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VOICES MATTER: THE IMPACT OF SERIOUS LEGAL PROBLEMS ON 16- TO 30-YEAR-OLDS IN THE BLACK COMMUNITY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study examines the impact of serious legal problems on 16- to 30-year-olds in the Black community in Toronto and Ottawa. The methodology is rooted in an intersectional understanding of people's experience of legal conflict and public services. The study recognizes the fluid and emerging nature of participants' understanding of the legal implications of issues in their lives.

Data collection happened in two stages. Participants were first asked to complete an online survey that collected demographic data about their age and racial self-identification to confirm membership in the target research group. Participants answered demographic questions and questions on employment, family structure, housing, and use of financial products before they were asked to identify if they have had different categories of serious legal problems in the previous three years. Participants who disclosed serious legal problems and met the eligibility criteria participated in online focus groups. A narrative focus group structure, spurred by scenario-based examples, invited participants to share their experiences. Thirty-four people completed the online survey, all but one of whom met the age and racial identity criteria. Twenty-six people participated in the focus groups.

CONTEXT

All stages of this research happened during the COVID-pandemic-related changes to social and professional gatherings. Survey respondents, focus group participants, and researchers all took part virtually.

This research looked specifically at the experiences of people who identify as Black. Their racial identity and the differential impact of legal problems is the key inquiry in this research. The death of George Floyd and the subsequent #BlackLivesMatter protests happened after the study was launched, but before the first focus group was held. Protests focused attention on police killings of Black and Indigenous people in Canada and on systemic racism issues in the Canadian criminal justice system. All participants and the researchers had a heightened awareness of the discussions of systemic racism in the justice system and in society as a whole.

STUDY RESULTS

Respondents ranged from 16 to 30 years old. Sixty percent of the respondents identified as women. All respondents identified as Black, some giving more specific identities such as "Black / Afro-Canadian" or "Jamaican." Just under half (44 percent) are currently attending school, 17 percent are working full time, and a third (32 percent) are working part time. A small number (six percent) care for children full time and 12 percent are currently looking for work. Five respondents were laid off due to the COVID pandemic.

When asked to identify the type and frequency of serious legal problems, all focus group participants identified at least one serious legal problem in the previous three years.

The most common types of legal problems were experiences of discrimination in public settings (48 percent), issues with housing (44 percent), police contact (40 percent), and employment issues (36 percent). No respondents identified legal problems related to estates or trusteeing a loved one's finances or being sued or suing someone in civil or small claims court. Two of the three people who disclosed that they have children listed child custody or child support issues.

The study indicated intersections between immigration status and the impact of legal problems, with increased instability and consequences felt by those who were also facing immigration uncertainty. Racial profiling by police and authority figures, including teachers and school administrators, result in increased distrust of legal resolutions. Childhood experience of legal processes, including landlord-tenant and family law disputes, led to greater isolation when these participants dealt with their own legal issues.

The legal problems that respondents faced resulted in negative impacts on their health, finances, education, trust in government services, and general sense of belonging in society.

Respondents pursued a range of resolution options, depending their own circumstances and the type of legal problem. Most expressed reluctance or distrust of formal legal supports favouring community supports. Many respondents navigated their legal issue with no supports and identified fear, isolation, and uncertainty as a result.

The experiences that the focus group participants shared varied in substantive area, severity, and complexity. Despite this variation, all of the participants understood their legal issues through a combined lens of race and social circumstance. They described their experiences of systems and institutions, as well their options for responding, as issues of racism in their lives. Race was not only a factor in overt instances of discrimination or racist treatment, but also a factor in their experiences of civil and criminal legal issues. They saw race, social privilege, and economic opportunity as fundamental to how they navigated legal issues and why they faced legal problems.

This qualitative research study examined the impact of serious legal problems on 16- to 30-year-olds in the Black community in Toronto and Ottawa. The study, one of 13 undertaken by different research teams across the country, provides a more detailed picture of the experiences of this subset of Canadian society. The 13 studies are intended to complement the national data collected through the Canadian Legal Problems Survey (CLPS) 2021. The CLPS 2021 is being conducted by Statistics Canada on behalf of Justice Canada and several other federal departments.

The methodology for this qualitative study is rooted in an intersectional understanding of people's experience of legal conflict, public services, and of research environments. Our approach uses a narrative focus group structure, spurred by scenario-based examples, to invite participants to share their experiences. The methodology is further informed by an understanding of the participants' age and level of experience with authorities and institutions. The focus group structure has been designed to solicit stories from participants, recognizing the fluid and emerging nature of participants' understanding of the legal implications of issues in their lives. Along with other benefits to participation, the opportunity to share experiences of serious legal problems was followed by a capacity-building opportunity to build the skills and knowledge of legal options to help participants navigate future legal problems.

RESEARCH TEAM

This research, commissioned by Justice Canada, was conducted by CALIBRATE and the Ontario Justice Education Network (OJEN) working in partnership. The research team includes:

Sarah McCoubrey is a strategist and founder of CALIBRATE. She has spent 20 years working in the public, non-profit, and private sectors to improve our justice system. She combines her legal experience with a Master of Education in adult and community-based education and an undergraduate degree in women's studies. She brings new perspectives and system-wide thinking to entrenched problems and emerging opportunities. Sarah has conducted research into access to justice, gender-mainstreaming, and human rights issues in Canada and internationally.

Meredith Brown is a strategist and partner at CALIBRATE. She specializes in developing a strategic approach to problem solving, and stakeholder and public consultation. She works globally in the area of gender equality, access to justice and rights, and good governance. Prior to joining CALIBRATE, Meredith spent 17 years with the Ministry of the Attorney General for Ontario, including as a practising lawyer and as the Executive Director of the Ministry's Innovation Office, introducing a culture of transformation and delivering successful change on key projects that improved the internal and public-facing administration of justice. She combines her legal education and experience with her education in international relations.

Enisoné L. Kadiri is a senior program manager at the Ontario Justice Education Network, where she manages public legal education projects geared to youth living in high risk communities and their trusted intermediaries and adult allies. A graduate of McGill University, Enisoné has a background in social justice, advocacy, non-profit management, community-based research, and community development. She has experience working with youth in counselling and mentoring capacities and has extensive experience working with equity-seeking groups and women's rights organizations.

Jess Reekie is the executive director of the Ontario Justice Education Network, where she focuses on OJEN's strategic direction and relationship building among legal, education, and community organizations. A graduate of Harvard University and Dalhousie Law School, Jess

practised immigration and refugee law and has worked for more than 20 years in the not-for-profit sector. She also serves as vice-president of the Board of Directors for the Public Legal Education Association of Canada (PLEAC).

Tina Yousif is a law student at the University of Ottawa, with a Master in Public Health. She has conducted data analysis as well as research and community engagement sessions in racialized contexts. Tina brings her experience in law, health, and statistical analysis to her role as research assistant.

