

I Have Two Strikes Against Me:

I'm Black and
I'm Young

Experiences and Needs of Young Black Canadian Mothers in Toronto

Community-Based and Black-Centered Research



Summary Infographic
for Funders

WHY WE DID IT ?

U.S Research strongly suggests that young Black women:

1. must mother in intense, complex, and intersecting living conditions arising from policies grounded in racism and gendered biases. ^{1,2}

2. are consequently more likely than young White mothers to face adversities associated with young motherhood ^{1,2}

We collaborated with TAIBU to investigate and provide knowledge on the experiences and needs of 13 young Black mothers in the GTA

- For TAIBU to benefit from research expertise needed to develop their community-based knowledge mobilization initiatives for young Black mothers and girls.
- To understand and document the experiences and needs of young Black mothers.

WHAT WE DID ?

1

Process

We co-created and were guided by an intersectional, decolonizing, trauma-informed approach to research.

2

Data Collection

Engaged in 2 one-on-one in-depth interviews focusing on their experiences of growing up in the GTA, and becoming young Black mothers.

Provided photos of their families to guide discussions, and created vision boards depicting their desires for their families.

Engaged in focus groups to recommend programs and policies for enhancing the well-being of young Black mothers.

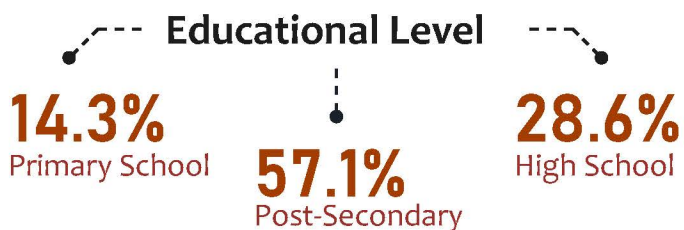
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Data Analysis

Combination of an adaptation of the Listening Guide approach to narrative analysis, and constructivist Grounded Theory.

Qualitative software Atlas.Ti used for both data management and analysis

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

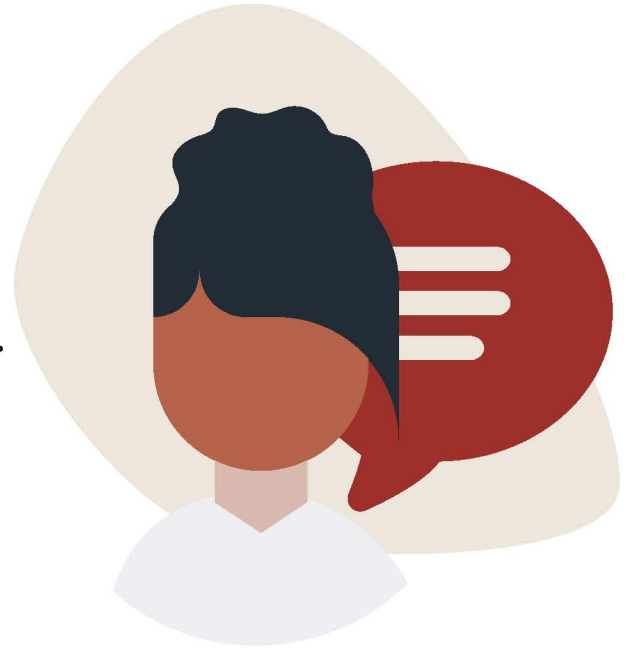


The experiences of young Black Canadian mothers is less understood.



WHAT WE FOUND

Policies grounded in anti-Black racism, xenophobia, & gender inequity gave rise to multiple, intersecting adversities for young Black Caribbean-Canadian girls in their childhood that both set them up for and exacerbated difficulties they faced as young Black mothers trying to care and provide for their families.



Experiences While Growing Up As a Black Girl in Canada

Enduring A Racist Education System

8/13 women were subjected to racist slurs; their reports were dismissed by school authorities

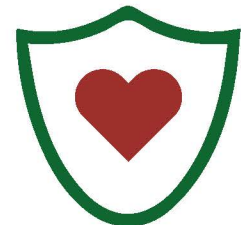
9/13 women encountered inequitable access to learning resources

8/13 women experienced punitive institutional response to racial trauma symptoms instead of psychosocial intervention

Experiencing Inter-generational Trauma

Black Canadian mothers develop parenting such as a strict and structured home environment and “tough love” in response to fear about the certain encounters their children will have with racist and sexist policies and programs⁴.

