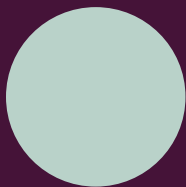


# The Young Black Women's Anti-Racism Insights to Action Project

Community Report

2022



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## **Authors:**

Irene Duah-Kessie, Apefa Adijivon, Nkem Ogbonna, Sumia Ali, Teshyla Bailey, Theresa Sinclair, and Muna Aden.

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# *Introduction*

Black girls and women in Canada often deal with the combined effects of racism and sexism across all parts of society. Young Black women experience challenges in employment and justice. These experiences are often poorly understood and under-recognized within anti-racism efforts.

The Greater Toronto Area is home to the largest proportion (36.9%) of the country's Black population, whereby more than half is comprised of women (51.6%) and those under 24 years make up almost one-third (Statistics Canada, 2019). Research on Black communities have demonstrated that social, economic and health inequities exist, however they rarely capture the unique experiences and perspectives of young Black women. The lack thereof does not only exacerbate the significant barriers experiences, but it also limits the capacity of organizations to respond with effective and sustainable interventions.

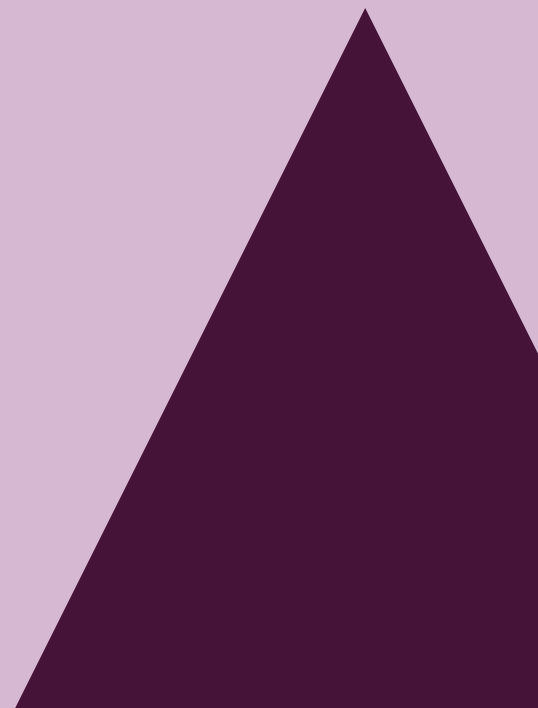




To address this gap, Women's Health In Women's Hands Community Health Centre partnered with young women to undertake the Young African, Caribbean, and Black (ACB) Women's Anti-Racism Insights to Action project, hereafter referred to as Insights to Action. By centering the leadership and voices of ACB women, the primary objective of the Insights to Action project is to improve the employment and justice outcomes for young ACB women by:

- **Leveraging the experience and expertise of young Black women**
- **Generate evidence on the racial and gendered disparities in employment and justice**
- **Develop and implement a knowledge transfer strategy to enhance policies, programs, and services**

This report presents the findings of the research gathered. The first section provides context to the realities of Black women and their communities. The second section provides an overview of the frameworks and methodology used to guide the work. The third section presents the findings of the survey, focus group and interview data. The final section summarizes key learnings, and presents recommendations to governments and organizations.



# *Previous Research*

## *Labour Market Disparities*

The pandemic has shown to have profound effects on the labour market, especially on young people's economic opportunities. Black youth aged 15 to 24 make up twice the employment rate (30.6%) as non-racialized youth (15.6%) (Statistic Canada, 2011). Previous work demonstrates that many factors impact youth unemployment among Black youth including, lack of network, supportive adults, ineffective employment services, and therefore limited knowledge of, and access to available job opportunities (St.Stephen's Community House & Access Alliance, 2016; Turcotte, 2020).

Trends over the past decade has shown that Black women earn significantly lower than Black men and their non-Black counterparts; whereby they earn 66 cents and 83 cents for every dollar non-racialized man and woman earn, respectively (Block et al., 2019). Black women are also overrepresented in lower paying occupations including food and beverages handlers, social services and underrepresented in professional, managerial and technical occupations (Gibbs, 1997; Block & Galabuzi, 2014). Despite Black women striving to achieve higher education, studies have shown Black women with graduate degree still experience unemployment at higher rate than white men without higher education (Torczyner, 2016). Evidence also shows that there is a lack of investment in business development supports for Black women impeding efforts for upward socio-economic mobility (FoundHers, 2021).



## *Education Disparities*

Education is widely understood as a critical determinant of career readiness and protective factor against contact with the justice system. Data has shown that Black students more likely to be streamed into lower-achieving pathways, less likely to be identified as gifted and graduate, compared non-Black students (TDSB, 2017; Jame & Turner, 2017).

Racial differences in achievement gaps have been attributed to 'zero-tolerance' school policies, which gives teachers and principals authority and discretion to exert harsh penalties for "subjective" offenses, such as suspension for weapon for bringing a nail file to school (Bhattacharjee, 2003). Although the Ontario education system has removed streaming practices and zero tolerance policies, data shows majority of students expelled and suspended are Black (Rankin et al, 2013; TDSB, 2017).





For young Black women, these subjective offensives are said to be intertwined by historical and contemporary stereotypes about Black femininity and imagery associated with Black womanhood. Studies show Black girls are disproportionately disciplined for qualities such as being too loud, “ghetto”, disrespectful, uncontrollable, defiant (Blake et. al., 2011; Nolan, 2011). These cultural narratives and biases have and continue to undergird the interpretations and perceptions of Black girls’ behaviours. A phenomenon known as adultification defines ways Black children are perceived as older than they are, and has proven to impact Black girls as young as 5 years old, especially in schools (Esptein et. al, 2017).

Many argue this framework does not accurately reflect in experiences of Black girls because the term ‘prison’ is often associated with boys and men, as girls are not often in prison, but rather group groups, detention centers, home subversions and other conditions of restriction (Morris, 2015; Blake, 2016; Hill, 2018; Hardaway et. al, 2019). Morrie (2015) suggests the term “school-to-confinement pathway” as a more appropriate term to describe the unique experiences Black girls (Morris, 2015).

The link between punishment in school and subsequent contact with the justice system is commonly understood as the “school-to-prison”, which describes the collection of policies and practices that facilitate the criminalization of youth in school and this process increases chances to contact the justice system (Morris, 2015). Many argue this framework has does not accurately reflect in experiences of Black girls because the term ‘prison’ is often associated with boys and men, as girls are not often in prison, but rather group groups, detention centers, home subversions and other conditions of restriction (Morris, 2015; Blake, 2016; Hill, 2018; Hardaway et. al, 2019). Morrie (2015) suggests the term “school-to-confinement pathway” as a more appropriate term to describe the unique experiences Black girls (Morris, 2015).

### *Justice Disparities*

Many scholars have noted the dearth of quality research in Canada on the female youth justice population (Hutton & Woodworkth, 2014), as well as the intersectional vulnerabilities, particularly race, disability, immigration status etc. Evidence shows that female youth currently make up a quarter of the youth juvenile system, where Black women are the second largest group following young Indigenous women (Malakieh, 2017). Toronto Police Services data also show that the overall charge rate for Black women is 2.4 times greater than white women and 6.2 times greater than racialized women (Wortley & Jung, 2020).



Several American studies show that most Black girls are committed for low-level offences that are often linked to their victimization such as fighting back after being physically assaulted or running away from an abusive home (Lopes & Nuño, 2016; Green, 2016). A study in Maryland found that Black girls are five times more likely to be referred to the justice system than white girls and committed 25% longer than boys, despite girls being less likely to be there for felonies or violent offenses (Green 2016). Another study also shows Black girls were 10 times more likely to be referred to police, and those with a disability were among the largest group referred (Goodkind, 2019). Million-dollar investments have also been made to improve services and

conditions within juvenile justice systems, however these efforts have focus on boys of colour, neglecting the needs of Black girls (Crenshaw, 2015). *There is a double standard where Black girls are punished and criminalized for their responses to abuse, yet society and its systems lack the supports and services to deal with circumstances they have no control over.*

A number of underlying causes for youth violence in Ontario has been identified, which includes poverty, racism, community design in programs, issues in education system, family challenges, health, lack of youth voices, lack of economic opportunity, poor interactions with police and justice system (Curling, 2008). Discussions in this report on family centered Black boys and their fathers and not girls, despite studies showing that family is a unique risk and protective factor to girls, as they tend to have stronger connections than boys (Zahn et. al, 2010). For young Black women their relationships with family, peers, teachers, police and various institutions are impacted by the distinct cultural and historical narratives associated with Black womanhood previously mentioned, and further demonstrates how trauma histories within home, schools and community are correlated with involvement in justice system (Holsinger & Holsinger, 2005; Quinn et al., 2020).