METHODOLOGY OVERVIEW

Data collection happened in two stages. Participants, recruited by OJEN's community partners, were first asked to complete an online survey that collected demographic data about their age and racial self-identification to confirm membership in the target research group. The survey also asked demographic questions aligned to the demographic section of the Canadian Legal Problems Survey, focusing on employment, family structure, housing, and use of financial products. The survey also asked participants to identify if they have had different categories of serious legal problems in the previous three years. Participants who disclosed serious l egal problems and met the eligibility criteria participated in online focus groups. Thirty-four people completed the online survey, all but one of whom met the age and racial identity criteria. Twenty-six people participated in the focus groups. Some of the online survey respondents met the eligibility criteria but were unable to participate in a focus group due to scheduling issues. The online survey questions are appended.

Four focus groups were held online using a video platform (Zoom). The focus groups brought together young people with previous involvement at one of the partnering community organizations. The researchers presented questions for discussion organized by theme. This group discussion allowed for the exploration of interconn ected legal problems. It also allowed young people, who may have been unsure about whether their experience constituted a legal problem, to hear the related experiences of their peers. This methodology let participants give

context to their experience, recognizing that participants' inexperience or age affected their comfort with the focus group format and with identifying and discussing legal problems.

Each session was facilitated by at least two researchers. The focus group structure was described to participants, including the fact that the sessions were being recorded. Once the recording started, all participants were asked to turn on their cameras during the reading of the letter of consent to participate. They were asked to give a visual or audible indication of their consent to each statement. Throughout the rest of the session, participants could turn their cameras on and off, as they preferred. They answered questions orally or by using the chat feature to respond.

Ethical Considerations

This research is premised on accepted principles of research ethics. Steps were taken to maximize benefits and minimize harm (risk-benefit ratio) by obtaining informed consent from participants, protecting their confidentiality, avoiding any deception, and providing a right to withdraw from the research study at any time.

Our approach was grounded in the contextual understanding of young people's lives with special procedures to protect their interests. The ethical considerations of research into young people's experience combine the risk-benefit issues common when researching adults, with the added attention to young people's inexperience with systems and lack of awareness of their legal rights and remedies. The facilitators warned against detailed descriptions of legal problems and intervened to promote anonymized accounts to protect privacy. There were no instances of detailed disclosure or admission of details of current charges or situations that warranted immediate assistance, legal advice, or intervention.

The research team was prepared to make effective referrals to legal aid and legal information and assistance, taking steps to protect rights. There was no instance that required a referral for legal supports.

Demographic and focus group data was collected using pseudonyms selected by each participant.[1] Participants were asked to log in to the video call using their pseudonyms. The researchers and other participants were able to refer to each other using these pseudonyms, which displayed on the video screen next to any chats written by that participant. This approach minimized the risk of individual identification in the data analysis process and provided participants with an added layer of trust in the process. It allowed for conversational-style discussion without learning or using participants' names.

A set of guidelines for the focus group discussion was outlined at the beginning of the session and reiterated at the end, reminding participants of their commitment to respect and maintain the privacy of participants.

At the end of the focus group sessions, participants were offered two benefits. They were given a $40 Amazon card, sent electronically within 24 hours. They were also advised that they could attend an OJEN public legal education session to help them address the direct and serious consequences of legal conflict in their lives.

Potential participants were emailed an information sheet describing the purpose of the research and the methodology, sent to them by the community partner. They completed an online consent form and then reiterated their consent to each component of the consent form visually or audibly at the beginning of the focus group sessions.

Summary results and the final report have been shared with the participants directly and with the community partners. This summary results version of the results is appended.

GEOGRAPHY

Originally planned prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, this study was designed to focus on participants in the Toronto area only, restricted by proximity to the researchers. The methodology was then adapted, in light of the prohibition on social gatherings, to be conducted online. This included consideration of online consents, recording and privacy issues. It also

[1] Participants were each asked to select a name of a city or country as their pseudonym. There were no instances of participants in the same focus group selecting the same name.

allowed for the participation of people from a larger geographic base, and participation was expanded to include people from and Ottawa.

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT

Participant recruitment was done by OJEN's community partners. Youth workers and program staff liaised with young people engaged in the agency's programming. Staff at these organizations shared a description of the research with people who fit the age and racial identity focus of the study. A listing of examples of serious legal problems, drawn from the Canadian Legal Problems Survey, was shared with potential research participants. Participants were asked to self-identify if they have had a serious legal problem, based on this description. They provided their age and demographic details, including racial identity and type of legal problems, in the online survey. Thirty-three people completed the survey and 26 of those who fit the research parameters and were available participated in the focus groups.

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Agency staff expressed interest in the research and encouraged people to participate as an opportunity to share their experiences. Community partners were eager to see the results of the research and were generally pleased to see a focus on the experiences of 16- to 30-year-old members of the Black community. The community organizations that assisted with participant recruitment include:

- Catholic Centre for Immigrants / Centre catholique pour immigrants
- City of Toronto Parks and Recreation
- Massey Centre
- St. Stephen's Community House
- West End Youth Motivators
- Youth Services Bureau – Ottawa

Questions and Discussion Themes

The online survey asked age-appropriate questions linked to the demographic section of the Canadian Legal Problems Survey.

The focus groups were organized into four themes. For each theme, a consistent set of questions was posed. The themes were:

- Legal problems about money (debt, purchases, employment, civil suits)
- Legal problems at home (housing, evictions, family breakdown, children)
- Legal problems about security / personal treatment (harassment, discrimination, immigration, social assistance)
- Legal problems about safety (threats, police interactions)

Scenario Prompts

At the beginning of each themed discussion, the researchers provided a series of scenario prompts to cue the interpretation of the theme and invite participants to respond with experiences aligned with the research questions.

Money Scenarios:

A serious legal problem with money might be:

- Defaulting on a cell phone contract and not being able to pay the bill or get a new phone
- Dealing with a collection agency or debt problems
- Getting called to court because of a money problem, including small claims court
- Being fired at work
- Not getting enough shifts at work, or being treated differently at work
- Working under the table
- Having problems with taxes

HOME SCENARIOS:

A serious legal problem at home might be:

- Having to move often
- Finding a great apartment online, but being treated differently after meeting the landlord
- Getting frequent noise complaints, more often than other neighbours
- Having trouble paying for repair or rent
- Going through a change in family structure (separation, divorce, remarriage)
- Dealing with changing child support or custody arrangements
- Not having child support or custody arrangements

SECURITY / PERSONAL TREATMENT:

A serious legal problem with security or personal treatment might be:

- Being treated differently in school, in a store, or in a public service because of your race, gender, or other aspect of your identity
- Being uncertain about your immigration status as a refugee, an immigrant, a permanent resident, or an undocumented worker
- Getting some kind of government assistance, or having trouble getting government assistance like disability benefits, social assistance, or the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB)
- Being treated differently at a government office or at school
- Being harassed (i.e., negative treatment that isn't discriminatory, but is still a problem)

SAFETY

A serious legal problem with safety might be:

- Interactions with the police, special constables on transit, or in schools, which could involve being stopped, detained, or arrested, or as a victim or a witness to an event
- Being threatened, or feeling unsafe (and not calling the police)
- Being threatened or feeling unsafe because of the police
- Experiencing issues of break-ins or vandalism in the neighbourhood that affect your personal safety

The discussion questions within each theme were:

Q1. Have you experienced a legal problem related to [theme]? [Participants who indicated yes described their legal problem.]

