

An Intersectionality Approach to Understanding and Addressing the Needs of Black Immigrants in Canada

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Indigenous Land Acknowledgement

- I am located on Treaty 6 territory, and respects the histories, languages, and cultures of First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and all First Peoples of Canada, whose presence continues to enrich our vibrant community.

Agenda

- Black Immigrants in Canada
- Past HIPP Findings
- Intersectionality Theory: An Introduction
- Structural Intersectionality
 - Social Determinants and Intersectionality
 - COVID 19
- Political Intersectionality
- Representational Intersectionality

Black Immigrants in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2020)

- In 2016, close to 1.2 million people in Canada reported being Black
- The proportion of Black women with a postsecondary education has increased over time
 - Immigrant women from Nigeria and Cameroon have one of the highest postsecondary completion rate in Canada but one of the poorest employment rate
- Black population have a lower employment rate than the general population
- Black people often experience racism in the labour force
- One-third of Black women work in the health care and social assistance sector (compared to 21% of general population)
 - “Capuccino Effect”: Most are direct care providers

United Nations Working Group of Expert Report (2017)

- “Despite the reputation for promoting multiculturalism and diversity and the positive measures taken by the national and provincial governments, referred to above, the Working Group is deeply concerned by the structural racism that lies at the core of many Canadian institutions and the systemic anti-Black racism that continues to have a negative impact on the human rights situation of African Canadians.”
- “Canada’s history of enslavement, racial segregation and marginalization of African Canadians has left a legacy of anti-Black racism and had a deleterious impact on people of African descent, which must be addressed in partnership with the affected communities.”

HIPP Past Findings on Anti-Black Racism

- Black People Experience Racism at Work
 - "So this person was from Africa and he was hired at a certain department. He was supposed to work the same job as others, regardless of the colour but they give him a cleaning duty because of the colour of his skin" (Immigrant Service Provider Focus group on Mental Health - 2016)
- Black Children Experience Racism in the School System
 - "And people talk about like racism within the (school) system, like our kids are really being looked at different as soon as they walk in. So if the Somali kid does the same thing as a white Canadian kid, they're going to be looked at different" (African Parent Interview, 2016)
- Anti-Black Racism Contribute to Health of Black Youths
 - "I grew up with so much internalized anti-blackness. God, I hated myself. I wanted to be white so bad. I wanted to have straight hair. I wanted to have lighter skin...." (Black Youth Mental Health Interview, 2020)
- Non-Black Health Professionals are Often Unable to Provide Anti-racist Health Services
 - "When you call Health Link ... So they are asking you if your child is blue. And being a black person, my child never turns blue. So then it makes you wonder how well these health personnels have been trained to know more about other races and how to address." (2018 interview)
 - "Oh, like I'm experiencing #racism" They'd be like, "What? Oh, what? Are you sure? Okay, let's get you some like other strategies you can deal with like the workplace or something." (Black Youth Mental Health Interview, 2020)

Intersectionality

- Intersectionality is concerned with simultaneous intersections of diverse aspects of social locations, social differences, identity, and how multiple forms of oppression intersect at macro, meso, and micro levels in complex and independent ways (Crenshaw, 1989).
- Forms of identity may include race, nationality, gender, class, geography, religion, ability, age, and migration status.
- An intersectional perspective recognizes how power and power relations across intersecting social locations are reproduced and how these power relations may affect migrant experiences.

Why Use an Intersectionality Perspective?

- Crenshaw challenged the idea that race and ethnicity are mutually exclusive categories
- Black women are often excluded from feminist discourse and anti-racist policy because both are based on distinct set of experience that does not consider the interaction of both gender and race.
 - Much of anti-racist discourse focus on what happens to Black middle class men and much of feminist discourse focus on what happens to white middle class women.
- The inclusion of a single issue framework for addressing discrimination marginalizes black women/girls and makes it difficult to address racism, discrimination and sexism.

Types of Intersectionality

- Structural Intersectionality
- Political Intersectionality
- Representational Intersectionality

Structural Intersectionality

- Structural problems by women of color can include income status, housing, immigration status and linguistic ability.
- These can intersect with gender and race to affect the experiences of immigrant women, including in cases of domestic violence.
- Intervention strategies based solely on the experience of women will not work for immigrant women of color as it does not consider the structural issues surrounding their lives including poor housing, income, language, religion and racism.
- Intersectionality based interventions must consider the multiple social locations of women, including in resource allocation.

