

**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 Policy Makers

# 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. <sup>1,2</sup>

2. are consequently more likely than young White mothers to face adversities associated with young motherhood <sup>1,2</sup>

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.

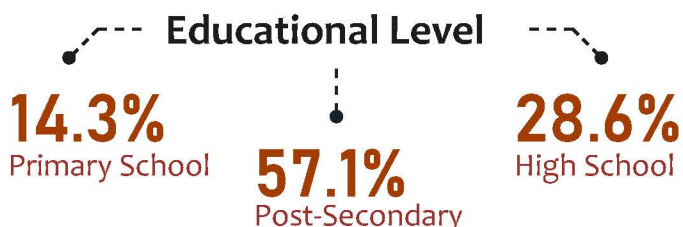
3

## 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



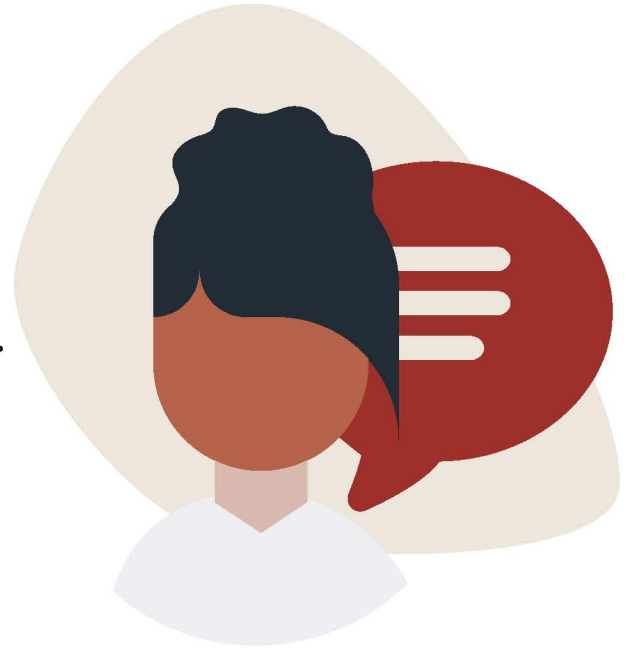
The experiences of young Black Canadian mothers is less understood.





# 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

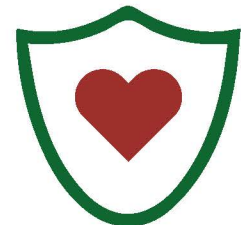
**9/13** women encountered inequitable access to learning resources

**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 programs<sup>4</sup>.

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.<sup>3</sup>

**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.

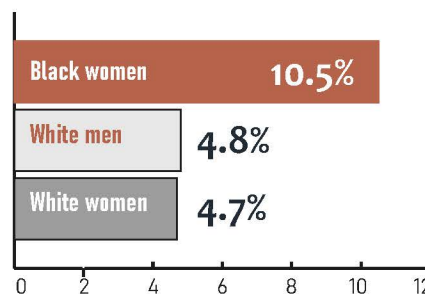


## Encountering A Racist Children’s Aid Society

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 investigations<sup>9</sup>.



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 women<sup>5</sup>.



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 sponsored<sup>6</sup>.

Childcare services in Ontario have historically been insufficient, and expensive even for families who are eligible for government subsidies.<sup>7</sup> 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<sup>5,8</sup> 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



## 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

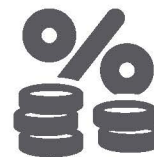
As Black Caribbean Canadian mothers, participants would be unable to benefit from the cultural tradition of having their own mothers assist with childcare. Participants' mothers (those still alive and/or in contact with their daughters) were employed full-time due to the inequities in pay that Black 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 <sup>8</sup> 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

## 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 RECOMMEND

Anti-Black racism influences both how service providers interact with young Black mothers and the policies that guide these interactions; this exacerbates the stress already associated with motherhood, and further constricts the participants' individual capacities to successfully care and provide for their families and deal with the emotional and material fallout of previous adversities produced by structural racial oppression. These specific barriers must be targeted.