Q2. How did it impact your life? For example, did it impact your health, money problems, your relationships with your family, friends, or co-workers?

[Prompts were given on each area (health, money, relationships)]

Q3. Has your legal problem been resolved?

Q4. If you said yes, it is resolved, how happy are you with the resolution?

Q5. What did you do to resolve your problem?

Q6. Who did you ask for help? For example, did you talk to a friend, a community worker, or a legally trained person? Did you hire a lawyer, solve the problem yourself, or ignore it? Answer with as many actions as you took.

Q7. Discussion: What do you want to tell us about how a legal problem in [theme] affected you?

The researchers facilitated the discussion, calling on participants who indicated that they had legal problems and following up on comments that indicated impacts or intersections between legal problems.

Data Analysis

The focus group conversations were re-watched, and common types of legal problems tagged by impact or experience. Online survey results were tabulated and integrated into the aggregated data. Similar impacts on participants' lives were grouped across the four sessions. This report expands on these commonalities, providing a qualitative snapshot into the impact of serious legal problems in the lives of 16- to 30-year-olds in the Black community.

Observations about Focus Group Participation

During the focus groups, participants were often initially quiet, indicating that they did not have a legal problem related to that particular theme. Once others started to discuss their experience, some participants who had initially indicated that they did not have related experiences would share the details of very similar incidents. We attribute this to a combination of not categorizing these experiences as legal and being prompted or reminded of an event by hearing someone else's similar story.

Participants also became more comfortable with the focus group structure over time, having less to say about the first theme and then describing problems that fit into that theme later in the discussion.

Some participants indicated that they had a type of serious legal problem, but did not want to talk about its impact. In some cases, the reticent person explained that the impact was too difficult to talk about or too personal.

CONTEXT

COVID-19

All stages of this research happened during the COVID pandemic-related changes to social and professional gatherings. Survey respondents, focus group participants, and researchers all took part virtually. While a few participants were travelling to work as essential workers, most were at home.

The evolving scientific information and related policy changes created a general sense of uncertainty, and, for some people, anxiety, throughout the time period of this study. In response to COVID, governments were also announcing new programs, initiatives, and changes to social infrastructure. The manner and frequency of government and media messaging was focused on the pandemic, especially during the recruitment and survey portion of the study.

It would be speculative to draw any specific conclusions about the impact of this period of uncertainty on the study results. However, it is important to consider the events and climate affecting both participants and researchers during the study.

RACIAL INJUSTICE PROTESTS

This research looked specifically at the experiences of people who identify as Black. Their racial identity and the differential impact of legal problems is the key inquiry in this research. George Floyd died after being arrested by police in Minneapolis, Minnesota. This pivotal event occurred after the project launched, but before the first focus group was held. The protests that began in Minneapolis on 26 May 2020 galvanized new attention to the #BlackLivesMatter (#BLM) movement, including global calls to address systemic anti-Black racism, police brutality, and defunding police services. In Canada, #BLM protests took place in most cities and drew substantial crowds, despite the pandemic restrictions on social gatherings. Protests focused attention on police killings of Black and Indigenous people in Canada and on systemic racism issues in the Canadian criminal justice system. Politicians at the municipal, provincial, and

national level made public statements about systemic racism and in some cases took steps aimed at police accountability.

The focus groups were held between 30 June and 19 August 2020. All participants and the researchers had a heightened awareness of the discussions of systemic racism in the justice system and in society as a whole. Participants had observations both about racism and about popular proposals to address it.

RACE, AGE, AND GENDER

In Ontario, 4.7 percent (627,715) of people identify as Black. In Toronto, the Black community makes up 8.9 percent (239,850) of the population and in Ottawa 6.6 percent (60,205). Ontario's large urban communities have Black populations of over twice the size of the Black community in Canada (3.5 percent).[2]

The Black community, particularly Black-identified young people, face anti-Black racism in their civic participation, as well as in their ability to contract for housing, employment, and other basic components of everyday life. The unemployment rate for Black people in Ontario is 13 percent, compared with 7.5 percent for non-racialized people.[3] Black youth face a 28 percent unemployment rate, compared with the national average for youth of 14.3 percent.[4]

The intersection of race and age magnifies the impact of this racism, further isolating these young people from the economic and social stability needed to establish themselves independently from their families.[5] Gender adds a further intersectional dimension with young Black men and women each experiencing different impacts of racism. Social expectations of young people are gendered. At the intersection of race and gender, young Black men face stereotypes about their aspirations, criminality, and academic or professional potential. They are often assumed to have a narrower range of emotional responses or interests, and often

[2] NHS Profile, Toronto, C, Ontario, 2016.
[3] National Household Survey, Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 99-012-X2011038. 2011. Statistics Canada.
[4] *The Colour Coded Labour Market By The Numbers: A National Household Survey Analysis*. Sheila Block, Grace-Edward Galabuzi, and Alexandra Weiss. 2014. The Wellesley Institute.
[5] *The Review of the Roots of Youth Violence, Vol 1: Findings, Analysis and Conclusions.* Government of Ontario. Hon. Roy McMurtry and Dr. Alvin Curling.
http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/documents/youthandthelaw/rootsofyouthviolence-vol1.pdf

describe negative pre-judgments at school, at work, and in public settings.[6] Young Black women face different expectations: about their sexuality, their role within the family, and their responsibility for others. For all genders, assumptions about their capabilities or choices are used to narrow their opportunities.[7] Visible markers of racial identity, religious adherence, and cultural connection can increase young people's experience of discrimination.

The experiences of these young people are heightened in urban areas where neighbourhoods are affected by media portrayals and demographic and crime trends that further stigmatize residents.[8] Each of these layers of discrimination and stereotyping makes their experience of legal problems unique.

STUDY RESULTS

ONLINE SURVEY RESPONSES

Thirty-four people completed the survey data. The responses of the 33 people who fall within the study's parameters are included here in the analysis of demographics and frequency of serious legal problems.

AGE AND GENDER

Respondents ranged from 16 to 30 years old. Sixty percent of the respondents identified as women. All respondents identified as Black, some giving more specific identities such as "Black / Afro-Canadian" or "Jamaican." One respondent identified as "Mixed (White & Black)."

[6] "As a Black student, he was told to dream small. He had hoped that things would change for his son," *Toronto Star*, Sept 06, 2019. https://www.thestar.com/news/atkinsonseries/2019/09/06/as-a-black-student-he-was-told-to-dream-small-but-he-hoped-things-would-change-for-his-son.html

[7] "Racialized Canadians continue to face barriers to decent work," Behind the Numbers. Nov 29, 2017. https://behindthenumbers.ca/2017/11/29/racialized-canadians-barriers-to-work/

[8] City of Toronto. *Toronto Action Plan to Confront Anti-Black Racism*. https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2017/ex/bgrd/backgroundfile-109127.pdf; Government of Ontario. *A Better Way Forward: Ontario's 3-Year Anti-Racism Strategic Plan*. https://www.ontario.ca/page/better-way-forward-ontarios-3-year-anti-racism-strategic-plan

Living Situation

All but one respondent described themselves as single, the other person listing themselves as part of a common-law relationship. Three respondents each have one child, and one respondent has two children. Eighty-eight percent of respondents do not have children.