## ***Filling the Gap: Why Insights to Action Project?***

While few Canadian studies have been conducted on racial differences in educational, employment, and justice outcomes among youth, the existing research heavily lacks the perspectives and experiences of young Black women. Current studies on justice-involved female youth often lack a racial lens and overall efforts for Black youth rarely account for gender and intersecting identities. As the Black Canadian population continues to grow, there is a cause for concern because Black girls and women are being left at the margins of anti-Black racism discussions, as such their unique experiences and pathways to poorer outcomes remain unaddressed. In the study presented throughout this paper, we explore the employment and justice experiences of Black women, aged 16-29, in the Greater Toronto Hamilton Area. The study attempts to address the following research questions:

- 1. What challenges and barriers do young ACB women face in hiring, workplace training or leadership development?**
- 2. What are the disparities that young ACB women face with the justice system?**
- 3. What strategies, services or programs can help organizations use to address systemic barriers and disparities in justice and employment?**



# *Methodology*

## Study Design and Recruitment

The project was designed using a community-based approach (Access Alliance, 2012). It was implemented by a team of six young ACB women in the GTA who were meaningfully engaged as co-/peer researchers from the initial phase of the project in identifying issues of interest, developing data collection guides to conducting the research, analyzing data, and knowledge transfer activities. Peers received training in research design, recruitment, data analysis, writing, and advocacy to support their involvement. They were also guided by the Community Advisory Board which comprised of four young ACB women and five academic researchers. Members of the CAB met on a bi-monthly basis to provide advice and direction for the project. Leveraging the expertise of CAB members ensured informed and thoughtful decisions about the framing and content of the data collection guides, analysis, and dissemination products.

The project includes both qualitative and quantitative methodology. The survey, focus group, and interview guides were developed in several collaborative meetings between May-August 2021 and conducted between September 2021 to December 2021. The population of interest for the survey and focus groups were self-identifying ACB women between ages 16-29 years living in the Greater Toronto Hamilton Area. Key informant interviews included young ACB women



and service providers in the employment and justice sectors. Recruitment strategies included community presentations, handout cards, promotional posters, and social media posts. Participants were also recruited through co-researchers' networks, snowball sampling, and across social media platforms. To engage community online, Facebook page, Twitter, and Instagram accounts were established and used to share ongoing posts, as well as, hosting Live chats to promote participation in the study. The survey and consent forms for qualitative methods were distributed on Interceptum, a Canadian online survey and questionnaire platform. Survey participants were also redirected to enter a raffle to win an Uber gift card for every 10 entries. Focus group and interview participants received a \$50 honorarium. The Insights to Action project design was approved by the Community Research Ethics Office (Project #214).



## Theoretical frameworks

The project was guided by the public health critical race praxis (PHCRP), intersectionality and the youth thriving model as analytical and theoretical tools used to inform the analysis, interpretations, and recommendations formed of the data collected.

The PHCRP examines the relationships between racism and health disparities, and ways it operates in one's daily life (Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2010). The 4-step iterative framework is grounded in principles of race consciousness iterative framework (Figure 1). to describe (1) key characteristics of racialization (2) how disciplinary norms influence knowledge production, (3) how to operationalize and illustrate key concepts and findings, and (4) use of data to determine actions to counter inequities.

Intersectionality is one of the principles within the framework, a tool developed by Crenshaw (1991) to convey the different ways race and gender interact to shape the various dimension of Black women's experiences.

**Crenshaw notes that the basis of an intersection results in a newly formed.** The principle centers the focus on conceptualization and measurement to ensure key concepts and findings account for various experiences and conditions.

The Youth Thriving Model was commissioned by the YMCA of Greater Toronto in partnership with the United Way to understand of critical factors that are necessary for adolescent development (Figure 2). The model holds autonomy, relatedness, and competence as the robust factors for positive learning, social and emotional outcomes among youth. These factors allow youth to become more active in coping, relating, and caring for others, and having stronger commitment to learning. The learning, emotional and behavioural outcomes that correspond to each critical factor will be used to guide the development of recommendations.



# Race Consciousness

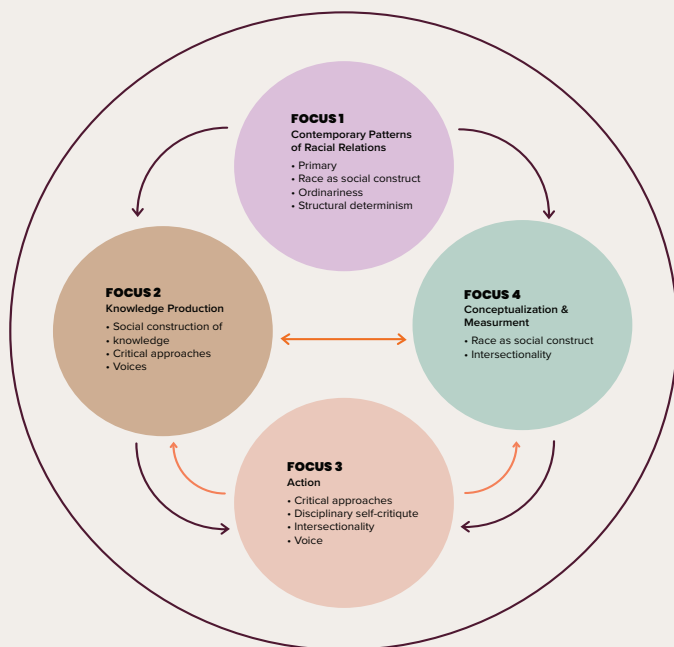


Figure 1. Public Health Critical Race (PHCR) praxis. Race consciousness, the 4 focuses and the 10 corresponding principles (Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2010).

THE YOUNG BLACK WOMEN'S ANTI-RACISM INSIGHTS TO ACTION PROJECT

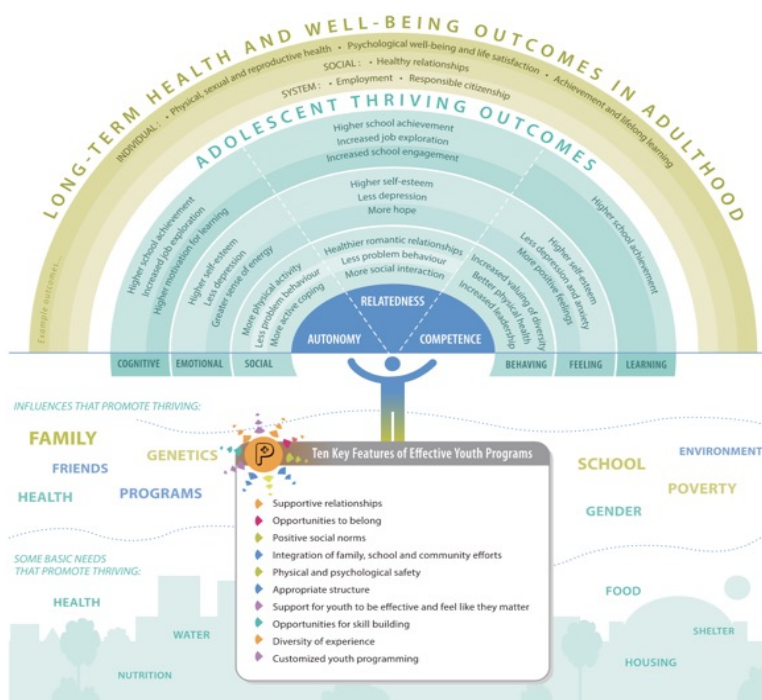


Figure 2. A Youth Thriving Model developed by Khanna et. al (2014) that centers autonomy, relatedness, and competences as for critical factors for thriving.

