youth may be removed from their families for what is seen to be neglect, they experience cultural, emotional and psychological harm in the child welfare system.⁹⁰

3.5 Experiences of the Black community with police

With the killing of Andrew “Buddy” Evans by Toronto police in his apartment in 1978 and the subsequent acquittal of the police officers, a change in the Black community’s response to police treatment began to emerge. In 1979, another Black man, Albert Johnson, was shot and killed by police in his apartment. Again, the officers were acquitted of the charges.

Part of the community’s response to the number of killings was the formation of the Black Action Defense Committee (BADC). Under BADC’s leadership, a campaign of demonstrations against police treatment of Black people began in earnest. BADC focused the attention of the Black and mainstream community on the actions of the police, which paved the way for strengthened civilian oversight of police services.

In May 1992, following the shooting death of Raymond Lawrence by police, and in solidarity with protests in the acquittal of Los Angeles police officers in the violent beating of Rodney King, BADC led a demonstration down Yonge Street in Toronto.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

Sections of the demonstration got out of hand, resulting in the windows of businesses being smashed and some looting. The event became branded the “Yonge Street Riot”.

The provincial government of the day, led by Premier Bob Rae, asked Canada’s former UN Ambassador, Stephen Lewis, to look into race relations in Ontario. The report to the premier catalogued the various ways that systemic racism affects the Black community, including the police. This report is the first to make reference to anti-Black racism in an official government report:

First, what we are dealing with, at root, and fundamentally, is anti-Black racism. While it is obviously true that every visible minority community experiences the indignities and wounds of systemic discrimination throughout Southern Ontario, it is the Black community which is the focus.⁹¹

The efforts of BADC, other community organizations, and individuals resulted in the establishment of the Special Investigations Unit (SIU), which investigates serious injuries or deaths and sexual assaults involving the police. An office for complaints against the police, established as a result of an earlier report by Claire Lewis, was also re-organized following Stephen Lewis’ report. Lewis was very critical of the lack of appropriate race relations training in the police training program:

One would have thought, given all the previous reports over the years, and the dramatic changes in the composition of Ontario’s society, that race relations training would be a kind of holy writ, integrated into all the police training programs, whether new recruits or long-time officers. It’s simply not the case. And there’s no excuse for it. None.⁹²

A recently released study of the Black experience in the Greater Toronto Area surveyed over 1,500 Black people and found that 66% of Black men and 67% of Black women frequently or occasionally experience unfair treatment because of their race.⁹³ Most of the Black men reported “being treated with suspicion” and mentioned “an experience related to negative interactions with a public institution, notably the police.” The Black women interviewed reported receiving poor service in a retail setting or experiencing harassment or being undervalued in the workplace.⁹⁴ The study found the most glaringly tense relationship exists with the police.

⁹¹ Lewis, S. (1992, June 9). Report of the Advisor on Race Relations to the Premier of Ontario, Bob Rae.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Environics Foundation. (2017). The Black Experience Project in the GTA: Overview report. p. 38.

⁹⁴ Ibid. p. 40.

When the *Toronto Star* brought the issue of racial profiling to its front pages in October 2002, it confirmed what the Black community had been saying for years. As the *Star* reported:

Blacks arrested by Toronto police are treated more harshly than white, a Toronto *Star* analysis of crime data shows... The Toronto crime data also shows a disproportionate number of black motorists are ticketed for violations that only surface following a traffic stop. This difference, say civil libertarians, community leaders and criminologists, suggests police use racial profiling in deciding whom to pull over.⁹⁵

The chief of police at the time, Julian Fantino, denied that there was any racial profiling, telling the *Toronto Star* that the police do not treat people differently. Nevertheless, his successor, Bill Blair, did acknowledge racial profiling.

The Ontario government has introduced a regulation to reduce street checks, or “carding,” and is now conducting consultations to determine whether the regulation is achieving its goal.

It is fair to assume that this over-policing and constant surveillance of the Black community by the police has a negative effect on the mental, as well as the physical health of Black people. Alang and co-authors classify most negative interactions with the police as police brutality:

Certainly, excessive use of physical violence constitutes brutality. But as others have noted, brutality goes beyond physical force. It includes emotional and sexual violence as well as verbal assault and psychological intimidation.⁹⁶

In arguing for greater scrutiny of police brutality, Alang et al. note the following:

We argue that police brutality is a social determinant of health, although it has not received sufficient attention from the public health community. To date, little

⁹⁵ Rankin, J., Quinn, J., & Sheppard, M. (2002, October 19). Singled out. *Star* analysis of police crime data shows justice is different for blacks and whites. *Toronto Star*. Retrieved from https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/known_topolice/2002/10/19/singled-out.html

⁹⁶ Bandes, S., Chaney, C., and Robertson, R. V., Cooper, H. L., & Fullilove, M., cited in Alang, S. et. al.: Police Brutality and Black Health: Setting the Agenda for Public Health Scholars, *American Journal of Public Health*, 107(5), 662–665.

empirical work has linked police brutality to poor health among populations who disproportionately experience brutality.⁹⁷

Alang et al. also believe that among five “intersecting mechanisms” that should be considered are the stressful financial burdens on Black families resulting from police brutality, such as arrests, incarcerations, and legal, medical, and funeral bills.⁹⁸

A more recent historical portrait of the relationship between Toronto’s Black community and the police and criminal justice system was documented in the 1995 report of the Commission on Systemic Racism in the Ontario Criminal Justice System. It includes considerable discussion about the perceptions of various aspects of the justice system. The Commission conducted surveys to assess firsthand the extent to which Black people and other racialized groups have a sense of distrust of the criminal justice system, and whether this distrust is fed by interactions with the system. The Commission’s survey of randomly selected Black, Chinese, and White respondents (over 400 in each case) who live in Toronto found widespread perceptions that Black people were treated more harshly than other racialized groups.

Generally, the survey shows that a significant proportion of Metro Toronto residents do not believe the justice system in practice treats everyone equally. Beliefs that judges discriminate on the basis of race are strongest among black respondents, but significant proportions of the city’s white and Chinese communities share this view.⁹⁹

Other findings, along the same lines, were that among all these groups, Black people were more likely to be discriminated against than Chinese, suggesting a hierarchy of discrimination.¹⁰⁰

The Commission’s findings show that a large proportion of black Torontonians — who comprise just over half of all black Ontarians — appear to have little

⁹⁷ Alang, S., McAlpine, D., McCreedy, E., & Hardeman, R.. Police Brutality and Black Health: Setting the Agenda for Public Health Scholars. *American Journal of Public Health*, 107(5), 662–665.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Commission on Systemic Racism in the Criminal Justice System. 1995. Report of the Commission on Systemic Racism in the Ontario Criminal Justice System. Retrieved from www.archive.org/details/reportracismontOOcomm

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

confidence that the criminal justice system delivers justice equally. Many white and Chinese Torontonians share this view.¹⁰¹

Again, in 2012, the *Toronto Star* published another series, “Known to police,” in which they investigated the issue of racial profiling, specifically the police recording of contact information of Black people who were neither being arrested nor under suspicion. The police were saving that information in a database:

A Star analysis of Toronto police stop data from 2008 to mid-2011 shows that the number of young black and brown males aged 15 to 24 documented in each of the city’s 72 patrol zones is greater than the actual number of young men of colour living in those areas.¹⁰²

In other words, many of those stopped have been documented more than once.

In 2017, CBC compiled and analyzed data on fatal encounters between civilians and police in Canada from 2000 to 2017. Their analysis shows that Black people are “overwhelmingly over-represented in these encounters.”¹⁰³ For example, their analysis shows that while Black people constitute 8.3% of the Toronto population, they represent nearly 37% of those killed by police in this period.

3.6 Black people and mental health

There is considerable evidence connecting race and negative health outcomes.¹⁰⁴ This relationship is due to both systemic racism and the direct stress of daily anti-Black racism, which causes not only low self-esteem and depression, but physical ailments as well.¹⁰⁵ In the United States, Brown et al. found that perceptions of racial discrimination

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 35.