When asked about their living situation, most responded that they live with their parents / siblings (62 percent), and the rest of the participants live with other family members, friends, a partner, or live alone. Almost all (97 percent) respondents live in rented homes, while three percent live in a home that they or their family owns.

Financial Products

Most respondents used financial products. They include: credit cards, cell phones (either in their own name or on someone else's plan), and bank accounts. Only three respondents (nine percent) use no financial products.

Work status

Respondents were asked about their employment status. Just under half (44 percent) are currently attending school, 17 percent are working full time, and a third (32 percent) are working part time. A small number (six percent) care for children full time and 12 percent are currently looking for work. Five respondents were laid off due to the COVID pandemic.

Income level

Respondents were asked to identify their household income level according to the Ontario Legal Aid eligibility thresholds. Seventeen people indicated that their house hold made less than the threshold for their family size. The rest of the participants did not know their household income level.

Type and Frequency of Legal Problem

Respondents were asked to identify the type and frequency of serious legal problems they had experienced in the last three years. Only one person, a 16-year-old male, did not identify a serious legal problem in the last three years. He did not participate in the focus group.

The most common types of legal problems were experiences of discrimination in public settings (48 percent), issues with housing (44 percent), police contact (40 percent), and employment issues (36 percent). No respondents identified legal problems related to estates or trusteeing a loved one's finances or being sued or suing someone in civil or small claims court. Two of the three people who disclosed that they have children listed child custody or child support issues.

FOCUS GROUPS

Of the people who responded to the survey, 26 participated in the focus groups. The groups were a mix of people who knew each other and some who did not, either because they were drawn from different programs at one of the community partners, or because they attended a different focus group that better suited their schedule.

Sixteen of the focus group participants identified as women and nine as men. One participant opted not to identify a gender.

The four focus groups were scheduled for 90 minutes each with two of them lasting slightly longer.

Participants' responses are presented here according to commonalities in their experiences. While discussions started along the four themes of *money, home, security*, and *safety*, the discussion often crossed into different or related areas. As participants became more comfortable with the discussion, they returned to substantive legal issues addressed in earlier themes. Others described an issue as discrimination or security that had a financial or family dimension. This fluid understanding of the substantive legal categories was anticipated and addressed at the analysis phase. In many instances, when asked if they had experienced a certain type of serious legal problem, such as an issue related to money, only one person would say they had experienced such an issue. However, as the discussion continued, more participants would share similar experiences. As a result, it is difficult to count the number of participants who recognize the substantive legal category of their problem. In the results described here, the themes and common experiences are described reflecting the focus of the

discussion, but without assigning a frequency of occurrence to each type of legal problem, because participants did not reliably make that identification.

Focus Group Results

In our analysis of the data, it is clear that participants – regardless of age or gender, whether talking about an employment or a housing or a family matter, whether relatively minor, or quite serious – were always aware of how their race and lack of social opportunity affected the incidence of legal problems in their lives and their ability to navigate them. Participants who assessed their options were aware of the impact of their relative lack of social opportunities – their access to full economic and civic participation – as well as their individual social capital. Race and economics were primary themes, more so than substantive legal topics or common strategies or avenues for resolution. They understand their legal issues through a lens of race and social opportunity.

The focus group data is presented here, organized by theme, reflecting the tenor of the discussions. These themes draw on the categories of impact used in the CLPS, as well as themes that emerged as prevalent among participants.

Themes

Intersections between Immigration Status and Legal Issues

Participants described how their current or past immigration instability affect their understanding of serious legal problems. They spoke of the different experience of moving from a country where everyone has a similar skin colour, to Canada, where they were suddenly made aware of their own skin colour by the treatment they received.

> "Right now, I have to think twice [about calling a lawyer] before I find myself at the airport." - 27 year old.

One participant spoke about repeatedly being assigned to English as a Second Language (ESL) in school because she wore a hijab.

> "I would have to fight for my seat in class. Otherwise, they would put me in ESL class even though I didn't need it. Because I wore a Hijab." - 20 year old

As a recent immigrant, one participant found that only government-sponsored immigrants could get housing. Arriving in Canada alone, he was not able to work around the landlord requirements. One participant, an international student, spoke about an inability to get a financial credit rating in order to obtain stable housing. There was no government official to help him obtain the appropriate credit report required to rent or qualify for university residence. As a result, he slept on the floor of a family member's home for a year, while attending university, before he was able to qualify for residence. After receiving advice from a settlement officer, one person who was discriminated against in the hiring process decided not to ask for legal help. He was not prepared to go to court and worried about the impact making a complaint would have on his immigration status. Some participants indicated that they did not pursue a formal complaint or report to or about the police because they feared the negative repercussions on their immigration status or professional licence.

POLICING AND RACIAL PROFILING

Participants described being stopped by police, carded, pulled over for alleged traffic violations, pulled over or stopped because they looked similar to someone the police indicated they were looking for. Participants indicated that they were frequently stopped by police without a stated reason, and police then looked for a reason to continue contact. For example, the police would indicate that the participant's evident fear was suspicious and sufficient grounds in itself for a search, or police would indicate that a discussion between occupants in the car in another language was a danger to police and therefore grounds for detaining the participant. One participant described an experience in which police made up a crime in order to pull him over, telling him that he matched the description of a hit and run suspect, only for the participant to find out later that there had been no hit and run.

> "I read in the Human Rights Commission report that Black people are 20 times more likely to be shot by police in an interaction. We are paying taxes into a

> system that murders us. That is how I feel, personally. … Police are my last resort because I have seen and witnessed what happens when they intervene. I don't feel protected by them. I feel unsafe. I feel I am moments away from it being my last interaction with anyone." - 26 year old

Policing and Neighbourhood Profiling

A number of participants were treated as suspicious by police once police learned that they lived in a low-income or a predominantly Black neighbourhood. Sometimes police would ask them to justify why they were outside their neighbourhood.

Participants also spoke about a lack of police engagement in responding or following up on crime within their neighbourhood. They described cases of police not fully investigating domestic violence or allowing cases to go unsolved. One participant spoke about their experience of being a victim of a crime. Participants indicated that in predominantly Black or low-income neighbourhoods, they were more likely to attempt to resolve issues on their own, rather than involve the police.

> "It is an understanding that nothing good comes out of interactions with police. You have to do your best to keep yourself safe…. The main goal with the police is to stay alive, that is the priority." - 26 year old.

> "The policeman said to me 'I hope you are not here doing what I think you are doing.'" - 27 year old.

> "I don't have any violations or a record so when I get pulled over I know it is because of the colour of my skin." - 27 year old.

> "I'm more likely not to call the police when I have an issue." - 29 year old

Some participants who described serious legal issues with police (including being wrongly identified as a person of interest), sought an apology from the police officer or filed a formal complaint. One participant who made a complaint against the police described a lengthy process for giving his evidence and then a long delay before a decision was made. Most participants indicated that they had no expectation that filing a formal complaint with the police would be successful.

CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES

While the participants' serious legal problems took place in the last three years, their experiences were directly informed by legal problems they experienced when they were younger. Participants described family and immigration issues as their first exposure to the formal justice system. They described the process as complex and intimidating, involving many offices and little support. They felt alone navigating the system, whether on behalf of their family or because they had arrived in Canada on their own.

The prevalence of legal problems in their childhood affected many participants' experiences of more recent legal disputes. Living in social housing, participants said that repairs were never done, and described a constant battle to get the minimum standards met. Participants described living with their families in rental housing that was poorly maintained, where landlords refused to make basic repairs. One participant talked about having to move regularly during her life because of unstable housing. As a child and adolescent, she often advocated to the landlord, or watched her family struggle with poor housing. Participants' experiences with landlords included constant confrontations, delays, and excuses. These experiences affect whether or not they take action on similar issues now. One participant explained that she does not trust social housing and is always ready for a confrontation about housing.

Participants also talked about the impact of family breakdown when their parents separated and its impact on their current relationships. Participants who were the oldest children described having responsibility for explaining what was happening to their younger siblings. One participant described having to assist his mother during her divorce, by acting as her representative at government offices at age 18. As family matters are considered private, he did not ask anyone for help. One participant had to help her mother get legal help and fill out forms.

Watching their parents try to resolve these matters taught participants to avoid the formal systems (courts) and legal supports (government offices and legal clinics).

> "It gave me insight into how the courts worked. It is something to avoid at all costs." – 27 year old.

IMPACTS

IMPACT ON HEALTH

Many participants described feelings of anxiety and depression as a result of their legal problems, or specifically because of their efforts to resolve the issue.

One participant explained how housing instability affected her. She is always looking for accessible housing and described herself as caught in a never-ending cycle of searching for new ways to secure housing or funding. The lack of housing stability affected her work and school choices and led to ongoing anxiety. The frequent moving strained relationships. She grew up without a solid foundation and attributes her anxiety and bouts of depressions to this pattern of housing instability.

Another participant explained that her childhood experiences of conflict with landlords and substandard housing became a way of life. She learned to adapt to change and keep going. Ongoing anxiety and a sense of isolation were common impacts for everyone with housing issues.

A participant who faced financial and debt issues explained that her legal issues triggered anxiety, depression, and a sense of being alone. She was ashamed and did not ask anyone for help. The collection agency repeatedly called her parents, introducing conflict into her only supportive relationship.

> "There are times when I have had to miss out on opportunities, or I have had to resign from my place of employment just because of the environment of discrimination and because of harassment." - 26 year old

Family issues that are re-visited/re-opened periodically bring repeated health consequences. Every time there is a variation or another procedure, it brings the same uncertainty and fear. Participants described experiencing all of the feelings again and having the sense of instability return.

Participants indicated that it was frequently difficult for them to sleep following an incident of discrimination and it influenced their ability to concentrate in school. One participant explained

that for a week after being discriminated against in a retail store, he did not feel like himself, he could not sleep, and he could not focus, as he kept replaying it over and over. In another instance, a participant resorted to violence, resulting in injury and arrest.

Participants did not talk to others about their problems. They described feeling alone or unable to reach out to informal supports like friends and family or to professional supports like social workers. Some described embarrassment, others confusion or isolation, and endured the health impacts of their legal problems themselves.

IMPACT ON FINANCES

Most participants did not identify a financial aspect to their legal problems, though they did describe having to quit jobs, move to new housing, or avoid business and experiences. Despite these links to financial stability, most participants did not connect the legal issue to a financial impact.

Participants, as consumers, limited their options in order to avoid stores where they had experienced discrimination, including clothing, beauty, and grocery stores. Participants who had experienced discriminatory treatment in their employment had quit their jobs, leading to periods of unemployment or underemployment. One participant who dealt with debt and collection agencies took two jobs and worked all the time to pay off their debt.

Involvement in family court on a child custody matter connected one participant to financial supports. She received financial support in the court process and learned about ongoing financial support that she was eligible for as a result of her interaction with the legal system.

Some participants opted not to pursue complaints against police because they were concerned about the long-term impacts of making a complaint on their choice of career or their immigration status. They factored the financial implications into their decision to report racist treatment.

A number of participants indicated that they had struggled to find new employment, especially in the retail sector, during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Impact on Education

Participants linked their educational experiences to discrimination, describing lower expectations and resources for Black students in school. They described a common experience of being sent to a resource room for help, being ignored or being labelled as a troublemaker when they were struggling in class, rather than having positive or affirming support from teachers. Black students were not pushed to do better. In terms of ongoing labelling and discrimination at school, there was a clear theme of having to accept it, being powerless to advocate or looking for allies (such as teachers who are also racialized) to support their advocacy. The long-term implications of the labelling and discrimination at school were also apparent to the participants. These included being streamed away from university and missing other opportunities.

Impact on Trust and Sense of Security

Participants spoke of the challenges they experienced finding support in the community, especially in light of their home circumstances. They felt a constant need to explain themselves and to prove that they were contributing members of society, to the point of carrying a letter from their employer with them at all times.

> "You have to be smart about where you go and what you say to certain people because you don't know, because of what you look like, how they might react to you and how they might think about you." - 18 year old

Experiencing anti-Black racism at her campus residence has affected one participant's sense of safety in her own home. She was challenged as not looking like a university student and barred from access to her own building. She thinks about the incident a lot and has trouble sleeping. Despite having seen posts about similar discrimination, she was shocked when it happened to her. Making a complaint and then not being taken seriously has been mentally draining. She has not found anyone to talk to about it.

Participants spoke of their discriminatory experiences in school as shocking at first and then becoming "normalized" for them. This was especially difficult for participants who attributed their behaviour in school to traumatic issues at home. They felt that they were not provided with the necessary support or even understanding at school to succeed, and the negative effects have continued into adulthood.

One participant spoke about being repeatedly harassed by an ex-partner, including death threats. One female-identified participant spoke of unwanted attention and sexual harassment by older male customers in her employment in a retail store. The intersection of race and gender was cited as the reason that these legal problems were dismissed, with the participants left to handle them alone.

Participants reported feeling powerless in the face of authorities, especially in the educational and employment context. Others reported losing key supportive relationships as a result of having to change jobs or move to new housing. They felt that they missed out on opportunities. One participant indicated that her experiences meant that she approaches people of different races, including children, differently.

"We need Black people to do better and not fit into stereotypes." - 20 year old

Participants described feelings of increased anxiety around police interactions, heightened by recent media reporting of police misconduct. They felt unsafe in their interactions with police and reported a loss of trust in police; including those participants who indicated that they had had confidence in police before their interaction. One participant reported that the feeling of anxiety about police interaction led to anxiety or "paranoia" using public transit and other public services where she might be confronted by an authority figure.

Some participants identified that Black youth should guard against meeting the negative expectations by adjusting their own behaviour.

