26 Policy Challenges to Homelessness Among Caribbean Youth in Toronto

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Introduction

The primary goal of this research project is to identify patterns related to homelessness among Caribbean youth between the ages of 15 and 25, and to advance policy proposals that would alter these pathways. This chapter examines the research literature on homelessness in Canada generally, and on youth homelessness specifically, in order to learn about the racialized dimensions of youth homelessness in Canada. The term "racialization" is used here to describe the discriminatory treatment of homeless Caribbean youth based on race. We also add a more focused examination of racialized immigrant groups arriving after 2000 and ask whether young people in this category share particular characteristics that make their route to homelessness distinct. The chapter builds on the current state of knowledge regarding the evolution of the homelessness crisis in Canada (Gaetz, 2010b) and the suggested policy proposals designed to address homelessness on a national or local scale (Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, 2012; Golden et al., 1999; Shapcott, 2007).

Between September 2005 and January 2006, 43 in-depth interviews were conducted with homeless Caribbean youth aged 15 to 25. The participants were reached through seven agencies serving homeless youth in Toronto. The data allowed us to develop a greater understanding of the socio-demographic characteristics (age, education, economic background) of homeless Caribbean youth, their pathways into homelessness, their support systems, their interactions with police,

their vulnerabilities, and the impacts all these factors have on their self image and sense of control they have over their own lives. To conclude, this chapter offers suggestions on how to improve relationships between Caribbean communities and many of the institutions in our society, especially the public school system and the police, as a way of addressing the needs of homeless Caribbean youth.

Background: Homelessness in Canada

In the past decade, while Canadian researchers have studied the issue of homelessness, basic statistics on the numbers of people who are homeless are uncertain. In part, the uncertainty lies in the various definitions of homelessness used in the literature. For example, homelessness can be defined very narrowly as "being out on the streets" with no shelter. In contrast, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 2012) offers a very broad definition of homelessness: a lack of housing that is "adequate for health and well-being." In addition, figures on homelessness tend not to capture homeless people who do not use social services (Dachner & Tarasuk, 2002), as well as women in transition houses (Du Mont et al., 2000). In the absence of an agreed upon definition, data on total numbers of homeless people, let alone homeless young people, are at best rough estimates (Chamberlain et al., 2007; City of Toronto, 2006; City of Saskatoon, 2008; O'Grady et al., 2011; Hulchanski et al., 2009; Laflamme, 2001; Peters & Robillard, 2007). According to the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS), there are between 200,000 and 300,000 homeless people in Canada (HIFIS, 2007). This number includes anywhere between 65,000 and 150,000 homeless youth (DeMatteo et al., 1999). In Toronto, the number of homeless youth ranges from 1,700 to over 2,000 (Gaetz & O'Grady, 2002). In this chapter, youth are defined as homeless if, at the time of the interview, they lived in shelters or described their own living conditions as highly insecure and unstable, such that they could easily be in a shelter, on a friend's couch, or on the street within a month.

Much of the research on street populations has focused on young people under the age of 25. Researchers have linked the existence of street youth in developed countries to poverty, family violence, the physical, emotional, and sexual abuse of children, and the non-conformity and rebelliousness of youth themselves (Baron & Hartnagel, 2002; Hagan & McCarthy, 1997). Besides identifying some of the complex background factors that lead some youth to homelessness (Gaetz & O'Grady, 2002; Springer et al., 1998), studies have also focused on the experiences of homeless youth while living on the streets, including their attempts to access community and/or government-based resources (Morrell-Bellai et al., 2000), means of survival such as theft, panhandling and/or abus-

ing substances (Basso et al., 2004; DeMatteo et al., 1999; Parnaby, 2003), the criminalization of homelessness (Tanner & Wortley, 2002, Gaetz & O'Grady, 2002), and the overlap between racial and social profiling in homeless people's interactions with the police (Gaetz & O Grady, 2006; O'Grady et al., 2011). Racial profiling refers to the discriminatory treatment or greater surveillance of individuals by police because of race or skin color. Social profiling refers to the differential treatment or greater surveillance of individuals by police because of their perceived social status (e.g., age, income level, being homeless). Racial and social profiling together tend to result in Black youth generally, and Black homeless youth in particular, being stopped, questioned and ticketed by police for a range of minor offences such as loitering, trespassing, or public intoxication more often than white youth or white homeless youth.

Generally, studies have found that most Canadian street youth are male (Kufeldt & Nimmo, 1987; Hagan & McCarthy, 1997) and live in major Canadian cities (Brannigan & Caputo, 1993). In the broader literature on homelessness, recent attention has also highlighted other groups such as women (Du Mont et al., 2000), Aboriginal people (Baron & Hartnagel, 2002; Report of the Mayor's Homelessness Action Task Force, 1999), and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender/transsexual and queer (LGBTQ) youth (Ray, 2006).

Noticeably absent from Canadian research is an analysis and understanding of homelessness through a racial lens. Little discussion has emerged on the particular homeless experiences of racialized groups, despite international research indicating that homeless populations are made up of a diversity of people who become and remain homeless for a variety of reasons (Daniel, 2002; Gaetz & O'Grady, 2002). For example, studies on homeless populations in Canada tend not to identify to which ethnic and racial categories homeless people belong. For this reason, it is difficult to point to the particular impacts of homelessness on different populations and thereby, identify policy solutions suited to specific groups (Basso et al., 2004; Dachner & Tarasuk, 2002). Indeed, studies that have noted a strong presence of racialized groups in their sample have failed to comment on whether the experiences of racialized homeless people differ from that of mainstream homeless populations (DeMatteo et al., 1999; Gaetz & O'Grady, 2002; Tanner & Wortley, 2002).

