



# THE 360 PROJECT

ADDRESSING RACISM IN TORONTO

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ADDRESSING THE  
DISCRIMINATION  
EXPERIENCED BY  
SOMALI CANADIANS

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RACIALIZED LGBTQ  
HOMELESS YOUTH IN  
TORONTO

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Urban  
on Race  Alliance  
Relations

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**The following organizations are helping to promote the study and/or hosting community engagement sessions - providing volunteers, venue space, and other resource assistance.**

**Karen Tizzard, Teal Jaques and Grace Costa** (Eva's Satellite)

**Garfield Durrant and Antony Baccas** (Black Coalition for AIDS Prevention)

**Hibaq Gelle and Habiba Aden** (Positive Change TO)

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# ABOUT

## About the Diversity Institute

Ted Rogers School of Management's Diversity Institute at Ryerson University undertakes research on diversity in the workplace to improve practices in organizations. We work with organizations to develop customized strategies, programming and resources to promote new, interdisciplinary knowledge and practice about diversity with respect to gender, race/ethnicity, Aboriginal peoples, abilities and sexual orientation.

We collaborate with industry, government, not-for-profits and academics to:

- Research existing practices and evaluate programs;
- Explore barriers to full participation in the workplace;
- Develop fact-based policies and programs to help organizations attract, motivate and develop underrepresented groups; and
- Provide customized training to support the development of diversity strategies.
- Using an ecological model of change, the Diversity Institute is driving social innovation across sectors. Our action-oriented, evidence-based approach is advancing knowledge of the complex barriers faced by underrepresented groups, leading practices to effect change, and producing concrete results.



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## Urban Alliance on Race Relations (UARR)

The Urban Alliance on Race Relations is a non-profit charitable organization that works primarily and proactively with the community, public and private sectors to provide educational programs and research, which are critical in addressing racism in society.

The Urban Alliance was formed in 1975 by a group of concerned Toronto citizens.



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# CONTENTS

ABOUT THE 360 PROJECT	viii
ADDRESSING THE DISCRIMINATION EXPERIENCED BY SOMALI CANADIANS	
LITERATURE REVIEW	2
METHODOLOGY	6
FINDINGS AND THEORETICAL ELABORATIONS	9
NEXT STEPS	21
RACIALIZED LGBTQ HOMELESS YOUTH IN TORONTO	
LITERATURE REVIEW	32
METHODOLOGY	34
FINDINGS AND THEORETICAL ELABORATIONS	39
NEXT STEPS	42
APPENDIX 1	55
APPENDIX 2	69

# ABOUT THE 360 PROJECT

"Addressing the Discrimination Experienced by Somali Canadians and Racialized LGBTQ Homeless Youth in Toronto" was a one-year study conducted from July, 2013 to July, 2014 by the Urban Alliance on Race Relations (UARR) in collaboration with the Diversity Institute at Ryerson University. The study was generously supported with funding from Mitacs Accelerate.

The study focused on two highly vulnerable and marginalized groups in Toronto: the Somali Canadian community and racialized LGBTQ persons who are homeless. The 360 Project has two objectives:

- First, to review the current needs, challenges, and opportunities facing vulnerable communities to effectively address racism in the City of Toronto. This review intends to identify the advocacy structure and model which can effectively respond to issues of access, equity, and inclusion confronting equity-seeking groups in the city.
- Second, to aid the strategic planning of the Urban Alliance on Race Relations to enhance its organizational capacity in responding to the city's diverse population.

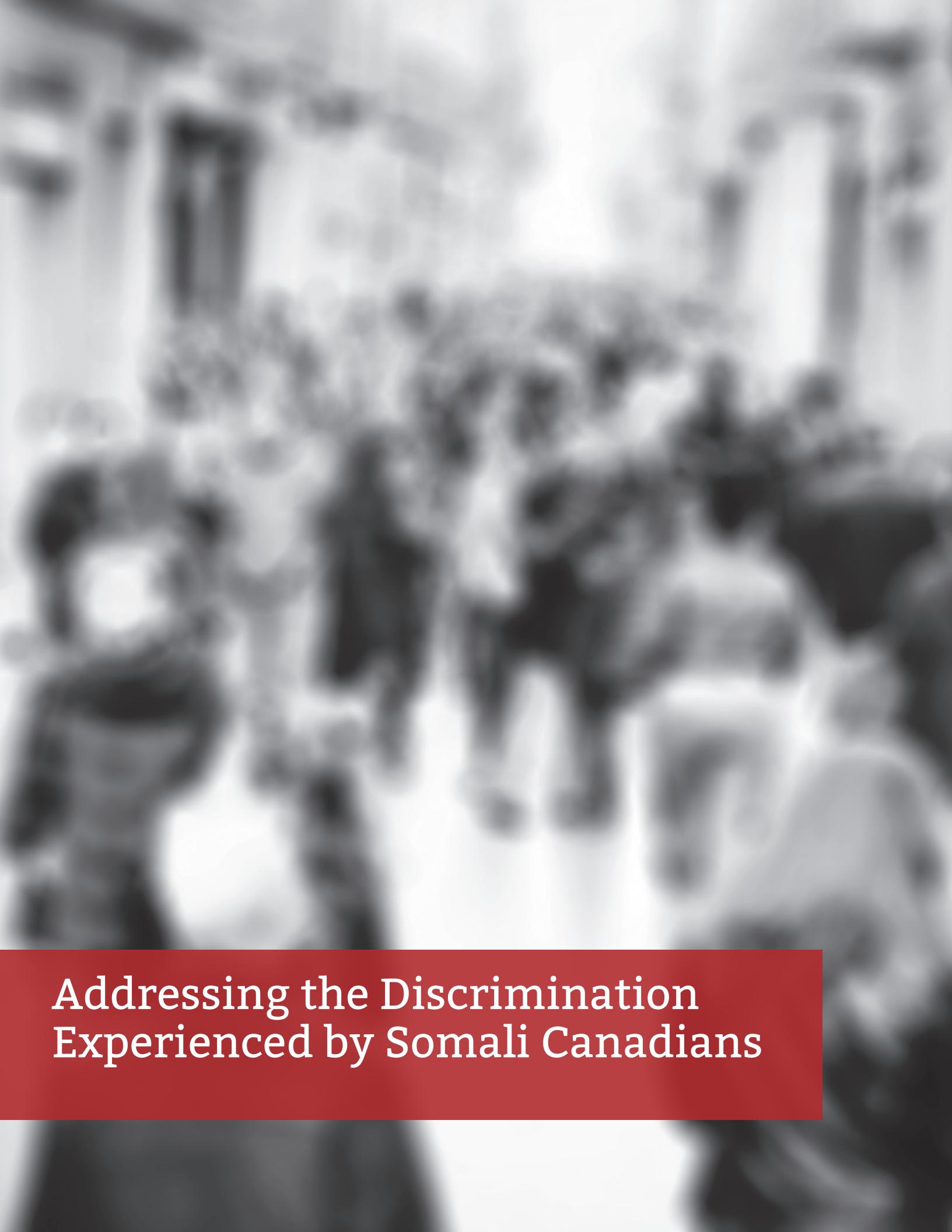
In order to reach these two goals, this project was guided by these four research questions:

- 1) What are the unique experiences of Somali Canadians and Racialized Homeless LGBTQ Youth in the GTA with respect to: racial and/or gender identity formation, education and links to success, employment and employability, physical and mental health, housing, media representations, and the criminal justice system?

- 2) What experiences shape and influence common perceptions of the Somali Canadian and Homeless LGBTQ Youth communities?
- 3) What are the underlying factors that account for socio-economic challenges and successes of members of these communities living in the GTA?
- 4) What strategies, policies, and initiatives do members of these communities believe should be prioritized in order to address these challenges?

The research team recruited 10-15 members from each community to participate in two focus groups, one focused on Somali Canadians and the other on Racialized LGBTQ Homeless Youth, for a pair of enlightening two-hour long meetings. The researchers encouraged each participant to share their personal struggles and discuss issues related to the barriers and challenges that they face in relation to employment, health, justice, education, and housing.

This report provides UARR with vital information about what is currently required to fulfill its mission of working to maintain stable, peaceful, and harmonious relations among the various groups that call Toronto home. This project is also aligned with the Diversity Institute's objective to develop customized strategies, programming, and resources to promote new, interdisciplinary knowledge and practice supporting diversity with respect to gender, race/ethnicity, Aboriginal peoples, abilities, and sexual orientation.



# Addressing the Discrimination Experienced by Somali Canadians

# INTRODUCTION

"Addressing the Discrimination Experienced by Somali Canadians and Racialized LGBTQ Homeless Youth in Toronto" is a one-year project conducted by Urban Alliance on Race Relations (UARR). In partnership with Ryerson University's Diversity Institute, this community-based research project aims to identify issues of access, equity, and inclusion for two highly vulnerable and marginalized groups in Toronto: (a) the Somali Canadian community and (b) racialized LGBTQ homeless youth. More specifically, this project aims to explore the barriers and challenges facing these communities in the following six key areas: (i) employment; (ii) health; (iii) justice; (iv) education; (v) housing; and (vi) community engagement. This particular report will focus on the findings from our work with a group of Somali Canadians in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Due to the lack of scholarship examining the migration, settlement, and integration experiences of the Somali diaspora in Canada — especially those of second generation immigrant youth — little is known about their daily struggles with discrimination based on their race, skin color, and religion. Since the Somali Canadian community lacked a previously-established diasporic community to guide them upon their relocation from Somalia to Canada, this group encountered a number of significant roadblocks that were, and arguably continue to be, a barrier to integration and social cohesion with their Canadian counterparts. Despite many of the successes achieved by Somali Canadians, an important characteristic often overlooked by dominant discourse, most of the adults documented in this study have found themselves underemployed, working low paying, entry-level positions without regard for their educational qualifications. The youth have also been impacted by these same obstacles and find themselves hindered in their integration into mainstream Canada due to discrimination and systemic barriers in the labor market and education system. This project examines the local experiences of Somali youth, adults, and elders in the Greater Toronto Area with the goal of developing initiatives and improving existing settlement services.

In the late 1980s, Canada saw a significant influx of Somali families fleeing violent persecution, mass repression, and torture under Siad Barre's military rule. Toronto became a popular destination for resettlement and soon the number of refugee claims by Somalis rose from a mere 31 claimants in 1985 to 3,503 within the first six months of 1991 (Opoku-Dapaah, 2006). The peak influx was reached in 1994/95, during which time Somalia was recognized as the source of the second largest number of refugee claims (Reitsma, 2001). Having lived through horrific trauma, unimaginable physical atrocities, and the numerous deaths of close family and friends in the civil war, Somalis were unprepared for the bombardment of hostile media and public scrutiny they faced upon their arrival to Canada. Negative preconceptions were formed by Canadians due to the media portrayal of the civil war and famine in Somalia, and stereotypes of Somalis as "third-world freeloaders" looking for an excuse

to abuse "first-world" Canadian generosity began to flourish (Berns-McGown, 2013; Wright, 2000).

Within Canada, Somalis essentially encountered three strikes against them; (i) being a newcomer to/refugee within Canada, (ii) being Muslim, and (iii) being Black (Reitsma, 2001). These new forms of identification among the Somali Canadian community are difficult to navigate at first for youths, adults, and elders alike. Upon their arrival in Canada, Somali immigrants immediately began to suffer from multiple forms of exclusion including, among other things, the labour market and housing; this is in part related to their lack of official citizenship documentation (Pegg, 2004). With many families forced to flee following the fall of the Somali government, they were unable to secure most of their official documents required by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC). However, it does appear that Somalis were targeted by CIC as they were one of only two groups to have a five-year waiting period imposed upon them before becoming eligible to apply for permanent residency (the other group being Afghans). While waiting for their landed immigrant status to be approved, Somali immigrants have a number of restrictions imposed upon them. Primary among them is that they are unauthorized to leave the country with a guarantee of re-entry. Moreover, they are unable to sponsor family members to come to Canada, and are only eligible for temporary work permits. They also remain ineligible for employment offered through Human Resources Development Canada (Lim et al., 2005; Pegg, 2004).

