



ABSENCE OF LANGUAGE

Mapping Disparities for Black Families Project
INFORMATION SHEET #2 | 2025

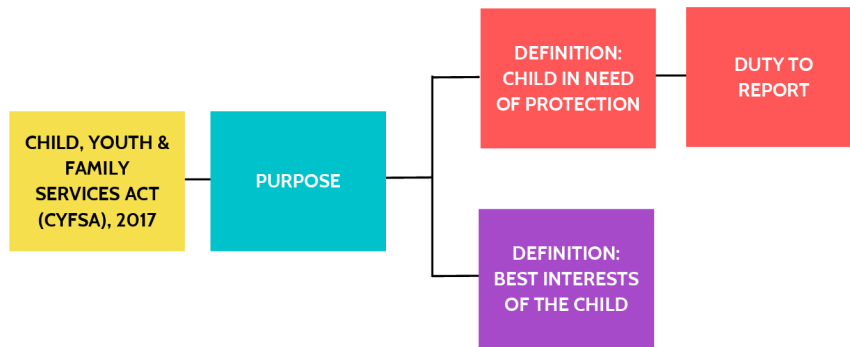
BACKGROUND & PURPOSE

The overrepresentation of Black families in Canada's child welfare system begins at the reporting or investigation stage. Although there is increased awareness about anti-Black racism, there has been limited exploration of the connection between anti-Black racism in child welfare's *Child and Youth Family Services Act* (CYFSA) and how the policy generates disparities for Black families. To address this knowledge gap, Edwards and colleagues (2023) investigated the entrenchment of anti-Black racism within the child welfare system by critically analyzing the language and absence of language in the guiding legislative and operational policies. This information sheet presents an overview of the findings from our published paper. Please contact the research team to request a copy.

Edwards, T., McManamna, N., & King, B. (2023). The absence of language: A critical race discourse analysis of Ontario's child welfare legislation and the impacts on Black families. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 143, 106249. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2023.106249>

WHAT WE DID

This paper utilized Critical Race Discourse Analysis, an innovative approach combining Critical Race Theory and Critical Discourse Analysis, to emphasize the role of race and examine how language reinforces or resists power and social inequalities. This analysis focused on whether and how the child welfare system integrates discourses of structural anti-Black racism. The figure below represents the data sources within the Child, Youth & Family Services Act (CYFSA, 2017) that were analyzed in this study.



WHAT WE FOUND



Anti-Black racism manifests in the absence of language in the legislation which shapes the practices of child welfare systems across Ontario. This trend is apparent in two ways. First, there is a lack of specific language acknowledging and recognizing anti-Black racism and its historical and ongoing harms. Second, where there is recognition of the need to consider race, it fails to mention Black communities specifically. This absence leads to seemingly colourblind policies that exacerbate existing disparities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

THE LEGISLATION

Include more specific language about anti-Black racism in the CYFSA to shift accountability and practice.



THE PURPOSE

Be explicit about the need for the government to commit to the protection of Black children, youth, and families.



BEST INTERESTS OF THE CHILD

Definition of the best interests of the child should require that practitioners *always* consider the race, ethnicity and cultural identity of Black families.



DUTY TO REPORT

Language in the Duty to Report should acknowledge how this policy contributes to the disparity in referrals and investigations of Black families.



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

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