



MAPPING DISPARITIES FOR BLACK FAMILIES PROJECT

Study Overview

INFORMATION SHEET #3 | 2025

The overall purpose of the Mapping Disparities for Black Families (MDBF) Project is to understand how anti-Black racism manifests within the child welfare system and to identify key areas where disparities emerge, are maintained, and can be meaningfully addressed with substantive policy, organizational, or practice change. This work is done through a partnership between One Vision One Voice and researchers at the Youth Wellness Lab, which is housed at the Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto.

METHODS

Individual and focus group interviews were conducted with 79 participants working within the Ontario child welfare system, including front-line child welfare workers, supervisors, agency leads, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) specialists, and lawyers, focusing on decision-making across the continuum of child welfare involvement. The research team used Interpretive Phenomenology to analyze interview data and to understand how participants experienced working with Black families and what influenced their decision-making. As we have identified key findings for dissemination, we have consulted with constituent groups (e.g., experts, practitioners, community members) to interpret and contextualize the findings and to develop practice and policy recommendations.



WHAT DID WE ASK ABOUT?

Our interviews explored workers' experiences with respect to: 1) their observations and patterns working with Black families; 2) how policy and protection standards shaped decision-making; 3) how their understanding of culture influenced practice and decision-making; 4) the impact of supervisors and agency context; and 5) how anti-Black racism, anti-oppression, and/or EDI training shifted their perspective on practice with Black families. We also focused our questions about how workers made specific decisions based on the participants' role in the continuum of child welfare service provision (e.g., investigations, ongoing services).

KEY FINDINGS FOR CONSULTATION

In 2023, the project team reviewed the main themes identified in the data and prioritized four themes for further analysis, consultation, and dissemination in 2024. Experts in the field, participants in the study, community members, and child welfare agency representatives were invited to weigh in on study findings and help generate recommendations for addressing potential contributors to disparities. The first year focused on the following themes, but additional consultations are planned.

- Impact of the Eligibility Spectrum on decision-making
- Allegations of physical abuse
- The role of supervision in decision-making
- The impact of poverty on practice and decision-making



PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS



AVERAGE AGE **43.5**

87% FEMALE



AVERAGE NUMBER OF YEARS IN CHILD WELFARE **14.3**



EDUCATION

Bachelor's Degree (34%)
Master's Degree (54%)
Social Work Degree (70%)

CURRENTLY WORKING AT OR ADJACENT TO A CAS

90% 

PRIMARY ROLE

Intake/Screening (8%)
Investigations (14%)
Ongoing Services (28%)
Out-of-Home Care (14%)
Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (20%)
Leadership/Specialized (16%)

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

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