Additionally, unlike other non-white immigrants, Muslim refugees face an unwelcome reception in North America, particularly following the attacks in New York on September 11, 2001 ("9/11"). Somalis and other Muslims in Western societies endure intense Islamophobia — largely borne of ignorance and fueled by a socially constructed public discourse that tends to depict Muslims as extremists, fundamentalists, archaic, static, barbaric, irrational, unresponsive to change, and thus unwilling to assimilate (Bigelow, 2008; Haque, 2004; Shah, 2006). Any effort made for them to affirm their Islamic identity is often met with great resistance, and Islam is often considered to be inferior to other Western religions. With the massive immigration of Somalis to Canada generally, and the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) specifically, the number of cultural contact zones, defined Canagarajah (1997) as "where different communities interact," is countless; yet these interactions are often still marked by fear, stereotypes, and discrimination, largely based on religion and race (Bigelow, 2008).

This tension has become apparent within the education system, where Somali Muslim youth, who are at a significantly higher risk of dropping out and expulsion (Brown, 2008; Daubs, 2013), experience considerable challenges when trying to reconstruct and negotiate their national and religious identities within a predominantly Judeo-Christian society (Van Driel, 2004; Zine, 2001, 2000). In the education system, they are expected to "master the social, linguistic, and cultural codes of the dominant if they [ever] hope to enter into the social fabric" (Bashir-Ali, 2006, p. 628). Schools are often the sites in which these larger societal systems of discrimination are reproduced, perpetuated, and maintained. Such descriptions resonated with Somali Canadian youth and their experiences of misunderstanding, mistreatment, unfair disciplinary practices and neglect within the school (Bhattacharjee, 2003; Bigelow, 2008; Collet, 2007; Reitsma, 2001; Ruck & Worley, 2002; Toronto District School Board, 2004).

Finally, upon their migration to Canada, Somalis encounter the Western classification system under which the nature of their identity markers shift (Ajrouch & Kusow, 2007). Often for the first time, race becomes a key element in Somali youths' identity as they are now defined as "Black" (Kusow, 2004, 2006). The notion of "Blackness" is commonly argued to be a North American construction and, for Somali immigrants in Canada, it fails to provide any meaningful form of identification. Systems of classification and societal cleavages are most often clan-based in Somalia, such that Somali youths in Somalia tend to identify more by culture and/or nationality than by skin color (Ajrouch & Kusow, 2007; Kusow, 2006; Landale & Oropesa, 2002). With this new label, they are now placed within the realm of the "visible minority" category and experience a "triple stigmatization" based on their race, religion, and citizenship status (or lack thereof). This process of "racialization" has become a powerful mechanism for discriminatory and exclusionary practices based on race (Bigelow, 2008; Pollock, 2004; Schmidt, 2002).

A recent study by Berns-McGown (2013) suggests that many young Somali Canadians face considerable challenges within Canadian society. Key challenges encountered include systemic or institutional racism in relation to police, schools, media, and intelligence agencies. Many Somali Canadians in Toronto feel that their community is unfairly and disproportionately targeted by police officers based on their race and religion. Common descriptors used to describe the relationship between Somali Canadians and police forces include distrust, anger, hostility, suspicion, and antagonism, in addition to descriptions of Somali Canadians experiencing intense fear of police (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2003). Somali Canadian male youth frequently report that they

feel actively sought out and harassed by police officers for what these authority figures claim to be “random searches”. Such instances of what is often termed “proactive policing” (Tanovich, 2004) are often attributed to the fact that Somali Canadian males feel they are unfairly profiled by the police because they fit a particular description — that of a Black suspect (Bigelow, 2007, 2008). Such fears are not unfounded. Research indicates that Black youth are three times more likely to be stopped by police when compared to any other youth group in Canada (Forman, 2001; Galabuzi, 2006). The psychological and social damage that can result from always being considered a “usual suspect” (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2003; Wortley, 1997) has yet to be fully examined.

Mental illness has been cited as a major issue within the Somali community, largely due to past traumas and losses experienced in the Somali civil war in the late 1980s and the 1990s and the strains of relocation due to their ‘non-status’ (Pyke et al., 2001; Reitsma, 2001; Bokore, 2009; Jacobson et al., 2010; Wambayi, 2010). Cultural and structural factors also affect the way in which mental illness is understood and the stigma associated with diagnosis and treatment (Silveira & Allebeck, 2001; Pyke et al., 2010; Tilikainen, 2011). Despite the multiple and deeply entrenched barriers the Somali Canadian community face throughout their processes of adaptation and acculturation within Canada, it is apparent that community members are actively challenging their marginalization (Reitsma, 2001). Although some literature argues that in spite of their significant population, the Somali Canadian community have a low level of collective mobilization and a low level of political visibility (Griffiths, 2000; Hopkins, 2006), in the city of Toronto the Somali Canadian community is widely known for their activism and organizing, particularly when it comes to the establishment and use of Somali community organizations. Many such organizations are connected through the umbrella organization of Midaynta and provide services and support to community members (Pegg, 2004). Importantly, significant number of the Somali families who immigrated to Canada were single parent households led by female figures, as many fathers, uncles, or other male authority figures were killed or unable to flee due to ongoing political unrest. As such, Somali Canadian women have undertaken a number of highly successful initiatives within Canada in spite of certain linguistic and cultural barriers (Mohammed, 1999; Reitsma, 2001; Bokore, 2009; MacDonnell et al., 2012). However, criticisms continue to be vocalized by the community with regards to a lack of programming initiatives, particularly those led by members of the Somali Canadian community, as well as a disconnect between those services which are available and the ability of community members to effectively reach out to those who are most in need of help (Kilbride & Anisef, 2001; Lim et al., 2005; Bokore, 2009; Lo, 2011).

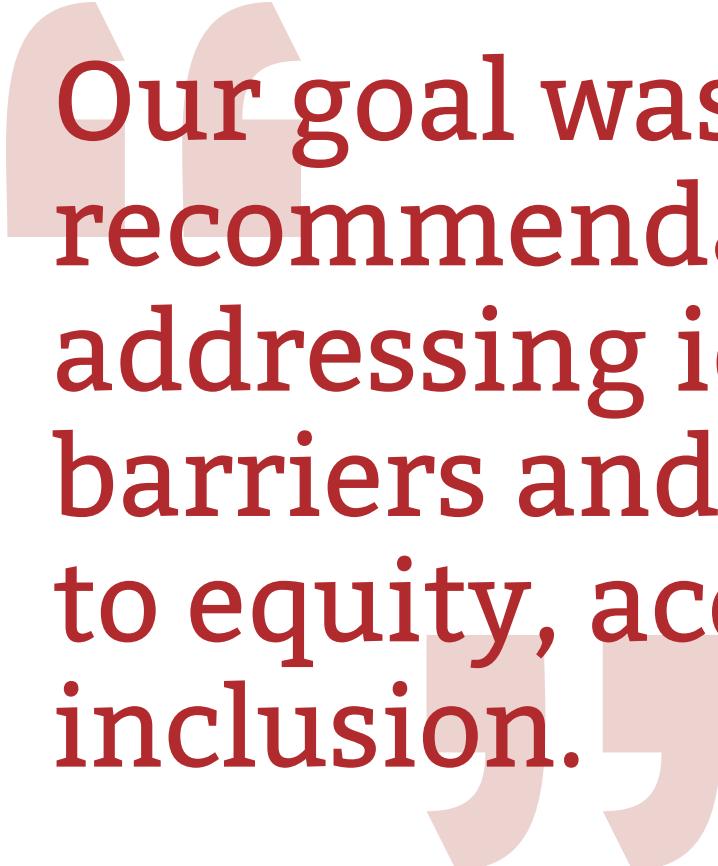
# METHODOLOGY

This research project aims to rigorously examine issues facing one of Toronto's most vulnerable and marginalized populations, the Somali Canadian community. Out of this Action Research (AR) project, our goal was to generate recommendations for addressing identified barriers and challenges to equity, access, and inclusion (Koshy et al, 2010). The AR method was utilized in order to allow the research group to work in collaboration with the research participants to undertake practical and applicable research developed by, and for, the Somali Canadian community.

All subjects recruited from the Somali Canadian community were selected based on age to encompass the age range of 18-59. This allowed for the inclusion of both young adults who had graduated, are in the process of graduating, or did not graduate from high school and are now looking to enter the workforce, as well as adults who are in the workforce but have not yet retired.

Potential project participants were initially recruited through purposeful sampling. We contacted specific community social service agencies and various community stakeholders and asked them to act as intermediaries. Once their support had been solicited, these initial contacts were invaluable in connecting us with interested participants due to their personal and/or work-based involvement with members of the community. Additionally, we requested that the consenting organizations aid in sending out project solicitation letters and/or posting solicitation flyers. From there on, we relied on a "snowball" method of recruitment through word of mouth. For the purpose of this study, snowball sampling was undertaken by the research team, asking participants to provide the study information to personal contacts, who then approached the research team to request to be a part of the study. People interested in participating were asked to contact the Diversity Institute to be included in our list of potential contributors in the focus group session, which was subsequently scheduled to accommodate their schedule. Those participants who were involved in the focus group session were provided with food and beverages and a \$20 cash incentive.

This qualitative research method involved one focus group in which members of the Somali Canadian community came together for a consultation meeting to examine their lived experiences, addressing key issues affecting the community with regard to employment, health, justice, education, housing, and racial identity. Located at Pathways to Education in Etobicoke, members of the research team facilitated the two-hour session that included a total of 15 participants. At the beginning of the meeting, all participants were advised that their participation was completely voluntary and that their



**Our goal was to generate recommendations for addressing identified barriers and challenges to equity, access, and inclusion.**

identities would not appear in any published documents. They were also advised that they were permitted to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. The participants were presented with a written consent form,

which they were asked to sign prior to commencement of the focus group, and were also informed that the meeting was to be tape recorded.

Prior to beginning the consultation meeting, a brief questionnaire was administered to each participant. The questionnaire was completely voluntary and solicited demographic information about each participant including name, year of birth, gender, ethnicity origin or race, major intersection of their current or last known address, postal code, immigration status, number of years spent in Canada, languages spoken, and whether or not they identify as a visible minority (refer to Appendix A to see the questionnaire in its entirety).

Of the 15 participants, with an average age of 29, there was a total of nine male participants and six female. 40% of the participants self-identified as both "Black" and "Somali", another 40% as only "Somali", and the remaining 20% as "Black". The majority of participants (80%) were born in Canada, all had lived there for 10 years or more, and all participants held full Canadian citizenship. Four of the participants were married or common law, and the remainder selected the "single" category. Six participants had high school listed as their highest educational qualification, one had obtained a college certificate, four had a Bachelor degree, and the remaining four had a Master's degree. Only one person indicated that they were homeless; however, all members of the group had some form of employment, whether it was full-time (60%) or part-time (40%).

After administering the questionnaire, the research team and members of the Somali Canadian community were asked to provide the group with a brief self-introduction. Once completed, the group was presented with a focus group agenda (refer to Appendix B to see the focus group agenda), which broke down the general structure of the meeting, its timeline, and the twelve interview questions that the research team had composed. For the first portion of the meeting, the group was posed with four identity questions. Based on this initial dialogue with the participants, the research team chose not to interfere with the natural progression of the discussion by posing each pre-determined question; however, the resulting conversations still touched upon each of the categories of education, housing, health, justice, and employment. The session was concluded with a final wrap-up where participants were able to voice any last comments or suggestions.

# FINDINGS & THEORETICAL ELABORATIONS

## Identity Crisis

The focus group was comprised of Somali Canadian youth and/or students, young business professionals, adults, and elders. Following the initial introductions, the research team posed a series of identity-based questions that elicited responses that formed the first theme category of "identity crisis". The crisis portion of this came from how the elders and the youth navigated and dealt with the inclusion of Somali Canadians in both the "Black" categorization in addition to their categorization as a distinct cultural or ethnic group (Kusow, 2004).