STRATEGIES

ASKING FOR HELP

Participants dealing with family matters accessed legal aid or hired a lawyer privately to help resolve custody, separation, or child protection issues. One person dealt with the family law problem himself and struggled with the court process; he complained about the many offices he had to visit and the paperwork.

When discussing a serious debt problem, one person explained that she did not talk to anyone or ask for help because there is no local support for her experience in her small, suburban community.

When talking about discrimination, participants identified formal options as internal complaints mechanisms or invoking administration or management, including making a complaint to the principal or the management of a store. None of the participants indicated that they had considered a formal legal system option for their experiences of harassment and discrimination. There was no meaningful legal recourse option that was visible to the participants.

A number of participants agreed that using community supports such as social workers or participating in the formal legal system resulted in stigmatization inside their community.

> "It is really hard to ask for help because no one really knows what you are going through… You want help, but you don't want people to judge you." - 18 year old

Consequently, they indicated that, where possible, they did not seek formal recourse or support.

FORMAL RESOLUTIONS

Most participants who were involved in a formal legal process were forced to appear in court due to a family or criminal matter. They sought legal help through legal aid or a private lawyer. In a family law context, they were relatively happy with the results, but commented on how slow and confusing the process was.

One participant who was given a traffic ticket as a result of an interaction with police did plead not guilty and went to court. The participant was found not guilty after telling the judge about their experience with the police.

> "I had a lawyer assist me. It was a positive experience working with a lawyer. He respected me as a client (he did not see me as a young person going to court for an issue). He defended me well." - 18 year old

One participant who had been arrested indicated that her issues were better resolved once she became pregnant, as she felt the criminal justice system was more willing to provide resources and support to her as an expectant mother. However, she experienced conflict with child services while she was pregnant, which resulted in her newborn staying in hospital after birth. Despite child services acknowledging that they had made a mistake, she did not make a formal complaint because she did not want to engage the system any further.

INFORMAL RESOLUTIONS

Participants spoke about a range of resolution approaches from "just accept it" to, in one instance, resorting to violence.

Efforts to find accessible or subsidized housing in Toronto always resulted in long lists. This left participants in substandard housing because there were no feasible alternatives. None of the participants mentioned dispute resolution options for housing and were resigned to the power differential between landlords and tenants.

The participant who dealt with her debt and collections issues worked two jobs to pay off the debt. She indicated she did not receive help and did not attempt to negotiate the debt.

For educational issues, two of the participants spoke about self-advocacy, approaching a teacher they felt comfortable with or directly approaching the professor. These approaches were considered successful. Other students spoke about "just accepting it," which was not considered to have resolved the issue.

For retail customer issues, most participants indicated that they now choose not to spend money in stores where they have had a discriminatory experience. One participant indicated that they raised the issue with store management but had no resolution.

> "Sometimes you just go in a store and they have extra eyes on you or keep an eye on you just because of your skin colour." - 18 year old

For retail employment issues, all of the participants who spoke about discrimination on the job, either from staff or customers, quit their employment. The participant who experienced sexual harassment in the workplace quit her job after management failed to resolve the issue. The participant who experienced threats from an ex-partner ignored the person and the behaviour until it stopped.

Participants who experienced bullying or threats indicated that they ignored the issue, resolved it themselves or, in one instance, spoke to the school principal. Each of these responses was considered a successful approach to resolution. In one instance, the participant resorted to violence and was consequently arrested and charged.

Participants provided numerous examples of attempting to resolve the issue of police treatment when they are stopped through advance preparation, such as always carrying their ID, reading resources about their rights and how to interact with police, and ensuring that their friends also know their rights. During police interactions, participants talked about trying not to escalate situations, and cooperating with police while still asserting their rights.

Making Legal Complaints to Authorities Other than the Police

Attempts at resolution that did not result in resolution entrenched participants' alienation from pursuing legal solutions. One participant, as the oldest child, has always had to deal with the housing agencies to get their family's apartment repaired. One participant had trouble getting a housing subsidy. He talked to a social worker, but in the end, nothing changed. After a year of unstable housing, another participant was able to get student housing without a credit score. During the year, the participant did not feel he could make a complaint.

One participant related an experience of anti-Black racism at her on-campus residence. After refusing to show student ID to another student barring entry into her own residence, she reported the incident to campus security. She was not taken seriously and was told that the cameras on the building were not working so an investigation was not possible. A week later, all residents were told of another investigation into a stolen chair, relying on footage from the same cameras. She is reluctant to complain again.

The participant who was a victim of crime pursued recourse through the formal legal system, including through police and social workers at victim services. The participant did not feel that sufficient investigation was conducted before the matter was withdrawn, leaving the participant with a feeling that justice had not been served.

Participants who had difficulty receiving Employment Insurance (EI) or the Canadian Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) indicated that they took active steps to address the delay in payment, including repeated calls to help lines and using government websites. All participants with this issue indicated that it had been resolved.

REASONS FOR NOT REPORTING

Reasons for not reporting or not taking action on legal issues ranged from lack of awareness of a recourse, to a sense of futility or mistrust of processes and officials. None of the participants specifically cited financial barriers to legal resolution.

One participant chose not to contact a lawyer about employment-related discrimination. He spoke with a settlement officer to try to understand Canadian hiring processes. He was advised that it might be a case of discrimination, but that he would have to take his chances in court to prove it. Without residency papers, he did not want to get involved or take additional risks. He worried that the federal government would use a legal action as a reason to deport him. He was not sure if even asking a lawyer about the problem might lead to the government flagging his immigration application.

A number of participants agreed that making a report might result in stigmatization inside their community. Consequently, they indicated that, where possible, they did not seek formal recourse or support.

Relationships with Friends and Family

One participant accrued a significant debt and struggled to pay it off. Collection agencies called frequently and spoke with her parents. It has strained her relationship with family members. She felt alone during this period and continues to worry constantly about money.

The legal aspects of family law were stressful and expensive, even if the outcomes were generally satisfactory. Participants expressed frustration and confusion. One explained that it has led to trust issues with her friends and families. Others described the impact of watching their parents' separation as detrimental to their own relationships.

One participant explained that having immigrant parents meant that she did not have support systems at home to help her deal with anti-Black racism. She felt caught in between, having to explain the workplace discrimination to her parents, who did not share her experience.

Relationships in the public sphere

Discrimination at work has led to mistrust and a feeling that things are not fair, but that there is nothing to be done about it. For one participant who faced additional immigration-related vulnerabilities, the sense of mistrust intensified.

> "People have power and they use it to make you feel less-than." - 18 year old

As parents, participants described being caught in lengthy or frustrating child custody issues. One person, while pregnant, was flagged by child services as gang-involved based on racist assumptions. Another participant had legal issues about the custody of her child and worried about their safety.

Participants spoke about a number of issues they faced in school, starting from elementary school and lasting into post-secondary. They experienced and observed Black children labelled as “troublemakers” or “loud” more quickly and more often than children from other races. Black children were singled out and punished rather than supported. Participants also indicated that Black children were more quickly sent to “resource,” were not supported to succeed academically and were encouraged towards trades rather than university, even when they expressed interest in university. In university, one participant experienced a professor who explained points twice to him and not to other students, despite the particpant not having asked a question. These experiences of discrimination accumulate and result in an expressed mistrust of authorities.