¹⁰² Rankin, J., & Winsa, P. (2012, March 9). Known to police: Toronto police stop and document black and brown people far more than whites. *Toronto Star*. Retrieved from https://www.thestar.com/news/insight/2012/03/09/known_to_police_toronto_police_stop_and_document_black_and_brown_people_far_more_than_whites.html

¹⁰³ Marcoux, J., & Nicholson, K. (2017). Deadly force — Fatal encounters with police in Canada: 2000–2017. CBC News. Retrieved from

¹⁰⁴ James, C. E., Este, D., Thomas Bernard, W., Benjamin, A., Lloyd, B., & Turner, T. (2010). *Race and Well-Being: The Lives, Hopes and Activism of African Canadians*. Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing; Mensah, J. (2010). *Black Canadians: History, Experience, Social Conditions*. Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing; Maynard, R. (2017). *Policing Black Lives: State Violence in Canada from Slavery to the Present*. Blackpoint & Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

are related to psychological distress.¹⁰⁶ Younger people and women were more affected by racial discrimination than men and older people.¹⁰⁷ More recent U.S. studies have linked racial discrimination to stress and the subsequent development of chronic ailments such as diabetes.¹⁰⁸

A study by Wong, Eccles, and Sameroff explicitly identified racial discrimination as a risk factor in child development.¹⁰⁹ Perceived discrimination was negatively related to achievement motivation and self-esteem while being positively related to anger and depressive symptoms. The study also found that “perceived discrimination increased the probability of engaging in problem behaviors and becoming involved with friends who had fewer positive qualities and more negative qualities.”¹¹⁰ Not surprisingly, experiences with racism in the school system also predicted lower levels of school adjustment. At the same time, the study found that strong ethnic identity was a mitigating factor and a protective mechanism.

In general, Caribbean Canadian adolescents demonstrated fewer externalizing symptoms and problem behaviours than their non-racialized Québécois peers, despite these youth experiencing longer periods of parental separation due to immigration.¹¹¹ This points to the possibility that the role of the extended family in Caribbean Canadian culture is an important strength.

African Canadians share the same mental health issues as the rest of the population, with racism and economic disparities acting as added stressors. Unemployment, poverty, and violence are also linked to mental illness, along with poor nutrition and a

¹⁰⁶ Brown, T. N., Williams, D. R., Jackson, J. S., Neighbors, H. W., Torres, M., Sellers, S., & Brown, K. T. (2000). Being Black and Feeling Blue: The Mental Health Consequences of Racial Discrimination. *Race and Society*, 2(2), 117–131.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Omole, M. (2018, February 12). How Racism Affects Your Health: What Research Tells Us About the Links between Discrimination and Stress. *The Walrus*. Retrieved from <https://thewalrus.ca/how-racism-affects-your-health/>

¹⁰⁹ Wong, C. A., Eccles, J. S., & Sameroff, A. (2003). Ethnic Identification on African American Adolescents' School and Socioemotional Adjustment. *Journal of Personality*, 71(6), 1197–1232.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Rousseau, C., Hassan, G., Measham, T., & Lashley, M. (2008). Prevalence and Correlates of Conduct Disorder in Caribbean and Filipino Immigrant Adolescents. *European Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 17(5), 264–273.

lack of stable housing, which have been identified as risk factors for poor mental health.¹¹²

The literature indicates that Blacks across North America shy away from seeking counselling for mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder, as well as other issues such as marriage problems and parenting issues.¹¹³ They do not readily seek help for mental illness for a number of reasons, stigma being one of them:

There's a lot of stigma associated with mental health in the community. It may be seen as a sign of weakness or you weren't brought up properly. When your community is not supportive that can be really traumatic. So when someone suffers from depression, they'll be like, 'Get over it.'¹¹⁴

Arti Patel echoes this in an article written for the *Huffington Post*, citing a Toronto-based psychologist, Dr. Natasha Browne:

For Africa, Caribbean and black (ACB) Canadians, the struggle for mental health is often a silent one. A Black man or woman experiencing a mental health challenge is more likely to hide it or delay seeking help over the fear of being shunned or labelled by the people around them."¹¹⁵

A Black man or woman experiencing a mental health challenge will try to hide it or will delay seeking help for fear of being shunned or being labeled. Because of misunderstandings in the Black community about what mental illness is, the person may not even be aware that they have a mental health issue and have trouble recognizing the signs and symptoms of mental health conditions. Some may also underestimate the effects and impact of mental health conditions.¹¹⁶

¹¹² Lee-Shanok, P. (2018, March 2). \$19M in federal funds for mental wellness in black communities desperately needed, experts say. CBC News. Retrieved from <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/19-million-for-mental-health-programs-in-black-communities-sorely-needed-1.4558513>

¹¹³ Williams, M. T. (2011, November 2). Why African Americans Avoid Psychotherapy. Retrieved from <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/culturally-speaking/201111/why-african-americans-avoid-psychotherapy>

¹¹⁴ Lee-Shanok, P. (2018, March 2). \$19M in federal funds for mental wellness in black communities desperately needed, experts say. CBC News. Retrieved from <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/19-million-for-mental-health-programs-in-black-communities-sorely-needed-1.4558513>

¹¹⁵ Patel, A. (2015, June 30). Stigma and Silence: Black Canadians and the Fight for Mental Health Awareness. Retrieved from https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2015/06/29/black-canadians-mental-health_n_7345182.html

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

Historically, Black people in North America have been and continue to be negatively affected by racism in the health care system, including being misdiagnosed, receiving inadequate treatment, and being served by health care professions who lack cultural competence. These experiences may lead them to mistrust health care professionals and avoid accessing care. For example, African Americans are more likely to experience physical symptoms related to mental health problems. They may describe bodily aches and pains when talking about depressions, but a health care provider may not connect these symptoms to a mental health condition. In addition, Black men are more likely to be diagnosed with schizophrenia when expressing symptoms of mood disorders or PTSD.¹¹⁷

These issues may be particularly pronounced for Black children, especially given the lack of access to children's mental health programs in general¹¹⁸ and the difficulties Black children face with accessing culturally relevant services. As a result, Black youth are significantly under-represented in mental health and treatment-oriented services and over-represented in containment-focused facilities.¹¹⁹ Further, research studies indicate that symptoms for mental illness may differ for Black and White people. One recent study found that depressed African American youth tend to complain about conflicts with others and difficulty sleeping, as opposed to symptoms more typically associated with depression such as feelings of sadness and lack of energy. As such, it suggests that the standard assessment tools may not work as well for Black teens. The study states, "It is imperative, therefore, to identify the ways black adolescents express their symptoms, determine any gender differences in symptom expression, and calibrate existing assessment tools to improve" their usefulness to Black youth.¹²⁰

Given Black children's negative experiences in the school system — being over-labeled with behavioural issues and special education needs and experiencing higher rates of discipline and suspension — Black parents may resist the further labeling of their

¹¹⁷ National Alliance on Mental Illness. African American Mental Health. Retrieved from <https://www.nami.org/find-support/diverse-communities/african-americans>

¹¹⁸ MHASEF Research Team. (2015). *The Mental Health of Children and Youth in Ontario: A Baseline Scorecard*. Toronto: Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences.

¹¹⁹ Gharabaghi, K., Trocmé, N., & Newman, D. (2016). *Because Young People Matter: Report of the Residential Services Review Panel*. Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario: Toronto.

¹²⁰ Lu, W., Lindsey, M. A., Irsheid, S., & Nebbitt, V. E. (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.

children. As such, they have difficulty accepting that their child may require treatment and seeking out this treatment.