The elders, who were originally from Somalia and had migrated to Canada at the time of the civil war, knew who they were as Somalis and where they fit into in the Black diaspora living in Canada. This became immediately apparent following the administering of our initial demographic questionnaire, where we found that all of the Somali Canadian adults and elders had self-identified as both "Somali" and "Black". However, the youth and young business professionals who had grown up in the GTA expressed feelings of confusion and conflict when it came to the appropriate terms of self-identification. A majority of the young participants (six members) selected "Somali" as their race/ethnicity, followed by three members selecting "Black" and the remaining two selecting both "Somali" and "Black". This provides an interesting contrast to existing literature, which indicates that many Somali Canadian parents are concerned that their children are rejecting Somali culture, language, and religion, assimilating into Canadian culture at the expense of their Somali identity (Forman, 2001; Reitsma, 2001; Bigelow, 2008). Interviewed parents suggest in the literature that they are concerned Somali Canadian youth are becoming too "Westernized" and are thus drifting away from the core values of their family and religion. This tension was made manifest when one young Somali Canadian male spoke up in response to the elders' concerns of maintaining the Somali culture by posing the poignant

question of, "how does me knowing my Somali-ness help me in resolving the issues I am currently dealing with in today's society?"

From our discussions with the youth, it appeared that they were occupying an uncertain space "shaped by an array of competing agendas" (Forman, 2001, p. 38) and were experiencing some difficulties in establishing a sense of stability with regard to their identity. However, they did express willingness and even a desire to maintain a connection with their traditional heritage while sustaining their dedication to embark on their new lives in Canada. Additionally, the literature has pointed to the fact that Somali Canadian youth have begun to self-identify as "Black" as opposed to just Somali; as they begin to interrogate how they are fitting into this system that has historically discriminated against visible minority youth, they begin to conjoin their struggles and complaints with those of their Black peers (Forman, 2001; Bigelow, 2008). While Kusow (2006) claims that the North American construction of "Blackness" fails to provide any meaningful form of an identity category, this statement is challenged by our results, which speak to fundamental feelings of confusion experienced by Somali Canadian youth who are negotiating classification systems that are loaded with hegemonic meanings.

These identity-based discussions resonate with notions identified in W.E.B. Du Bois' (1903) theory of African American "double consciousness". The term originally referred to the psychological challenge of reconciling an African heritage with a European upbringing and education, and in the present study we are witnessing this double, perhaps even triple, consciousness among these young Somali Canadians, who are claiming their Canadian-ness, their Black-ness, and their Somali-ness. One of the participants said that "kids who grew up here [in Canada] know that they are Black, but their parents who grew up in Africa pose the valid question of what does "Black" even mean?" He stated the following:

Everyone is Black in Africa. You come here [to Toronto], you are identified as Black, and with that you are put into a box that is very confusing, even if your skin is brown. I am not Black, I am Somali. Parents don't know what Black is, however, the young people know that there is a Black experience.

One participant added, "I am more Canadian than Somali. I have been here since I was one year old. This place [Canada] is the only thing I know and I connect more to Canadian society. My day-to-day is more Canadian than

...[the youth] were experiencing some difficulties in establishing a sense of stability with regard to their identity.

Somalian, even though this is stolen land." Another participant reiterated this conflict in negotiating the multiple identities available to them when they stated that "it's as if, when you leave Canadian soil, you are Canadian. However, when you are in Canada you are not Canadian, you are Somalian."

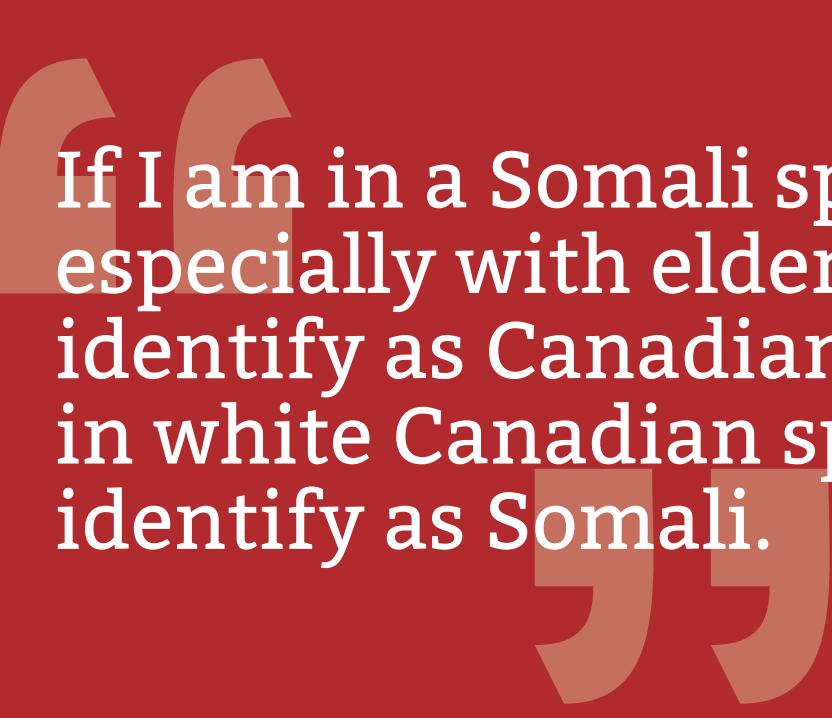
This statement demonstrates of how dependent their identity can be on the space in which they inhabit. For example, one participant offered the following point on how their idea of Blackness changed depending on which part of the city they were residing in. One participant explained:

I used to live in the jungle [downtown Toronto]. When I moved to Brampton, the concept of Blackness was ghetto. When I was in Brampton I was told I was not Black... but African. So I wondered in what spaces am I Black and in what spaces am I Somali?

This quote provides an illustration of the argument that skin colour alone is not a basis for group solidarity (Kusow, 2006). Due to the fact that colour-based categories of social understanding tend to be of low importance within the Somali Canadian cultural narrative, the majority of community members identify according to cultural and/or religious affiliations. However, even these

categories are a fluctuating and multi-faceted process of negotiation; for example, one participant stated that, "when I am in White spaces I tend to identify as a Somali Canadian. But as much as it's not difficult for me to say 'I am Somali'... most times it's hard to say 'I am Canadian' because I do not identify as just Canadian." There were similar sentiments shared by another young Somali Canadian, who spoke about identifying within their community. "If I am in a Somali space, especially with elders, I identify as Canadian; but in white Canadian spaces I identify as Somali."

There were additional dialogues that arose with regard to the multiple layers of stigma and discrimination associated with Somali Canadians' religion, race and citizenship status. One of the participants captured this when they said, "To be Somali is to be a different kind of other, a particular kind of other. We are Muslim, we are Black, we came here as refugees. We haven't really interrogated what it means to be Somali within the Canadian context." Although over one-third of racialized group members are Canadian-born overall (Galabuzi, 2006), shifting notions of citizenship have caused many racialized Canadians to feel like "second-class" citizens. "Racialization" has ultimately damaged the value of Canadian citizenship for racialized groups, and has led to an "otherization" of Somali Canadians that masks the



If I am in a Somali space, especially with elders, I identify as Canadian; but in white Canadian spaces I identify as Somali.

complexity of their identity and attempts to maintain the status-quo of us versus them (Schmidt, 2002; Pollock, 2004; Bigelow, 2008). This sentiment was shared by one participant:

For the people who are White, it doesn't matter the time they have been in Canada; they are already part of the system. They can claim themselves as Canadians. But for us [Somalis], no matter how long we stay here, we will always have that problem of being an outsider. When I came here, I had my PhD and the only company that would hire me was for a courier position. Everyone gave me the feeling that I wasn't supposed to be here.

This quote reinforces findings in the literature that document how racialized groups can be discriminated against through the assumption of non-Canadian origin — within not only the public discourse but also the workplace (Galabuzi, 2006). The participant eventually added, "I changed my clothes and put on a suit and tie, and then I felt that I could go anywhere without any problems." However, some of the younger participants challenged this statement because they believed that the issues of discrimination and otherization that Somali youth were facing could not be solved by simply changing the clothing that they wore.

Some participants pointed toward the role the media plays in the social construction of the Somali identity, particularly as understood by non-Somalis. Allegations or assumptions commonly made against Somali immigrants relate to assumptions regarding criminality and involvement with drugs, indolence, and welfare cheating (Wright, 2000). The portrayal of Somalis in Hollywood was also identified as problematic by one participant:

Look at how the media portrays Somalis in major blockbuster films such as Black Hawk Down and Captain Phillips. If you knew nothing about Somalis, how we are portrayed in the media has direct repercussions on our public image. You would think that we are blood thirsty, barbaric, tribalistic warlords and Islamist terrorists.

## Redefining or Broadening the Policing Phenomenon

In our discussions, particularly with the Somali Canadian youth, the issue was raised of the interconnectedness between policing and other institutions that wield authority: specifically, between police, policy-makers, and the school systems within Canada generally and the Greater Toronto Area specifically. Under the topic of policing, participants shared personal narratives that spoke of the traumatizing effects of their interactions with the police and the criminal justice system. One of the participants shared his story:

I have been arrested five times and all five times the charges have been dropped and it's because I am Somali and we all have a similar resemblance. It has come to the point that if I just see a cop parked in the parking lot, a fear comes over me. I get scared every time I hear sirens and see flashing lights even if I know I didn't do anything.

Another participant spoke about similar interactions between her brothers and the police:

I have three older brothers, who were driving from Shoreham to York University. They got pulled over for no reason and then got carded and the cops realized after the fact that they were students and let them go. But the fear remains with these Black men, Black boys even, after the cops have left.

According to the Ontario Human Rights Commission's *Paying the price: The human cost of racial profiling* inquiry report (2003), 'policing' was the institution most commonly identified as having lost the faith of an individual or community across the province. This shift in perception of policing was due to either a single incident or a number of encounters occurring over time. One major social cost of this form of racial profiling, experienced by the Somali Canadian community in particular, is the deep-seeded level of mistrust that has developed. This mistrust has been fueled by the feeling in the community that their members, particularly Somali Canadian males, are unfairly targeted by the police and actively sought for random searches and interrogations, solely because they ostensibly fit a general description of a Black male. One participant spoke about these targeted policing practices as occurring within specific areas that are known for housing poor racialized communities. He explained that the "Toronto Police System (TPS)'s TAVIS unit is constantly around the Rexdale community. There was a recent raid in one

of the public housing units and everyone who lives in that area knows they are a target."

Tensions between the Somali Canadian community and the police force appear to have reached an all-time high for children, youth, and adults alike. This mistrust has extended across a number of key institutions, such as the criminal justice system, law enforcement, and now, sadly, the Canadian education system. One of the elders of the group spoke about the recent partnerships between the TPS and the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) schools in racialized communities and pointed to a school that acted differently by excluding police intervention:

I started to normalize the collaboration with the police and the school system. I was working in Rexdale and saw three police cars parked in the school every day. I then attended a presentation at a school north of the City of Toronto. The principal at this school said in her presentation that, in her 22 years of being a principal, she has never called the police. I asked the principal why she chose this approach and the principal responded that teenagers are teenagers, and all the issues can be resolved with the parents and within the school.

This principal's approach lies in direct contrast to other schools, such as those in Rexdale, which tend to favour the involvement of the police in most incidents involving students. School policies were initially enforced to allow principals, teachers, and school boards a greater degree of authority when it came to the suspension and expulsion of students, as well as police involvement, but have also resulted in a disproportionate enforcement of school authority against racialized students.