\* Outcomes listed are examples from studies that passed the standards of evidence test for the literature review. There may be other outcomes that contribute to thriving in adolescence.



## Data Collection and Participants

The online survey was administered on Interceptum. Questions were gathered based on trends in literature, past employment, justice, and educational, health studies, and the team's lived experiences. The survey featured 12 distinct sections: 1) demographics and socio-cultural characteristics 2) employment status, security, and satisfaction 4) training and resources 5) job search and hiring 6) newcomer experiences 7) racism and discrimination 8) education 9) family 10) justice system navigation 11) violence and harassment 12) overall health, which consisted of

skip patterns conditional on various identities and experiences. A total of 182 individuals fully completed in the survey, 102 participated entered the raffle draw, and 10 winners were selected.

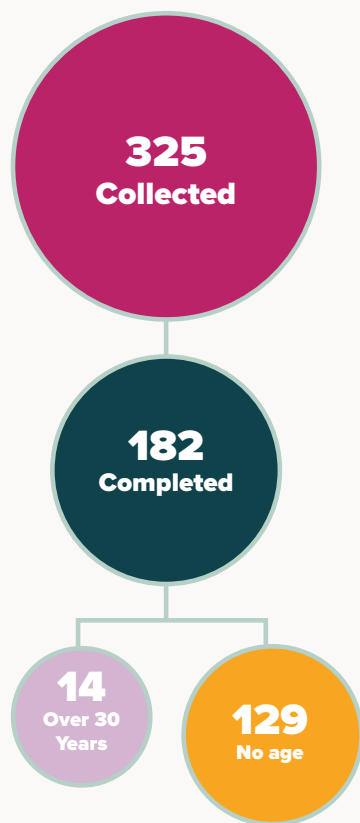
Five focus groups and 12 in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted virtually on Zoom. Three focus groups and 7 interviews centered on employment experiences and 2 focus groups and 5 interviews were on justice. There was a total of 24 focus group participants and 12 key informants, comprised of 6 service providers and 6 young



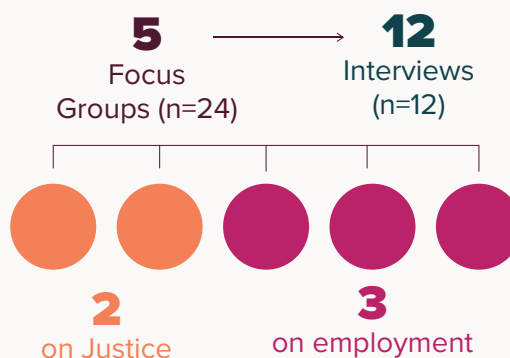


ACB women, however, 2 interviews were excluded for analysis due to technical issues around eligibility. Focus groups and interview centered leadership, education, racism, safety, the justice system, organizational sector gaps, and opportunities. All focus groups and interviews were audio-recorded and ranged in length from 30 mins to 90 mins. Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim using NVivo Transcription and further edited with pseudonyms assigned to names and places to ensure participant anonymity.

**Figure 3:** Survey, Focus Group and Interview Sample



**Figure4:** Focus group and interview sample



### Data Analysis

Focus groups and interviews were analyzed in six main phases, and NVivo software was used in coding the data. In addition to the PCHRP, a five-step hybrid process of deductive and inductive thematic analysis was taken to interpret the data (Bingham & Witkowsky, 2021). A codebook was first developed based on the themes and topics within the literature review and data collection guides. It was used primarily to organize segments of similar or related text to support interpretation (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Second, the reliability of the codebook was tested with two transcripts that were each coded by co-researchers. Very minimal modifications to the predetermined codes were required, though the flexibility to update codes as new ideas emerged was maintained. The initial coding of each transcript followed, where two co-researchers coded each transcript using the code book. Three meetings were held to examine coded text closely to describe key experiences and barriers. The fourth staged involved identifying patterns and more ab-

stract categories via coded data and memos.

The coded transcripts were combined on NVivo to narrow down segments of the data cross-coded, coded by one person and/or coded by none. All coded data was analyzed collectively using hard-copy and virtual sticky notes to categorize and identify themes. Miro Board was the online software used to visualize the relationships between themes. Short phrases were developed to connect findings to existing research and examined how critical race theories, intersectionality, and the youth thriving model explain the key findings.

Descriptive statistics were computed to characterize the demographics of young women (n = 182) who participated in the survey, and their employment, justice, and overall health experiences. Responses that were most salient to the research questions and in alignment with the themes identified were presented in the Tables 1 to 4.

“  
*I think of something as simple as just small programs along confidence and identity and importance of us being in these roles right. And purpose. So taking it can be something as a field trip, taking youth into different environments and making them see how a day in a job of something that they probably desire to be in or intimidate to be.*  
”

# *Key Findings*



## Quantitative Findings

The findings from the survey are organized into four sections: the characteristics of survey participants; the employment experiences; the justice experiences; and the overall health status and access to supports.

As indicated in Table 1, majority of the participants self-identified as Black-Caribbean (36.61%), followed by Black-West African (15.3), Black-North American (13.11) and Black-East African (8.2). Over a 80% of the participants were cis-female, and some participants identified as trans-female (3.6%), non-binary (4.32) and Two-Spirit (2.16). Most participants had either a high school diploma (29.08) and under or an undergraduate degree (27.88).

**Table 1: Socio-Cultural Demographic**

VARIABLE	N (%)	TOTAL RESPONSES (%)
<b>RACE AND ETHNICITY</b>		<b>182 (100)</b>
Black-Caribbean	67 (36.61)	
Black-West African	28 (15.3)	
Black-North American	24 (13.11)	
Black-East African	15 (8.2)	
Black-European	14 (7.65)	
Black-Latinx	14 (7.65)	
Mixed Heritage	6 (3.28)	
Black-South African	5 (2.73)	
Prefer not to answer	1 (0.55)	

<b>GENDER IDENTITY</b>		<b>138 (75.82)</b>
Cis female	117 (84.1)	
Trans female	5 (3.6)	
Non-binary	6 (4.32)	
Two-Spirit	3 (2.16)	
Intersex	2 (1.44)	
Prefer not to answer	7 (5.04)	
<b>EDUCATION</b>		<b>165 (90.66)</b>
Highschool and under	48 (28.09)	
Undergraduate degree	46 (27.88)	
College diploma/certificate	33 (20)	
Trades certificate	18 (10.91)	



Post-graduate degree (Masters & PhD)	20 (12.13)	
<b>DISABILITY</b>		<b>150 (82.42)</b>
Yes	27 (17.88)	
No	122 (80.79)	
Prefer not to answer	2 (1.32)	
<b>HOUSEHOLD INCOME</b>		<b>169 (92.86)</b>
Less than 25 K	42 (24.85)	
25 K - 75 K	31 (18.34)	
75 K - 100 K	30 (17.75)	
100 K +	7 (4.14)	
Do not know	9 (5.33)	
<b>SEXUAL ORIENTATION</b>		<b>150 (82.42)</b>
Heterosexual or Straight	111 (73.51)	
Homosexual or Gay or Lesbian	13 (8.61)	
Bi-sexual	12 (7.95)	
Queer	9 (5.96)	
Questioning	7 (4.64)	
Asexual	4 (2.65)	
Prefer not to answer	5 (3.31)	
Other	2 (1.32)	

Do not know	1 (0.66)	
<b>RELIGION</b>		<b>149 (81.87)</b>
Christianity	74 (49.33)	
No Religion / Atheist	21 (14) / 21 (14)	
Islam	18 (12)	
Hinduism	11 (7.33)	
Buddhism	6 (4)	
<b>CITIZENSHIP</b>		<b>150 (82.42)</b>
Canadian citizen	101 (67.33)	
Canadian citizen by naturalization	26 (17.22)	
Landed Immigrant / Permanent Resident	13 (8.61)	
Refugee	7 (4.64)	
Temporary Worker		
Student Visa	1 (0.66)	

With respect to employment experiences, almost half (48.57) of the participants are employed full-time, and just over a tenth are unemployed. Consistent with the literature most women work in the government, social services (26.67%), public health and health care industries (22.96%), and sales and services (20%). Approximately two-thirds of participants received job-related training and training improved experiences. Race and co-



four (70.18%), national origin (35.09%), gender (29.82%), name (22.81%), age (17.54%), and disability (17.54%) were the top five types of workplace discrimination experienced. Almost half (48.65%) also identified discrimination as the main difficulty for finding work.