Over the last few years, more researchers have been examining the effects of racism on mental and physical health. In a review of over 300 sets of data and articles published on the subject of the effects of racism on mental and physical health, researchers found that there were very strong links between them:

Our findings corroborate previous research findings as to the magnitude of association between racism and a diverse range of outcomes, including overweight, somatization, psychological stress, and post-traumatic stress (PTS) and stress disorder (PTSD). It also provides evidence that racism has long-term effects on health that remain significant despite attenuation over time.¹²¹

3.7 Ethnic and racial identity

While parents may be the means by which trauma is passed on, they also act as a protective factor by helping their Black children become resilient in a racist world. Parents build their children's resilience by supporting the development of positive ethnic and racial identity and by helping their children understand and navigate racism:

“Resiliency focuses attention on positive contextual, social, and individual variables that interfere or disrupt developmental trajectories from risk to problem behaviors, mental distress, and poor health outcomes.”¹²²

These positive contextual, social, and individual variables are called promotive factors and help youth overcome negative effects of risk exposure.¹²³

The dimension of racial and ethnic identity that focuses on positive feelings about group membership “is perhaps the most salient promotive factor identified in the literature.”¹²⁴ A positive connection to one's ethnic group can moderate the association

¹²¹ Paradies, Y., Ben, J., Denson, N., et. al. 2015. Racism as a Determinant of Health: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis. *PLoS One*, 10(9).

¹²² Zimmerman, M.A. (2013, August). Resiliency Theory: A Strengths-Based Approach to Research and Practice for Adolescent Health. *Health Education & Behavior*, 40(4), 381–383.

¹²³ Fergus, S., & Zimmerman, M.A. (2005). Adolescent resilience: A framework for understanding healthy development in the face of risk. *Annual Review Public Health*, 26, 399–419.

¹²⁴ Neblett, Jr., E. W., Hudson Banks, K., Cooper, S. M., & Smalls-Glover, C. (2013). Racial Identity Mediates the Association Between Ethnic-Racial Socialisation and Depressive Symptoms. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 19(2), 200–207.

between racial discrimination and poor academic achievement and problem behaviours.¹²⁵

Ethnic and racial identity, or “youth’s attitudes and behaviors that define the significance and meaning of race and ethnicity in their lives,” have both become increasingly recognized as important ‘protective’ factors against the harmful effects of racial and ethnic discrimination.¹²⁶ Research has confirmed the importance of ethnic and racial identity for the psychological well-being of racialized people.¹²⁷ For example, strong ethnic/racial identity has been shown to be a mediating factor in relationship to mental health amongst both adults and adolescents.¹²⁸ One study of African American college students found that the internalization of a positive Black identity was related to healthy psychological functioning.¹²⁹ In Canada, Codjoe found that Black university students in Edmonton were helped by a strong racial identity to overcome the racism they had encountered throughout their school careers and to succeed academically.¹³⁰ Wu, Noh, Kaspar, and Schimmele found that, although racial discrimination leads to clear disadvantages in income and education, Black Canadians experienced fewer depressive episodes than non-racial populations (with the exception of Indigenous people).¹³¹ The authors surmise that racial or ethnic identity is the mediating factor.

¹²⁵ Wong, C. A., Eccles, J. S., & Sameroff, A. (2003). The influence of ethnic discrimination and ethnic identification on African American adolescents’ school and socioemotional adjustment. *Journal of Personality*, 71, 1197–1232.

¹²⁶ Neblett, Jr., E. W., Rivas-Drake, D., & Umana-Taylor, A. (2012). The Promise of Racial and Ethnic Protective Factors in Promoting Ethnic Minority Youth Development. *Child Development Perspectives*, 6(3), 295–303.

¹²⁷ Phinney, J. S., & Kohatsu, E. L. (1997). Ethnic and racial identity development and mental health. In J. Schulenburg, J.L. Maggs, & K. Hurrelmann (Eds.), *Health risks and developmental transitions during adolescence* (pp. 420–443). New York: Cambridge University Press.

¹²⁸ Neblett, Jr., E. W., Hudson Banks, K., Cooper, S. M., & Smalls-Glover, C. (2013). Racial Identity Mediates the Association Between Ethnic-Racial Socialisation and Depressive Symptoms. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 19(2), 200–207; Davis, G. Y., & Stevenson, H. C. (2006). Racial Socialization Experiences and Symptoms. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 15(3), 303–317; Sellers, R., Copeland-Linder, M., Martin, P., & L’Heureux Lewis, R. . (2006). Racial Identity Matters: The Relationship Between Racial Discrimination and Psychological Functioning in African American Adolescents. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 16(2), 187–216.

¹²⁹ Helms, J. E. (1993). An overview of Black ethnic racial identity. In J.E. Helms (Ed.), *Black and White racial identity: Theory, research and practice* (pp. 9–32). Westport, CT: Praeger.

¹³⁰ Codjoe, H. (2001). Fighting a ‘Public Enemy’ of Black Academic Achievement—the persistence of racism and the schooling experiences of Black students in Canada. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 4(4), 343–375.

¹³¹ Wu, Z., Noh, S., Kaspar, V., & Schimmele, C.M. (2003). Race, Ethnicity and Depression in Canadian Society. *Journal of Health and Social Behaviour*, 44(3), 426–441.

Amongst children and adolescents, Wong, Eccles, and Sameroff found that a strong connection to ethnic group mitigated low school achievement, behavioural problems, and association with negative peer groups (despite everyday racial discrimination).¹³² The work of Sellers et al. supports these findings. Regardless of the level of discrimination reported by African American adolescents, positive regard towards being Black were “linked to more positive psychological outcomes.”¹³³ Williams et al. examined the relationship between ethnic identity and positive behavioural outcomes while taking multiple stressors into account amongst Black adolescents in poor urban neighbourhoods in the United States.¹³⁴ The study found that ethnic identity held up as a protective factor for youth who were also experiencing risk factors such as economic hardship and family instability.

Adolescence is noted as a life stage where children become more cognizant of racial discrimination and microaggressions while also developing a sense of identity.¹³⁵ During early adolescence, children become more perceptive about discrimination, are at risk of developing conduct disorders as a result, and are beginning the process of identity formation. Hence the potential asset of a strong racial or ethnic identity cannot be overemphasized. In fact, a poor racial and ethnic identity has been identified as a risk factor in and of itself.¹³⁶

Various U.S. studies have examined the relationship between racial identity and academic performance among African Americans. A 2018 study led by Dr. Sheretta Butler-Barnes found that young African American women with a strong racial identity

¹³² Wong, C. A., Eccles, J. S., & Sameroff, A. (2003). Ethnic Identification on African American Adolescents' School and Socioemotional Adjustment. *Journal of Personality*, 71(6), 1197–1232.

¹³³ Sellers, R., Copeland-Linder, M., Martin, P., & L'Heureux Lewis, R. (2006). Racial Identity Matters: The Relationship Between Racial Discrimination and Psychological Functioning in African American Adolescents. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 16(2), 187–216.

¹³⁴ Williams, J., Aiyer, S., Durkee, M., & Tolan, P. (2014). The Protective Role of Ethnic Identity for Urban Adolescent Males Facing Multiple Stressors. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 43, 1728–1741.

¹³⁵ Sellers, R., Copeland-Linder, M., Martin, P., & L'Heureux Lewis, R. (2006). Racial Identity Matters: The Relationship Between Racial Discrimination and Psychological Functioning in African American Adolescents. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 16(2), 187–216.

¹³⁶ Gilbert, D. J., Harvey, A. R., & Belgrave, F. Z. (2009). Advancing the Africentric Paradigm Shift Discourse: Building Towards Evidence-Based Africentric Interventions in Social Work Practice with African-Americans. *Social Work*, 54(3), 243–252.

Stevenson, H., & Arrington, E. G. (2009). Racial/Ethnic Socialization Mediates Perceived Racism and the Racial Identity of African American Adolescents. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 15(2), 125–136.

are more likely to be “academically curious and persistent in school.”¹³⁷ Moreover, racial identity was found to act as a protective factor in hostile or negative school climates, and feeling good about your racial identity could act as a buffer for students in such environments.