These discussions are congruent with recent literature that has been written with regard to examining the Safe Schools Act and other related School Board policies (Toronto District School Board, 2004). Studies have shown that the Safe Schools Act and other such "zero tolerance" policies have resulted in an increase in total suspensions and expulsions (Cho, 2005), with a disproportionate impact on racialized students (Ruck & Wortley, 2002; Bhattacharjee, 2003; Toronto District School Board, 2004). While Bhattacharjee (2003) has noted a total lack of statistics on race in relation to these school board policies, there appears to be sufficient anecdotal evidence to support such claims. One participant spoke of the problematic tendency of teachers and school administrators to over-exercise their authority toward

“disruptive” Somali Canadian students. This is reflected in the following statement made by one participant:

Teachers are not engaging with parents. They are quick to suspend or expel students and even call the police on racialized kids in the school, even though there are other options that these school administrators can do first.

Another participant stated that “Somali students, particularly boys, have the highest rate of suspension and expulsion in the TDSB, even higher than other African Canadians.”

Several participants also made connections between the school and the prison industrial complex in Canada. As one of the participants put it, “Instead of acting as a place for the mind to be liberated, the schools in the GTA have become a place that imprisons the mind.” Another participant added the following:

We saw first-hand the effects of such ‘zero tolerance’ policies. We saw a flood of Somali and Black students get sent to the office for suspension or expulsion, and many of our peers began to get recruited by gangs. By pushing our youth out of the school system, we are only working to raise future problems.

The punitive approach endorsed by these school board policies has had a broad and negative effect on not only the racialized students that have been disproportionately scrutinized, targeted, and penalized for arguably “subjective” offences (TDSB, 2004; Brown, 2008), but also their families, the community, and society at large. Some of the most commonly identified repercussions have been negative psychological consequences, loss of education, higher dropout rates, and increased criminalization and antisocial behavior (Cho, 2005). One participant equated this lack of commitment from the educational system to a form of violence when they said, “You have a school that is already defective, and this becomes more of an act of violence when you are a young person coming from the hood.” The participant also posed two very important questions:

In our cities, in the marginalized and racialized communities, the schools in these communities are defective... what does this mean for our children? If the schools successfully destroy your mind, what chances do we and our future children have?

These schools and their administrators, teachers, high school guidance counsellors, and other staff were ultimately targeted by the participants for their failure to provide appropriate support and motivation to their students. One participant sharing their own personal experience within the school said that they saw "guidance counsellors telling Somali kids who were straight-A students that post-secondary education was too hard and they should look into getting a job in the trades instead." This disproportionate streaming of racialized students into vocational programs and/or basic-level and special-needs classes was an issue frequently raised in the literature that we came across (TDSB, 2004; Cho, 2005). One participant noted that this was a "systemic issue. They actively discourage us from taking certain courses they don't deem as appropriate for us, such as chemistry or mathematics. But we didn't listen. We survived and we went to university." Participants didn't express surprise about those who didn't make it out of these schools, as they felt "almost like the schools didn't want us to go to university and succeed."

This sentiment seemed to be further emphasized when a participant mentioned the Fraser Institute Report on high schools in Ontario, which contained specific findings about the schools in marginalized communities. Even though some of these schools have scored very low over the past 5 to



**Several participants also made connections between the school and the prison industrial complex in Canada.**

6 years, the community has seen absolutely no pressure applied to change the systematic faults that have permeated these institutions. A participant further noted that in the Fraser Institute Report of 2012/2013, he saw certain high schools in Toronto had the lowest ratings, such as Sir Robert L. Borden, Nelson A. Borden, and Bendale. Many of these schools serve the most vulnerable racialized populations in the city. Though some of these schools have had an average rating of 0 out of 10 for the past five years, the Somali Canadian community has still seen no changes implemented (Cowley & Easton, 2014).

## Cycle of Poverty

One last major theme that arose from our discussions with the participants was with regard to the “cycle of poverty” that is currently playing out in the Somali Canadian community. This racialization of poverty is largely due to unemployment challenges faced daily by both adults and youth alike. One participant described the high unemployment rate in the Somali Canadian community living in the GTA:

There are a high number of people who are either under- or unemployed. There are definitely structural pieces and reasons for this, such as systemic discrimination through policies such as the undocumented convention refugee in Canada class status, which came in around 1993.

This policy mostly affected Somali and Afghan refugees who came to Canada during this time, and caused problems with securing their citizenship status. One participant said, “we were not able to apply for permanent residency for five years and during that time it’s hard to get a professional job because we do not have the documents needed for those jobs.” Another participant mentioned the multiple dimensions of discriminatory attitudes faced by Somali Canadians, stating that “the Somali Canadian is being profiled on two levels, race and religion, and after September 11 the Somali has been profiled more so on Islamophobia. These are the layers... we are newcomers, refugees, Black, and Muslim.”

Another point raised in the literature was that Somali family networks are frequently termed as “economies of affection” (Hyden, 1983; Tilikainen, 2011). This means that they are interdependent, offer mutual support, and make strategic decisions based on kinship connections. There are high

expectations of the diaspora to not only send financial remittances to those extended family members left behind in Somalia, but also to contribute financially to the immediate family residing within Canada (Lindley, 2009; Hammond et al., 2011). This financial obligation weighs heavily on Somali Canadian youth in particular, as they feel that any of their successes, achievements, and resources gained in Canada are experienced by and hence shared with every member of the family. As many Somali Canadian parents are unemployed or occupying low-level positions not commensurate with their educational attainment, the children often find themselves saddled with not only their own financial obligations, but those of their entire family's as well.



## The high expectations placed on Somali Canadian youth have led to the issue of intergenerational poverty.

The high expectations placed on Somali Canadian youth have led to the issue of intergenerational poverty. One of the participants mentioned that they are "witnessing first-hand the struggles of their parents being passed down to their children." Another participant also commented that she has taken on her parents' mortgage payments of \$1,200 per month in addition to her own bills because her parents are unable to make enough money to cover their own expenses. This familial commitment was illustrated when one participant said, "You are so committed to supporting your family and yet you're not able to support yourself." One participant mentioned that the mentality among Somali Canadians has increasingly become that of "keeping up with the Joneses, where you have certain families within the Somali Canadian community moving to places like Peel and buying homes that they cannot

afford. They are just not able to keep up with all the costs that come with home ownership in the suburbs."

Participants also discussed the need to have more visible role models from the Somali Canadian community in order to highlight many of the accomplishments that have failed to enter into the mainstream public discourse. One participant captured this sentiment in the following statement:

There is a need for role models who are like us, who have started where we have started, and who have been through what we have been through. Role models representing both genders... since there are a lot of single mother households in our community.

Despite the fact that traditional Somali tribes have been mostly patriarchal, the majority of Somali Canadian families now consist of female-headed households (Bokore, 2009). In spite of struggling with their own literacy issues, financial burdens, and the numerous other challenges they encounter upon their arrival in unfamiliar cultural and social landscapes, these mothers have taken on both roles of provider and caretaker and are managing the welfare of themselves and their children with great resilience and determination. Often, single mothers look to their oldest sons to take control over the household — one participant mentioned the challenge they encountered of leading a good example for their younger siblings: "My younger siblings see the challenges that I face in trying to find meaningful work, even with a post-secondary degree." Without strong leaders to set examples of success, Somali Canadian youth may feel that they do not have the tools to successfully escape intergenerational cycles of poverty. One participant touched upon this in the following statement:

We don't have anyone to lead the way. I have three older siblings who have experienced challenges in finding jobs and they are setting the standard for us. Also, you watch your parents who are educated trying to find work with no luck, and then they tell you to get an education... and you do it but you are still not able to find work.

# NEXT STEPS

## Definitions of Success

When asked what “success” would look like in the Somali Canadian community, there was a strong and unanimous consensus from the elders that there is a need to strengthen intergenerational ties within the community to ensure that Somali cultural heritage and traditions are successfully passed on to youth and preserved for future generations to come. As one elder stated:

For me, success is that, before I die, the Somali youth come to trust the elders and become strong in the community. Kids who are really progressive thinkers and liberal must stand up for leadership in the community. If we can train future Somali leaders, then I can pass the torch onto them.

For the younger participants, they felt that the next steps toward success should be centered on doing more work with school boards in order to make education more equitable. One participant said, “For me, success would be justice. Starting to put things in place that would put people in the right place. Success would be accountability: when schools commit a race issue and suspend people, teachers and school administrators are held accountable.”

Equity, accessibility, inclusivity, and accountability within not only post-secondary institutions but also employment were identified as critical. A member of the group asked that job opportunities be brought to her neighborhood rather than requiring Somali Canadian youth to commute all the way into the city in order to gain access to jobs and schooling. These concerns were key for the young professionals in the group who said that “employment issues, such as getting your first job with no experience... that is the biggest barrier. It starts when you are 15-16. You have nowhere else to go and then you may have to go do something that is illegal.” The crucial need for access to education for the upcoming generation was referenced by one participant:

For me, success would be justice. Starting to put things in place that would put people in the right place. Success would be accountability: when schools commit a race issue and suspend people, teachers and school administrators are held accountable.

Success for me is access to knowledge, identifying skills early in our Somali youth. Early on, as in before they enter university, because they don't seem know or be taught that there are alternative things they could get into such as entrepreneurship and opening up their own business. They seem to have these pressures placed on them by the school system and parents to not stray too far from the expected path.

### Identity

Although the Somali Canadian community is largely seen by Canadians as homogenous, there is a level of fragmentation due to generational conflict, tribal affiliations, and other factors (Pegg, 2004). Participants attempted to challenge this myth of homogeneity while simultaneously stressing the importance of community building. This was reflected in the following comment made by a participant:

Success for me would be a rich sense of community. We as a community need to come together, talk to each other, and discuss with each other. That is where the community will ultimately get its success from. We will hold together and stay together. Success has to always come from within.

As such, conversations like the one conducted for the present study were seen as a beneficial stepping stone in order to foster a dialogue from within. These conversations will allow the community's diverse members to find out new information and spark new dialogue about what matters to them the most.

Another participant vocalized a need for the creation of more culturally relevant media for the Somali Canadian community and more representation within politics. As one participant said:

We need Somali Canadian representation in all levels of politics and in the media. We don't have them right now. But the Somali Canadian TV show called Integration that is airing this Saturday at 10:30AM on City (TV) is definitely a good start. We are encouraging families to watch the show, eat Somali cultural food, and have dialogue around the show. We need to have more positive spaces for Somali Canadians.

## Social Factors

There were also recommendations made with regard to more work needed around the physical and mental health of the Somali Canadian community. It was argued that the "aura of silence" that has surrounded the health concerns of the community must be demolished. One participant shared this sentiment, stating that "mental health is something we don't talk about. It's a silent killer. I would like to see mental health professionals come to Rexdale instead of us going to them."

Participants expressed a keen interest in seeing more work around the school system engaging with mental health concerns that are encountered by the Somali Canadian community, as well as other racialized communities and their youth. One participant captured this, saying, "Mental health is stigmatized. Within our community, we don't have the accommodations in the schools system, and we are still not accessing it. We have to step up and say we demand it." Not only is the community asking for an increased awareness of health issues faced by their members, participants also stressed the additional need to provide such health and social services in a culturally appropriate manner in order to tackle the stigma that continues to surround mental health in particular. One participant commented to this effect:

You have Somalis and their idea of normal. In the Somali Canadian community, people with mental issues they are seen as normal. But in Canada they are not seen as normal. So there is a clash. I'm all for mental health, but I want a black person treating me.

## Community Involvement

Among our participants, there was also a sense of futility with regard to politics. The conversation was filled with background information of policies that have affected the Somali Canadian community. One participant in particular captured this:

We have to fight for our rights. We need to lobby and get more Somali people in the system. The whole process in this system is done by lobbying. We tell the stories to each other but we don't tell it to others outside of the community.

## LGBTQ Inclusion

In our group discussion, we originally noted that when the topic of queer identities surfaced, it caused some tension and apprehension in the room, particularly between the elders and the younger participants. One elder referred to Somali Canadians who self-identify as LGBTQ as "those Somalis that live downtown," and a youth commented that "from a cultural standpoint, LGBTQ is beyond abnormal in the Somali community." The implications of "coming out" not only for oneself but for the individual's family would be immense, as a participant stated that, "the reputation of my family is reflected if I was to come out. Honour and shame and preserving the dignity of the family has been a reason for isolation and silence on issues such as homosexuality." However, some of the participants did acknowledge a gap in programs and dialogue surrounding Somali Canadians who identify as LGBTQ:

Somalis who are LGBTQ... there is no specific support system for them. And it's really sad, because I volunteer with someone who is queer, and she doesn't have any support. We haven't gotten to that conversation in the community and I don't think we are going to get there for a while.