**Table 2: Employment Experiences**

VARIABLE	N (%)	TOTAL RESPONSES (%)
<b>EMPLOYMENT STATUS</b>		<b>139 (76.37)</b>
Full-time employment	68 (48.57)	
Part-time, casual, seasonal employment	29 (20.71)	
Unemployed	17 (12.14)	
Self-employed	5 (3.57)	
<b>INDUSTRY OF OCCUPATION</b>		<b>135 (43.41)</b>
Government and Social Services	36 (26.67)	
Public Health and Health Care	31 (22.96)	
Sales and Service	27 (20)	
Business, Finance, Administrative	23 (17)	
Management	17 (12.59)	
Arts, Culture, Sports	16 (11.85)	
Manufacturing and Utilities	12 (8.89)	

Beauty	6.67 (9)	
Natural and Applied Sciences and Engineering	2 (1.48)	
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishery	1 (0.74)	
Other	14 (10.37)	
<b>TRAINING EXPERIENCES</b>		
Received job-related training	70 (69.31)	101 (32.48)
Improved work experience	49 (71.01)	69 (22.19)
<b>WORKPLACE DISCRIMINATION EXPERIENCED</b>		<b>57 (18.33)</b>
Race and Colour	40 (70.18)	
National Origin	20 (35.09)	
Gender	17 (29.82)	
Name	13 (22.81)	
Age	10 (17.54)	
Disability	10 (17.54)	
Religion	9 (15.79)	



Sexual Orientation	8 (14.04)	
<b>DIFFICULTIES FINDING WORK</b>		<b>111 (35.69)</b>
Discrimination	54 (48.65)	
Lack of opportunities	43 (38.74)	
Inexperience	37 (33.33)	

The justice sections of the survey illustrate challenges in childhood and school, navigating the justice system and experiences of harassment and violence. More than half indicated development social and psychological skills and traditional social and family controls as the main childhood challenges.

Referrals to the guidance counselor (23.68), detention (21.05), and transfers to alternative schools (21.05) were the top three experiences of school discipline. Among those involved in the child welfare system (41.1%), school workers such as teachers, guidance counselors (25.5%) and community health workers (25.5%) were also reported to refer young women the child welfare system.

More than half have not been involved with the justice system, however some identified as a witness or victim of crime, or the relative or partner of some accused of crime. Five-percent of participants were youth accused of crime, and five percent expressed involvement in other capacities.

More than half (58%) have reported police discrimination. Race and colour, nationality,

religion, disability, and gender discrimination were the main types experienced navigating justice systems. Interpretation and legal services were the top services indicating barriers for supports.

**Table 3:** Justice Experiences

VARIABLE	N (%)	TOTAL RESPONSES (%)
<b>CHILDHOOD CHALLENGES</b>		<b>74 (23.79%)</b>
Developing social and psychological skills	40 (54.05)	
Traditional social and family controls	37 (50)	
Relationships with family and friends	26 (35.14)	
Continuing education	16 (21.62)	
Running away from home	10 (13.51)	
<b>EXPERIENCES OF SCHOOL DISCIPLINE</b>		<b>76 (24.44)</b>
Referrals to guidance counselor	18 (23.68)	
Detention	16 (21.05)	
Transfer to alternative school	16 (21.05)	
Suspension	13 (17.11)	



Expulsion	5 (6.58)	
Community Service	3 (3.95)	
None of the above	30 (39.47)	
<b>JUSTICE SYSTEM INVOLVEMENT</b>		<b>77 (24.76)</b>
As a victim of crime	13 (16.88)	
As a witness of crime	12 (15.58)	
As a relative and partner of person accused	14 (18.19)	
In other capacity	4 (5.19)	
As youth accused	4 (5.19)	
No involvement	44 (57.14)	
<b>DISCRIMINATION EXPERIENCED IN SYSTEM</b>		<b>29 (9.32)</b>
Race and Colour	13 (44.83)	
National Origin	12 (41.38)	
Religion	6 (20.69)	
Disability	3 (10.34)	
Gender	3 (10.34)	
<b>SERVICE BARRIERS</b>		<b>46 (14.79)</b>

Interpretation	14 (30.43)	
Legal representation	12 (26.09)	
Bail	9 (19.57)	
Accommodations / Accessibility	8 (17.39)	
Experiences of violence or harassment		
Experiences of assault		
Reports to police		

More than half participants self-rated their overall health as very good (38.16%) and good (27.63%). Most participants self-rated their mental health as good (25.97%), followed by fair (24.68%) and very good (20.78%). Majority responded that their sense of belonging to the community is both somewhat strong (36.84%) and somewhat weak (27.63%). Of those employed, most have access to health and dental plans, paid sick and vacation leave, however just one-fifth have access to no benefits (20.18%). Watching movies, walking, eating and therapy were among the top selected coping mechanisms.





**Table 4:** Health and Well-being

VARIABLE	N (%)	TOTAL RESPONSES (%)
<b>SELF-RATED HEALTH</b>		<b>76 (41.76)</b>
Excellent	11 (14.47)	
Very Good	29 (38.16)	
Good	21 (27.63)	
Fair	9 (11.84)	
Poor	6 (7.89)	
<b>SELF-RATED MENTAL HEALTH</b>		<b>77 (42.31)</b>
Excellent	9 (11.69)	
Very Good	16 (20.78)	
Good	20 (25.97)	
Fair	19 (24.68)	
Poor	12 (15.58)	
<b>SENSE OF BELONGING</b>		<b>76 (24.44)</b>
Somewhat strong	28 (36.84)	
Somewhat weak	21 (27.63)	
Very weak	15 (19.74)	
Very strong	9 (11.84)	

<b>ACCESS TO EMPLOYMENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS</b>		<b>109 (59.89)</b>
Health and Dental Plan	38 (34.86)	
Paid Sick, Personal, Educational, Vacation Leave	95 (87.15)	
Other	2 (1.83)	
None of the above	22 (20.13)	
<b>COPING MECHANISMS</b>		<b>76 (24.44)</b>
Watching TV or movies	41 (53.95)	
Walking	39 (51.32)	
Eating	36 (47.37)	
Therapy	31 (40.79)	

## Qualitative Findings

Using the iterative approach of inductive and deductive processes outlined in section 4, six key themes were identified, and 20 findings were identified, which had many overlaps between employment and justice contexts. This section will explore the key themes and sub-themes outlined in Table 5.



**Table 5:** Key Themes and Findings

KEY THEME	FINDINGS
<b>Perceptions and Surveillances</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blackness is often perceived as inferior, threat, ghetto, loud, and aggressive</li> <li>• Black women exhausted from codeswitching</li> <li>• Black women’s appearances and performance are policed and surveilled</li> <li>• Feelings of anxiety when around the police and recognize a poor relationship with black communities</li> </ul>
<b>Discrimination and Isolation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Microaggressions are experienced at the hiring stage and in the workplace</li> <li>• Black Muslim women are consistently facing anti-Blackness and islamophobia</li> <li>• Teachers and administrators are discouraging and neglect the needs and experiences of young women</li> <li>• Experience bullying, feel isolated are hyperaware of stereotypes impacting self-worth and confidence</li> </ul>
<b>Leadership and Advocacy Challenges</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership experiences are too demanding, not appealing, and lead to microaggressions</li> <li>• Positive leadership experiences were those in equity, diversity and inclusion roles and initiatives</li> </ul>
<b>Inadequate Supports</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of appropriate skills training</li> <li>• Newcomer women need supports with transitioning into the Western working culture, language, and access to technology</li> <li>• Holistic supports for well-being centered on Black women’s needs</li> <li>• Supports during the pandemic have been minimal or non-existent</li> </ul>
<b>Gender-Based Discrimination and Violence</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Young Black women are harassed and hypersexualized</li> <li>• Experience domestic and sexual violence impacts mental health and daily experiences of youth offenders</li> </ul>
<b>Organizational Capacity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inadequate training, morale, and representation of staff across staff in social service and justice systems</li> <li>• Need for greater supports and education for young Black women entering adulthood</li> <li>• Financial aid and policies that enable increase access to resources and upkeep of supports</li> <li>• Police officers and the justice system need to develop a better way to connect with students</li> </ul>



## Theme 1: Surveillance and Perception

***Blackness is often perceived as inferior, threat, ghetto, loud, and aggressive,*** and some feel as though you have to conduct a certain way to command respect. When Black women assert themselves it often gets called aggressive and intentions get confused. Co-workers tend to get confused when Black women do not play into their narrative of a Black person. However, others see commanding a level of respect by holding yourself high and accountable can be reaffirming by embodying positive representations of blackness and debunking negative connotations.