This study supports the findings of Dr. Janine Jones. She notes that:

There are a lot of girls who check out in school when they feel like they're not seen, not understood or invested in by school personnel. There are a lot of negative perceptions of African-Americans, and the perception they receive is that it's not a good thing to be black... We may think it's easier to avoid it than address it. But if we start addressing oppression by countering it with the humanness of who these kids are, we're more likely to keep them engaged and feeling a sense of belonging.¹³⁸

Other studies also identify the promotive and protective effects of recognizing and understanding racism. African American youth who felt that others viewed their race less favourably were also not as vulnerable to the negative impact of racial discrimination.¹³⁹ Neblett and Carter found that “youth who are more aware of discrimination due to their identity, socialization, or cultural orientation may understand a racial or ethnic affront as part of the way the world operates rather than as a personal derogation.”¹⁴⁰

This finding echoes the results of a recent study that found that believing society is fair can lead disadvantaged youth to act out and engage in risky behaviour. This study examined how beliefs about the fairness of the U.S. system (system justification) in Grade 6 influenced self-esteem and behaviour. They found that “system-justifying beliefs

¹³⁷ Butler-Barnes, S.T., Leath, S., Williams, A., Byrd, C., Carter, R., & Chavous, T.M. (2017, November 20). Promoting Resilience Among African American Girls: Racial Identity as a Protective Factor. *Child Development*. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12995>

¹³⁸ Jones, J. H., Lee, L. H., Matlack, A., & Zigarelli, J. (2017). Using sisterhood networks to cultivate ethnic identity and enhance school engagement. *Psychology in the Schools*, 55, 20–35.

¹³⁹ Sellers, R. M., Copeland-Linder, N., Martin, P. P., & Lewis, R. L. (2006). Racial identity matters: The relationship between racial discrimination and psychological functioning in African American adolescents. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 16, 187–216.

¹⁴⁰ Neblett, Jr., E. W. & Carter, S. E. (2012). The protective role of racial identity and Africentric world view in the association between racial discrimination and blood pressure. *Psychosomatic Medicine*, 74(5), 509–516.

undermine the well-being of marginalized youth and that early adolescence is a critical developmental period for this process.”¹⁴¹

3.8 Cultural competence and cultural safety

The discourse on culture in the social work profession is not a new one. This has been born in part from the perception that racialized communities either hesitate in seeking services or often do not complete treatment once they have been enrolled in a program.¹⁴² In approaching the issue of engaging racialized communities in mental health programs, research has focused on the issue of race but less so on racism itself in Eurocentric models of service and care.¹⁴³ The social work profession is one that some scholars see as being positioned between competing ideologies:

Social work is a contradictory profession, torn between competing forces shaped on the one hand by the desire to advance liberation and social justice, while simultaneously being constrained by pressures to enforce state imperatives for social order on the other.¹⁴⁴

For scholars such as these, the notion of cultural competency does not go far enough in addressing the structural power relationships between the marginalized client and the service provider. For one, official multiculturalism that emphasizes ethnic equality and takes a colour-blind approach fails to recognize the lived experiences of daily racism and the inherent risk factors that accompany it.¹⁴⁵ Furthermore, the significance of culture is neutralized, causing the oppressive structures of racism to fade in the backdrop.¹⁴⁶ Finally, the task of mastering knowledge of the sheer magnitude of

¹⁴¹ Godrey, E. B.,

¹⁴² Williams, C. (2001). Confronting the Racism in Research on Race and Mental Health Services. *Canadian Social Work Review*, 18(2), 231–248.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Pon, G., Giwa, S., & Razack, N. (2016). Foundations of Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression in Social Work Practice . In G. Pon, S. Giwa, & N. Razack, *Diversity and Social Work in Canada* (pp. 38–58). Don Mills: Oxford University Press. p. 39.

¹⁴⁵ Pon, G., Giwa, S., & Razack, N. (2016). Foundations of Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression in Social Work Practice . In G. Pon, S. Giwa, & N. Razack, *Diversity and Social Work in Canada* (pp. 38–58). Don Mills: Oxford University Press; Este, D. (2007). Cultural Competency and Social Work Practice in Canada: A Retrospective Examination. *Canadian Social Work Review*, 24(1), 93–104.

¹⁴⁶ Sakamoto, I. (2007). An Anti-Oppressive Approach to Cultural Competence. *Canadian Social Work Review*, 24(1), 105–114.

cultures is a formidable one.¹⁴⁷ In this case, cultural competency might not take into account the broad diversity within the Black community in Canada.¹⁴⁸

The Code of Ethics of the National Association of Social Workers, Illinois Chapter, states, in part, that:

- a) Social workers should understand culture and its function in human behavior and society
- b) Social workers should have a knowledge base of their clients' cultures and be able to demonstrate competence in the provision of services that are sensitive to clients' cultures, and
- c) Social workers would obtain education about and seek to understand the nature of social diversity and oppression with respect to race, ethnicity, national origin.¹⁴⁹

It begs the question: Is it enough to be culturally competent, especially when providing mental health services or supporting children whose behaviours have been deemed to be “disruptive”? In other words, is it enough to have “knowledge” of the culture of the person you are helping?

Izumi Sakamoto does not go so far as to use the term “cultural safety,” but her argument certainly steers in that direction. She writes:

Ultimately, in spite of the significance and volume of literature on cultural competence, its current definitions are implicitly problematic, limiting both the utility and application of the concept, as well as the subsequent transformative changes needed in the social work field.¹⁵⁰

Sakamoto argues that the profession of social work, as it was taught (or conceived), was devoid of attention given to the variety of cultures — that it was “apolitical or de-political”. That gave the dominant culture supremacy — “Whiteness” was the “norm”:

¹⁴⁷ Gross, G. D. (2000). Gatekeeping for Cultural Competence: Ready or Not? Some Post and Modernist Doubts. *Journal of Baccalaureate Social Work*, 5(2), 47–66.

¹⁴⁸ Este, D. (2007). Cultural Competency and Social Work Practice in Canada: A Retrospective Examination. *Canadian Social Work Review*, 24(1), 93–104.

¹⁴⁹ NASW Illinois Chapter. (n.d.). The Importance of Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice. Retrieved from <http://naswil.org/news/chapter-news/featured/the-importance-of-cultural-competence-in-social-work-practice/>

¹⁵⁰ Sakamoto, Izumi. 2007. An Anti-Oppressive Approach to Cultural Competence. *Canadian Social Work Review*, 24(1), 105–114.

Given that the social work profession is based on “Whiteness”, social workers carry inherent historical baggage in working through a fundamental dilemma: in seeking to help those who somehow do not meet societal standards, the profession simultaneously reinforces said standards while also requiring the existence of a group that does not meet them.¹⁵¹

The notion of “cultural safety” is taken from the context of the nursing profession in New Zealand. It was part of an effort to decolonize the relationship with the Maori.¹⁵² There is a simplicity and directness of what is meant by cultural safety in an article by Robyn Williams:

One definition of cultural safety that has emerged from years of reflection, argument and discussion between Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff and students, is that it means: “more or less — an environment, which is safe for people, where there is no assault, challenge or denial of their identity, of who they are and what they need. It is about shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge and experience, of learning together with dignity, and truly listening.”¹⁵³

The following four principles illustrate its conceptual framework:

- The explicit aim of the first principal is to improve the health status and treatment outcomes not only by accepting cultural diversity but also acknowledging it
- The emphasis of the second principal is on the significance of power relationships in striving to empower the client while focussing and being responsive to the diverse needs of clients
- The third principal is the recognition of inequalities in accepting the legitimacy of cultural differences, and

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Williams, R. (2008). Cultural Safety – What does it mean for our Work Practice? Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-842X.1999.tb01240.x>

- The fourth principal lies in examining practice through the recognition of cultural bias in order to balance power relationships.¹⁵⁴

There is little literature that takes cultural safety out of its original New Zealand context, although it has become a working term in the Canadian framework of health care delivery to Indigenous communities. From the Canadian literature, we can learn that cultural safety aims to:

- Mitigate cultural risk where racialized people may feel disempowered through the treatment process
- Apply cultural safety to avoid the delivery of services that inadvertently marginalize through research and policy, and
- Address issues of participation and voice while redressing inequities and maintaining an understanding of the impact of past colonial processes on the present.¹⁵⁵

In advocating for the adoption of cultural safety practices in nursing in Canada, Browne, et al. acknowledge that there are some “significant differences between Canada and New Zealand with regard to the processes of colonization and decolonization,”¹⁵⁶ but there are many similarities that warrant its adoption.

