Defining and Analyzing Community Violence in Their Community: Jane-Finch Youth Perception of Violence in Their Toronto Community

"Jane-Finch youth are able to offer more nuanced definitions of what violence is … to identify violence beyond its typical physical manifestations (guns, murder, street fights), pinpointing discrimination and lack of opportunities, including barriers to post-secondary schooling, as two major forms of violence in their lives" (p. 20).

1. What is the research about?
A large body of literature examines the link between community characteristics and youth violence. Some of this research supports a common but problematic belief that crime occurs in particular areas (disadvantaged neighbourhoods) and among particular people (lower class, ethnic/racial minorities). Rather than relying on observation, this study presents the **perspectives of youth** living in a disadvantaged community on issues of wellbeing, violence, and "turf". In particular, it addresses the following questions: What are the perspectives of youth concerning their needs and wellbeing? How do youth understand "turf issues" in their community? How do youth experience violence in their lives?

2. Where did the research take place?
The research took place in Jane-Finch, a disadvantaged urban neighbourhood in Toronto, Ontario.

3. Who is this research about?
This research is about youth living in a disadvantaged urban area. Demographic data is not available, as the study maintained a high level of anonymity.

4. How was the research done?
Data was collected at two local malls using a novel qualitative method termed the Mobile Speakers' Corner. Youth researchers set up tables at the entrance to each mall, and approached young people as they entered to invite them to participate in the study. Participants signed a consent form, received a tape recorder, and were given instructions to respond to one of the three research questions. They found a spot within sight of the researchers (but out of hearing) to talk on tape for about five minutes, then returned the tape recorder and collected a $10 honorarium.

Recordings were transcribed *verbatim* (word-for-word) and analyzed using a qualitative software program. In the process of identifying and organizing themes, researchers focused on "how participants' narratives produced, troubled, or disrupted the notion of Jane-Finch youth as troublemakers with limited understanding of the world around them" (p. 13).

5. What are the key findings?
Participants were able to offer **nuanced definitions of violence**, citing its physical manifestations as well as systemic barriers, such as discrimination and lack of opportunities.

In the context of education, these barriers manifested as a **"violence of low expectations"** (p. 20). Youth described teachers who were removed and disinterested in the challenges that youth faced, which made schooling difficult for them. Racial discrimination on the part of teachers and school staff produced problematic learning experiences, which served to limit young people's opportunities in post-secondary education and employment.

Young people's **responses to violence differed** based on its form and pervasiveness. Those who experienced physical violence had multiple strategies for dealing with it, including avoidance, fear, and speaking out. Most participants seemed resigned to the violence of racial discrimination.

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6. Why does it matter for youth work?

This study suggests that *neighbourhoodism*, or discrimination based on where one lives, "can lead to self-paralysis, or the inability to challenge and change one's station in life" (p. 21). In order to understand young people's involvement in *physical* forms of violence, practitioners and researchers need to take into account how young people's lives are shaped by *less tangible forms of violence*, such as discrimination and lack of opportunities. When working with youth in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, it may be helpful to use an *intersectional approach*, which accounts for the ways in which identity is shaped by experiences of social oppression and privilege.

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