*“I think being black a lot of the time, you’ve got to watch your tone because you’re aware of the fact that everything that you say is deemed as aggressive especially when you’re a black woman. And I think black men face this as well in the sense that everything they say is taken as aggressive.”*

***Black women are exhausted from having to codeswitch,*** upholding the strong women’s character, not being unable to show up as themselves. Many have learned to adopt a “white” way of speaking as a protective mechanism in the workplace but would like to sometimes speak casually or in a colloquial way, as they do outside of work. This change in tone, or “mirroring their way” has been viewed to minimize their blackness,

and is exhausting because young women consciously turn on and off as they go to and leave, making the workplace not a safe space for some. Some participants mention avoiding social events outside of work hours due to not feeling part of the collective, and their lack of engagement may be viewed as rude or angry.

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***“It’s needing to be a strong black woman and carry and present yourself a certain way, which is mentally draining and mentally exhausting. It’s taking into account things like maintenance and needing to be educated. But it’s really just needing to carry yourself a certain way so that you can move away from discrimination and the violence that’s perpetrated onto you.”***

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***Black women’s appearances and performance are highly surveilled*** by peers, co-workers, managers, and teachers. Their hair is constantly touched without permission or stereotypically commented on to look a certain way or “professional”. Wearing natural hair is either seen as cool or scrutinized, which can be frustrating and stressful because many are unable to be



free and overthink their hairstyles. Black women's natural bodies are also policed and surveilled, where they are called out for their pants being inappropriate or distracting due to their curvy shape or told to tuck in their back by dance instructors, in comparison to peers who are never questioned. Participants also discussed the animosity and competition experienced by co-workers. When entering a new role, or growing into another position, co-workers monitor schedules, ask questions about assigned tasks, behave as your boss, and become hostile and unsupportive.

*"I felt like sometimes looking a certain way took a toll on my mental health because if my hairstyle looks a certain way someday one person would be like, you look so sophisticated today or you look so pretty today. Then the moment I have my natural hair out, it's like, oh, like what happened? And this is like constantly having that stress it takes a toll on you. It will take a toll on my mental health. Right. And I just I hope, like, one day we get to a place where we can*

*enforce in the workplace to just leave black woman's hair alone and their bodies alone because no one does this to a white woman or like Asian woman"*

***Black women feel anxiety when seeing or being around the police and recognize a poor relationship with black communities historically.*** The police are viewed as having no regard for rules/laws, targeting and profiling young Black women, especially those with previous charges. Being handcuffed as a minor with hands at the back, pulled over for weed without any cause, picked up and questioned on the street for fitting a suspect profile, or asked to give up information on drugs and guns were some of the instances shared where police actively surveilled, target, and scare Black women and have them in contact with the system. Familial involvement in the justice system also tends to have an impact on the experiences of young women and their families, where some move around consistently, fear retaliation and interact with police due to recognition of their family name.

*"So I feel like a lot of us just don't like the police. We don't like seeing the police. It gives me anxiety that I know for sure. Like even if I'm driving and I see a police cruiser like I get anxiety, even though I know I'm not doing anything, I get anxiety because I've been in a situation where I've gotten pulled."*



## Theme 2: Discrimination and Isolation

### *Microaggressions are experienced during the hiring stage and in the workplace.*

Participants shared experiences where hiring managers tend to move from questions about qualifications to questions about their identities. Some discussed using alternative, western-sounding names or selecting ‘Caucasian’ as their ethnicity in job applications to get their foot into the door. In the workplace, many feel mistreated and stereotyped, which does not leave space to be themselves and grow in a company. Instances of management being inappropriate in touching hair, name calling, critiquing for little things, gossiping, not being supportive, and discreetly building reports behind their backs, making them the scapegoat. Many have not reported challenges due to mistrust of human resources. There are few instances of supportive and patient managers that have made young women feel validated, respected, and affirmed.

*“I’ve noticed with management or just with those in leadership positions. Just the way that they approach you in the way that they speak to you, it’s not from a place of sincerity. So you kind of need to be equipped and you need to be alert in the workplace so that you’re not a victim.”*

*“I had an Afro [my manager] sees me called me a streetwalker, basically a hooker on the street because of my hair. I reported it and they didn’t take my cases or my situation serious. I kind of knew that this workplace and HR is not for me, they don’t support me and they don’t really respect the fact that I’m being physically and sexually assaulted by both people”*

**Black Muslim women are consistently facing anti-Blackness and islamophobia** in the workplace and school. They are often questioned about their ethnic and cultural practices, including wearing hijabs, prayers, and perpetuating stereotypes. There is a rhetoric that religious practices can waste company time, however it was noted that the same ideas are not applied to western workplace cultures such as smoking breaks. For Muslim women that are not Black, when they challenge their managers or a co-worker, their tone and what is said is often received differently than from Black Muslim women.





For Black women with natural 4C hair texture, wearing the hijab can be difficult to manage as it looks more puffy than others, leading to more attention. This has been described as embarrassing, weird and contributes to feelings of not fitting in.

*“He also asked me where I’m from. And I said I’m Canadian. And he was like, no, where are your parents from? And I was like, Somali. And then he said I know a lot of Somalis live in Dixon. And now Dixon is just this gang gang place, how do you feel about that? You kind of have to humble the anger inside of you that’s justified in order to not piss off someone who gets to be racist. So that way you get to keep your job and get to continuously bring money home to your family.”*

**Teachers and administrators are discouraging and neglect the needs and experiences of young women.** Many expressed not feeling comfortable with or supported by school staff. They are often labeled as remedial, having a learning disability, and discouraged from pursuing university pathways, whereas later in life many women have come to realize they are intelligent, capable and believe they could be further if they had known their capabilities in high school. Sports are often shoved into Black students’ faces and it is not always of interest to them, some seek extra circulars that reflect their identity and history. Instances of teachers and principals punishing Black girls more harshly than their non-Black counterparts have been shared,

where their side of the story is dismissed and spoken to without respect or dignity. Further, there is a lack of support for transitioning out of post-secondary in the workforce by administrators and educators.

*“She came into the office and he didn’t scream at her. He asked her what happened, what transpired. He spoke to her like she was a human being, but spoke to me like I was like nothing. And that’s something I noticed when it came to teachers and principals that they favor certain type of shade, colour I would say because with me, he gave it to me. He could have he could ask me what happened. He could have sat down to talk to me. He could have tried to figure out, investigate to see who started it, what caused it. And he didn’t do that for me, gave it to me. But with her, he just spoke to her in a polite way.”*

**Black women experience bullying, feel isolated are hyperaware of stereotypes about them,** which has impacted self-worth and confidence. Many feel that they need to show up in different ways to avoid stereotypes. When Black women hear biases coming at them from everywhere, school, work, community, the media, they begin to see the world through a lens where they may not feel as deserving or good enough. Experiences of cyberbullying and colorism have been described as devastating and hurtful because of being judged, not being seen as desirable by peers, and being publicly humiliated. These instances have been discussed as violent and

perpetuated by other Black women as well, which leads to gaslighting and dismissal due to all being Black. Such challenges create complex dynamics that are difficult to navigate and resort to becoming strong and independent. Hence, never really having the space to process their feelings, keeping things bottled up, and dismissing their experiences.