Another participant added that, "Your whole tribe is affected; your whole family is affected if you were to come out."

The honour and shame paradigm that the Somali culture operates on is a controlling force in the community. Although this code will always play a decisive role in community members' decision-making, participants did acknowledge its delimiting potential:

Honour and shame in the Somali community and preserving the community at the end of the day is the most important thing. We are so used to keeping quiet about these issues, like mental health and people who are LGBTQ, because we are told by our elders that you are carrying our name. So you keep silent.

## Support and Re-integration

As important as it is to create more programs and services that can address the multitude of issues faced by racialized communities, participants asked for a focus on reintegration programs that specifically cater to the Somali Canadian community — particularly the youth, who often experience involvement in criminal activities and struggle to find success in the labor market, even when most often they have been charged with nothing more than a petty crime (Jibril, 2011). One participant spoke of this common struggle:

With so many Somali boys in the prison systems, some parents don't know that they are there or, since they are in a limbo with registration status, there is no release. Or if they are released, there is no help afterward.

Another participant commented on the urgent need for support for Somali boys and men after they are released from the prison system:

Recently, there is a young Somali who came out of the prison system and took his life as a result of not being able to reintegrate into the system. Why isn't there a system in place helping these men in the community?

This study has highlighted some of the challenges faced by the Somali Canadian community in the GTA, including issues related to education, social services, and policing. The study has also articulated ways forward, as described by the Somali Canadian community itself. These include defining success, addressing social factors, seeking inclusive policies.

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# Racialized LGBTQ Homeless Youth in Toronto

# INTRODUCTION

"Addressing the Discrimination Experienced by Somali Canadians and Racialized LGBTQ Homeless Youth in Toronto" is a one-year project conducted by Urban Alliance on Race Relations (UARR). In partnership with Ryerson University's Diversity Institute, this community-based research project aims to identify issues of access, equity and inclusion for two highly vulnerable and marginalized groups in Toronto: (a) the Somali Canadian community and (b) racialized LGBTQ homeless youth. More specifically, this project aims to explore the barriers and challenges facing these communities in the following six key areas: (i) employment; (ii) health; (iii) justice; (iv) education; (v) housing; and, (vi) community engagement. This particular report will focus on our findings from our work with a group of racialized LGBTQ homeless youth in Toronto.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

As a city dealing with a high rate of homelessness, Toronto has been dubbed the homeless capital of Canada (Laird, 2007; Novac et al., 2009). Notwithstanding efforts by Canadian researchers to study the issue of homelessness (Gaetz & O'Grady, 2002; Parnaby, 2003; Springer, Lum & Roswell, 2013), basic statistics on the number of homeless continue to be estimates (Springer, Lum & Roswell, 2013). Recent statistics on the number of nightly homeless youth in Toronto range from approximately 1,500 to 2,000 individuals (Canadian Foundation for Children Youth and the Law, 2011; O'Grady & Gaetz, 2002). A 2013 Street Needs Assessment conducted by the City of Toronto found that 21.0% of homeless youth identify as part of the LGBTQ community (City of Toronto, 2013). According to the same study, 11% of the female homeless youth population and 7% of the male homeless youth population identify as LGBTQ. Despite this high disproportion of homeless LGBTQ youth, this group is often excluded from social justice and social service planning discourse (e.g., Poon, 2004). As Abramovich(2012) notes, there "is little understanding regarding the situation of LGBTQ youth who are homeless, because the Canadian literature has yet to focus specifically on this population" (p. 31). Racialized LGBTQ individuals in particular often face incredibly intense challenges and social barriers borne out of the confluence of racism, sexism, heterosexism, and classism. Given the racial diversity of Toronto, it is important that further research be conducted with respect to not only LGBTQ youth and homelessness but to racialized LGBTQ youth and homelessness due to their uniquely complex and multifaceted experiences and struggles.

The fact that studies on homeless populations have in the past tended to avoid identifying the ethnic and racial identity of homeless persons (Springer, Lum & Roswell, 2013) has limited findings in two important ways. First, it has made it impossible to determine whether or not (and if so, to what extent) the experiences of racialized homeless individuals differ from those of the non-racialized homeless population (Gaetz & O'Grady, 2002; Tanner & Wortley, 2002). Second, it has prevented the development of political, economic, social, and cultural solutions such as shelters, emergency services

and even educational programs suited specifically to this group (Basso et al., 2004; Dachner & Tarasuk, 2002). In essence, absent from Canadian research and scholarship is an analysis and understanding of homelessness through a diverse lens that acknowledges the social and psychological complexities unique to racialized LGBTQ homeless youth.

Some recent scholarship is at least beginning to address the racial composition of homeless populations, revealing the extent to which Aboriginal youth, and black youth are overrepresented (Abramovich, 2012, 2013; Baron & Hartnagel, 2002; Barr & Evenson, 2009; Baskin, 2013; Cochrane et al., 2002; Gaetz, 2004; Gaetz et al., 2013; Gattis, 2011, 2009; Higgit et al., 2003; Springer et al., 2013, 2006). However, this epidemic, termed the “racialization of poverty” (Block & Galabuzi, 2011; Galabuzi, 2001), is a specific area of research that has yet to be fully explored and understood. In particular, current research on the homelessness of Aboriginal youth is notably lacking in spite of the fact that Aboriginal youth are the fastest growing population in Canada (Baskin, 2007). In fact, approximately 50% of the Aboriginal population is below the age of 25 (United Native Nations Society, 2001). It has been argued that systems of education, justice, health, and child protection have left Aboriginal people in a “cycle of economic dependency, including high rates of poverty and unemployment” (Morissette et al., 1993, p.94). The combination of skin colour, age, homelessness, and poverty places these youth in a position of “multiple structural disadvantage” (May, 2000, p. 613), causing them to be more reluctant to access community or government resources, services and shelters, preferring to first take advantage of their informal social networks (Abramovich, 2013; Anisef & Kilbride, 2003; Cochrane et al., 2002).

This reluctance is only compounded when taking into consideration the LGBTQ status of many racialized homeless youth. Due to the rampant lack of both culturally relevant and LGBTQ-specialized services, racialized LGBTQ homeless youth are even more reluctant to access existing general resources, agencies, and service providers for fear of social stigmatization and even violence, particularly for those youth who self-identify as transgendered (Abramovich, 2013; Barr & Evenson, 2009; Denomme-Welch et al., 2008; Quintana et al., 2010; Ray, 2006; Saewyc et al., 2006). Homeless youth have often expressed a need for LGBTQ-specific policies and guidelines as well as support staff who are not only appropriately trained, but who have experienced some of the same life struggles as them (Boyle, 2006). However, the significant gaps in knowledge regarding the disproportionate vulnerability of racialized and/or LGBTQ communities within Canada who live

in poverty results in a general lack of support for this particular population whose members occupy multiple positions of stigma, discrimination, and disadvantage due to their age, race, lack of housing, and sexual orientation (Abramovich, 2013; May, 2000).

Racialized LGBTQ homeless youth occupy a precarious position and face multiple forms of profiling both in the public and private spheres of their life. Profiling, whether social and/or racial, refers to the differential and/or discriminatory treatment attributed to one's race or skin color, sexuality, or gender orientation, or one's negatively perceived social status resulting from age or income level (Gaetz & O'Grady, 2006; O'Grady et al., 2013, 2011; Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2011; Satzewich & Shaffir, 2009; Springer et al., 2013; Wortley & Tanner, 2003).

Over the past few years, the practice of racial and social profiling has become a key area of interest and concern to Canadian researchers (Satzewich & Shaffir, 2009; Wortley & Tanner, 2003). The concept of racial and social profiling has become a matter of particular importance because it has served as the basis for what is now widely known as the "criminalization of homelessness" (Berns-McGown, 2013; Esmonde, 2002; Hermer & Mosher, 2002; O'Grady et al., 2011; Parnaby, 2003; Sylvestre, 2010a, 2010b). Recently instated policies, such as targeted policing practices, are disproportionately impacting impoverished and racialized communities (Baron et al., 2001; Gaetz, 2004; O'Grady et al., 2011; Tanner & Wortley, 2002). Society's problematic and discriminatory tendency to generalize and assume a direct connection between homeless youth, deviance, and criminality – although not entirely unfounded – fails to recognize the reality of life on the streets and hence the strategies, whether legal or not, that these youth are forced to employ in order to survive. The high visibility of these youth and their criminal involvement means that they have become stigmatized with a criminal reputation and framed by the media as "disorderly people," "welfare cheats," "violent youth," etc. (Hermer & Mosher, 2002; Parnaby, 2003). Attention needs to be paid to how these dominant discourses and the overlap of racial and social profiling experienced by these youth affect their self-image and perpetuate the problem. There also needs to be an effort to highlight some of the more positive aspects of the community that have failed to enter the mainstream narrative.

Contrary to popular belief, homeless youth are not avoiding work. Rather, a vast majority face significant barriers to obtaining and maintaining employment due to very limited employment options and inadequate

# Over the past few years, the practice of racial and social profiling has become a key area of interest and concern to Canadian researchers.

employment supports (Gaetz et al., 2011; Gaetz & O'Grady, 2002; Hagan & McCarthy, 1997). Homeless youth face numerous challenges when seeking and/or trying to maintain secure employment (Baron & Hartnagel, 2002; Gaetz & O'Grady, 2013, 2002; Karabanow, et al., 2010; Keenan et al., 2006; O'Grady & Gaetz, 2004; Robinson & Baron, 2007). Furthermore, the lack of traditional employment among a majority of homeless youth does not necessarily mean that they are not working at all. Recent research has uncovered that due to their need to meet immediate survival needs, and in spite of facing considerable barriers to employment, homeless youth are participating in what is now commonly referred to as "informal" economic activities in order to generate small amounts of income on a daily basis (Barnaby et al., 2010; Gaetz & O'Grady, 2004, 2002; Karabanow et al., 2010; Kidd, 2003). These activities, which have led to frequent encounters and conflicts with the police (Esmonde, 2002; Hermer & Mosher, 2002; Parnaby, 2003), can range from lawful practices, such as "binning" (collecting bottles for refunds), to more risky unlawful or quasi-legal activities, such as prostitution, panhandling/begging, squeegeeing, theft, and drug dealing (Baron & Hartnagel, 2002; Keenan et al., 2006; Kus, 2006; O'Grady & Gaetz, 2003; Robinson, 2007; Salvation Army, 2011). The types of informal income-generating strategies adopted by homeless youth are ultimately socially patterned, meaning that they emerge from a background of factors and social characteristics such as the age one began living on the streets, history of abuse, problems with addiction, or mental health issues. These strategies are utilized in order to survive (Gaetz & O'Grady, 2013). Despite the hardships experienced by street-involved homeless youth or those who find themselves at risk of becoming homeless, many youth respond to their circumstances with ingenuity, resilience and hope. Living homeless and participating in the informal economy demonstrates a willingness on behalf of homeless youth to be productive and organized, challenging the pervasively common perception that homeless youth are lazy and lack any form of motivation, are delinquent and welfare dependant, and have no aspirations for employment in the formal economy. The informal labour market adopted proactively by homeless youth can combat negative self-perceptions and allows them to feel more control over their circumstances,

providing emotional and psychological strength (Baron & Hartnagel, 2002; Gaetz & O'Grady, 2013).