By intentionally shifting the focus of analysis away from cultural characteristics or cultural differences as the source of the problem, cultural safety has been instrumental in directing us to shift our gaze onto the *culture of health care* and in showing us how practices, policies and research approaches can themselves create marginalizing conditions and inequities.¹⁵⁷

Cultural safety also means that “individuals experience their cultural identity and way of being as having been respected, or at least, not challenged or harmed.”¹⁵⁸ Most relevant for this literature review, it “brings to the forefront the issue of “race” and

¹⁵⁴ De Souza, R. (2008). Wellness for all: The possibility of Cultural Safety and Cultural Competence in New Zealand. *Journal of Research in Nursing*, 13(2), 125–135.

¹⁵⁵ Browne, A. J., Smye, V. L., & Varco, C. (2005). The Relevance of Postcolonial Theoretical Discourses to Research in Aboriginal Health. *CJNR*, 37(4), 16–37.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ball, 2008, as cited in Starting Your Community’s Journey with SNAP: A Companion Manual for SNAP in Aboriginal Communities, p. 10.

makes explicit how this socially constructed category has been used in the colonizing process, and the effect that this has had on peoples' lives and life opportunities."¹⁵⁹

Cultural safety extends cultural competency so that race becomes a salient theme in the relationship between client and service provider. It should mean, for example, that racial discrimination or lack of a positive racial identity are explicitly treated as risk factors.

3.9 Perceptions/kinds of services for Black communities

The literature is lacking as to which types of services Black communities have access to and how these services are perceived. Some insights can be gained, however, from the little that has been written. One study found that racialized clients are much more receptive to family-based programs than ones that include only children or youth.¹⁶⁰ These authors also say that family protective factors have been found to influence African American youth more positively than other youth.¹⁶¹

Bent-Goodley et al. emphasize the need to take the unique strengths of the African American family into account when delivering culturally appropriate services.¹⁶² Turner highlights five key strengths of the African American family: (1) The significance of religion and spirituality, (2) the strength of the extended family, (3) flexibility in family roles, (4) the belief in education and hard work in attaining goals, and (5) the ability to develop unique coping methods in the context of racial discrimination.¹⁶³

There are a number of intervention programs in the United States that aim to encourage the formation of a strong racial identity.¹⁶⁴ The themes of such programs

¹⁵⁹ Anderson 2004, as cited in Browne, A. J., Smye, V. L., & Varco, C. (2005). The Relevance of Postcolonial Theoretical Discourses to Research in Aboriginal Health. *CJNR*, 37(4): 22.

¹⁶⁰ Kumpfer, K. L., Alvarado, R., Smith, P., & Bellamy, N. (2002). Cultural Sensitivity and Adaptation in Family-Based Prevention Interventions. *Prevention Science*, 3(3), 241–246.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., p. 242.

¹⁶² Bent-Goodley, T., Snell, C. L., & Carlton-Laney, I. (2017). Black Perspectives and Social Work Practice. *Journal of Human Behaviour in the Social Environment*, 27(1–2), 27–35.

¹⁶³ Turner, W. L. (2000). Cultural Considerations in Family-Based Primary Prevention Programs in Drug Abuse. *Journal of Primary Prevention*, 21(2), 285–303.

¹⁶⁴ Okeke-Adenyaju, N., Taylor, L. C., Craig, A. B., Smith, R. E., Thomas, A., Boyle, A. E., & DeRosier, M. E. (2014). Celebrating the Strengths of Black Youth: Increasing Self-Esteem and Implications for Prevention. *Journal of Primary Prevention*, 35(5), 357–369; Gilbert, D. J., Harvey, A. R., & Belgrave, F. Z. (2009). Advancing the Africentric Paradigm Shift Discourse: Building Towards Evidence-Based Africentric Interventions in Social Work

include a focus on self-esteem, a connection to African ancestry, and an awareness of racial discrimination. Many of these programs have been shown to be effective and have been characterized by a high level of client engagement. Some of these programs are described below.

Rites of Passage: Programs incorporating traditional African rites of passage have been in use for quite some time in the United States and Canada. In many African traditions, rites of passage involve the initiation of adolescents into adulthood in order to “transmit adaptive cultural resources”¹⁶⁵.

In North America, Rites of Passage programs are used to mark the transition from childhood to adulthood, with certain elements incorporated into programs for younger children. Williams describes the Afrocultural Tool Kit, which emphasizes attributes such as spirituality, communalism, social interaction/involvement, social responsibility, interconnectedness and emotional expressiveness¹⁶⁶. Rites of Passage is based on the Seven Principles of Nguzo Saba, which are:

- 1) Unity
- 2) Self-Determination
- 3) Collective Work
- 4) Responsibility
- 5) Cooperative Economics
- 6) Purpose, and
- 7) Creativity and Faith.¹⁶⁷

Practice with African-Americans. *Social Work*, 54(3), 243–252; Watson, J., Washington, G., & Stepteau-Watson, D. (2015). Umoja: A Culturally Specific Approach to Mentoring Young African American Males. *Childhood and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 32, 81–90; Serpell, Z., Hayling, C. C., Stevenson, H., & Kern, L. (2009). Cultural Considerations in the Development of School-Based Interventions for African-American Boys with Emotional and Behavioural Disorders. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 78(3), 321–332.

¹⁶⁵ Williams, L. (2012). Rites of Passage. Retrieved from http://www.youthresiliencyinstitute.org/BCYRI_files/PAGES/about-us/RITES.html, p. 2

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p.12.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 8.

The program consists of an orientation and initiation, weekly educational sessions on African and African American culture, and a “transformational ceremony” where youth “demonstrate their personal growth, knowledge and skills” to an intimate audience.¹⁶⁸ Program evaluations indicate that youth experience an increase in self-esteem, while key themes on the strengths of the program that emerged from qualitative data include holism, the Africentric angle, family orientation, the strengths-based approach, and the fact that staff was African American.¹⁶⁹

UMOJA mentoring: A cultural adaptation of the evidence-based U.S. mentor program for justice-involved Black youth. Umoja utilizes African drumming groups with a set structure, where the mentors take on central roles in the drum circle. It should be stressed that this adaptation was not empirically evaluated, but focus groups conducted by staff with the mentors themselves suggested that there were very positive outcomes in the short term.¹⁷⁰ There is evidence, however, that group drumming can reduce internalizing problems, depression, attention problems, and oppositional defiance in a sample of 10- to 12-year-old Latino children.¹⁷¹

PLAAY program: This school-based program — Preventing Anger and Aggression in Youth — focuses on self-esteem, ethnic and racial identity, and awareness of racial discrimination while dealing with student-teacher interactions in a constructive way: “Program components and assessments reflect cultural styles... such as the dynamic use of language.”¹⁷² The program is effective in decreasing levels of aggression and anger.

The Strengthening Families Program: This program consists of parent, child, and family skills training for children aged 6–11 who have drug-using parents. Cultural adaptations were tested in African American communities in rural Alabama and Detroit. The

¹⁶⁸ Harvey, A. R., & Hill, R. B. (2004). Africentric Youth and Family Rites of Passage Program: Promoting Resilience Amongst At-Risk African American Youths. *Social Work, 49*(1): 68.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 73.

¹⁷⁰ Watson, J., Washington, G., & Stepteau-Watson, D. (2015). Umoja: A Culturally Specific Approach to Mentoring Young African American Males. *Childhood and Adolescent Social Work Journal, 32*, 81–90.