Structural Intersectionality and Immigrant Health

- "Why is Kwame in the hospital?"
- Because he has a bad infection in his leg.
- But why does he have an infection?
- Because he has a cut on his leg and it got infected.
- But why does he have a cut on his leg?
- Because he was playing in the junk yard next to his apartment building and there was some sharp, jagged steel there that he fell on.
- But why was he playing in a junk yard?
- Because his neighbourhood is kind of run down. A lot of kids play there and there is no one to supervise them.
- But why does he live in that neighbourhood?
- Because his mom can't afford a nicer place to live.
- But why can't his mom afford a nicer place to live?
- Because his mom is a single parent (one income household) and she is underemployed?
- But why is his mom a single parent and underemployed?
- Because she experienced domestic violence and because her credential is not recognized in Canada?
- But why ...?" Intersecting effect of **race, class, gender, and nationality**

Research Example: Intersecting Influence of Race and Gender

- Parenting Boys vs Girls

- “Boys are – I don’t know how to explain. Boys are very hard to raise, honestly... my daughter is way maturer than my boys, because I don’t know why. Maybe that’s the way they are”. PI001
- “My girls were very easy, very straightforward. Their education, they [are] focused. What we tell, they listen. The boys, always they want to have entertainment. Even if you say, ‘Don’t do this. This time is a study time’. You find out he’s playing a game in the basement, hiding himself”. PI004

COVID 19 Among Black People

- Emerging data in Canada (specifically Toronto, Montreal and Ottawa) suggest that neighbourhoods that are predominantly black have a higher prevalence of COVID 19 infection (Bowden & Cain, 2020; Rocha, Shingler and Montpetit, 2020).
- An analysis in Montreal of prevalence of COVID 19 and the influence of 24 social determinants of health indicate that the strongest positive correlation to COVID is the percentage of Black populations in a neighbourhood (Rocha, Shingler, & Montpetit, 2020).
- The proportion of Black people in a neighbourhood had a stronger influence on rate of COVID than poverty, visible minority status, housing situation, refugee status or percentage of health workers living in that neighbourhood.
- Similarly in Toronto, neighbourhoods with a higher number of Black people have a higher rate of COVID 19 infection and this is stronger than those in neighbourhoods with low level of education, visible minority status, conditions of work and low income (Bowden & Cain, 2020).
- Indeed, Black people are more likely to be affected by the COVID 19 pandemic.

Impact of COVID 19 on Black Canadians (ACCEC et al., 2020)

- Black Canadians are more likely to report COVID 19 symptoms and are three times more likely to know someone who has died from COVID 19
- Black Canadians are twice as likely to commute to work via public transit
- Black Canadian commuters are more likely to report COVID 19 symptoms
- Black Canadians are more likely to report their job requires face to face interaction
- Black Canadians report much worst financial impact from COVID 19

Intersectionality and COVID 19 Among Black People

- Greater burden of disease among Black people, including HIV, Diabetes, Asthma
- Inequities in the job market: Blacks are more likely to be employed in the lower tiers. In healthcare, they are more likely to be personal support workers and healthcare aides rather than managers. Their higher presence at the front line and in service industry means more exposure to COVID 19
- Physical Environment: Black populations are more likely to live in cramped housing, neighbourhoods with limited green space and low income neighbourhoods
- Adherence to Social Distance: Being able to adhere to social distancing is shaped by income and employment. Many black people may be forced to not adhere to social distance rules because they are often employed in the lower sectors of the economy, poor and on temporary jobs. Also many do not have the luxury of a big space to ensure social distance
- Women face disproportional burden for COVID 19 as they assume more childcare roles

Political Intersectionality

- Political intersectionality highlights the fact that Black women are situated within at least two subordinated social location (Black and Women) and these groups often pursue conflicting political agendas
- In Canada, we often pay more attention to issues of gender than of race (including the experience of Black people)
 - Example:
 - Canada's Feminist International Policy not Canada's Anti-racist policy;
 - Canadian Institute of Health Research Institute of Gender and Health not Canadian Institute of Health Research Institute of Racial Equity;
 - Gender Equity Considerations on grants not Racial equity consideration;
 - Gender Equity goal of political cabinet not racial equity

Political Intersectionality: Black Men's Experience

- Black men are often cast as a threat to white women
 - Crenshaw highlights that the dominant conceptualization of violence as perpetrated by Black men towards white women has left Black men subject to legal and extralegal violence. It has also resulted in less attention to violence against Black women

HIPP Research on Black Youth's Mental Health

- “In my community it's very easy, because obviously the community understands the struggles that are out there. Outside my community there is (racism). I think I've subconsciously learned to do this, is to kind of start out with the notion that I'm not going to rob you [Laughs], right? Or just kind of when I interact, especially just blatantly blank with white... especially when I interact with white people, just kind of the first thing that I have to attack is the preconceived notion that I am black, I'm a thug, or whatever.”

Representational Intersectionality

- Representational intersectionality is how the production of images of women of color and the contestation over those images tend to ignore the intersectional interests of women of color
- Images of women of color in the media is often racist and sexist
- Black women are often sexualized, portrayed as sassy, portrayed as angry and associated with crime
- Advocates for the importance of women of color having good image and representation in the media

Key Considerations

- Awareness of multiple and intersecting social locations of both service providers and service recipients
 - Increasing the number of Black service providers and policy makers
- Resisting homogenizing conceptualization of gender or race. Recognizing the diversity among women and the diversity among Black populations (Black LGBTQ, Black Muslim, Black Christian, Caribbean immigrants, historical black communities, African immigrants etc)
- Attention to power relations
- Attention to both race and gender as well as other determinants
- Intersectionality based data collection, including on race
- Resource allocation to attend to intersecting influences such as added time and language support
- Intersectional practice as employee performance appraisal or standards of practice
- Improve image of Black people and women of color in media
- Capitalize on strengths

Thank You

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