These important points should be taken into consideration in order to provide youth a pathway off the streets rather than simply criminalizing poverty. This latter strategy has been popularly employed due to the supposedly increasing visibility of homelessness (Crocker & Johnson, 2010; Hermer & Mosher, 2002), which has only served to further public sentiments of irritation towards these displaced individuals. This "inconvenience" of increased visibility has prompted legislatures to act by introducing legislation such as the Ontario Safe Streets Act, 1999 (Government of Ontario, 1999), to go above and beyond the merely neutral application of policies and laws and promote a law-and-order response to the problem of not only homelessness but urban poverty (Galabuzi, 2001; O'Grady & Gaetz, 2013, 2011). The key mechanisms of this approach have included the implementation of new laws, policies, and statutes which curtail or restrict the movement of homeless people; the discriminatory and disproportionate enforcement of these laws, which has led to the increased surveillance and policing of public and/or semi-public spaces by police and private security; and the increased incarceration of the homeless (O'Grady et al., 2011). All of these mechanisms have failed to alleviate the high rates of urban homelessness.

Homelessness is much more than just a lack of access to shelter. Having a home provides a certain level of security, belonging, and participation in society (Hartman, 2000; Sommers, 2013), and for those youth who call the streets home, every day is a constant struggle for survival. In addition to the chaos of street life, the lack of access to food and shelter (Christiani et al, 2008; Dachner & Tarasuk, 2002) places LGBTQ homeless youth at a dramatically higher risk of self-harm or suicide, depression, and other mental health difficulties, as well as substance abuse largely due to the shame and stigma they encounter from family, friends, and peers (Abramovich, 2013, 2012; Cull et al., 2006; De Bruyn, 2004; Frederick et al., 2011; Gattis, 2011). LGBTQ homeless youth are also increasingly vulnerable to sexually transmitted diseases, such as HIV and AIDS, and face higher rates of criminal and/or sexual victimization (Christiani et al., 2008; Dunne et al., 2002; O'Grady & Gaetz, 2004; Van Leeuwen et al., 2006). All of these risk factors are significantly amplified by the lack of familial and social support available (De Bruyn, 2004; Ray, 2006; Sherriff et al., 2011).

# METHODOLOGY

This Action Research (AR) project aims to rigorously examine issues facing one of Toronto's most vulnerable and marginalized populations: racialized LGBTQ homeless youth. The project will generate recommendations for addressing identified barriers and challenges to equity, access, and inclusion (Koshy et al, 2010). The AR method of administration was utilized in order to allow the research group to work in collaboration with the research participants to undertake practical and applicable research developed by, and for, racialized LGBTQ persons who are homeless.

All subjects recruited from the racialized LGBTQ homeless youth community had to fall within the age range of 14-29. This criterion was based on how both the city of Toronto and shelters located throughout the GTA define "youth."

Potential project participants were initially recruited through purposeful sampling as we contacted specific community social service agencies and various community stakeholders and asked them to act as intermediaries. Once their support had been solicited, these initial contacts, due to their personal and/or work-based involvement with members of the community, were invaluable in connecting us with interested participants. Additionally, we requested that the consenting organizations aid in sending out project solicitation letters and/or posting solicitation flyers. From there on, we relied on a "snowball" method of recruitment through word of mouth. For the purpose of this study, snowball sampling was undertaken by the research team asking participants to provide the study information to their contact, who then contacted the research team to request to be a part of the study. People interested in participating were asked to contact the Diversity Institute to be included in our list of potential contributors in the focus group session, which was scheduled for their convenience. Those participants who were involved in the focus group session were provided with food and beverages and a \$20 cash incentive.

This qualitative research method involved one focus group in which racialized LGBTQ homeless youth came together for a consultation meeting examining their lived experiences and addressing key issues affecting the community with regard to employment, health, justice, education, housing, and racial identity. Located at the Black Coalition for AIDS Prevention (Black CAP) offices in downtown Toronto, members of the research team facilitated the two hour session, which included a total of 11 participants. At the beginning of the meeting, all participants were advised that their participation was completely voluntary and that their identities would not appear in any published documents. They were also advised that they were permitted to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. The participants were presented with a written consent form which they were asked to sign prior to commencement of the focus group and were also informed that the meeting was to be tape recorded.

Prior to beginning the consultation meeting, a brief questionnaire was administered to each participant. The questionnaire was completely voluntary and solicited demographic information about each participant such as name, year of birth, gender, ethnicity/origin/race, sexual orientation, major intersection of their current or last known address, postal code, immigration status, years spent in Canada, languages spoken, and whether or not they identify as a visible minority. Please refer to Appendix A to see the questionnaire in its entirety.

Out of the total 11 participants, with an average age of 26, there were five male participants, two of whom self-identified as "Black", one heterosexual and the other homosexual, with both born outside of Canada and whose immigration status was categorized as "refugee". The remaining three males self-identified as "Aboriginal", two as bisexual and one as gay, but all were born and raised in Canada and hence had full Canadian citizenship. There were four female participants, two of whom disclosed their sexual orientation as bisexual, one as lesbian, and one declined to answer. Half (50%) of the women self-identified as Aboriginal and the other half as Black, and all were Canadian citizens. The final two participants self-identified as "trans", one of whom self-identified her sexual orientation as "lesbian" and the other preferring not to disclose that information. More specifically, one of the self-declared trans participants was Canadian and the other Indo-Caribbean. All of the participants who had refugee status had only lived in Canada for less than one year. All participants had an excellent working knowledge of the English language. All but one of the participants categorized themselves as "unemployed," although over half of the group had at least a high school

diploma, with three of the participants having attained some form of a college certificate, and one having acquired a Master's degree.

Following the administering of the questionnaire, the research team and the participants were asked to provide the group with a brief self-introduction. Once completed, the research team divided the participants up into two smaller groups. Both groups were presented with a focus group agenda (please refer to appendix B to see the focus group agenda) which broke down the general structure of the meeting, its timeline, and the twelve interview questions that the research team had previously composed. For the first portion of the meeting, each group was presented with four identity questions. Following this, we transitioned back to the full group in order to share any important points that had been raised in the smaller group discussions. Based on this initial dialogue with all the participants, the research team chose not to interfere with the natural progression of the discussion by posing each pre-determined question; however, the conversations that were had still touched upon each of the categories of education, housing, health, justice, and employment. The session was concluded with a final wrap-up where participants were able to voice any last comments or suggestions.

# FINDINGS & THEORETICAL ELABORATIONS

## Community & Invisibility

During the vibrant discussions that occurred in the focus group, one of the first set of themes that became apparent involved sentiments of isolation, invisibility, and a desire for community within the racialized LGBTQ homeless youth population. There was a level of sadness that was voiced when participants began to open up and tell their personal narratives with a profound level of honesty and transparency. Despite their many challenges and personal hurdles, when it came to the topic of relationships and community it appeared that some of the participants had managed to develop positive relationships with their fellow homeless peers, providing them with a certain level of security and genuine connection.

Once youth find themselves on the streets, their connections with family, school, friends, and their communities of origin are dramatically weakened if not completely lost. These traditional networks of social support, which we so often take for granted, are replaced with a slightly more unconventional substitute often described by street youth as their "street family" (Gaetz & O'Grady, et al, 2013; Yonge Street Mission, 2009). On the one hand, some literature argues that these relations, whilst beneficial for immediate survival on the streets, are in the end of little value in helping homeless youth develop long-term and healthy relationships because ultimately these "families" are not based on trust. Additionally, there is the belief that exposure to these supposedly "high risk" and "troubled" street networks can lead to risky behaviours (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006; Winland, 2013). On the other hand, however, a majority of studies as well as our own data garnered from the focus group shows that when youth create their own "street family" they gain security and stability and a genuine sense of community, which provides them with emotional support, protection, respect, and dignity (Karabanow & Naylor, 2013; Yonge Street Mission, 2009). One participant who self-identified as two-spirited said, "being in the sex trade business, a lot of the girls I work with on the street were disowned by their families.

It's very important, because we are not accepted as individuals by society, to create families with each other." The importance of having a community truly cannot be overemphasized from the discussions in this study, and the literature also supports the fact that isolation and a lack of social support increases the likelihood of mental health problems, including depression and suicide attempts, and even worsening existing mental health issues (Boivin et al., 2005; Kidd, 2006). One participant narrated this connection perfectly when they stated that for them:

Communication is very important as there is always a need for someone talking to someone every day in some form-whether face to face or on social media such as Facebook-and when you do not get that, your health is impacted negatively. I find those people who don't get that end up in strait jackets.

Other such positive stories of finding and connecting with other street-involved youth were echoed when another participant noted that, "you find love with other outsiders and outcasts" and that it is possible to find love "in this homeless place" where "we get each other, we get the struggle, we have each other."

It is interesting to note the use of terms such as "outsider" and "outcast" in reference to homeless youth, as this specific use of terminology by our participants points to our next theme of invisibility, which was spoken of multiple times throughout the session. Certain research has spoken to the idea that due to the increase in police surveillance and hostile glares/attention from the general public (Buccieri, 2013; Kelly & Caputo, 2007), homeless youth generally attempt to make themselves invisible. One participant made note of this when they were discussing the clear evidence of trauma caused by the proactive policing of homeless people in Toronto. They said that:

When it comes to cops and homeless people, we feel targeted. We are the ones they are looking for, the homeless, racialized and LGBTQ... all of us mashed up together. When we are on the streets, we do not feel safe; we are the ones that they are looking for. We feel that we should hide from the cops, even if we didn't do anything or are guilty of anything. We feel that we shouldn't be showing our faces because a cop can say, well, you look like a person we are looking for.

While these common and arguably valuable strategies such as blending in, so as not to draw negative attention toward their poverty and homelessness, can be beneficial, as noted in the literature (Radley et al., 2005; Roschelle & Kaufman, 2004), participants also felt that this was hindering their ability to overcome their homeless situation and that because society labels them as deviants, criminals, or even worse.

There is, however, a flip-side to this dynamic of visibility and the strategy of "becoming invisible" to avoid being targeted by the public or by the police. While at times homeless youth feel that they are all too visible, it is also the case that they sometimes feel the opposite; that they are "invisible and insignificant bodies" (Karabanow & Naylor, 2013, p. 52). One participant captured this experience eloquently:

When I am walking on the streets I feel like a phantom. People do not see me there because they do not feel I am important and I am sure that is how others feel. Isolation is hard and not being acknowledged even if you are there.

According to the participants, disengagement/detachment of the public from the problem of homelessness (treating homeless youth as invisible) is a major challenge that results in feelings of self-doubt and worthlessness. As one participant stated, "nobody wants to be friends with a homeless person, especially the regular people walking on the streets who do not see me." Participants spoke frequently of the lack of compassion from society and the difficulty of encountering love from people who are not homeless. This struggle is further compounded by the fact that racialized LGBTQ homeless youth are placed in a position of "multiple structural disadvantage" (May, 2000, p. 613) due to the combination of skin colour, gender identity or sexual orientation, age, homelessness, and poverty. One participant spoke of this challenge in terms of a feeling of being unloved:

It's quite difficult to find love, when you are all those things combined – racialized, homeless, etc. – all mashed up into one; it's chaotic and people I find are very judgmental when it comes to being on the streets, and they want to push you off into the distance and pretend you are not there, and when you are in that position, who is going to want to love you?

Another group member mentioned that the best way to describe their lived reality was isolation:

# When I am walking on the streets I feel like a phantom.... Isolation is hard...

I don't have any experience of love, and isolation has become my reality... right now there is no one in my life that was in my life a year ago, and it has been that way for every year for the last 10 years.