A few studies have commented on the different factors that increase the vulnerability to homelessness of visible minorities, including immigration, education, employment, housing, or the criminal justice system (Anisef & Bunch, 1994; Anisef & Kilbride, 2003; Hagan & McCarthy, 1997; Springer et al., 1998). For example, Anisef and Kilbride (2003) noted that the needs of newcomer (immigrant) youth have not been adequately met, especially in the education system.

They identified in the Ontario education system some structural and ideological barriers, which do little to encourage achievement among minority youth. Barriers include school policies (such as the *Safe Schools Act* that allowed schools to expel students automatically for fighting), the discriminatory attitudes of teachers, and a widespread practice in some Toronto schools of assessing Caribbean youth as non-English speaking, resulting in those students being put back several grades or assigned to English as a second language programs. Anisef and Bunch (1994) contend that such barriers have led to poor attendance and feelings of hostility towards school. While the links between such barriers and homelessness remain largely unexplored, a major national US study that included 682 youth who experienced homelessness concluded that school expulsion is among one of the key risk factors for homelessness. Further, the authors suggest that a lack of education makes it less likely that youth will reintegrate into society and more likely will become chronically homelessness (Shelton et al., 2009).

Examining the issues facing newcomers is important because immigrants are a major presence in the Greater Toronto Area. In 2006, foreign-born residents made up 50 percent of the city of Toronto's population (Statistics Canada, 2007). The immigrant population in the city grew at a rate roughly twice that of the overall population over the previous 10 years. In other words, the city's overall rate of population growth was 4.5 percent for the period of 2001 to 2011, while its visible minority population grew by 10.6 percent over the same period (City of Toronto, 2012). Many immigrants to Canada are racial minorities coming from countries such as the People's Republic of China, India, the Philippines and Pakistan. It is important therefore to broaden the discussion of youth homelessness to include dimensions of race and immigrant status. Anisef and Kilbride (2003) found that homeless youth from minority communities are more reluctant than white homeless youth to access community or government resources for assistance, preferring first to take advantage of their informal social networks. Thus, visible minority youth who are recent immigrants and may not have well-developed informal networks in Canada may be at even greater risk.

Homelessness, Poverty and Immigrant Status

Immigrants are more likely than people born in Canada to be vulnerable to housing insecurity, and possibly homelessness (Springer et al., 2011). They depend on rental housing, since they are mostly unable to buy houses, and face unique challenges in finding acceptable housing, in part because of poverty: they are more likely to spend at least 30 percent of total household income on housing (Preston et al., 2007; Preston et al., 2009). For immigrants who have lived in Canada for fewer than ten years, this is even more likely to be the case. Among immigrant households who landed in Canada between 1991 and

2001, 40 percent owned a home. Of the remaining population who rented, only 56 percent secured affordable rental housing (i.e. under 30 percent of total household income); 20 percent paid 30-50 percent of their income and almost 25 percent paid more than half of their income in rent. These statistics, which demonstrate the very serious housing affordability challenges for newcomers to Canada (Hieburt & Mendez, 2008), are supported elsewhere in the research literature. Murdie et al., (2006) covered housing and immigration issues from 1990 to 2005, and found that affordability challenges were a major barrier for most immigrants in finding adequate and suitable housing. Poverty, immigrant status and a shortage of affordable housing can stretch the resources of immigrant parents and potentially increase the risks of homelessness for immigrant youth, particularly when tensions at home become unbearable.

Shelter use is one indication of homelessness and poverty well documented in the research literature. Data from the City of Toronto Shelter, Support and Housing Administration (2009) system show that youth make up 19 percent (5,020) of shelters users. Of significance to this study is the relationship between newcomer status, poverty and shelter use: among families using emergency shelters, 24 percent were refugee claimants and 9 percent of families were newcomers to the city. In addition, single newcomers to the city accounted for 3 percent of shelter users, as did single refugee claimants (City of Toronto, 2001). Despite these alarming statistics, most newcomers who stayed in shelters were able to leave within a relatively short period of time: the majority of recent immigrants needed only four days to two months to leave the shelter system. Nonetheless, 6 percent did stay in the system for a year or longer (Springer et al., 1998).

Recent arrival in the city has also been found to be an important contributor to homelessness. The *Report of the Mayor's Homelessness Action Task Force* (1999) noted that, in 1997, 16 percent of shelter users had arrived from other parts of Ontario, 17 percent from other provinces, and 14 percent from outside of Canada. Similarly, Springer et al.'s analysis of the characteristics of the homeless population in Toronto found that slightly under half of the shelter users studied had lived outside of the City of Toronto one year before their use of shelters. Indeed, one of the most common reasons for shelter use was that many of the users were new to the City of Toronto: approximately 30.7 percent of total shelter users stated this as their reason for using the service (Springer et al., 1998).
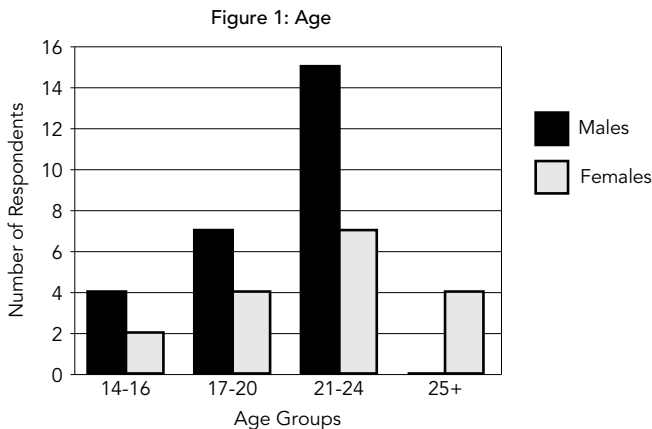
Research Method