Given that Black women make significantly less annual average income than non-racialized Canadians participants’ reports of their mothers’ working long hours and often are unsurprising.



6/13 women had mothers who are overly protective and gave tough love to protect them from having similar experiences for as long as they could.



Black women earn **59 cents** on average for every dollar that non-racialized men earn.³

5/13 women had their mothers privileging provisioning at the expense of cultivating a nurturing parental relationship due to tremendous pressure to care and provide for them in the racist, sexist, xenophobic Canadian context.

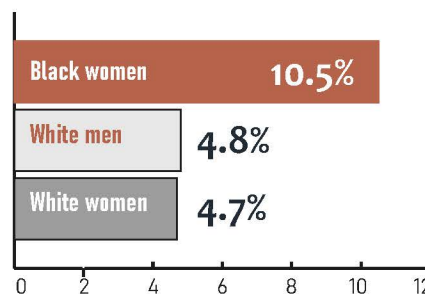


Encountering A Racist Children’s Aid Society

Children from Black families in Ontario are **40%** more likely to be investigated by CAS compared to those from White families, even though they are not neglected or abused at a higher rate than White children, and Black children are more likely to be removed from their homes during these investigations⁹.



As children, **7/13** of the women’s families were Investigated by Children’s Aid Society



One of the highest rates of working poverty is among Black women⁵.



Immigrants to Canada must demonstrate that they can support their family for three to twenty years depending on the age and the relationship of the person to be sponsored⁶.

Childcare services in Ontario have historically been insufficient, and expensive even for families who are eligible for government subsidies.⁷ This situation differentially impacts Black families as Black women are among the most impoverished in Canada.

The Canadian immigration policy makes it difficult for immigrant mothers to bring in and benefit from their family networks as an alternative for child care. Participants indicated that their parents did not have an alternative to formal child care while they worked due to loss of their kin networks through immigration.

Because Black Caribbean persons account for the largest of persons living in poverty in Ontario^{5,8} Canada’s immigration policy differentially acts as a barrier, preventing them from bringing their families of origin with them and denying them tangible benefits such as support for childcare, that would come with this family network.

2

Impacts of Growing up In a Racist, Sexist, Xenophobic System



5/13 women reported receiving mental health diagnoses of depression and anxiety that they connected to these experiences.



8/13 women reported engaging in self-harming, aggressive and sexually and physically risky behaviors in response to their experiences.



Disengagement from school-most mothers (**9/13**) had initially dropped out of high school before becoming pregnant; motherhood motivated them to further their education

The cumulative impact of dealing with these racist, xenophobic challenges while growing up was **Racial Stress**, defined as the mental health effects of experiencing and witnessing racism for Black and other racialized persons, and is exacerbated for those with intersecting social identities.

3

Experiences Becoming a Young Black mother in Canada

Stigmatization

All **13** of the women were stigmatized by the community and their families.

No Use of Any Form of Contraception

11/13 women were not using any form of contraceptive leading to pregnancy.

Challenges Experienced As Young Black Mothers in Canada

4

Mental Health Impacts of Motherhood



8/13 women said untreated life-long racial stress was exacerbated by motherhood.

“

Type of anxiety that comes through me because this is s**t I had to go through... I was thinking about what if Children’s Aid looks at me as being 16 and pregnant and they want to take my kid away from me.

”

13/13 women experienced postpartum depression.

Mothering in Unsafe, Inappropriate Spaces

13/13 women said that due to their childhood experiences, they were aware of encountering racism as Black mothers & this intensified their mental health struggles.

13/13 women shared that while they reached out to formal mental health and medical services for support coping, racism, discrimination, and White privilege in the various contexts of services constrained their access to resources needed to care for themselves and their children.