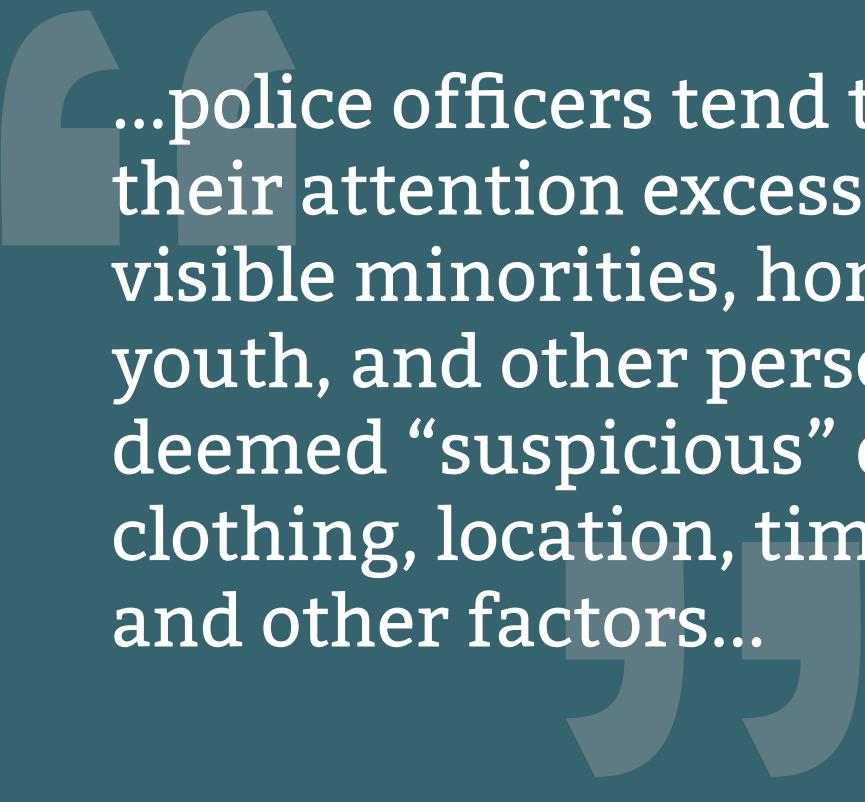
Rejected by society, their family, and their peers, these youth are burdened with intense shame and a debilitating lack of self-worth that is difficult to comprehend for those who have never found themselves in the same predicament. These street-involved youth who experience such social and emotional complexities appear to occupy an even further stigmatized space within the public, which according to one participant, "will marginalize you in a different way by treating you like a cockroach on the ground." This attitude toward homeless youth, while not exactly a new perspective, has become popular in mainstream narratives. Researchers have identified this attitude as originating in neoliberal ideology, which attributes poverty and homelessness to individuals' choices and personal failures while sadly failing to address the myriad of contributing factors (Gaetz & O'Grady, 2013; Kidd, 2006; Kus, 2006).

Through these self-descriptions, we begin to glimpse a complex tension that exists between (on the one hand) a public that stares at, scrutinizes, and judges homeless youth along with a police force that targets them; and

(on the other hand) a sense among homeless youth that they are invisible, insignificant, and ignored by the state and the public, but only when it is convenient for the state and the public to ignore their problematic existence.

## **Police and Public Violence Against Homeless Youth**

Lack of access to employment often leads youth to engage in quasi-legal or illegal activities and places them under the scrutiny of the police. Several participants raised the key point that the community's increasing susceptibility to physical violence is experienced particularly at the hands of police officers and private security. When homelessness becomes "too visible," law enforcement often becomes one of the key components to addressing this "problem." One recent study has examined policing practices in relation to homelessness, and with its publication has come a growing recognition that police officers demonstrate a certain degree of officer discretion or choice when it comes to their interactions with the public, including the homeless (O'Grady et al., 2013). The question of whether an increase in police surveillance of the homeless population is due to their actual involvement in criminal activity or whether there are other factors that



...police officers tend to focus their attention excessively on visible minorities, homeless youth, and other persons deemed "suspicious" due to clothing, location, time of day, and other factors...

might account for these frequent encounters is something frequently raised in the literature. Research indicates that police officers tend to focus their attention excessively on visible minorities, homeless youth, and other persons deemed "suspicious" due to clothing, location, time of day, and other factors (O'Grady et al., 2011; Satzewich & Shaffir, 2009; Wortley & Tanner, 2003).

Our participants also described a feeling of being targeted by police officers:

Some cops care but a lot of people don't care about homeless people, which is a lot of cops I know. Some cops are really happy to use their guns. They get trigger happy and aggressive and are ready to use their power.

The money-making strategies employed by homeless youth in particular make them frequent targets of police intervention. Although it has become a popular public myth to assume that street-involved youth are unintelligent, lazy, delinquent, deviant and criminal in nature, our research team found that our participants were thoughtful, reflective, had a strong work ethic, and expressed a genuine desire for different circumstances. However, excluded from the formal work economy, they are left to seek less conventional, often informal employment. Research participants stated they would prefer and strive to secure lawful and legal employment, but the money-making strategies that are usually available to them take the form of more informal means of paid employment such as panhandling, squeegeeing, and busking. Meanwhile, the public and the police force prefer to assume that the homeless are involved in more illegal or criminal activities. One participant said that "rather than feeling safe around the police I feel like a target because they assume I am like selling drugs or something". They added that actually "I do outreach and harm reduction, and for a lot of homeless people I see, the police target them and treat them like criminals, especially people of colour". The importance of knowing one's rights was raised by a participant, who stated that "if you do not know your rights they will try to keep you longer in jail, which happens a lot." It was similarly noted that coming into conflict with the law raises its own set of challenges; one participant said that "if you are homeless and are assaulted by police or security you do not have any rights really, it's their word over yours... if you are homeless you have less of a voice."

One way in which the youth did, to a certain extent, stand up to the police was by ensuring they carried their ID on them at all times. This importance of identification was addressed heavily by participants, as it was noted that

instances of mistaken identity leading to the false imprisonment of homeless youth were frequent:

A lot of the kids who are homeless lose their ID, it sucks to not have your ID... you have to try to convince the cops that you are who you are, even if it's a piece of paper, it makes the process harder with the cops because you do not have the ID. It makes you seem unreliable and it can go against you in the courts.

An example of this happened to one participant's friend: "a buddy of mine got jailed and beat up for looking like someone else. It came up later that it wasn't him and all the cops said was you can go now." Another participant shared a personal story of a similar experience:

Today my boyfriend is in jail and he is getting charged for assault and robbery and it wasn't him, but he didn't have any ID on him. He was leaving his grandfather and the incident happened five minute before he left the house. He was drunk and the police saw him by the Danforth station and arrested him.

Another participant said that "it's really common for abuse to happen to homeless people, especially by security and police," and added, "I have seen people wake up in the hospital with a black eye. They do not know what happened because the security beat them up so badly. They are supposed to help them but they do not know what to do with them." Similar incidents were reported throughout our interviews with regard to policing in the city, along with a concern regarding a lack of accountability. One participant said, "police and security do it because they know they can get away with it." A female participant spoke about her own experience with a security guard:

Security beat me up in a bar and I was blacked out, had a cut on my lip, my friend's hand was fat the next day, and was stuck like that for two weeks, bruises on me. Homeless are treated like a lower standard by police.

Participants suggested that police have been known to essentially set up "target squads," which involve officers focusing on strategic locations throughout the GTA that are often poor racialized neighbourhoods. These proactive policing methods were first seen around the initiation of the "Community Action Policing Initiative," which was a program run from July 1999 to September 1999 and involved the assignment of officers paid

overtime to patrol secret “hot spots” and was said to have had tremendous success in making the streets of Toronto safe and preventing “uncommitted crimes” (Toronto Police Service, 2000). One participant shared her experience of this tendency to target homelessness in specific public spaces:

When it comes to winter and you have to layer up but you are still cold... during the winter security guards and police officers make their rounds and target the “hotspots” across from the shelters where they know we all hang out. They then kick us out but where else can we really go. The shelters are so dispersed and are so far from each other and it's really hard to get from place to place when you do not have any money. I am not on welfare, so I have nothing. It's really hard the winter sucks, the winter is really difficult.

Homeless youth, due to their appearance, lack of access to private spaces, and public visibility for activities such as sleeping and begging in public have been framed as not only threats to urban safety (and, hence, a policing matter) but essentially an “eye-sore.” This point was clearly illustrated when another participant spoke more about the brutal winters in Toronto, during which time homeless people struggle to find a warm place to rest and/or sleep:

A homeless lady bought a tea at McDonalds. She had a buggy and there were several other people sitting inside, however security came up and told her that her 20 minutes was up. Some other customers were glancing at her and I guess the staff at McDonalds must have said something because security kicked her out for the comfort of the ‘civilized people.’

This attitude toward the homeless is particularly problematic given that Toronto’s freezing winters are, in the participant’s words, “no joke because people lose their fingers, lose their toes”.

A number of participants also spoke about their personal stories of violence at the hands of the general public. One told a story of a homeless couple who had been violently attacked by a member of the public in downtown Toronto while squeegeeing:

It was the girl’s turn. She asked the driver if she could squeegee his car. She tried to clean the car, but I guess he may have not heard her. He opened the door and hit the girl with the car door, and was yelling at

her, but there was traffic and other cars behind him, so he jumped back into his car and left.

Another participant recalled a similar incident:

My friend is two-spirited and she went into the men's bathroom and a guy punched her in the face, choked her and threw her against the mirror. Security did nothing and the guy who assaulted her was able to walk right out and the security guard ended up blaming her saying that she shouldn't have been there in the first place because it was a men's washroom.

In such cases of violence against racialized LGBTQ homeless youth, it is often an intersection of various markers of "otherness" that make these youth "too visible" and easy targets. Furthermore, as the above examples show, these youth have little recourse to protection or justice when they are made victims of violence. In this respect, while their visibility makes them targets, their suffering is conveniently invisible.

## Support for Racialized LGBTQ Homeless Youth

Many racialized LGBTQ homeless youth experience minimal to no familial support. One participant noted that "a lot of kids are on the streets and in shelters because they came out as LGBTQ and their families disowned them and have no one to turn to and end up turning to drugs and alcohol because they know those will never leave them." Participants' survival tactics and coping mechanisms in response to this familial abandonment were diverse and often deeply emotional, as exemplified by one participant:

If you identify outside of the box, it's hard to check all the blanks when you are filling out forms when you go to shelters or court or just in general. Since the world tends to be more conservative, in that you have a mum, dad, have an income, white, etc., and when you are none of those things you start to feel abnormal. So it's safer to not check all the boxes... you will get further in life if you do not expose who you really are.

Unfortunately for homeless youth, the shelter system does not offer a viable solution to this lack of support. Participants spoke of the challenges they had living within the shelter system in terms of ignorant staff and fellow homeless peers who were also residing within the shelter. One key point raised was the

importance of culturally relevant spaces, services and shelters, particularly for those participants who self-identified as both LGBTQ and Aboriginal. Although they expressed a great sense of community and deep connection amongst their fellow Native homeless peers, they identified a lack of programs with a cultural focus that would allow them to reconnect with and foster their Aboriginal cultural traditions while also accepting and nurturing their LGBTQ identities. One participant shared that they had been living in the shelter system from the age of 15 years old. They were currently staying at a Native transition house, where they had had a positive experience, but they were also looking for programs specific to LGBTQ people and their particular needs. Discrimination, especially against transgender youth, on the streets and within the shelter system was often noted, which echoes literature that has spoken of the fact that transgender youth face more discrimination than any other homeless youth group (Abramovich, 2013; Quintana et al., 2010). A lack of training and knowledge was also noted when it came to staff at shelters; one person who identified as trans spoke of this challenge when she said that "I have not met any person that held any position of power to help at shelters that was competent to help a trans person."