Between September 2005 and January 2006, in-depth interviews were conducted with Caribbean youth aged 15 to 25 who self-identified as homeless. At the time of the interview, these young people either lived in shelters or believed

that their current living conditions were so uncertain that they could be in a shelter, on a friend's couch, or on the street within a month. The sample was drawn from young people who were willing to participate and who accessed services from seven community agencies serving homeless youth in Toronto. While the sample was not random, attempts were made to ensure that enough women were included. We used a detailed questionnaire to probe for socio-demographic characteristics (age, sex, ethnicity, education, etc.) of this homeless Caribbean youth sample. Questions addressed reasons for being homeless, previous episodes of homelessness, family background, hopes and goals, feelings of safety, experiences of racism and discrimination, sources of social and financial support, and community resources accessed during periods of homelessness. Sixty interviews were attempted, yielding 43 usable results (26 males and 17 females). Each participant was given thirty dollars for their participation.

Study Results: Demographics & Histories of Homelessness

Age and Sex

Twenty-six of the 43 respondents (61 percent) were between 21 and 25 years of age, including 15 males and 11 females; 11 (26 percent) were aged 17 to 20; and 6 (14 percent) were between 14 and 16. In total there were 26 males (60 percent) and 17 females (40 percent) in the sample. As stated in the methods section, our sample deliberately overrepresented women. In most North American research on homeless youth, there are twice as many males as females. A 2006 Public Health Agency of Canada Report notes that males outnumbered females by a ratio of approximately 2:1 among homeless youth. As well, almost two-thirds of our sample was over 21 years of age, which is consistent with the age distribution of homeless youth in other studies (O'Grady et al., 2011).

Figure 1: Age

Immigrant Status

Of the sample, 35 (81 percent) were born outside Canada, while 8 (19 percent) were born in Canada. Fifteen (35 percent) were citizens; another 15 (35 percent) were landed immigrants; 7 (16 percent) were undocumented; and 5 (12 percent) were refugee claimants. Eighteen of the 35 immigrant youth in the sample (51 percent) had been in Canada for fewer than 5 years, with 8 (19 percent) having been here less than 2 years. Although all respondents were born in the Caribbean or to Caribbean parents, forty percent thought of themselves as "Canadian."

Race/Ethnicity

It is important to note that the Caribbean population is racially mixed. The Caribbean's history of slavery and indentured labour brought large numbers of enslaved people from a variety of African countries, as well as Indian and Chinese indentured labourers. Caribbean populations in the diaspora (such as in Canada) reflect this diversity, as well as a variety of combinations of these populations with French, Spanish and English colonial masters.
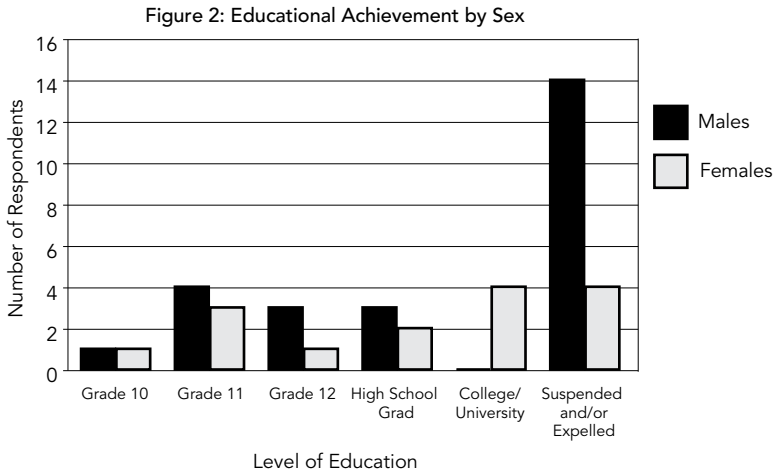
Our sample of homeless youth was overwhelmingly Black. Indeed, 33 of the 43 (77 percent) respondents identified as Black, 7 (16 percent) as mixed-race, 2 (5 percent) as East Indian, and 1 (2 percent) as Chinese. All respondents were either born in the Caribbean or to Caribbean parents in Canada.

Education

At the time the survey was conducted, 18 (42 percent) of the youth had been either suspended or expelled from school, mostly for fighting under the zero-tolerance policy of the *Safe Schools Act*. Not surprisingly, this problem was more common among the males in the sample. Of the 25 others, five (12 percent) reported having graduated from high school; 4 (9 percent), all female, had some college or university education. Thus only 9 of the 43 (19 percent) had completed high school. Thirteen (30 percent) had completed Grade 12 or less, although only two (4.7 percent) reported having less than a Grade 10 education.

Academically, while the majority of respondents (37, or 86 percent) reported receiving grades of "C" or better during their time in school, 15 (35 percent) had dropped out at some point. It is noteworthy that 34 (79 percent) planned to continue or complete their education. We suspect that the 26 older youth between 21 and 25 years of age are unlikely to re-enter the traditional high school system given their age and relationship with the school system.