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*“So my experience with colorism have been very hurtful in high school. I think it had come down to desirability and not being seen as desirable by my peers. And then I felt as though colorist, Black women sometimes have perpetuated the exact same violence as white women. The difference now is that there was this being gaslit because we’re all Black at the end of the day, that’s the common dismissal I would hear. [And] at the time, I had just kept my guard up or your feelings are dismissed. So you kind of always have your guard up sort of thing.”*

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*He also asked me where I’m from. And I said I’m Canadian. And he was like, no, where are your parents from? And I was like, Somali. And then he said I know a lot of Somalis live in Dixon. And now Dixon is just this gang gang place, how do you feel about that? You kind of have to humble the anger inside of you that’s justified in order to not piss off someone who gets to be racist. So that way you get to keep your job and get to continuously bring money home to your family.”*”



## Theme 3: Leadership and Advocacy

***Leadership experiences are too demanding, not appealing, and lead to microaggressions,*** hence many young women avoid leadership opportunities. These roles are viewed as having too much politics and were positions of tokenism. Some have declined promotions because their supervisors always seemed stress and were not making a much higher rate, so it “makes no sense”.

For those who took on leadership roles, without any fancy credentials, they found these opportunities to be challenging because they are discredited, invalidated when sharing their voice. Some shared being misled about additional pay for taking on these roles, and not being compensated, and the challenges with being heard when voicing their concerns and self-advocating for better treatment in the workplace.

For others in formal roles, having to deal with white senior colleagues led to further microaggressions, condescending tones as dynamics change as Black women’s assertion is not well received. Many question why they are asked to take on certain leadership tasks, as they continue to be micromanaged and face microaggressions.

*“And that’s the thing that would bother me, because you would like you get that leadership experience and then the way that they handle you while you’re in, still makes you question okay, then why did you give it to me if you still have all these problems or why did you give it to me and you’re still like breathing down my neck and watching over me, like, I don’t understand what the purpose is”*

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***Positive leadership experiences were those in positions of equity, diversity and inclusion,*** as these roles are often dedicated to uplifting the voices and experiences of those marginalized. It was noted that Black women are looked upon and received well mainly in these instances, compared to non-equity related leadership roles. A glass ceiling when it comes to hiring and promoting Black women is discussed as there are rarely opportunities to move past the district manager level into c-suite positions.





## Theme 4: Inadequate Supports

***There is a lack of training and support in order to succeed in a new role.*** Participants do not feel that they receive adequate training by their colleagues. They feel they do not really want to train, properly explain or demonstrate key tasks and there is an expectation that you should know everything or improvise when given new tasks. When honest mistakes occur managers and/or colleagues are frustrated yet do not provide proper supports. Many discussed the need for training on how to navigate microaggressions and situations when boundaries are crossed.

***“I found that when you’re starting a new position at a job like the people who are training, you don’t seem like they want to train you. So I felt like I ran into a lot of that, I got into a job and three days after working, they’re like OK, why don’t you know everything? Because I’m still new, what are you talking about?”***

***A need for newcomer women is support with transitioning into the Western working culture, language barriers, and access to technology.*** For some, entry into Canada started at a shelter and in health care centers, which have been described as a disgusting, repulsive, hostile environments as workers are insensitive to their hardships.

***“I can remember when a teacher asked me, the only black kid in class, if I was in ESL student, that really sucked or when a doctor, a white lady doctor asked me if there were schools in Nigeria”***

Service providers discuss a culture shock that is often experienced because in African and Caribbean countries, women tend to be homemakers, and the fast-working culture in Canada is a challenging adjustment for many. Newcomers tend to lack social and family connections that their counterparts tend to have access to for greater opportunities. There is also a need for access to technology and training for technical skill development, as they are unable to access programs and work opportunities. More language interpreters and multi-language programs are also needed.

***“A lot of clients, primarily newcomers, don’t really have access to technology. They don’t really know how to use computers that well. So that’s a training that we’ve had to start facilitating because there are programs out there, but they’re all virtual. And a barrier that black women newcomers face that I’ve worked with is that they’re not able to access these programs because they’re online. Most of these programs, their instructions come in English. They don’t really understand the language.”***



***There is a need for holistic approaches in the workplace to support well-being.*** Many share the lack of and need for Black therapists and mental health supports exclusively for Black women in the workplace. Social support spaces for Black women to network, share, validate and uplift their experiences has been a strategy that has worked well and is desired among participants as a way to support emotional distress in the workplace. Participants recognize the need to address solidarity within the workplace as there are efforts to keep the very few apart, for example never being scheduled together. Child care and consideration for Black women's roles in their families are aspects of their experiences that require support too.

*"I find depending on [my workplace's] funding, the supports of resources you can provide for your employees is sometimes limited. And we had a few issues with staff, like on some staff members had a mental breakdown, some were crying. And the only thing they seem to be able to do was the manager would just like comfort them one on one in private. And I think it depends on your contract. Like sometimes I was part time or casual. And if you're not full time, that also limits how much support you can sometimes get in the workplace."*

*"I think of something as simple as just small programs along confidence and identity and importance of us being in these roles right. And purpose. So taking it can be something*

*as a field trip, taking youth into different environments and making them see how a day in a job of something that they probably desire to be in or intimidate to be."*

***Supports during the pandemic have been minimal or non-existent for those unable to work from home.*** Participants shared that COVID-19 protocols prioritized customer health and safety, however same priority was not given to employee health, in some instances social distance was not enforced for customers, protective equipment was not provided and time off or sick leave were not granted. Others were let go with out any communication and/or severance packages. Participants able to work from home expressed that reduced contact with management and peers has led to less instances of microaggressions making things better.

*"So the communication levels from senior management and supervisors was terrible. So they never sent any official letters or official statements to staff about how they were planning to adjust and adapt to the lock down. I had to figure out what they were doing by looking at their social media accounts. The managers and supervisors that I typically would directly answer to. They have not officially notified me about my employment status until this day."*



## Theme 5: Harassment and Violence

***Young Black women are harassed and hypersexualized*** by young boys in school, their male coworkers, and men in public spaces. Participants share instances of being harassed by young boys about their looks, making up rumours, grabbing their private areas, tackling and fighting them and being told about their sexual fantasies etc, from as young as 8 years old. Young women recall random men catcalling them, and not being able to take no for answer, whether it is to talk to them or take their number. Many expressed feeling obligated to speak back and never having the tools to respond or say no in these situations until adulthood, however, some still do not feel fully equipped to do so. Participants express feeling uncomfortable simply eating or walk because men will watch them, and they would actively walking in circles to avoid being watched or called upon in a sexual manner. Male co-workers also objectified and disrespect women bodies, while requesting sexual advances. These instances occurring on an ongoing basis have led women to quit their jobs due to lack of action from management and impact on mental health.

*“Being called by random guys from when I was young and still not knowing how to respond without aggravating them further, since some guys are violent. When I entered university, there was a guy that was drastically older that kept insisting on taking me on a date, and I declined multiple times, but he kept pushing. I find that men also assume that because I’m a black woman, I’m hypersexual”*

***Young women experience domestic violence which does not only impacts their mental health, but their daily experiences*** as charged youth are faced with expectations and limitations.



Participants shared instances of being attacked by young boys in the neighborhood and being set up by family members with older men who have made sexual advances. Others commented on unwanted touching from older men yet unable to recall the varied instances of harassment as “traumatic events are suppressed from memory.” Emotional and physical abuse from older siblings and parents were also described as some of the most traumatic experiences of one's lives.

Service providers shared young women tend to bear more of the consequences in domestic violence cases as they often show greater emotion and are likely to be removed and charged. For young women raising children, paying rent, and going to work, they are not always able to do it all alone, therefore resort to their partner and break peace bonds as a result. When young women rely on their partner, parent, or family member that is removed from the home and not given proper assistance with childcare, groceries, rent, and other well-being needs, it then perpetuates their involvement with the system.

