



FACTSHEET

Seven Reasons Why Black Youth Are Overrepresented in Ontario's Child Welfare System

Developed in partnership with the Vulnerability, Trauma, Resilience & Culture Lab in the School of Psychology, University of Ottawa. From *The Seven Reasons Why Black Children Are Overrepresented in the Child Welfare System in Ontario (Canada): A Qualitative Study from the Perspectives of Caseworkers and Community Facilitators (2021)* by Jude Mary Cénat, Pari-Gole Noorishad, Konrad Czechowski, Joana N. Mukunzi, Saba Hajizadeh, Sara-Emilie McIntee, & Rose Darly Dalexis in *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*.

There is an overrepresentation of Black children and youth in Ontario's child welfare system, which often results in negative outcomes for Black youth; these can include homelessness, lower levels of education, unemployment, lower incomes, mental health challenges, and involvement in the criminal justice system.

We must understand the factors contributing to the overrepresentation of Black children and youth in our child welfare systems in order to inform policies through a lens of racial equity that can better accommodate and support Black families.

These seven reasons surfaced through focus groups with caseworkers and community facilitators in Ontario.

THE SEVEN REASONS

» POVERTY

Poverty is made visible when children are not able to afford school lunches and after-school or other recreational activities, and when families are not able to afford child care.

» LACK OF DIVERSITY AMONG CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETY (CAS) CASEWORKERS

The current demographics of caseworkers do not reflect the families being served.

» MENTAL HEALTH

Experiences of trauma, in a country of origin or in immigrating to Canada, can be passed from parents to children. Cultural (mis)understandings of mental health may affect how a child's behaviour is understood and whether a young person is able to seek support.

» INSUFFICIENT COMMUNITY SUPPORT & NETWORKS

A lack of community support and networks can be a barrier to families accessing adequate social services.

» CULTURE

Caseworkers may have misconceptions about the cultures and customs of families that are read as unfamiliar.

» DISCIPLINE

Cultural differences in disciplinary practices may trigger mandatory reporting to child protection services.

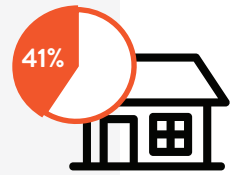
» RACISM

Pervasive and systemic anti-Black racism exists across institutions.

"The number of Black children in the child welfare system is **2.2 times higher** than their proportion in the general child population" (p. 1).



Black youth make up **41%** of the youth in the care of the Children's Aid Society of Toronto¹ – **five times** their representation in the overall population.²



WHAT CAN WE DO?

- 01. HIRE CASEWORKERS** from culturally-diverse backgrounds that reflect the clients they serve (and extend this hiring to managers, judges, and everyone else involved in the child welfare system).
- 02. COMMIT TO TRAINING PROGRAMS** that promote anti-racist, anti-oppressive, and culturally-inclusive services.
- 03. BUILD CONNECTIONS** between families and child welfare services through partnerships with community organizations to ensure trust and safety.
- 04. PROVIDE ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES** to Black parents/caregivers, especially those living in poverty or those who have stigmatized perceptions of mental health care.
- 05. DEVELOP STRUCTURAL PROGRAMS** to eradicate poverty in Black communities and to disassociate skin colour from socioeconomic status.

ENDNOTES

- Children's Aid Society of Toronto. (2015, July). *Addressing disproportionality, disparity and discrimination in child welfare: Data on services provided to Black African Caribbean Canadian families and children*. <https://www.torontocas.ca/sites/torontocas/files/bacc-cc-final-website-posting.pdf>
- Contenta, S., Monsebraaten, L., & Rankin, J. (2014, December 11). Why are so many black children in foster and group homes? *The Toronto Star*. https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2014/12/11/why_are_so_many_black_children_in_foster_and_group_homes.html