Other studies find similar educational backgrounds to those of the homeless youth in this study. Tarasuk et al.'s study (2005) of 261 homeless youth found that most had not completed high school; 7 (3 percent) reported that they were currently attending school, but only 2 were in school full-time. Only 10 percent of Hagan and McCarthy's sample of 482 youth (330 in Toronto and 152 in Vancouver) (1997) and 10 percent of Gaetz and O'Grady's sample of 208 youth (2002) had completed high school.

Figure 2: Educational Achievement by Sex
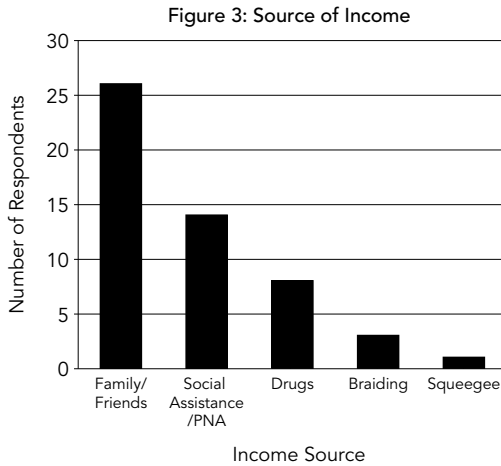
Family Background

Out of the 43 respondents, 40 (93 percent) were raised by family members. Ten (23 percent) had been raised by both parents, 16 (37 percent) by single mothers, 13 (30 percent) by other family members, and 1 (2 percent) by a single father. One respondent reported being raised by a non-family member and two did not respond to this question. None of our youth reported any history with institutions such as Children's Aid Society. Twenty-six of those interviewed (61 percent) had two or more siblings.

The employment status of their parents was remarkably stable. Most of their parents were gainfully employed: 29 of the youth (67 percent) had parents who worked full time and just 7 (16 percent) had parents who worked part-time. Only 3 (7 percent) had parents who were unemployed; none of their parents were on social assistance.

Income

Without question, this group of youth had experienced financial hardship. At the time of the survey, 37 of the 43 in our sample (86 percent) were

unemployed; 14 (33 percent) received either social assistance or a personal needs allowance (PNA), but 29 (67 percent) did not receive any such support. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that approximately two-thirds of the unemployed youth would have been receiving no social support at the time of the study, leaving them with no official income.

Figure 3: Source of Income

Twenty-six of the youth (61 percent) claimed they got some financial help from family and/or friends. All reported having less money than their peers. Mothers were the main providers in 60 percent of cases; fathers in 12 percent. Some young women (3) braided hair to earn extra money; 8 youth reported having sold drugs at least once. None reported panhandling or prostitution as sources of income, but one spoke of squeegee activity.

Present Housing

As stated above, the homeless Caribbean youth in this study lived in shelters or unstable housing arrangements, but not on the streets. This is an important point because it distinguishes between homeless youth who manage to access temporary shelters or insecure accommodations from those who sleep on the streets, that is, "sleep rough." None of our respondents was without shelter or "sleeping rough" at the time of interview. Studies conducted by Tarasuk and Dachner (2002, 2006, 2009) showed that homeless youth sleeping rough (as compared to homeless youth in shelters) had more severe challenges, especially in meeting daily nutritional needs, tended to have longer arrest records and were more likely to use "harder" drugs than marijuana.

Twenty-eight respondents (65 percent) were living in a shelter or group home during the study period. While 2 were living in rooming houses and

5 (12 percent) in shared apartments with others, they felt that their living arrangements were highly unstable and transient and for this reason, identified as homeless. An additional 8 (19 percent) described their living arrangements as "couch surfing." The lengths of time that the members of our sample had been homeless varied, but were of considerable duration. Almost 60 percent had been homeless 9 weeks or more. The most frequent duration of homelessness cited by the respondents was 9 to 24 weeks.

For most, this was not the first episode of homelessness. Twenty-five (58 percent) had been homeless more than once, with 10 (23 percent) experiencing homelessness more than 3 times and 8 (19 percent) more than 5 times. Despite contact with family, a slim majority (22, or 51 percent) did not return home once they had left, claiming they had not returned home between episodes.

Reasons for Homelessness

Participants in our survey said that "family breakdown" was the most common reason for homelessness. This was the main reason given in 17 (40 percent) cases. "Family breakdown" was the catchall phrase describing family interpersonal dynamics and conflicts, which escalated to such levels that young people felt they had little option but to leave home. Family breakdown included problems with parents, partners, other family or guardians, sometimes relating to abuse and/or sexual identity. For example, two Black youth who self-identified as LGBT youth reported being "kicked out of the house" because of their sexual identity. The next most reported reason was eviction due to an inability to pay rent, cited 25 percent of the time.

Personal Safety

Respondents reported witnessing drug dealing, car theft, fights (both with and without weapons), threats with weapons, and sexual assault. About 11 (25 percent) had previously been part of a gang that "looked out for each other." Only 2 confided that they were still part of a gang. Ten of the youth in the sample had faced threats of physical injury, including death threats, more than once; half of the females had been attacked without a weapon. Eleven respondents experienced unwanted sexual touching; of these, 3 males and 5 females had faced unwanted or forced sex; 5 females reported past sexual abuse by a family member. In response, 4 (10 percent) respondents carried knives for their own protection.

The geography of personal assault differed by gender. Women were most likely to be assaulted in the home. Indeed, 8 of 13 assaults on women reported by participants took place at home; 7 of the 8 assailants were males over

30; and in 5 of the 7 cases, this adult was a family member. By contrast, 12 of 15 assaults on males took place outside the home. In each of the 12 assaults outside the home, there were 2 or more other male attackers. Some assaults were based on race, others on sexual orientation. About 17 (40 percent) respondents reported experiencing non-physical assaults such as ethnic slurs.