¹⁷¹ Ho, P., Tsao, J. C., Bloch, L., & Zeltzer, L. K. (2011). The Impact of Group Drumming on Social-Emotional Behaviour in Low-Income Children. *Evidence-Based Complementary and Alternative Medicine, 2011*. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/ecam/nej072>

¹⁷² Serpell, Z., Hayling, C. C., Stevenson, H., & Kern, L. (2009). Cultural Considerations in the Development of School-Based Interventions for African-American Boys with Emotional and Behavioural Disorders. *The Journal of Negro Education, 78*(3), 327.

adaptations included culturally relevant stories, graphics, and examples in group sessions. Although treatment outcomes did not change significantly, the adaptations drastically improved completion rates.¹⁷³

Celebrating the Strengths of Black Youth: Emphasizing the strengths of Black children aged 7–11 and their families, this program promotes a strong racial identity while equipping students with tools to navigate daily experiences of racism. Children in the treatment group demonstrated higher levels of self-esteem at post-assessment.¹⁷⁴

BPSS: A cultural adaptation of Parenting the Strong-Willed Child Program. It approaches the uniqueness of African American parental strategies and racial socialization as strengths. Portions of parenting group sessions are devoted to, for example, coaching parents to advocate for their children at school in regards to teacher bias and dealing with racist incidents between peers. In addition, parents are made more aware of the development of racial identity. Delivery adaptations include an emphasis on the collective and African American values of “collective responsibility, cooperation and inter-dependence”.¹⁷⁵ A pilot study demonstrated excellent results in terms of engagement, as all participants were retained for the post-intervention assessment.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷³ Kumpfer, K. L., Alvarado, R., Smith, P., & Bellamy, N. (2002). Cultural Sensitivity and Adaptation in Family-Based Prevention Interventions. *Prevention Science*, 3(3), 241–246.

¹⁷⁴ Okeke-Adenyaju, N., Taylor, L. C., Craig, A. B., Smith, R. E., Thomas, A., Boyle, A. E., & DeRosier, M. E. (2014). Celebrating the Strengths of Black Youth: Increasing Self-Esteem and Implications for Prevention. *Journal of Primary Prevention*, 35(5), 357–369.

¹⁷⁵ 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. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 35(6).

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.; Coard, S. I., Herring, M. H., Watkins, M. H., Foy-Watson, S. A., & McCoy, S. Z. (2013). Black Parent Strengths and Strategies Program: A Cultural Adaptation of the Strong-Willed Child Program. In C. S. Clauss-Ehlers, Z. N. Serpell, & M. D. Weist, *Handbook of Culturally Responsive School Mental Health* (pp. 77–88). New York : Springer Science and Business Media .

SECTION 4: COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVES

Eight community consultations were held in the identified Ontario BYAP communities, including Toronto (sessions were held in both the east and west ends), Durham Region, Peel Region, York Region, Hamilton, Windsor, and Ottawa. 135 individuals participated, from varied backgrounds and professions, including Black, White, and other racialized parents, advocates, social workers, SNAP® program staff, community organizations, police officers, educators, and mental health practitioners. The consultations were well received by the community, and the resulting conversations provided substantial insight into the early intervention, prevention, and mental health needs of children, youth, and families from communities across southern Ontario.

Participants identified numerous issues that they felt may cause and/or contribute to Black children engaging in behaviours that can be considered disruptive. They also provided a range of recommendations to address the identified issues. Both the issues and recommendations are summarized in this section.

4.1 Anti-Black racism and labeling of Black children

Anti-Black racism was a central theme at each of the community consultations, with participants noting that anti-Black racism continues to be experienced by Black children, youth, and families in a variety of settings and in numerous ways. They shared their perceptions that ongoing experiences of anti-Black racism, which are embedded in the criminal justice, child welfare, education, and health care systems, have created a deep sense of mistrust of these systems.

As such, some participants were quick to challenge the labeling of Black children as exhibiting “disruptive” behaviours. Throughout each of the consultations, participants questioned *who* was defining the behaviours of Black children as disruptive. They shared their concerns that Black children are often identified as disruptive, particularly in the school system, as a way of pushing Black children out of school. They noted that Black children are often described in harsher terms than White children, and even when they are engaged in the same behaviours as White children, Black children are seen as aggressive, threatening, and “disruptive.” As one participant noted:

Our children are hyper-punished and hyper-labeled, when our kids do the same things that other kids do they often get labeled disruptive.

Participants found the term disruptive to be cloaked in the uneven power dynamics and cultural racism that routinely describes the behaviours of White people as the norm and problematizes the behaviours of Black people. As such, it advantages White

people and White norms over the experiences of racialized people, in particular African Canadians. They also noted that normal cultural behaviours by Black people are seen as disruptive because of the stereotypes associated with Black people. For example, a group of Black youth speaking enthusiastically is thought to be an argument and seen as threatening by a White person. However, a group of White youth engaged in an equally loud conversation would be seen quite differently. Coupled with the hyper-surveillance of Black children and youth, teachers and others will ultimately find problems with the behaviours of Black children, despite similar behaviours engaged in by their White peers.

Participants shared their perceptions that the Black experience in Canada is replete with examples of how Black children, youth, and families are racially profiled by educators, child welfare workers, police, and health care professionals. As such, participants connected the labeling of Black children's behaviours as problematic to the historical and irrational fear held by the dominant society towards Black children, youth, and adults, and the desire for Black people to be compliant and silent in the face of racism. As such, they expressed concern that the labeling of Black children's behaviours as disruptive continues Canada's long history of anti-Black racism, which for Black children creates and reinforces the school-to-prison pipeline.

Instead, community members felt that rather than seeking to "fix" Black children, programs need to address the underlying causes of the disruptive behaviours. This can only begin by first acknowledging and validating the experiences of African Canadian children that might be causing or contributing to the disruptive behaviours. As such, participants felt that any program designed to address "disruptive" behaviours of Black children should also support these children and parents to navigate the systems into which anti-Black racism is baked. As some participants noted:

Our community always gets a healthy dose of disrespect from systems. How do children cope with that?

We need to first start with a program that teaches children and their parents how to challenge the systems of racial inequality in the schools.

They felt that it was unfair to Black children to have to attend a program to address the symptoms of a problem while those causing the problem itself went unchallenged. They also felt it was important for the staff and agencies working with Black children whose behaviours have been labeled as disruptive to engage with the various systems to help change them:

Agencies that are working to assist Black children should participate in advocacy regarding the macro issues of systemic racism within the police, health care, education and child welfare systems.

For participants, long-lasting systemic change — including increasing the number of Black Canadians in leadership roles within these systems and ensuring that mental health practitioners and educators are trained in anti-Black racism, anti-oppression, and cultural safety — will contribute to changing the negative outcomes for Black children, youth, and families.

Participants also felt that White teachers and other school professionals who are in daily contact with Black children need training on anti-Black racism and to better understand the Black community if they are to support positive outcomes for Black children. Participants noted that White teachers and professionals need to be brought into these conversations and must become comfortable with the discomfort that these conversations bring. As a group of White teachers and school administrators shared at one of the consultations:

The guilt associated with the suffering and injustice experienced by Black people creates an environment where it is easy to lose sight of the individual needs of Black students.

Participants of the community consultations offered a number of recommendations to address these concerns:

- Any program meant to deal with the behaviours of Black children that are seen as disruptive must not only deal with the symptoms (i.e., the behaviours labeled as disruptive) but should also identify and address the underlying causes of these behaviours.
- The program needs to help Black children and families recognize, understand, and navigate anti-Black racism.
- Every organization developing and delivering the SNAP® program (including Black-focused agencies) must deliver training to staff and undergo an organizational assessment to ensure that it is inclusive and anti-oppressive. This step will ensure that organizations can provide effective programming to Black children, youth, and families.

- Black children need to better understand what behaviours are appropriate for the school and community setting and which are not; further, they need to understand how and when to code switch.

4.2 “Disruptive” behaviours as a response to anti-Black racism

There were also participants who shared very strong beliefs that the observable behavioural problems exhibited by Black children are in response to, and in defiance of, the anti-Black racism. The community and school settings were identified by participants as places where anti-Black racism thrives and can cause a great deal of harm because of daily and prolonged interactions between staff and Black children. They note that Black children and youth are over-policed in the community and profiled by teachers and administrators in schools. When children or their parents do complain about this treatment, they feel they rarely have their complaints addressed.

Others point to the anti-Black racism exhibited by White and other racialized children, which might also impact the behaviours of Black children. In one consultation, a community member shared that Muslim children were told “You don’t belong here” and “Take off your hijab, you’re in Canada now.” They noted that this treatment, particularly when it goes unaddressed by teachers and other adults in the school, can cause children to feel angry and hurt, which can then be exhibited as aggression.