As customers, participants indicated that in some stores they were followed persistently by staff and watched by security. In some stores, the employees ignored their requests for service.

As employees, participants spoke about a number of challenges they experienced related to being Black, including noticing that no racialized staff were assigned to work the cash or to be up front with customers. Racialized staff also received overtly critical management in a manner different from other employees.

> “It got to the point where the assistant manager scheduled me on days when the manager wasn’t working, because I was the only one she picked on.” - 29 year old.

Other participants described customers ignoring them, asking to speak to other staff, or expecting them to provide an unreasonable level of service and then complaining if they did not comply.

> “I faced a lot of discrimination racially at my last retail job with customers treating me differently and making comments. They basically treated me like a slave…. I talked to the company but because it was so high end, they didn’t do anything. Eventually I quit the job. … I decided that I wasn’t going to work there anymore, and I’d find a new job that respects me.“ (Took 3–4 months to find a new job) - 20 year old

A number of participants indicated that they had experienced delays in receiving Employment Insurance benefits and the CERB because of COVID. They spoke about trying to navigate a complicated and confusing system and repeated calls to phone lines that were unanswered.

One participant described anti-Black racism on campus. She was denied entry to her building and questioned by another student who did not believe that she looked like a student. She distrusts campus security's willingness to protect her and is stunned that she can be challenged in this way.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH AUTHORITY

Participants had many negative experiences with those in authority – whether in health care, or police services, education, or employment. One striking example is of a participant who had been flagged by child protection services and was not allowed to take her newborn baby home from the hospital. Eventually the allegation was found to be false and child services apologized. She resents the loss that was caused by the way this authority was misused.

> "You have to be smart about where you go and what you say to certain people because you don't know, because of what you look like, how they might react to you and how they might think about you." - 18 year old

One participant described how negative interactions with authority affected her on a daily basis. She rides public transit every day on a post-secondary pass and is always ready to be challenged on whether she is a student. It has become a part of her life; she expects to be asked more questions than other people. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, she takes all of her identification with her everywhere, along with a letter from her employer, as she expects to be stopped by police or challenged about why she is outside (en route to work as an essential worker). She recognizes that her interactions with police have resulted in an ever-present paranoia, but she takes steps every day on the assumption that something bad is going to happen. She makes sure that she knows the rules and is ready in case something happens.

One participant spoke about being repeatedly harassed by an ex-partner, including death threats. One female-identified participant spoke of unwanted attention and sexual harassment by older male customers in her employment in a retail store. These participants have no

confidence in legal resolution of these issues through the authorities that hear complaints about discrimination, including the police, human rights bodies, and immediate authority figures like retail managers.

> "Government information and documents are all so confusing and no one knows where to go for help." - 21 year old.

> "The idea of criminalization starts at a very early age. My experiences with policing were too early. … What I thought was normal I now realize was not normal." - 26 year old

Some participants indicated that they felt concerned for their physical safety around police. The participant who had been arrested said that she stopped going to school because that was where police came to question her.

Some participants expressed regret in the change of relationship between them and the police, as they had had positive experiences with in-school officers prior to their personal interaction with police. Others indicated that they had never experienced a positive interaction with police. Participants indicated that, after their own experiences, they were less likely to call the police for help.

CUMULATIVE IMPACT OF RACISM

Microaggressions[9] in daily interactions led to many participants' sense of exclusion or apprehension in everyday transactions. The cumulative impact of these racist incidents affects their reaction to services, authorities, and legal issues.

> "My race affects my sense of community."

One participant indicated that her experiences meant that she approaches people of different races, including children, differently. She is cautious and will not approach a child in the same friendly way she might talk to a Black child because of the racist response of a parent.

[9] Indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination against members of a marginalized group.

Participants described surprise or shock at experiencing racism personally. One participant was shocked when racial profiling happened to her and her complaint was not taken seriously. Another described not being hired for a position that he was perfectly qualified for. He received very positive feedback from the hiring personnel, but was then told that management had not approved him for the position. Another, when relating experiences of being followed or watched in a mall, said he could not believe that this was happening in Canada.

> "It was not OK. Is this really happening? No one should be going through that. It really made me really stand back and think. No one should ever be made to feel like this." - 18 year old

A number of participants spoke about specific racist slurs and threats they and their family members had experienced, including watching their mother be told by a store clerk to go back to where she came from. Participants also spoke about being referred to by racist names and being asked by other students which neighbourhood they come from as a means of broadcasting exclusion. Participants agreed that this is an understood form of threat among high school students. Participants raised the issue of these slurs being used between members of the Black community, as well as by people of other racial identities.

> "They won't give us service and they followed us. … We asked the manager and said You guys are always watching us and you are not helping us. … So, me personally I don't buy their products anymore and I just go somewhere else." - 22 year old

#BLM and Calls for Police Reform

The focus groups occurred in a time of heightened racial tensions with police in North America. The Black Lives Matter movement has renewed its public calls for police reform. The questions about safety and police interaction were answered in this context and spurred a larger dialogue in each focus group about current issues facing policing and Black communities.

For all participants but one, a police interaction changed their views on police, reducing their willingness to engage police again and heightening their anxiety around police. Only one individual, the oldest participant in the study, indicated that even after a negative police

interaction they remained open to dialogue with police and were willing to confront police to assert their rights.

In one focus group, the views on policing were more moderate, expressing that some police presence is necessary and advocating for different kinds of police training, effective police management in various neighbourhoods, and more community supports. This group did not indicate that they were afraid of police, although they did use words like anxious, uncomfortable, and "on alert."

In general, participants felt simultaneously upset about the recent events and inspired to act. Participants' comments about police reform and #BLM include:

- Need for specific anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism resources and training for police;
- Need for more mental health supports and more supports in schools;
- Need for more community resolution options;
- Police are the last resort because they do not lead to safe outcomes for BIPOC;
- Not all police are bad, but we need to establish trust;
- Hard to watch the media;
- Need to address poverty – lots of discrimination is rooted in poverty;
- Belief that police will always cover for themselves against the community;
- Support from different races and cultures is reassuring;
- The protests encouraged me to be more proactive;
- One protest will not fix everything;
- Observation that police do not investigate crime in the Black community;
- Defunding money should go to youth and mental health programming;
- Cannot dismantle the police entirely – we still need them for 911 issues;
- Need better screening processes and different kinds of police;

- Removal of the school resource officer was a bad idea because that person was trusted, and students felt comfortable;
- Structure of BLM as an organization has issues – limits their hopefulness of systemic change or police reform through this movement;
- We have seen more white people showing up, so maybe that will mean this protest will result in something different;
- Feeling as if the fact that the participants are Black means that they have to act, whereas their white peers don't have the same pressures;
- Now it is easier to talk to white people about race;
- There is a stigma about police now even there are good cops, so something major needs to change if we are going to trust police again (here and around the world).