9/13 women’s stories highlighted how the impact of racial trauma in childhood shaped if and how they engaged with services for themselves and their children; this in turn prolonged and exacerbated their mental health challenges, especially post-partum.

“

I guess working with people or having supports from people who are not of colour, it’s too much for me to explain. Like I already have so much stuff going on and then to explain to you one of my Black girl struggles, it’s just a lot.

”

Economic Barriers

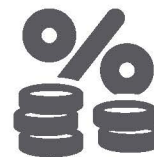
As Black Caribbean Canadian mothers, participants would be unable to benefit from the cultural tradition of having their own mothers assist with childcare. Participants' mothers (those still alive and/or in contact with their daughters) were employed full-time due to the inequities in pay that Black Caribbean Canadian female immigrants experience as well as the fact that their daughters having a child as a teenager meant that they were still young enough to be a part ⁸ of the workforce.



9/13 women dealt with the predicament of insufficient child care spaces, that they can even barely afford with a subsidy when one does become available.



9/13 women do not receive maternity or parental leave benefits



9/13 women have OSAP repayment rates which outpace their earning potential and expenditures as young mothers

“
The type of work that I was basically qualified to do did not necessarily happen within the hours of 07:00 and 18:00. So even if I went back to that job, who's watching my kid?
”

Mothering without Fathers

“
It was like alcohol abuse issues, his own mental health issues, like abuse from his mom that he's dealing with and it was like then he started to abuse me so it's like it just escalated to another – I guess another form of toxic behaviour, yeah.
”

However, our research did not explore fathers' perspectives on why they were not caring for, nor financially providing for their children. The women's description of their children's fathers suggests that they were caught up in unaddressed mental health issues from their own cycles of racism, low education levels, drug use, violence in families and communities.

10/13 women mothered with no or little support from child's father.



5

Young Black Mothers' Vision for their Families

The lives that participants envisioned for themselves reflect those desired by many mothers of other races and ethnicities. The key difference is that young Black women encounter unique structural and systemic barriers to achieving this vision.



What I hope or what I've been dreaming about anyway, for a while is being independent... I want to make my own money.



Financial Stability



Mental Health
Welbeing



Healthy Family
Relationships



WHAT WE PROPOSE

Given the distinctive, intersecting barriers faced by young Black mothers, there is a need for dedicated program tailored to meet their unique needs; no such program exists in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA).

Program Approach

Culturally grounded

Anti-racist

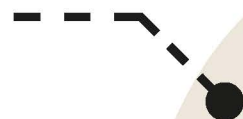
Trauma-informed

Intersectional

Decolonizing

Anti-oppressive

Individually tailored



Program Components

Financial Support & Empowerment

- Secondary school curriculum tuition
- Academic & Career counsellor appointments/drop in
- Business development, management and marketing classes
- Financial management classes
- Job readiness preparation
- OW Appointments/drop in
- Resource board
- Housing Support
- Appointments
- Food bank
- Clothing bank

Mental Health Care

- Short & Long-term Individual therapy
- Ongoing Psychoeducational groups
- Ongoing Family therapy
- Crisis intervention

Parenting Support & Empowerment

- Parenting for anti-Black racism support group
- Mommy & me groups
- Child development classes
- Licensed Daycare
- Licensed Respite care
- Educational Advocacy
- Family Mediation & Legal Support
- Child Welfare Support

Policy Advocacy

- Representative on key municipal & provincial committees
- Provide Training on integrating EDI in key policies

Medical Clinic

- Appointments Walk In

Program Outcomes

Needs Reflected in Socioeconomic Policies

Parenting Competence

- Knowledge of Child development
- Access to safe, accessible child care
- Access to respite care
- Access to support navigating educational system for children
- Access to support navigating family court

Needs Reflected in Social Service Design & Delivery

Financial stability

- Income security
- Transportation
- Housing & food security

Physical health

- Access to Pregnancy and postpartum, Pediatric,
- Family, Dental, Optician, Dermatologist, & Nutritionist Care



DO YOU WANT MORE INFORMATION ON THIS?

Read the full report online at: www.taibuchc.ca/en/YoungMothersProject

FOOTNOTES

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