Discrimination and Racism

There was a very strong perception among respondents that racism and discrimination were pervasive in social institutions. Thirty-eight (90 percent) voiced a belief that police discriminate on the basis of race, and that some racial groups are treated more harshly than others. Moreover, 33 (77 percent) respondents thought police targeted males more often than females, and almost half believed racism had affected their grades in school. Respondents' own contact with police had been overwhelmingly negative. Without question, males bore the brunt of this. Twenty-two (50 percent) of the 43 youth in our sample had been arrested at least once; 27 (66 percent) had been stopped and questioned at least once but not arrested; and 10 (25 percent) had been searched more than 10 times but never arrested. A study by O'Grady et al., (2011) found that about 44 percent of the sample of homeless youth they surveyed had been stopped or arrested in the previous year, compared to 11 percent of housed youth. The Caribbean homeless youth in our sample were stopped or arrested at a considerably higher rate than housed youth, and at a higher rate than homeless youth in other samples that were not mostly Black. Many of the stops by police were part of a process of "carding," a practice whereby police routinely stop and question individuals, and collect personal data, which are then entered into a database. Since Black youth were more likely than white youth to be stopped and questioned, they were also more likely to be arrested than white youth. It is thus not difficult to see how they have come to see carding as police harassment.

Self-Image

Despite their housing status, respondents generally had a positive self-image. Their self-mage was based on responses to three statements. When asked whether they had "control over the bad things that happen to them", 22 (50 percent) believed that they had control; 33 (77 percent) believed that they had "control of their future"; 35 (80 percent) considered that they could "do things as well as others". This overall optimism was reflected in their identification of preferred jobs; 20 (47 percent) chose the skilled trades or skilled professions as the form of employment they would ultimately like to achieve, while only about 5 (12 percent) expected to be in the lower-paid service sectors. The youth in our sample did not see their existence as aimless. Indeed, 29 (67 percent) disagreed with the statement that "they

lived life day to day with little thought for the future." Their responses reflected a willingness to take responsibility for their circumstances and behavior.

Nevertheless, 23 (54 percent) described themselves as self-centered, acting without regard for their impact on others; 22 (50 percent) admitted that they lost their temper easily; and 20 (44 percent) agreed that they often acted impulsively, without stopping to think.

Social Supports

According to the survey respondents, mothers were the primary source of support in 25 (60 percent) cases, other family in 11 (26 percent), and fathers in 5 (12 percent) cases. Almost 26 (60 percent) respondents claimed they received small amounts of help from friends; 25 (58 percent) stated they had 2 or more close friends. These tended to belong to the same race, sex, and social class as the respondent, even if they lived in different parts of the city. Only 6 (14 percent) participants reported they had no close friends.

Summary

The homeless youth in this study were all Caribbean, either born in the Caribbean or having parents born in the Caribbean. They were poor, unemployed and poorly educated. While poverty, unemployment and low education may characterize the general homeless youth population, what is distinctive in this sample is that most were Black, mixed-race or Asian; 18 (43 percent) had been suspended from school; and most reported negative interactions with the school system and the police - experiences they attribute to racism, which set them on the path to homelessness and prevented them from seeing a path out of homelessness. The combination of skin color, age, homelessness and poverty subjected them to what May describes as a position of "multiple structural disadvantage" (2000:613). Nonetheless, they retained both a positive self-image and a sense of optimism.

Looking Forward – Policy Implications

There are key policy concerns that flow from the results of this study. The first policy challenge addresses what our respondents identified as a principal trigger that set them on the pathway to homelessness. Here we point to the *Safe Schools Act* that was introduced in 2000 and continued until April of 2007. Although the Act has since been abolished, it carries lasting consequences that are still affecting youth and that still need to be corrected. The second policy challenge focuses on what our respondents identified as negative experiences with police: the practice of "carding," that is, stopping and questioning individuals and collecting details

on their appearance, age, gender, location, mode of transportation and skin colour. "Carding" continues into the present in Toronto. Finally, we look at policy initiatives for the community that would provide young people with better access to housing, health and other basic social supports. While respondents were by and large optimistic about their futures, given the challenges they face on the street, supportive services are important to help them maintain a positive outlook regarding future life possibilities. While such initiatives support all homeless youth, the roots of some of the youth programs offered as examples here can be traced to communities with large Caribbean populations, such as Eva's Phoenix, a community-based service agency in Toronto spearheaded by a Jamaican woman to address a need that had not been previously acknowledged by the Caribbean community: to help shelter, support and guide homeless Caribbean youth.

Initiatives for Schools

The public school system needs to work more vigorously to bridge the social and cultural gaps that face immigrant youth entering the education system. This assistance may be especially critical in schools with growing immigrant populations. Systemic racism in public schools presents structural barriers that overwhelmingly disadvantage Black males. A policy that was especially destructive for young Black males in Toronto was the 2000 *Safe Schools Act*, which was in place when this study was conducted. As noted above, 18 respondents had been either suspended or expelled from school, reflecting the strained relationship between respondents and the school system. The main cause for the suspension or expulsion was fighting, which, under the zero-tolerance policy of the *Safe Schools Act* resulted in automatic expulsion, with no intermediate or alternative solutions. Other studies (Bhattacharjee, 2003) in Toronto have similarly suggested that the Safe Schools Act, coupled with "zero tolerance," has resulted in higher numbers of Black students being suspended and expelled in comparison to white students. Ruck and Wortley's study (2002) of Toronto high school students agreed that Black students were more likely than white students to perceive discrimination in treatment by teachers, school suspension practices, school authorities' decisions to call in police, and police treatment at school. This perception is supported by research in other areas, particularly in the U.S. (The Advancement Project and the Civil Rights Project, 2000), all of which contributed to reversing the zero tolerance policy in schools in 2007. Our study suggests that after school expulsion and experiences of homelessness, young people are not likely to return to school without significant intervention. As noted above, there is some evidence in the literature to suggest that a lack of education heightens the likelihood of chronic homelessness (Shelton et al., 2009).