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*I work with a lot of young women who experience domestic violence. I work with a lot of young women who experience family violence. I work with a lot of young women who experience intimate partner abuse. So that is often between the age that I told you eighteen to twenty-six, sometimes twenty-seven. But I would say, you know, at twenty-six actually. And so some of the, the barriers that you also see there is, these are also young women who are in school and working, and if they get charged schools out of the door, they might not be able to do their placement, they might not be able to volunteer or volunteering as a part of the program requirements if let's say they're in high school and they can't volunteer, they don't graduate. Right. Which means instead of graduating with your Ontario secondary school diploma, you now graduate with a GED because you could change the entire program there. And so a lot of the barriers impact their lives specifically, but then also how we have to navigate what's going on, because if they cannot volunteer or they're being mandated to volunteer, they can also use they can't double dip is what I'm saying.*”

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## Theme 6: Organizational Capacity

*Inadequate training and representation of staff across staff in employment, social service and justice systems* has been discussed greatly among young women and key informants. Many shared the difficulties with finding work in their field due to the lack of Black women in the recruitment spaces and previous experiences of discrimination, making them hesitant to apply to certain positions. It is recognized that greater representation of Black women would enable opportunities to excel.

*“It’s been difficult to find work in my field, and I’ve changed my resume and now I’m doing my best to network and things like that. So if there have been more black women who had been recruiters and black women who are genuinely concerned with other black women and wanting to see us excel, if we could have more employment programs that are specifically designed for black women, that would be really, really helpful”*

Young Black women also do not feel comfortable seeking support from justice authorities, and majority of Black service providers are often front-line workers, rather than legal staff and therefore may be limited in their capacity to provide supports to critical legal challenges. A suggestion is to address the disparities was to

*“hire internally, hire the people who are within the company, working front line, working with others, working with the community and give them positions of policy and give them positions to be able to create and change policies within the organizations, because the frontline workers are the ones who are seeing the clients every single day or every other day, if not every day”*

The lack of representation decision-makers demonstrates the lack of trust and relationships with young Black women. The lack of diversity and poor attitudes towards Black and newcomer service users was also discussed among both young women and service providers. Social service workers in shelters, for example, were described as not always friendly of their needs and often felt dismissed and not supported. There is a need to move away from one-shot training and prioritize ongoing self-awareness and critical thinking to improve morale of non-Black service providers.



***There is a need for greater supports and education for young Black women entering adulthood.*** Many wished that there were more supports growing up to deal with complex problems including living in a single-parent household, dealing with toxic and abusive relationships, sexual intercourse and protection, regular check-ups, transitioning into adulthood, understanding, and knowing their rights with the justice system, and more. The education system and schools have been described as a place for these supports to exist as many challenges have been experienced and endured with and by peers in school spaces. Service providers mention instances where Black girls involvement in the justice system prevents opportunities toward a higher education and work, where students are limited in placement or programs. This often leads to a GED instead of a high school diploma, so supports and policies to address is a barrier is needed.

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*“I could definitely say that I wish there were more support growing up, especially getting into high school and the transition and some of the problems that we as young females face going into high school in terms of if we didn’t come from a healthy two parent household and we didn’t know what that looked like, a lot of us got into toxic relationships or abusive relationships or we were having sex early on and we’re protecting ourselves and not knowing that we should go and get regular checkups and things like that and literally just feeding off of each other, which is the blind leading the blind”*

***Financial aid and polices that enable increased resources and upkeep of supports*** across organizations is greatly needed for young women who are not only justice-involved youth but for employment to maintain their work appearance and healthy lifestyle for their families. The nature of confidentiality makes it challenging for various professionals to work together and support an individual and their family in a holistic manner. There is often a lack of consistency with child and youth workers such as Children’s Aid, where there are high turnover rates, so young people are engaging with several workers, making it challenging for young people to receive the supports they need. Additionally, legal aid policies are described as flawed because it requires one to be part-time or unemployed, however, young women who work full-time do not earn enough to cover their personal and familial needs and legal fees yet they do not qualify because of their income level.

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*“The justice system should focus on therapy, focus on psychiatrist, focus on social work, focus on really investing into our community. So that way the judicial system will no longer capitalize upon vulnerability that it has created in the black community because the judicial system profits off of black vulnerability and it capitalizes upon it.”*



Similar policy challenges are discussed within the employment sector as supports are not sustained once young women are employed or unable to access multiple services. When young women access employment a plethora of needs are still to be satisfied such as clothing, childcare, work etiquette, money, navigating work dynamics and time management. These policies exacerbate other inequities and create additional challenges for women in the work place. Some organizations also do not have the capacity to hire multi-language instructors, which limits their ability to support newcomer women. Institutions with the connections, resources, and power are called upon to provide solidarity and sponsorship and coaching to build relationships with community groups working young women. Greater funding opportunities for collaborations and partnerships have been discussed to use current infrastructures create tailored opportunities that bring young women's voices to the table.

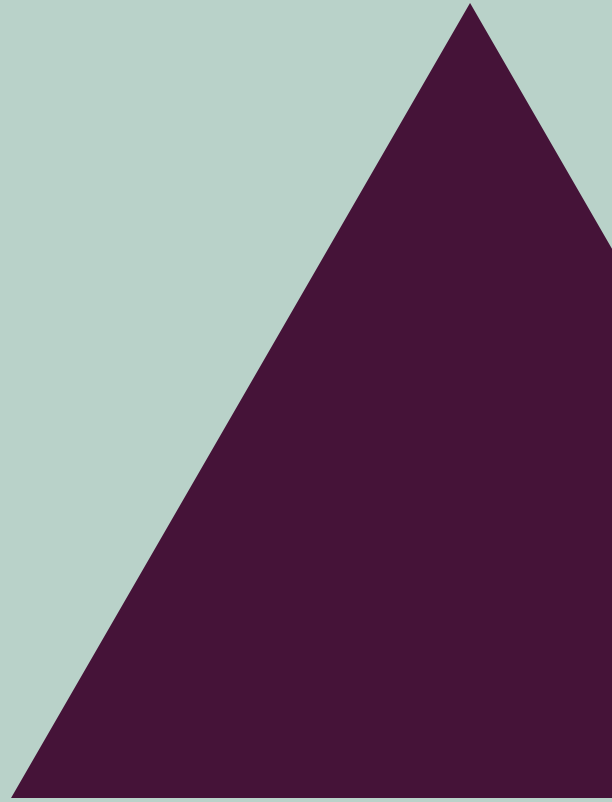
*"I look at big institutions, like even academic institutions, as an example, they have a whole department devoted to fundraising and government relations. They have a whole person, if not more, that scours government websites looking for funding opportunities. They have the infrastructure and the resources to be able to build those relationships."*

**Police officers and the justice system needs to develop a better way to connect with students** in schools to make they feel safe.

Schools and in community were instances of poor, uncomfortable instances with school and police officers. Greater community engagement among police officers was a way shared where officers can become more sensitized and familiar with the community and begin to build trust and positive relationships with young women. Some shared that police officers should be trained like social workers and on topics such as anti-Black racism, disability, gender discrimination, homelessness, and mental health, rather than just physical nature of crime and violence.

*"So I guess more community engagement, involvement. You know, if you talk about youth justice, we talk about police officers getting police officers to be more familiarized with individuals in the community. So when things arise, it's not more I'm being stigmatized, it is more so I know you're here to care for me and my actions is causing the reason for the consequences"*





# *Discussion*



## The objectification of Black women in public spaces

The overall findings on the key barriers in employment and justice were consistent across the qualitative and quantitative findings. Issues of surveillance, objectification, and advocacy were common challenges within surveys and interviews that young women experience in schools, the workplace, in the community. Two-thirds of survey respondents indicated either feeling somewhat safe or not safe at all in their community, while interview respondents emphasized the varied types of sexual harassment and violence experienced that often goes unnoticed. Consistent with the literature, The Toronto District School Board has also acknowledged that violence against girls and young women is a pervasive problem, where sexual assault victimization in school is highest among young Black women (School Community Safety Advisory Panel, 2008). However, not many changes in policies and practices have been made to combat hegemonic racialized sexism in schools.

