



FINDINGS RELATED TO POVERTY

Mapping Disparities for Black Families Project
INFORMATION SHEET #7 | 2025

BACKGROUND & PURPOSE

Poverty is a key factor in the overrepresentation of Black families in the child welfare system. The 2021 Canadian Census reported that 12.4% of Black Canadians lived in poverty, compared to 8.1% of the total population, with poverty rates for Black newcomer children in Ontario even higher at 19.5%. Contributors to and outcomes of poverty for individuals and families include food insecurity, inadequate housing, poor health, lack of access to services, social exclusion, and hardships. Poverty in Canada is racialized and intergenerational, shaped by a history of anti-Black racism, including slavery, segregation, and discriminatory policies. Although Ontario's Child, Youth, and Family Services Act states that although poverty alone is not a reason for child welfare involvement, poverty often creates the circumstances that are considered unsafe or present risk under the system's criteria. Scholars argue that the system disproportionately targets low-income families and that many interventions could be avoided with material and financial support as preventative measures.

WHAT WE DID

We explored how participants experienced the impact of poverty on practice and decision-making with and for Black families involved in the child welfare system by conducting semi-structured interviews and focus groups with 79 participants. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was used to explore the experiences of participants who work or have worked in child welfare, as well as those who influence policy and practice decisions affecting Black families involved in the child welfare system.



WHAT WE FOUND

Participants in the study described their experiences and perspectives on how poverty affects practice and decision-making involving Black families, as well as the specific challenges Black families facing poverty encounter within the child welfare system. Participants shared how the hardships of Black families were exacerbated by child welfare interventions and the child welfare funding model. Participants also spoke about practical ways of supporting Black families who faced socio-economic hardship. We identified four major themes, which are described in greater detail in our full report: *Mapping Disparities for Black Families Project: Findings Related to the Impact of Poverty*.

Theme 1:
The Impacts of Systemic Racism, the Racialization of Poverty, and Concerns about Neglect

Theme 2:
Severing Family Bonds: Poverty and the Apprehension of Black Children

Theme 3:
The Child Welfare Funding Model Shapes Practice

Theme 4:
What Helps? Supporting Black Families Experiencing Poverty



RECOMMENDATIONS



Engage in advocacy and reflective practice.



Provide legal advocacy and support.



Review policies and tools.



Strengthen community partnerships.



Ensure accountability and equitable funding.



Prioritize funding for families



Expand the scope of emergency services for families.

For more information about MDBF, please reach out to members of the project team:

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