Enhancing Access to Post-Secondary Education for Male African Immigrant Youth in Southern Ontario: PHASE 1 FINDINGS

Presenters: Dr. Edward Shizha (PI – Wilfrid Laurier University); Lydia Awuah-Mensah (RA)

Co-Investigators: Dr. Stacey Wilson-Forsberg; Dr. Oliver Masakure; Dr. Magnus Mfoafo M’Carty – Wilfrid Laurier University (WLU)

Collaborators: Dr. Ginette Lafreniere, Social Work WLU; Dr. Sandra Hoy, Social Work WLU

INTRODUCTION

OBJECTIVE
Our participatory research project aims to better understand the role played by acculturation, cultural capital, and masculinity in first generation male African immigrant and refugee youth’s efforts to access post-secondary education in Southern Ontario.

BACKGROUND
• Male African immigrant youth face a number of challenges that include completing high school and transitioning to post-secondary education.
• Many of them feel being on the periphery of society. Their alienation results in negative outcomes, including: having the lowest high school completion rate, lowest post-secondary education participation rate and employment rate of all immigrants (Statistics Canada, 2011).
• For them to be successfully and effectively integrated into Canadian society, higher education is a key determinant.
• However, along with ‘Black’ students from the Caribbean, first-generation students from Africa are the least likely of all immigrant youth in Canada to pursue post-secondary education (Abada & Tenkorang, 2009) and the most likely to leave school early (Brown, 2006).
• Previous studies on African immigrants in Canada have identified educational access and completion as one of the barriers to successful integration into Canadian society (Dei & Kempf, 2013).
• However, what has not been adequately studied is the role of acculturation, African definitions of masculinity, the effect of both ‘ethnic’ cultural capital and the host society’s cultural capital on school performance and completion rates of the male African immigrant youth.
• In fact, their experiences of transitioning from high school to postsecondary education have not been captured in previous studies.

PURPOSE OF QUALITATIVE CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY
1) capture voices of male African immigrant youth and share their experiences of transitioning from high school to post-secondary education
2) gather data that can be used by academics, community stakeholders, and policy makers to design policies, services and programs that can assist African immigrant youth to access post-secondary education
3) analyse the importance of both ‘ethnic’ cultural capital and dominant cultural capital and the role of acculturation and masculinity in determining educational success or failure for male African immigrant youth
4) train and engage students and community peer researchers in knowledge production, translation and mobilization
5) recommend methods of engaging these youth in successful educational practices.

FINDINGS
Preliminary findings highlight a number of key themes that were identified as enabling and disabling factors during high school when preparing for transition to postsecondary education among male African immigrant youth in Southern Ontario. Some of the factors were family and neighbourhood based, while others were school-related. Most of the themes fell into both categories of enabling and disabling factors. For example, family, peers, neighbourhood, school environment, parental expectations were identified as both enabling and disabling. Some key coping strategies that participants relied on include: avoiding confrontation with authority, using familial support to provide them with support and motivation, using available resources and information on accessing postsecondary education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Cultural Diversity in High Schools
Inclusive Curriculum
“In high school, I don’t think they are interested in educating the students about Africa. The only reason I was able to talk about Africa in grade 8 was because I had to do a presentation and at that time, I had just arrived and I could come up with great stories about Africa but they don’t teach us about Africa particularly. However I think high schools should but they don’t. So there should be courses even in the high schools when people can learn about Africa.” - Appiah

Minority Teachers
“It’s important to have teachers from our culture in the school. They will bring us all together. They are part of the community and should be in schools. I wouldn’t mind having them to identify with and get support from” - Thomas

Understanding Minority Students
“Teachers should encourage students not to be shy but ask for help. Students come from countries where the education system is different even for me it was different. Sometimes it is good to understand the students and design ways that will make the transition easier for them.” - Takawira

Community Mentorship
“We need this community centre so we have to figure this out. That African community centre could save so many lives. I would tell the parents to be supportive because what male Africans deal with coming here in the first place is actually the relationship with teachers, other students, counselors and principals (both positive and negative experiences), role models, their neighbourhoods, preparations for college or university, their definitions of being a male African youth and definitions of success.

ELIGIBILITY FOR PARTICIPATION
• First and 1.5 generation male African immigrant and refugee youth (ages 18-24).
• Male African youth in college or university or had completed postsecondary education.
• Came to Canada as an immigrant or refugee.
• Resided in Canada for less than 10 years.
• African youth make up a sizable proportion of the immigrant population in Ontario. The 2011 National Household Survey reveals that there were 23,200 African immigrants between the ages of 15 and 24 in Ontario.

REFERENCES

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF FUNDERS
1. Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC)
2. Manulife Centre for Community Health Research