Although we had few justice-involved youth participated in our study, majority of participants do not feel safe reporting instances of harassment and violence to police and justice authorities. The main reasons for not reporting were due to fears of being dismissed and not believed, as well as the associated stigma, shame and guilt due to cultural narratives about Black women and their bodies. These findings show that young women may be experiencing harm, and unable to report due to a lack of supports available and trust to report. Hence, there is a need to “prob-



lematized and resist” harmful stereotypes of Black women, so that violence against their bodies is believed and addressed (Hardaway et. al, 2014).

## Leadership development among young Black women

Our findings around leadership development and income satisfaction and stability demonstrate the significant need for employment training and advocacy supports for young Black women. About half (49%) survey participants reported having an income of less than 50 K and were unsatisfied with their current income. Most (40%) were neutral on the opportunities for growth and majority (58%) did not feel comfortable negotiating in the workplace. Consistent with previous research, participants were likely to work within occupations and industries that historically pay less. These realities can resort to precarious employment and such inequities can be attributed to the gaps in leadership development opportunities. As demonstrated by Mims & Kaler-Jones (2020), it is important to develop leadership capacity among Black girls during childhood as the significance of developing leadership capacity among Black



girls during childhood, and ways identity development at a young age can have significant impacts on how young Black women recognize and take on leadership roles in the workplace.

## Identity politics in the workplace

Interview participants extensively shared their frustrations around their Black identity being scrutinized and experiencing discrimination and anti-Islamophobia in the workplace. Mugabo (2016) discusses the term anti-Black Islamophobia as a specific form of racism experienced by Black Muslims compared to non-Black Muslims, and our study has shown ways gender, race and religion facilitates a unique marginalized experience. Whether one is judged for their religion, where they lived, their hairstyles, bodies and being hyper sexualized as a result, there was a common thread of defeat as many participated are unable to show up as themselves; they either code switch or stay quiet to avoid attention or problems.

The mental health implications due to these interactions in the workplace is significant to acknowledge as it demonstrates ways discrimination against Black women and the lack of support or accountability impacts one's health and ability to survive. These findings calls for greater attention to Black women's relationship with human resource systems and organizational policies around

anti-Blackness and discrimination.

Income, resource, and skills disparities often translate into wealth gaps that heavily impact those living at the intersection of gender and race (Kerby, 2013). Earning less income often means fewer opportunities to participate in wealth building activities such as investments in stocks and bonds, retirement saving plans, life insurance, and developing businesses. About half (49%) survey participants reported having an income of less than 50 K and were unsatisfied with their current income. Gaps in wealth building activities were demonstrated as 71% of our participants reported the ability to afford basic needs such as food, shelter, and social participants, whereas only 17% reported ability to save, invest into stocks and bonds and pay their debts.

These findings are consistent with previous work, which has shown that Black women in Toronto are not earning thriving income compared to their counterparts, and there is a need to redefine poverty strategies to models that promote economic, social, physical

# *Limitations*



and mental well-being.

There are a few limitations to keep in mind while interpreting these findings. of in the interpretation of these findings. The recruitment and data collection period were shortened due to time constraints, which may have impacted in the quantity of participants engaged in the project. The nature of the pandemic also restricted opportunities for in-person community engagement, focus group and interviews, which affected our ability to reach many young women. As such, the voices of young women who have been incarcerated and newcomers to Canada were minimal in the data; therefore the data does not capture such nuanced experiences of Black women navigating public systems.

Technical discrepancies were also noticed during the data analysis for the newcomer section in the survey data. Therefore unclear to determine the unique challenges and experiences of those not born in Canada.

Another limitation is the lack of perspectives from young non-Black women to compare differences in experiences and better understand the mechanisms in which racism and sexism impact young Black women. The lack of previous community-based research in Canada exploring Black girls women's challenges in employment and justice makes it difficult to accurately contextualize the findings beyond the interpretation of the

Insights to Action team and participants from the Community Forum.

Lastly, the representation of team of co-researchers and CAB members is not reflective of the various intersecting identities and conditions experiences by young Black women. Although, majority of the team are young women, between 16 to 29 years old, we recognize that our identities as African- and Caribbean- Canadians born and raised in the Greater Toronto Area and among others reflected upon in the PCHRCP analysis shape our overall approach and those engaged in the work.



# *Recommendations*



We hosted two knowledge transfer events: A Youth Spotlight event on Sunday February 27th, which brought to together 20 of the project participants and researchers to connect, discuss the findings, and discuss ways to move forward informally. Our second virtual Community Forum on Saturday, March 19th brought together over 60 people including, project participants, service providers, and other key stakeholders, where the peer researchers presented the study and held knowledge transfer tables on the skills and anti-racism training, leadership and advocacy, representation in the workforce, and community safety and justice.

The discussion from these two events, social media engagements via Instagram lives and the ongoing analysis from the team has informed the following recommendations for governments and organizations:

### For governments:

**1) A broader scope in poverty reduction strategies and its measures involve creating sustainable and comprehensive interventions** that address diverse needs and experiences of young Black women. The poverty strategy is currently based on physical needs, however, it should be holistic in nature and account for the psychological, social and emotional needs of people overall, which may enhance the current conditions of those most vulnerable.

**2) Funding and resources to foster opportunities for mentorship and leadership for young Black women**, particularly in traditionally underserved communities. As funding opportunities for Black youth continue to grow, funders should allot a significant percentage of the funding available to project that focus on the leadership and identity development for young girls.

**3) Greater investments into the education system to enhance supports available regarding the unique experiences of Black girlhood and womanhood** in schools and meeting needs around puberty, relationships, sexuality etc. Investment should also include opportunities to build knowledge around community-oriented safety measures, role of police officers, and their human rights.

**4) Police require ongoing training to identify and unlearn discriminatory practices specific to Black women and their communities.** It should ensure officers and justice authorities are equipped with trauma-informed training, restorative/ holistic practices, and sensitivity around domestic violence.



## For organizations and service providers:

**1) Focusing recruitment efforts on diversifying workplaces,** executive roles, and recruitment teams themselves to create safe and supportive spaces for Black women, clients, and staff. Qualifications should be re-evaluated to also center lived experiences. There should also be greater transparency in job postings to include details around responsibilities, compensation, and benefits working with the role.

**2) Ongoing anti-Black racism training should be mandatory for all employees,** prioritizing tangible ways to check biases, enforce accountability, and understand ways sexual harassment and violence show up in the workplace for Black women and women of colour.

**3) Curate workshops and social spaces for Black women to build** relationships, self-advocacy skills, better understand their employee and human rights, and ways to address incidents of discrimination. There is a need for more knowledge development opportunities around disability, mental health, and financial literacy and overall job preparation.

**4) Organizations must take a cultural competence lens to proactively provide leadership roles for Black women within all levels** of the company. Additional compensation and allowances for professional development and the mental and emotional labor for those engaged in equity and diversity initiatives beyond their specified workload should always be considered.

**5) Develop mentorship structures or “buddy” programs within employee resource groups** or during the probationary period of a job, allowing for new staff, particularly racialized staff, to have a “go-to” support person within the organization/business.



# Conclusion

Although more research and efforts are needed to address the challenges and barriers within employment and justice systems, our findings demonstrate that young Black women are often confronted with unique challenges that ultimately require attention. The stereotypes and biases attributed to Black womanhood are deeply ingrained within our society. The historical factors that continue to perpetuate such ideologies also require further attention to understand the root causes of inequities facing young Black women.

Further studies to understand young Black women's experiences in other public settings such as health care, within leadership roles across various industries, and the generational impacts of inequities may help to better invest in the well-being of Black women, and therefore Black communities. As the Black Canadian population continues to grow exponentially it is imperative that investments into the health and well-being of Black girls and women are prioritized.





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*“the justice system should focus on therapy, focus on psychiatrist, focus on social work, focus on really investing into our community. So that way the judicial system will no longer capitalize upon vulnerability that it has created in the black community because the judicial system profits off of black vulnerability and it capitalizes upon it.”*