More constructive strategies need to be put in place to keep racialized youth in schools. Using anti-racist approaches to education, and providing counselling

that targets young people at risk of leaving school, as well as "go-to" mentors and role models that youth can turn to when their home situation sours, can go far in helping youth avoid homelessness. An example would be to add to the curriculum illustrations of positive contributions and heroes of diverse racial, ethnic, cultural and religious groups. Another example would be to address the underrepresentation of racialized groups among teachers and administrators in schools. Broader community-based outreach programs that encourage immigrant parents and children to become engaged in extra-curricular school activities (see Boys and Girls Clubs, discussed below) can also help correct the damage done by the zero tolerance elements of the *Safe Schools Act,* especially for those students whose education was interrupted during the 2000 to 2007 period, who are still out of school and now homeless.

One example of a proactive initiative is the Pathways to Education model. This collaborative community-government program, founded in Toronto in 2001, was designed to help youth in low-income communities stay in school and graduate to post-secondary education. By combining academic, financial, social and mentoring supports, the program helps prevent the frustrations that lead to fighting and expulsion, and secondly, helps draw young people who have dropped out of school back to their studies. The program has produced impressive outcomes, such as higher school attendance and participation in extra-curricular activities, lower dropout rates and increased college enrollment among program participants. Most heartening is the beginning of Pathways programs in ten more low income communities across Toronto and other cities including Ottawa, Kitchener and Montréal, with close to 4,000 students getting positive results. In the long run, such programs promise to break the cycle of poverty and homelessness, and enable broader social change (Pathways to Education, 2012).

Another example of a constructive educational outreach program is the Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada (BGCC), a national non-profit organization with provincial and local branches. These Clubs successfully build community capacity by teaching people to optimize a community's internal resources. For example, the Clubs recruit local volunteers to act as mentors, and find local facilities that can be used for recreational and sports programs. In doing so, the Clubs help overcome society's structural barriers for children and youth from all economic, cultural and social backgrounds (Boys and Girls Club of Canada, 2012). The Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada are also in the process of adapting the Pathways model described above to make mentorship support available to a wider community (N. Price, personal communication, April 10, 2012). While such programs may be broadly applicable to all youth, Pathways was specifically designed to respond to issues facing Caribbean youth, many of whom live in low income, high-risk social housing communities. Dedicated mentoring addresses feelings of alienation; financial

support tackles poverty; and tutoring improves academic performance, thereby helping to change the low expectations of teachers. Taken together, programs that encourage and support youth to complete their education go far to prevent homelessness among Black youth by breaking the cycle, which triggers homelessness: economic inequality, low expectations for achievement in schools, and fighting as a response to frustrations and family tensions, leading to expulsion from school. Importantly, Boys and Girls Clubs also reach out to homeless shelters, group homes and the streets, responding to the support needs of homeless youth.

Initiatives for the Streets

Issues of race and racism are critical in understanding the life terrain that all Black youth must navigate. Whether they are born in Canada, Africa or the Caribbean, Black youth face the same issues of institutional and individual racism. Perhaps as a reaction to institutional and individual racism, Caribbean youth may tend to rely on informal social networks, as discussed earlier, rather than community resources.

Carding

In an investigative journalism series by the *Toronto Star* (2010), reporters outlined the procedure and impact of "carding." In Canada, police can approach and ask anyone to answer questions about personal information, other persons of interest, or about what one is doing. Also documented are details on appearance, age, gender, location, mode of transportation and skin colour (O'Grady et al., 2011).

In Toronto, these data, gathered by police in mostly non-criminal encounters, are entered on contact cards and then stored in The Master Names Index (MANIX) & Field Information Reports (FIR). According to *Toronto Star* (2010) reporters, race is a key factor in carding. The number of contact cards filled out where skin colour was Black is three times higher than the proportion of Blacks in the population of Toronto. The document card rate for white people is proportional to the white population. When age is factored in, young males of every skin colour are disproportionately carded. Black males, aged 15-24, seem to be documented at a rate of 13 times higher than non-Black males of the same age, while the rate for Brown males is 7 times higher. Importantly, *Toronto Star* reporters also found that, of the people carded between 2008 to mid-2011, fewer than one in five had been arrested or charged in Toronto in the previous decade (Winsa, 2012; Winsa & Rankin, 2012).

What is the connection between carding and homelessness? What are the implications for policy strategies? First, because of negative relations between police and racialized youth, law enforcement officers are not seen as trusted authority

figures or as a source of help when these youth find themselves in distress and homeless. Recall that in our study, contact with police had been overwhelmingly negative. Over 50 percent of those in our sample had been arrested at least once; 66 percent had been stopped and questioned at least once; and 25 percent had been searched more than 10 times, with males bearing the brunt of the negative contact with the police. Clearly carding is part of this negative experience for young Black males generally, but particularly for street youth. The extensive literature on policing and racial profiling (Gaetz, 2002, 2009; O'Grady et al., 2011; Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2011; Wortley, 2003, 2004, 2005; Sylvestre, 2010) validates such perceptions and experiences of discrimination. Secondly, because homeless Caribbean youth often find themselves living in neighbourhoods that are subject to high levels of police surveillance, they are at greater risk of negative interactions with police. As a group, they are overrepresented in the court and correctional systems (Gaetz & O'Grady, 2006).

