

5. PERSPECTIVES ON BLACK YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS

Overview

As the Black community in the GTA looks to the future, it naturally focuses on the situation and prospects of its youth and young adults. The discussions that took place as part of the community engagement phase of this project (Phase 1) highlighted a number of hopes and concerns for Black youth, as they pertain to education and employment, identity and engagement, health and well-being, and security and safety. Older participants in these discussions often expressed concerns about how Black youth in the GTA were faring (in terms of, for instance, barriers to education and employment), while younger participants focused on the opportunities and challenges facing their generation.

This Chapter examines the situation and perspectives of younger BEP participants in more detail (this is defined as participants aged 16 to 24, or in some cases 16 to 34). The Chapter highlights some of the generational differences revealed through the BEP survey. Younger BEP participants do not necessarily have a different perspective than their parents' or grandparents' generation on every issue; on a number of questions asked in the survey -- such as the question of how often participants say they are treated unfairly because they are Black -- the responses of participants across age cohorts are virtually identical. On other questions, however, differences are more apparent.





Key Findings

As outlined in the demographic portrait in Chapter 1, the Black population in the Greater Toronto Area has become more diverse over time. The older population is overwhelmingly Caribbean-born, while the younger population has a more diverse mixture of Caribbean, African and Canadian origins. As of 2011 (and for the first time), young Black adults in the GTA have been majority Canadian-born. This shift is reflected in the results to the BEP survey questions about identity, reported in Chapter 2. In terms of ethno-cultural identity, for instance, younger BEP participants are more ethnically diverse, compared with their parents and grandparents, among whom the Caribbean ethnicity is predominant.

To this portrait can be added information relating to the composition of social networks. The composition of the friendship networks of younger BEP participants is much more racially mixed compared with that of older participants (see Figure 30).

Younger participants are less likely to say that most of their close friends are Black or from their own ethnic identity group, and more likely to say that at least some of their close friends are non-Black. Fewer than half (44%) of participants under the age of 35 have friendship networks that are predominantly Black, compared to almost two-thirds (64%) of those age 55 and over.

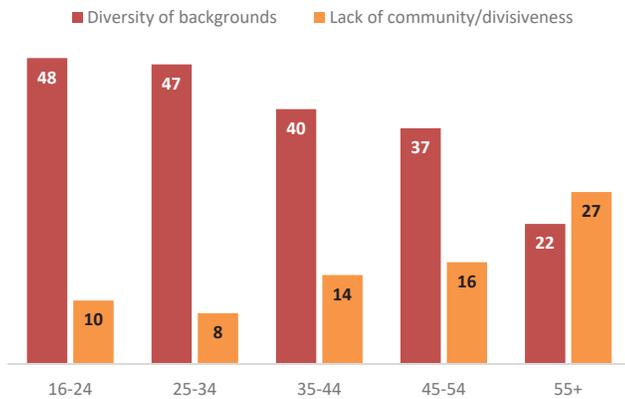
BEP participants who self-identify as LGBTQ tend to be younger, but apart from this demographic characteristic these individuals are most likely to say that most of their friends are non-Black (versus Black or from their ethnic identity group).

(30) Racial mix of friendships

Racial mix of friendships	Total %	Age 16-34 %	Age 35-54 %	Age 55+ %
Predominantly Black Most or some close friends Black + a few or no close friends non-Black	53	44	58	64
Mix of Black and non-Black Most or some close friends Black + most or some close friends non-Black	38	44	36	29
Predominantly non-Black A few or no close friends Black + most or some close friends non-Black	6	9	5	2
Other combination A few or no close friends Black + a few or no close friends non-Black	2	3	1	4

Younger BEP participants are twice as likely as their older counterparts to single out diversity within the Black community as one of its most distinctive features. Almost half of those under the age of 35 specifically mention diversity as something that makes the Black community unique, compared with fewer than one in four participants who are 55 and over (see Figure 31). Younger women are particularly likely to mention diversity as one of the Black community’s unique characteristics.

