

## FACTSHEET

# TAKE 5: BLACK YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

YouthREX's **Beyond Invisible: Black Youth Mental Health** was a Youth Work Teach-In for the Ontario youth sector on pedagogies, perspectives, and practices on Black youth mental health, presented in collaboration with Donna Richards, Hellen Gateri, and the York Research Chair in Youth and Contexts of Inequity on October 6, 2022.

The opening keynote, **Unashamed yet Unsupported**, was provided by **Mercy Shibemba**, an award-winning youth activist from the UK who uses her story of growing up with HIV to educate, challenge stigma, and inspire. Here are 5 key messages from Mercy's talk:



### 01. BLACK YOUTH CAN ONLY THRIVE WHEN FULLY INCLUDED AND SUPPORTED.

Exclusionary systems and structures prevent Black youth from receiving the resources and supports they need to reach their full potential.



### 02. BLACK YOUTH EXPERIENCE DIFFERENT TYPES OF STIGMA WITH RESPECT TO MENTAL HEALTH:

- **Public Stigma:** When harmful and damaging messages about a person or an idea exist in society.
- **Perceived Stigma:** When harmful and damaging messages are expected.
- **Structural Stigma:** When harmful and damaging messages are embedded within systems, structures, institutions, and/or policies.
- **Stigma by Association:** When harmful and damaging messages are felt by someone associated with a person who is stigmatized.
- **Self-Stigma:** When harmful and damaging messages from society are internalized.



### **03. ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES IS MORE COMPLICATED FOR BLACK YOUTH.**

Youth from racialized communities are less likely than their white peers to access traditional mental health services due to discrimination and/or stigma. They are also more likely to access these services in moments of crisis or by court order, such as through social service or criminal justice related orders, due to the overrepresentation of Black youth in the child welfare system and the overpolicing and criminalization of Black youth.



### **04. BLACK YOUTH EXPERIENCE DISCRIMINATION IN THE HEALTHCARE SYSTEM.**

Young people from racialized communities report not feeling understood or validated when talking to their doctor about their mental health needs. Moreover, Black people are more likely to be apprehended for mental health reasons than white people. Black youth often struggle with intergenerational trauma as well, which may not be recognized by all mental health professionals.



### **05. RACISM IMPACTS YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH.**

Young people from racialized communities are disproportionately exposed to many known risk factors linked to compromised mental health, including being excluded from school, being in care, being involved in the criminal justice system, and being insecurely housed or homeless. The mental health and wellbeing of racialized youth has also been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. These experiences are the result of pervasive and systemic racism, and specifically anti-Black racism.