Recognizing that current police practices focus too much negative attention on racialized youth, whether homeless or housed, there needs to be greater oversight to ensure that the carding process is strictly monitored and controlled. Officers should be trained to avoid stopping youth not otherwise involved in illegal or inappropriate behavior without sound and defensible reasons. Furthermore, enhanced training can teach police officers the negative impact of their carding actions. The carding process should allow law enforcement officers to ensure public safety without undermining racialized youth's overall trust in authority. In this vein, O'Grady, Gaetz and Buccieri have recommended alternative policing strategies and practices that would have "a more positive outcome on the lives of people who are homeless, and which would make the streets safer for all citizens" (2011:82). They propose community policing and "diversion strategies…that avoid entanglement in courts" (O'Grady, Gaetz & Buccieri, 2011:82).

Prioritizing community policing has tremendous potential as a strategy to help homeless Black youth by encouraging officers to get to know the community and its residents better. One significant benefit is a possible shift in police attitudes so that officers come to see homeless Black youth as vulnerable persons in need of assistance rather than as potential criminals who should be controlled or removed. O'Grady et al., (2011) note that in only 13.6 percent of cases did youth report being stopped by police as supportive. By the same token, homeless Black youth can come to see police as a source of assistance rather than harassment. Community policing can help break the cycle of surveillance, negative contacts, and carding, and allow mutual trust and respect to develop instead.

Similarly, youth diversion programs are an alternative strategy that can help break the cycle of homelessness, petty crime, fines and imprisonment. In 1999,

Ontario passed the *Safe Streets Act*, which enables police officers to issue tickets for minor offences such as "aggressive panhandling". However, as O'Grady et al., (2011) report, 80 percent of Safe Streets tickets issued between 2004 and 2010 were for non-aggressive panhandling. In other words, homeless youth resort to panhandling or squeegeeing to survive but get fined for their efforts. In addition, youth in this study were ticketed for drinking in public or for loitering, and charged for drug use or shoplifting. Applying punitive justice for such petty crimes is both expensive and unhelpful. Youth face fines that they are unable to pay and the system wastes resources in trying to pursue the matter. Youth diversion programs offer young offenders, homeless or not, paths away from substance abuse, negative peer associations ("falling in with a bad crowd"), attitudes in favour of criminal conduct and a lifetime of cycling in and out of jail.

One positive example of intervention and diversion is the Ottawa Police Service Youth Intervention and Diversion initiative, operated through the Ottawa Boys and Girls Club and the John Howard Society of Ottawa (2012) and funded by the Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services. After police conduct a risk assessment analysis, young offenders who are identified to be at low or moderate risk to reoffend are diverted out of the criminal justice system. They must admit responsibility for the criminal incident and must also agree to individualized courses of action that focus on improving and rehabilitating the root causes of the offending behaviours. Action plans may include community service hours, a letter of apology to the victim or another form of restitution (compensation) and/or participating in classroom programs. Diverted youth may also have to participate in intervention services that address their specific risk factors (e.g., drug or alcohol counselling, anger management counselling, recreational engagement, victim-offender mediation). Diversion programs claim to promote positive behaviors and environments, reduce rates of reoffending, complement community policing efforts, and enhance community safety (John Howard Society of Ontario and Wellesley Institute, 2012). Such programs, however, depend on a host of non-profit community-based agencies offering a wide array of supportive services, and on the efforts of outreach workers to help homeless youth navigate their way back into the social mainstream.

Initiatives for Communities – Outreach and Supportive Structures

In our study, the majority of youth (51 percent) did not return home after episodes of homelessness. Over half (58 percent) had been homeless more than once and 65 percent were living in a shelter or group home. What community initiatives can better remedy youth homelessness? What particular aspects of community initiatives can help Caribbean homeless youth?

Non-profit community-based agencies provide an essential safety net for home-less youth and have the local knowledge to tailor their services to the specific needs and challenges of youth in their particular areas. Knowing the neighbour-hood and having the capacity to harness local resources such as volunteers, role models and fundraising are strengths of the community sector. For example, Eva's Phoenix is a community-based service agency in Toronto that offers transi-tional housing and training for 50 youth aged 16 to 24, with a particular focus on Caribbean youth. Staff at Eva's Phoenix provides a range of services to help youth achieve and maintain self-sufficiency including counselling, mentorship, job placement assistance, help in finding adequate and affordable housing, and follow-up support. Such barrier-free access to community supports and pro-grams that connect youth to education, employment, health and legal services is critical to help youth transition from homeless to housed. Agencies that serve youth of all backgrounds need solid anti-discrimination policies and procedures.

For racialized or otherwise marginalized subgroups within the homeless pop-ulation, community outreach workers who are rooted in these communities (for instance, the Black community, or the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual/transgender, or queer community) and their cultures play a vital role in effective-ly targeting and drawing homeless youth into supportive community structures and services. As reported in the literature, the two gay Black youth in our sam-ple may carry a double stigma of race and sexual identity, and may avoid shelters and support services for fear of discrimination (Abramovich, 2012; Cochran et al., 2002). There is not one shelter among Toronto's 14 youth shelters geared to LGBTQ youth. Dedicated community outreach workers can redirect homeless Black and LGBTQ youth away from a range of risky behaviors by offering real-istic alternatives and culturally appropriate guidance and role modeling.