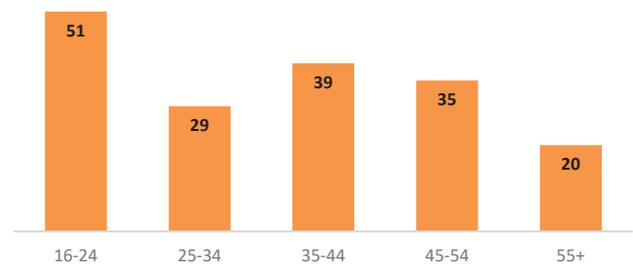
(31) Unique attributes of GTA Black community (by age group)



Two other themes stand out in terms of youth perspectives on the opportunities and challenges facing the Black community and Black people in the GTA. One of these is the importance of education – although in this case, the views of younger participants are shared by their older counterparts. Both younger and older participants identify the opportunities provided through education as among the most important ones for Black youth in the GTA, in terms of growing up and preparing to be part of today’s society (Figure 32).

The other prominent theme is that of racism. For instance, when considering the biggest challenges the Black community faces in achieving its goals, the youngest cohort of BEP participants – those between the ages of 16 and 24 – are somewhat more likely than others to identify challenges relating to racism and the perpetuation of stereotypes; one in two young participants cite racism as the biggest challenges for the Black community. And racism is identified by younger BEP participants (age 16 to 24) as one of the main challenges facing Black youth in the GTA (see Figure 33).

(33) Racism/stereotypes as greatest challenge facing Black community (by age group)



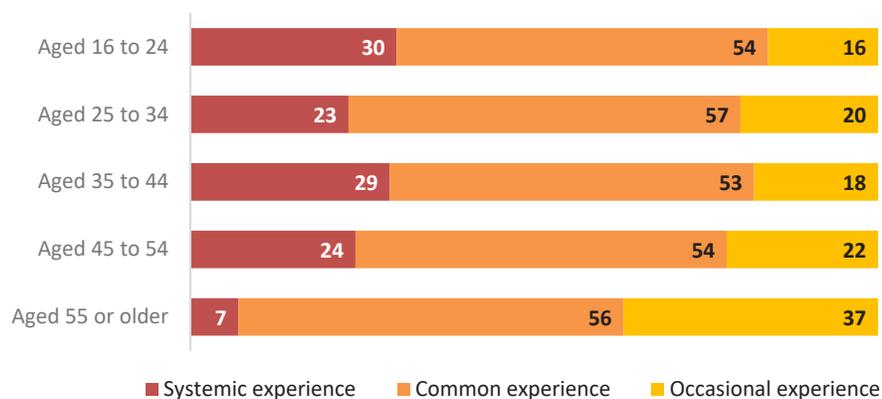
These findings have relevance in the context of experiences of discrimination and relations with the police and criminal justice system (as presented in Chapter 5). As noted, people under 45 years of age, and men in particular, are especially likely to have had negative experiences with the police and to report involvement with the criminal justice system as someone accused of wrongdoing.

Also relevant in this context are the experiences of younger BEP participants with the day-to-day experiences of interpersonal forms of racism (discussed in Chapter 4) described as “micro-aggressions.” In general, the proportion of participants who say they frequently experience these forms of day-to-day discrimination is higher among younger participants, in comparison with those 55 years and older (see Figure 34).

(32) Biggest opportunities for Black youth today (by age group)

Biggest opportunities for youth	Age 16-24	Age 25+
	%	%
Education system (access/affordability)	77	65
Community programs/resources (employment)	53	66
Leadership / mentor support	30	16
Technology / social media	19	10
Diversity/Inclusiveness in the GTA	13	6
Sports leagues	11	4
Potential of youth themselves (strength/creativity)	10	24
Other opportunities	20	18

(34) Frequency of day-to-day discrimination (by age group)