## Mental health supports

Amend the Ontario Mental Health Act (and associated legislation) and the Ontario Health Protection & Promotion Act to mandate medical and mental health services in Canada to offer culturally grounded, anti-oppressive, trauma-informed, anti-racist, decolonizing services to young Black girls and mothers

## Education

Alter educational policies to more equitably allocate educational resources, provide anti-racist training for teachers and staff at schools, and instill processes that empower Black students to safely report microaggressions from peers and staff and have perpetrators held accountable.

## The Family Sponsorship Program

Ensure that the program account for the socio-cultural and economic contexts within which Black Caribbean and other immigrants who are similarly socially located function when they arrive in Canada.

## Ontario Works

Increase the income threshold for young Black mothers coming off OW to better account for income inequalities faced by Black Canadian women and to reflect current child raising costs and challenges, including securing childcare.

## Children's Aid Society (CAS)

Ensure CAS workers to give greater consideration to the realities of immigrant life, such as the loss of kinship networks and childcare support and racialized structural barriers, income inequities, elevated childcare costs, and lack of childcare spaces.

## OSAP

Ensure OSAP offers grants or reduced loan repayment rates based on actual earnings or earning potential.

## Parental benefits

- Make a case for federal government for a 'mixed system' of parental benefits (maternity leave, parental leave, and paternity leave).
- Convince the Ontario government to remove marginalizing requirements (e.g. the requirement to complete 13 continuous weeks of employment in a year to qualify for job-protected parental leave)

## Childcare

- Advocate for additional childcare spaces and more flexible hours of operation to accommodate more mothers' work and school schedules.
- Make more childcare spaces available to Black families, especially to young Black mothers.







## DO YOU WANT MORE INFORMATION ON THIS?

Read the full report online at: [www.taibuchc.ca/en/YoungMothersProject](http://www.taibuchc.ca/en/YoungMothersProject)

### FOOTNOTES

Silver, L. (2008). The politics of regulation: Adolescent mothers and the social context of resiliency. *Voices*, 8(1), 1-11.

Kulkarni, S. J., Kennedy, A. C., & Lewis, C. M. (2010). Using a risk and resilience framework and feminist theory to guide social work interventions with adolescent mothers. *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services*, 91(3), 217-224.

Statistics Canada (2016). Census of Population, Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-400-X2016210.

Mullings, D. V., & Mullings-Lewis, R. (2013). How Black mothers “Successfully” raise children in the “Hostile” Canadian climate. *Journal of the Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Involvement*, 4(2), 105-119.

Stapleton, J. (2019). *The Working Poor in the Toronto Region: A Closer Look at the Increasing Numbers*. Metcalf Foundation.  
<https://metcalfoundation.com/site/uploads/2019/11/Working-Poor-2019-NEW.pdf>

Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2021, April 28 ). How long am I financially responsible for the family member or relative I sponsor?  
<https://www.cic.gc.ca/english/helpcentre/answer.asp?qnum=1355&top=14>

Japel, C., & Friendly, M. (2018). *Inequalities in Access to Early Childhood Education and Care in Canada. The Equal Access Study*.

Statistics Canada (2017). Data tables, Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-400-X2016211.

Turner, T. (2016). *One Vision, One Voice: Changing the Ontario Child Welfare System to Better Serve African Canadians. Practice Framework Part 1*. Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Societies.

Comas-Díaz, L., Hall, G. N., & Neville, H. A. (2019). Racial Trauma: Theory, Research, and Healing: Introduction to the Special Issue. *The American Psychologist*, 74(1), 1-5.

Reynolds, T. (2005). *Caribbean mothers : Identity and Experience in the U.K*. Tufnell Press.



This project was part of a wider **Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Insight Grant (435-2014-1623)**.

**Suggested Citation:** Goddard-Durant, S., Doucet, A., Tizaa, H., Sieunarine, J., Moore, K., & Bobwa, P. (2021). *A Report on the Experiences & Needs of Young, Black Caribbean-Canadian Mothers in Toronto*

#### Graphic Design:

Michael Scheianu ([www.fiveline.ca](http://www.fiveline.ca))