Community agencies and outreach workers may also help homeless Caribbean youth reconnect with their families. Eva's Initiatives Family Reconnect Program highlights the important role of the family not only in preventing youth home-lessness, but also in re-housing homeless youth through family mediation and reconciliation (Winland et al., 2011). The success of family reconciliation rests in large part on bringing together a range of services "upstream," before young peo-ple become homeless, by identifying and helping to resolve family conflicts before they hit a crisis point. Winland et al., (2011) have documented benefits of this ap-proach in three major areas: family relationships, socioeconomic conditions, and health (17 percent moved back in with family; housing improved for 42 percent; employment for 15 percent; self-care for 28 percent; social skills for 18 percent; and mental and physical health improved for smaller numbers of youth).

To what extent can reconnection initiatives be used with racialized youth? As we

noted, family breakdown, the primary reason for homelessness for 17 (40 percent) respondents in our sample, included problems with parents, partners, other family or guardians, sometimes relating to assault and sexual identity. In some cases, where the reason for leaving involves issues such as sexual abuse, divisions within families may be irreconcilable. Reconciliation may not be possible or even desirable. For others, family reunification may be possible. Recall that although 22 (51 percent) respondents had not returned home despite maintaining contact with family, 49 percent did in fact return home after episodes of homelessness. Mothers (60 percent) and other family members (26 percent) helped support respondents. These findings suggest that family does matter: family reunification may be a workable, even vital, response to Caribbean youth homelessness.

Funding for outreach workers, community-based agencies such as Eva's Phoenix and programs like Family Reconnect rely heavily on municipal, provincial and federal governments for a large portion of their operating budgets. In the present economic climate of government fiscal restraint, these agencies that are already operating on shoestring budgets face serious financial cutbacks. Aside from the "top-line" costs to homeless youth in lost life opportunities, there are the "bottom line costs" for society. As a report from *Raising the Roof* on homelessness in Canada (Barr, 2009) asserts, in 2001, it cost an estimated $30,000 to $40,000 per year to keep a youth in the shelter system. The cost of keeping one youth in detention is estimated at over $250 a day, or $100,000 a year. Supporting agencies that help youth to access education, employment, health and legal services, and housing makes more economic sense than spending tax dollars on emergency services such as hospitals, shelters and detention centers. From both economic and social perspectives, funding front line agencies and dedicated outreach workers to support and to house homeless youth is a better investment than leaving youth homeless. Winland et al., (2011), writing about Eva's Initiatives Family Reconnect Program (cited above), reached similar conclusions. The authors stated that in 2009, the cost of helping 32 young people return home, move into stable housing (and for some, preventing them from becoming homeless in the first place) was $7,125 per youth. If they were to remain in the shelter system for a year, the total cost would have been well over $30,000. The costs would have been even higher if the expenses for health care, mental health and addictions support, and corrections that are a direct result of being homeless were also considered. In fact, research on the general homeless population in the United States suggests that, aside from the benefits to society, the economic costs of housing homeless people are more than offset by savings on emergency room visits, hospital in-patient stays, emergency shelters, and prisons (Culhane et al., 2002; Proscio, 2000).

The Caribbean youth in this study believe that issues of systemic racism in schools, police harassment, and a shortage of affordable housing contributed to their

homelessness. This study suggests that the path out of homelessness for Caribbean youth lies not only in remedying the distinctive problems affecting racialized young people in schools and on the streets, but also in building community supports with which homeless Caribbean youth can identify. As can be seen, this includes optimizing the capacity of local Caribbean communities, drawing Black leaders and role models from the community, providing opportunities and strategies to engage immigrant parents and encouraging local facilities to share resources.

Recommendations

Recommendations from our research on Caribbean homeless youth include the following.

- Establish outreach programs working out of schools to correct the damage done by the *Safe Schools Act.* This is especially important to those students whose education was interrupted during the period between 2000 and 2007 when the Act was in effect. Such outreach programs also importantly bridge the social and cultural gaps that immigrant youth face when entering the education system. For example, the Jamaican Canadian Association offers classes that help students in a variety of academic areas. These classes are frequently taught by Caribbean youth who volunteer (Jamaican Canadian Association, 2012). This assistance may be especially critical in schools outside the city core, where immigrants are increasingly making their homes.

- Re-examine the problems with English language assessments that result in putting Caribbean youth back several grades or assigning them to English as a second language programs because they are seen as "not speaking English". Explore innovative programs that can help improve language skills without the awkward discomfort of being older than everyone in the class (after being put back several grades) or in an ESL (English as a second language) class when English is one's first language.

- Expand the practice of community policing to help change the "culture" of policing and reduce racial profiling by building connections between police and local residents.

- Make greater use of youth diversion programs in the criminal justice system to replace punitive measures with positive actions that can help turn around the lives of homeless youth.

- Manage and monitor the practice of "carding" so that officers have sound and defensible reasons for stopping youth not otherwise involved in illegal or inappropriate behavior. Recently

there have been some positive steps forward. The Toronto Police Services Board now requires the Police Chief to report carding statistics to the Board every three months. The impact on the relationship between homeless Caribbean youth and police will depend on how these policies are implemented.

- Recognize and adequately fund the vital role of community based agencies and outreach workers in targeting and connecting homeless Black and racialized LGBTQ youth to supportive services, and where appropriate, to help them reconcile with family.

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