Further, Black children’s frustration with how they are treated within their community and schools can also lead to defiant behaviours in an attempt to assert some agency over their circumstances. In other cases, Black children can behave in ways that confirm the stereotypes that they believe others hold of them. For example, if they believe that they are seen as “threatening” and that teachers are afraid of them, they can become aggressive and threatening.

Some shared concerns about the racism of low expectations and how that can manifest in disruptive behaviours in the school system. For example, Black children who are gifted and are not seen as such by their teachers will be bored in class. They may then engage in behaviours that are disruptive. In addition, Black children are over-represented in behavioural and special education classes, even when they have not been diagnosed as such. The resulting boredom displayed by Black children — coupled with a curriculum that is not culturally relevant and White teachers who don’t know how to engage with these children — can all lead to behaviours that are seen as disruptive.

Participants shared their concerns that the behaviours labeled as disruptive can then simply be a coping mechanism used by Black children in response to their daily experiences of anti-Black racism and other forms of oppression. Unfortunately, for some Black children their acts of resistance are quickly labeled as problematic.

Facing the threat of anti-Black racism and Islamophobia everyday makes the children become angry and hurt. Sometimes all that hurt and anger comes out as aggression.

Sometimes the thing being called disruptive behaviour – is not disruptive – but, rather just a means of survival in dealing with the daily microaggressions of anti-Black racism.

The effects of anti-Black racism are closely related to the observable behavioural problems that are impacting Black children, particularly in the classroom and community settings.

Disruptive behaviours carry with it such negative connotations, but what if the behaviour is justified?

They felt that dealing with the disruptive behaviours in isolation of the systems with which Black children and families interact was not going to be effective in the long term. They felt that a program such as SNAP® would not be effective if the anti-Black racism, poverty, and other stressors in the children's lives were also not addressed. Participants noted that along with addressing the mental health and early intervention needs of Black children, structural and systemic anti-Black racism must also be addressed:

It is crucial to look at the power of institutions, and hold them accountable for how they label and treat our children.

Some participants pointed out that asking children to modify their behaviours while leaving them exposed to everyday racism and oppression can cause long-term damage. As some participants shared:

Rather than focusing on the labeling of children as disruptive, it would be worthwhile to address the underlying issues and resulting consequences of anti-Black racism that appear to predispose Black children to being labeled as disruptive.

Programs that target kids for being aggressive is just a further extension of labeling, programs need to look at the underlying issues of anti-Black racism.

Participants also raised the need for Black parents to better understand and navigate the education system. They noted that the inability of the parents of Black children to navigate the education system leaves Black children exposed to unchecked anti-Black racism. They noted that Black parents often don't have the knowledge, resources, time, and understanding of the education system to intervene. They also noted that immigrant parents come from countries in which the education system played a vastly different role. As such, parents were able to send their children to school and not question whether they were learning, and not even consider that they would not have the same educational experience as their peers because of the colour of their skin. As such, parents don't understand the need for parental engagement with Ontario's education system. As one person noted:

In our community, we send our children to school and it is the teacher's job to educate them. Some parents have never gone to a parent-teacher interview because they don't understand the need to.

Others shared other factors that contribute to the disengagement of Black parents with their children's schools. They noted that schools are not always the most welcoming places for Black parents. In addition, they noted that parents, particularly immigrant parents, may feel intimidated by the system itself. There was further concern that when teachers contact parents only when there was a problem, rather than taking the initiative to develop a relationship with the parents from the beginning of the school year, also set the stage for an adversarial relationship and the parent's further disengagement from the school system.

Participants of the community consultations offered a number of recommendations to address these concerns:

- Program facilitators should work with schools to ensure that issues negatively impacting Black children at school are identified and addressed, including anti-Black racism from teachers and bullying from peers.
- SNAP® practitioners must become skilled at engaging teachers and school administrators in effective conversations about anti-Black racism within the school setting.
- Parents should be supported to understand the education system and how to appropriately engage with teachers and administrators.
- Program facilitators need to establish a working relationship with schools and the larger community.

- Because schools are often not safe spaces for Black children, facilitators of the SNAP® program need ensure that they create spaces that are culturally safe for Black children, youth, and families from all backgrounds and identities, including Black children who are LGBTQ+, Muslim, and newcomers.

4.3 Limited access to, and distrust of, mental health services

Participants acknowledged that the behaviours labeled as disruptive could also be indicators of underlying mental health issues and that there is a lack of culturally appropriate mental health supports and early intervention for behavioural issues for Black children and youth. Instead, participants noted, these children tend to be pushed out of schools and into the criminal justice system.

Participants shared concerns that anti-Black racism is within the very system that is supposed support the mental health of children. They also noted that when parents are able to access child mental health and behavioural intervention services, there seems to be a limited number of Black staff, and those who are not Black are unable to deliver services in a culturally appropriate manner. As such, Black children often don't receive the full benefit of these programs. As one participant noted:

Even if you do get through a lengthy waitlist for services, you are likely to encounter a White social worker with little to no training on cultural sensitivity and anti-Black racism.

Numerous participants echoed this sentiment, pointing to the structural and systemic racism that have led to an under-representation of Black teachers, clinical staff, and others in positions of leadership and authority. While they supported the delivery of the SNAP® program through Black-focused community agencies with Black staff, they wondered about the experience of Black children who access services through mainstream agencies:

How inclusive and anti-oppressive are the organizations that are using the SNAP program?

Concern was also shared about the historical and present-day racism experienced by Black children, youth, and families at the hands of professionals working in agencies and public institutions, which has created and maintained the mistrust of these institutions. The result is a great deal of hesitancy in engaging with these systems to address issues, particularly those related to mental health or behavioural issues in Black children.

There is no trust. When you go to programs for help you are made to feel like a criminal; it blocks you from wanting to be free to talk about your issues.

There is a lack of trust in the school systems that are bringing behavioural concerns to the parents. How can parents trust a system that they know has been oppressive and racist?

In addition, participants noted that once a child has been identified as needing support for behavioural issues, they found it challenging to access mental health and early intervention services because of the location of these services. They noted that the mainstream services being offered were not located in the areas that had high concentrations of Black families. For these families, these services are difficult to access, particularly in the suburban areas outside of Toronto and particularly if the family relies on public transit. They felt that culturally appropriate programs need to be easily accessible by locating them in the Black community.

For those outside Toronto, they also identified the dearth of Black-focused social service agencies in these regions:

It is hard to find counsellors and mental health workers that are of African descent; there is no Jamaican Canadian Association or Tropicana in Durham and other bedroom communities—where do we go to access culturally responsive supports?

Participants of the community consultations offered a number of recommendations to address these concerns:

- There is a critical need to hire not just Black facilitators and clinicians, but Black professionals who have a good understanding of anti-Black racism and trauma.
- The programs should maintain a list of Black therapists and culturally relevant programs that parents can be referred to should underlying mental health and other issues be identified.
- Programs need to be offered in spaces that are easily accessible by the Black community, and accessible by public transit.

4.4 Stigma associated with accessing mental health services

At each of the community consultations, participants raised stigma as a significant challenge in getting the Black community to access mental health and behavioural intervention programs and services. They were concerned that accessing these

programs could further label and stigmatize their children in the education system. Participants also noted that many families do not want to “air their dirty laundry” to professionals and mental health practitioners because of the negative repercussions such disclosure may have. This was a significant hurdle that they felt agencies needed to overcome if they are to encourage parents to enroll their children and engage themselves in the SNAP® program.

Participants of the community consultations offered recommendations to address these concerns:

- To get buy-in from parents, the program should not be promoted as a program for “troubled children” but as a program that will “help children do better in life.”

4.5 Need for culturally appropriate, trauma-informed programming

Many participants expressed their view that existing mental health and early intervention programs apply a “one size fits all” or “colour-blind” approach to service delivery. Not only do the resources used not reflect the Black community, the programs do not consider the history of intergenerational trauma, including slavery, colonization, immigration, and present-day racism, all of which inform the Black experience.