> "The biggest change is the support from all different cultures, seeing all different races marching. Where I go to college is predominantly white, so now it is easier for me to talk about what is happening and what needs to happen." - 27 year old.

> "We give too much power to policing. We put too little time into ourselves and our community. There is power in community and in neighbour-to-neighbour resolution." - 18 year old

OBSERVATIONS

After conducting the focus groups and analyzing the data, the research team identified a number of general trends in the frequency and impact of certain experiences. These provide an additional context to the results.

AGE

The age of the target population may have affected some of their responses. Participants in the younger end of the age range may not necessarily have held a job or signed a housing or employment contract. Others did not volunteer a legal issue at first but then commented in response to another participant's story. They may not have initially recognized the legal aspect

of the issue. This may also have affected the way that they identified the frequency of the serious legal problem or how they categorized it.

The relatively young age of some participants may also have affected the kinds of impacts they identified. For example, many participants talked about leaving jobs because of discriminatory treatment, discrimination in hiring processes, or extended periods of housing instability, but few of them identified a financial impact to these legal problems. Whether this is because they compartmentalized the legal issue from the financial impact of unplanned unemployment, or because they have not yet felt the financial impact is unclear.

Age is also evident in the strategies participants used in the face of serious legal problems. Older participants were more likely to take specific or direct action in response to experiences of discrimination, such as addressing issues directly with teachers, professors, and employers and quitting their employment. Younger participants were more likely to tolerate the mistreatment, accepting harassment, labelling, or bullying at school or use avoidance strategies such as not shopping at certain stores.

Older participants understood the options for complaint and for resolution and were willing to fight individual issues like a traffic ticket. However, they were largely unwilling to make a formal complaint about police.

GENDER

The data also showed differential results based on gender. All of the parents in the study identified as women and described issues of safety and risk around the security of their children. However, the expectation of managing family matters for their parents or helping siblings deal with family breakdown were experienced by both men and women.

Women described incidents of sexual harassment and discrimination by customers while working in retail environments, aligning with sexualized experiences of women across racial distinctions.[10]

[10] Adam Cotter and Laura Savage, *Gender-Based Violence and Unwanted Sexual Behaviour in Canada, 2018: Initial Findings from the Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces*, Statistics Canada, 2019. Accessed at: Https://Www150.Statcan.Gc.Ca/N1/Pub/85-002-X/2019001/Article/00017-Eng.Htm

Racial profiling and police carding, an issue often associated with Black men, was identified by men and women equally with no gendered difference in the frequency, level of aggression, personal risk, impact on physical safety or steps taken to avoid police interactions that the participants reported.

LASTING, PERVASIVE IMPACTS

The childhood experience of serious legal problems, including their peripheral involvement in their parents' legal issues, had a significant impact on participants. The way that they understood and responded to legal issues was informed by their observation of their parents' legal issues, and the ensuing instability in their childhood from discrimination, immigration, and housing uncertainty and family breakdown. Participants were already apprehensive of employers, landlords, government services, people in power, and avenues for assistance when their own first legal problem arose.

While family matters generally resulted in acceptable outcomes, none of the individuals who had experienced criminal legal problems felt that their cases had been handled well by police or the legal system, despite being active participants in the cases.

The experiences that the focus group participants shared varied in substantive area, severity, and complexity. Despite this variation, all of the participants understood their legal issues through a combined lens of race and social opportunity. They described their experiences of systems and institutions, as well as their options for responding, as issues of racism in their lives. Race was not only a factor in overt instances of discrimination or racist treatment, but also a factor in their experiences of civil and criminal legal issues. They saw race, social privilege, and economic opportunity as fundamental to how they navigated legal issues and why they faced legal problems.

APPENDIX A: ONLINE SURVEY QUESTIONS

Top of Form

Serious Legal Problems – Participant Survey

* Required

Please choose a city name (other than Toronto) as your codename. You will use this codename during the focus group as well as on this survey. This will protect your privacy. We will record your responses by your codename. Choose a city name that you will remember at the focus group. It can be any city in the world except Toronto (e.g., Tokyo, Windsor, Kenya, Sidney, Oshawa, Ankara, Montreal).*

Age:*

Race / Ethnicity:*

Do you identify as:

Woman

Man

Non-binary

Prefer not to say

Other:

Are you...

single?

married?

living with a partner (common-law)?

Do you have kids?

0

1

2

3

4

more than 4 children

Living situation:

live alone

live with your parent(s) / siblings

live with extended family (grandparents, aunts, uncles etc.)

live with friends

live with roommates

don't have stable housing

live with my partner and / or kids

Other:

Housing: Do you or your family...

... rent?

...own?

Other:

Do you have...

credit card in your own name?

credit card in someone else's name?

cell phone contract in your own name?

bank account?

bank loan?

leased vehicle?

mortgage?

none of these

Employment: Are you...

working full time?

working part time?

going to school?

going to post-secondary school (college/university)?

caring for children full time?

on a parental leave?

dealing with a long-term illness that prevents you from working?

currently looking for work?

Other:

Do you or your family qualify for legal aid? Pick the size of your family. If you or your family make MORE than that amount, click "more - don't qualify." If you make LESS than that amount, click "less - do qualify." Only answer for one family size. You do not need to answer if you do not know or prefer not to answer.

single person $18,795

family of two $32,131

family of three $39,352

family of four $45,289

family of five or more $50,803

single person $18,795

family of two $32,131

family of three $39,352

family of four $45,289

family of five or more $50,803

Serious Legal Problems: In the last three years (since 2017) have you dealt with any of these? Check as many as apply.

1) A problem with a large purchase where you didn't get what you paid for (vehicle, appliance, refund, gym membership, billing mistake, renovations etc.)
2) An issue with your work (not getting paid properly, not getting overtime or benefits, being fired or disciplined at work etc.)
3) A serious injury at work, a traffic accident, or an injury in a public place or business
4) Property damage, vandalism, threats, or excessive noise from neighbours
5) A problem with your house or apartment (rent or mortgage, or rent owed to you, eviction, not having repairs done, foreclosure etc.)
6) Money you owe to a company or is owed to you (other than rent or mortgage) including bankruptcy, collection agencies, credit issues
7) Getting social assistance or housing allowance or other financial government assistance
8) Getting disability allowances (disability pension, workers compensation, private insurance)
9) Immigration or refugee issues for you or a family member (permanent residency, deportation, student or work visas, citizenship)
10) Police contact (being stopped, accused, charged, detained, or arrested) or with getting a pardon

11) Being the victim of a crime or witnessing a crime and having involvement with the justice system

12) Separation or divorce of your relationship (married or common-law)

13) Custody of children or child protection services

14) A will or dealing with the finances of someone who can't look after themselves (inheritance, medical care)

15) Poor medical treatment

16) Being sued or suing someone in civil or small claims court (or a letter threatening to sue)

17) Being harassed at school, work, or in a public place

18) Bring discriminated against at school, work, in a public place, business, or in getting a job or housing

19) Any other serious legal issue: _____

Thank you. We look forward to seeing you at the Focus Group

You can contact us about this research at research@calibratesolutions.ca

Submit