



# Understanding the Over-Representation of Black Children in Ontario Child Welfare Services

*“Anti-Black racism is woven into the fabric of every social, economic, and political system that is meant to support citizens and help them succeed” (p. 14).*

## 1. WHAT IS THE RESEARCH ABOUT?

This research is about maltreatment-related investigations involving Black children and youth in Ontario child welfare services in 2018. These investigations are compared to investigations involving white children and youth across child, family, and household characteristics, and other specifics of these investigations. *Maltreatment-related investigations* include situations in which there are concerns that a child or young person may have been abused or neglected and situations in which there is a risk of future maltreatment.

## 2. WHERE DID THE RESEARCH TAKE PLACE?

The research took place in Ontario.

## 3. WHO IS THIS RESEARCH ABOUT?

This research is about Black and white children and youth, 15-years-old and younger, who were involved in maltreatment-related investigations in Ontario child welfare services.

## 4. HOW WAS THE RESEARCH DONE?

A multi-stage sampling design was used to select a representative sample of 18 child welfare agencies (out of 48 child welfare organizations in Ontario); this involved drawing a sample from a population using smaller and smaller groups at each stage. Child welfare workers at each of the 18 child welfare agencies were asked to select the ethno-racial category that best described the children, youth, and caregivers who were involved in maltreatment investigations opened between October 1 and December 31, 2018. Researchers then focused on those investigations involving Black children and youth and those investigations involving white children and youth. Comparisons were made, and the incidence rate of investigations per 1,000 children in Ontario was calculated.

## 5. WHAT ARE THE KEY FINDINGS?

This research surfaced **10 key findings**:

- i. Black children and youth were **2.2 times more likely** than white children and youth to be involved in an investigation for a child maltreatment-related concern.
- ii. Black children and youth were **2.5 times more likely** than white children and youth to have their cases substantiated (i.e. the balance of evidence indicated that abuse or neglect had occurred).
- iii. Black children and youth were **2.5 times more likely** than white children and youth to be placed in out-of-home care during the investigation.

- iv. Among maltreatment investigations involving Black children and youth, **physical abuse was the primary concern (27%)**, followed by **exposure to intimate partner violence (18%)**, and **neglect (12%)**. In maltreatment investigations involving white children and youth, physical abuse was also the primary concern (17%), followed by exposure to intimate partner violence (17%), and neglect (16%).
- v. **27%** of investigations involving white children and youth were referred by non-professional sources, such as a relative, compared to **15%** of investigations involving Black children and youth.
- vi. Investigations involving Black children and youth were **14% more likely** to be initiated by professional referral sources, such as a mental health professional, than those involving white children and youth.
- vii. Black children and youth were **1.7 times more likely** to have their case referred to receive ongoing/longer-term services and support than cases involving white children and youth.
- viii. Investigations involving Black children and youth were more likely **to feature police involvement** than those involving white children and youth.
- ix. **Attention-Deficit / Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)** was the second-most frequently noted child functioning concern involving Black children and youth, whereas **depression, anxiety**, and **withdrawal** were the second-most frequently noted for white children and youth.
- x. Investigations involving Black children and youth were **less likely** than those involving white children and youth to feature households whose primary income source was from full-time work.

## 6. WHY DOES THIS RESEARCH MATTER FOR YOUTH WORK?

**Anti-Black racism**, a form of systemic and structural racism that has been historically and contemporarily perpetrated against Black people, is found in every social, political, and economic system. This consequently impacts the way in which Black children, youth, and families are provided resources and services. This research is important for youth workers and youth sector stakeholders to understand how disproportionality, disparity, and race impact the representation of children and youth in Ontario child welfare services.

As Black mothers have reported a number of negative encounters with the child welfare system, youth workers should be **continuously educating themselves on anti-Black racism and how to work against it, listening to the voices of Black mothers, children, youth, and families, and incorporating their learnings into their practice**. Moreover, youth workers should be providing resources and services that **address fundamental material and social concerns**, such as housing, employment, and childcare, to Black mothers and families, to support mitigating some of the factors that may make Black families more vulnerable.



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