They also expressed concern that when the Black community is served by mainstream programs, the community is seen as a homogenous group and the rich diversity within the community ignored.

Further, when programs and services are offered through a trauma-informed lens, participants noted that it is often through a Eurocentric lens that defines traumatic experience as being limited to death, accidents, sexual abuse, etc. This approach excludes structural, systemic, and interpersonal anti-Black racism as trauma.

Throughout the consultations, participants shared that the history of intergenerational trauma continues to impact Black families. Participants felt that this trauma is made worse by present-day experiences of forced migration, poverty, as well as the daily effects of structural, systemic, and interpersonal racism experienced by Black children, their families, and their communities. They felt that these experiences of historical and present-day trauma contribute to mental health issues, ineffective coping strategies, and internalized oppression, all of which can be labeled as disruptive behaviours.

Participants of the community consultations offered recommendations to address these concerns, including:

- Programming must be culturally relevant and needs to consider the diversity of cultures and experiences within the Black community.
- The program should address intergenerational and present-day trauma experienced by Black children and their families.
- Program facilitators should understand that the diversity within the Black community can lead to conflict, as in any community. They should be prepared to address any conflict within the group, including cultural differences, shadism, classism, homophobia, Islamophobia, etc.
 - The program should take a strengths-based approach to avoid stigmatizing children who participate in the program. It should recognize and build on the strengths and resilience of Black children, families, and communities.
 - With gender-specific groups in the SNAP® program, program facilitators need to consider how to create inclusive spaces for trans children and those who are gender nonconforming.

4.6 Need to create a strong racial identity

Throughout the consultations participants described the constant negative and anti-Black messages that children receive every day. They also noted that the school curriculum does not include Black history and that many Black children may not even have a Black teacher throughout their school careers, even in the Greater Toronto Area.

Participants felt the SNAP® program needs to help Black children build a strong racial identity to counter the negative messages they receive on a daily basis. The program should ground children in a strong sense of who they are to help them reject the negative messages they are bombarded with on a daily basis in their schools and communities, and also through music, television, and movies.

Participants of the community consultations offered recommendations to address these concerns, including:

- All program materials should use positive images that reflect Black children and their families.

- The program should operate through an Africentric or Black-focused lens and ground the participants in their common African ancestry and blackness. It should raise their consciousness about issues of anti-Black racism, instil a positive racial identity, and deal with internalized racism.
- The activities offered by the program should be used as a way for Black children from across the diaspora to connect to one another and the larger Black community through the use of drumming, rapping, and other forms of cultural expression.

4.7 Poverty

While participants observed that there are members of the Black community who are faring well both economically and socially, they noted that the high rate of unemployment and underemployment within the Black community — the result of structural racism — contributes to behaviours among Black children that may be labeled as disruptive.

They shared their perception that disruptive behaviours among African Canadian children may be symptoms of the chronic poverty in which they could be living. Poverty results in an inability of parents and/or caregivers to meet the social and emotional needs of children. Further, they noted that poverty limits the options for parents to access the interventions needed to address their children's issues.

Participants of the community consultations offered recommendations to address these concerns:

- Locate the Black-focused SNAP® programs in areas in which there is a large Black community and at a site that is easily accessible by public transit.
- Offer the program in libraries, churches, community centres, or other sites that are more accessible to Black communities.
- Provide bus tickets to ensure those living in poverty are able to attend programs.
- Cover the cost of or provide childcare so that families with other children are able fully engage in the program.
- Ensure programs are scheduled at times that are accessible for parents who have long commutes or who may work multiple jobs.

4.8 Single-parent households

In all consultation sessions, participants noted that single parents struggle to raise their children because of inadequate community or social supports, which can contribute to disruptive behaviours in children. As participants noted:

A lot of children stay at home alone, taking care of siblings while their parent works. Without adequate adult supervision for guidance and emotional support the children struggle to deal with the challenges of anti-Black racism.

There is an absence of positive role models, especially men, and so the kids look to mass media and other male figures in their community — and not all of them are positive role models for Black and African Canadian children.

Along with the recommendations already offered, participants added this recommendation to address these concerns:

- Hire Black men as facilitators and clinicians to serve as positive role models.

4.9 Parenting styles

Participants shared some concerns about the parenting component of the SNAP® program and felt that it needs to recognize and honour Black parenting styles. They felt that it was important to recognize that firm parenting styles are the result of intergenerational trauma, but they are also a way to try keep Black children safe in an unsafe world. They wondered about how the parenting program is being framed for Black parents. As one person noted:

To say that it is to “improve” parenting is insulting. I know my mother would never attend a program described that way.

Participants of the community consultations offered recommendations to address these concerns:

- Ensure that the program honours parents as the experts.
- Allow parents to give input into and feedback about the program.
- The program needs to understand, recognize, and honour different parenting styles while supporting these parents to learn new strategies to parent in the Canadian context.

- Staff need to address the concerns of parents who fear losing their children to the child welfare system if they say or do something “wrong”.

4.10 Immigration and newcomer experiences

The immigration experience was identified as creating and maintaining feelings of otherness, isolation, and marginalization for Black newcomer families. Structural and systemic barriers are woven into Canada’s immigration programs. The programs recruit Black migrants to Canada based on their education, skills, and work experience, yet do not recognize the foreign-earned credentials and work experience of immigrants once they arrive. Participants repeatedly raised this issue throughout the consultations and noted that it negatively impacts the lives of Black children by keeping newcomer families in poverty. They also noted the resulting struggles and stress of long absences from the home, as parents work multiple jobs or far away from home.

In Black newcomer families, language barriers or a lack of comfort in dealing with public institutions can mean that children are required to navigate the complexities of the educational and housing systems for the family. Giving children the responsibility of relaying and disseminating information, and in certain cases advocating for themselves or their siblings, disrupts family dynamics and can undermine the authority of the parents. As one participant noted:

The children become the experts. Parents are going to the children for guidance on navigating the system — often based on language barriers — and it leads to children that are empowered and parents that are disempowered.

Participants noted that the complexities of the immigrant experience in Canada, coupled with the anti-Black racism that is embedded in Canadian society, can cause or exacerbate trauma and mental health issues and create considerable challenges for Black newcomer families. This can then contribute to Black newcomer children displaying behaviours in the school and community settings that become labeled as disruptive. These stressors can undermine parents’ ability to discipline and re-direct children that are displaying behavioural issues at school or in the community.

Participants, and more specifically the parents present at the consultations, expressed the challenge of parenting Black children in the Canadian context. In their experience, living with the constant threat that the child welfare system will apprehend their children reinforced their loss of power. Participants noted that traditional child rearing styles aren’t necessarily appropriate or effective in the Canadian context and that new strategies must be learned:

We cannot discipline our children here in Canada the same way we did back home and now there is a breakdown in the traditional approaches to child rearing.

Behavioural issues need to be addressed, and to do so we must engage the community and ensure that parents, especially those that are newcomers to Canada that have a language barrier, are getting the supports that they need.

Throughout the community consultations, many participants shared their migration experiences and revealed that the experiences of those who migrated voluntarily differed significantly from those who experienced forced migration and came to Canada as refugees. Participants felt that engaging with social service agencies could at times magnify these negative experiences. They felt that the numerous questions asked during the intake process mirrored their experiences with immigration officers and could re-traumatize refugee families. As one participant noted:

Being a new immigrant to Canada was more traumatic for me than the time spent in refugee camps. The memory of how my parents were treated, seeing them powerless has never left me, and for those who have experienced the immigration process, entering public institutions stirs up unwanted memories. The lines of questioning are the same, and so are the feelings that it brings.

Participants of the community consultations offered recommendations to address these concerns, including:

- Programs for parents and interactions with parents who don't speak English should be done in their first language.
- Newcomer parents should be supported to understand how to adapt their parenting style and strategies to the Canadian context.
- Newcomer parents, who may have never experienced anti-Black racism, should be supported to understand anti-Black racism in the Canadian context and the impact it can have on their children.