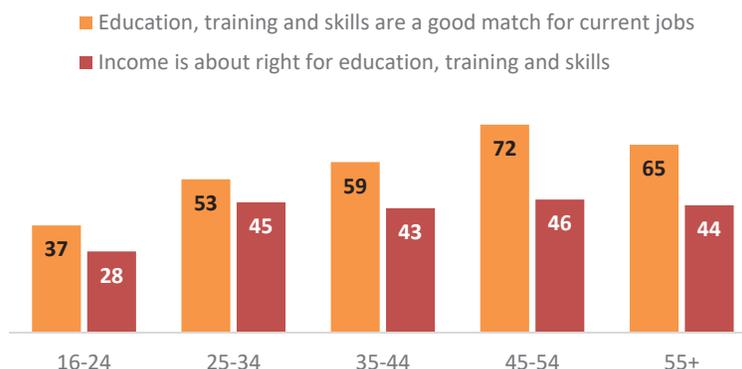


Younger BEP participants also differ from their older BEP counterparts in terms of their patterns of community and political engagement. As may be the case across Canadian society as a whole, community and political engagement among BEP participants is strongly related to both age and educational attainment. Compared with younger individuals, older participants volunteer more hours and are more likely to belong to groups that specifically address the interests of the Black community, to follow politics closely, and to vote in elections.

This, however, does not mean that Black youth are “disengaged.” Young BEP participants between the ages of 16 and 24, for instance, are more likely than those in other age groups to belong to educational or school groups, to sports and recreational leagues, and to environmental or conservation groups. About four in ten younger participants belong to religious organizations, to local community organizations, and to groups that specifically address the interests of the Black community – a level of participation that is only slightly below the average for all age groups (41%, versus 48% for all participants).

In the area of employment, the BEP survey results suggest that some Black youth, especially those without a postsecondary education, are facing challenges transitioning into the labour force. Among BEP participants across all age groups who are currently employed or self-employed, more than half say their education, training and skills are a good match for their current job. They also mention that their income is either about right for their education training and skills, or even higher than what they would expect. A sizeable minority, however, do not find themselves in this positive situation. For example, younger workers are among those who are more likely to say they feel overqualified for the job they currently have, and that their income is below expectations (see Figure 35).³⁹

(35) Alignment of jobs, skills and income employed (by age groups)



Of note, however, is the fact that satisfaction with workplace experiences and job alignment with qualifications improve noticeably with age, educational attainment and work experience. The BEP survey also indicates this improvement is much more likely for those youth who attain a postsecondary education.

Among BEP participant aged 16 to 24, who are in the labour force, the unemployment rate is 12 percent. But the rate is only five percent among those who have a college or university education, compared with 24 percent for those who have no more than a high school diploma. Research suggests this can be partly attributed to the practice of ‘streaming’. While this is no longer a policy, there is recently-published evidence that students continue to be grouped into vocational, college-bound or university-bound levels based on perceptions of ability, which are often tainted.⁴⁰

As a young person, what do you see as the biggest opportunities and challenges for Black people your age in the GTA, in terms of growing up and preparing themselves to be part of today's society?

"Racism and discrimination has an effect on youth. I grew up in a country that is Black, there are Black doctors, lawyers: here in Canada there aren't many Black role models. Black people are representing lower income brackets. A lot of us are immigrants, our cultures are often different from the culture in Toronto, so we have to navigate having Haitian parents living in a Canadian society.



There is more room for participation in education, politics and communities in comparison to the past. Today, there are more ways for black youth to be successful in these areas. Because of GTA diversity, often times it's easy to ignore the struggles in race and the accessibility gap present within the city. Making it not only hard for Black youths to gain access to certain opportunities, but hard to even acknowledge that there is struggle in the first place.

People making assumptions because you are Black, for example that you're lazy, unmotivated, media negative portrayal... to be honest there are individuals that have given up and the way that the few have carried themselves is being reflected on the entire group of youth. A lot of youth are lacking identity in terms of cultural roots (i.e. Jamaica doesn't accept Canadian-raised Jamaican youth): not knowing yourself and your place in the GTA.