Stigma around gender identity or sexual orientation has caused LGBTQ homeless youth to experience another level of "othering," with one

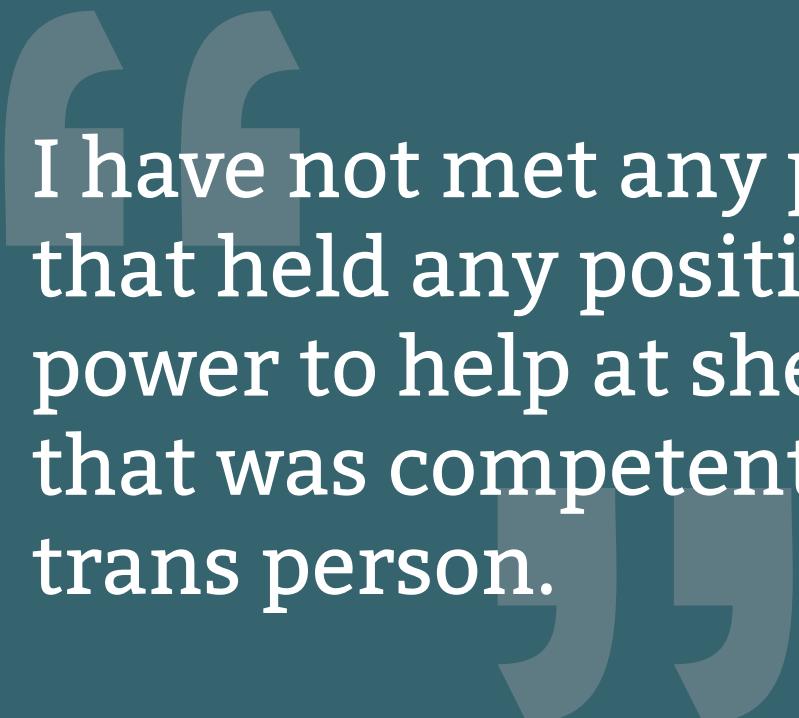


Many racialized  
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participant saying that “people look down on them (LGBTQ persons), as if they were a waste of breath.” There was a general consensus of non-acceptance by straight people in shelters, with one participant stating that “folks who are bi-sexual have more issues in shelters than other people, because some people do not believe in it.” While Toronto claims an increasing acceptance of sexual diversity, coinciding with an increased number of youth coming out at a much younger age (Lepischak, 2004), homophobic and transphobic bullying continue to occur, affecting persons of all ages and situations in the city. Societal recognition of the social and emotional complexities that are involved in coming out are needed, as well as increased empathy as to how this can turn into a traumatic experience, as many youth find themselves forced out of their homes and onto the streets (Abramovich; 2013; Cull et al., 2006; Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006). There appeared to be a shared level of understanding amongst the focus group participants that in their interactions with organizations, shelters, police, and society as a whole they were perceived as “second-class citizens.” One participant poignantly stated that “I am not the one being served and protected.” One extreme case of this was brought to light when two of the female participants shared a personal story, recalling that, “the other night, two guys threatened to rape us, and we spoke to security and their response was ‘fucking Indians.’” This lack of compassion, particularly in the case of Aboriginal people in the city, was a commonly voiced concern among participants. There appears to be a widespread misconception that Aboriginal persons are handed everything, a myth directly addressed by one Aboriginal member who stated, “When we live in the city, we do not receive as much support as when we live on reserves. When a Native goes off a reserve to better themselves, they pretty much have to start from rock bottom, which leads to poverty.” Aboriginal homelessness is rooted in historical and structural factors and much of the literature points to the fact that they are a population which has suffered terribly from the effects of colonization and whose current social, economic, and political conditions have placed them in a deeply disadvantaged position (United Native Nations Society, 2001). Many young Aboriginals, including our own participants, have internalized this pain, which became apparent from statements like that of one participant, who said, “I only access Native organizations that deal with Native youth because I was adopted and I am in search of being complete. It’s kind of maddening because I don’t feel complete and I do not know my roots.”

Society’s fundamental lack of understanding with regard to LGBTQ racialized homeless youth in particular, as well as the racism and discrimination they face, make this community particularly resistant to accessing support

services or shelters. One participant said, "I consider myself two-spirited and transgender, and it's a very difficult lifestyle to live. With racism and discrimination, you just want to go and crawl into a hole at times." Despite LGBTQ homeless youth consistently vocalizing the fact that they feel unsafe both on the streets and within shelters, and despite literature supporting these claims, there are still no specialized services or emergency/crisis shelters available in Canada for this community. One participant who was transgender spoke of their own personal challenge when staying at Covenant House: "because I was transgender it was hard for the staff to wrap their



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head around my lifestyle and whether or not to fit me in the male or female section when I accessed their shelter". When we posed the question of whether or not there should be trans-specific shelters, one of the study's trans-identifying participants felt that such a safe space would be fully supported, which seems to contradict claims by some researchers that such specialized services would only work to further stigmatize and marginalize racialized LGBTQ individuals (Abramovich, 2012). Further research, of course,

remains to be conducted on this topic. The trans-identifying participant did want to highlight, however, that even if these services and shelters employed people who were confident in dealing with LGBTQ people, a process of re-education had to take place first in order to not subject LGBTQ people to invasive, demeaning, and often inconsequential or inappropriate questions. The participant said that when she faces these types of questions now, she tells people to do their own research: "there is a lot of unlearning people have to do and people should get into the habit of Googling and looking for their own answers".

Even among their friends and peers, racialized, homeless youth who identify as LGBTQ often experience unique challenges. One participant, for example, described the difficulty of coming out to his friends:

It was hard coming out to my friends. I am bi-sexual, and telling my friends was very difficult. I was in a gang and they did not want any gay people in their gang. These friends are accepting of it now, but when I was younger that wasn't the case.

One participant who self-identified as trans spoke about the challenges of her daily interactions with peers:

When I tell people that I am trans, that is all people tend to focus on. They do not see anything other than that and all they ask is about hormones and surgeries and what I have or do not have. They just want to do the whole body politics, what you are going to get and what you are not going to get. It's only about what you are doing sexually.

## NEXT STEPS

While much of the literature tends to highlight all of the obstacles faced by homeless youth, our research team also wanted to establish that it is important to facilitate the ability of participants to “dream;” that is, to visualize a space in which they could freely live and work. Each participant allowed us a brief glimpse of their “dream” job, which included owning a food truck, opening a clothing store, or becoming a social worker, among other examples. While street-involved youth are typically represented as a distinctly dangerous underclass, studies such as ours have pointed to the fact that they have indicated a rather strong desire for conventional goals such as owning a home, having a family, and securing stable employment (Gaetz & O’Grady, 2002; Karabanow et al., 2010). Some literature argues that homeless youth consistently display a problematic tendency to avoid long-term strategic planning in favour of more immediate results. However, we did not find that to be the case in this study, where group members voiced a desire for security and stability, often in the form of mentorship, access to education, and skills training, as well as more employment opportunities and access to secure long-term and affordable housing.

When asked what success would look like for the racialized LGBTQ homeless youth community, supportive, long-term/ongoing and secure housing was identified as a critical priority, particularly for times of transition, when racialized LGBTQ homeless youth are over the age of 18 and after turning 24. One participant pointed to this when they asked for housing for two-spirited people over the age of 25. Two-spirited people are rarely discussed within the literature, and as one participant argued, they are equally as marginalized and hence their experiences and challenges need to be heard. Trans youth face ridicule and violence on a daily basis and staff at shelters and other support services are often not equipped to deal with these situations. The Toronto Hostels Training Centre run by the City of Toronto needs to re-implement their mandatory training workshops, which were discontinued due to low registration, as well as enforce additional training to shelter staff. This training would include anti-homophobia training and knowledge about mental health issues, as well as LGBTQ culture and terminology.

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Outreach is another area in which current strategies are in dire need of change. Rather than taking the now common approach of reaching out via social media and other online platforms, there was a demand among participants to take communication and outreach back to basics, given the limited access to social media among the homeless:

Information about different organizations is not reaching the people. It's taking too long or not getting to them at all, such as the poor communities along George Street or Church Street. What we need is for you to take it to the streets and speak with us directly, face to face.

To address the issues raised in this study, the demand for face-to-face outreach must be met, educational initiatives need to be promoted, and services addressing the specific needs of racialized LGBTQ homeless youth need to be developed.

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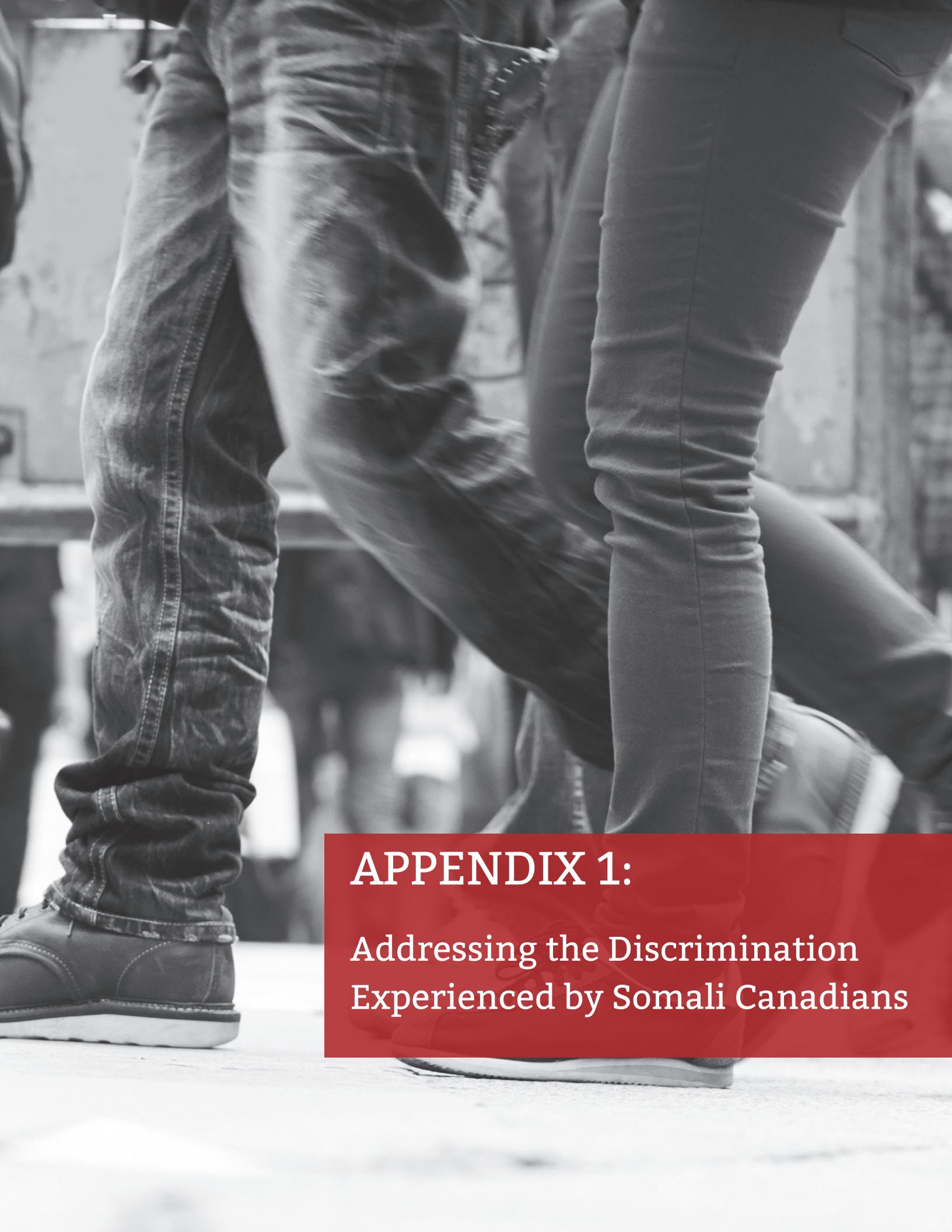
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## APPENDIX 1:

Addressing the Discrimination  
Experienced by Somali Canadians

# APPENDIX 1A:

## SOMALI CANADIAN QUESTIONNAIRE

### INITIAL QUESTIONNAIRE

**Background Information:**  
These questions ask for background information about you. This information will be kept confidential

**1. In what year were you born?**

---

**2. What is your gender?**

- Female
- Male
- Trans
- Other (please specify):  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Do not wish to answer

**3. What languages can you read, write and speak? (Check all that apply)**

- English
- French
- Chinese

- Cantonese
- Tamil
- Italian
- Spanish
- Mandarin
- Portuguese
- Tagalog (Pilipino, Filipino)
- Urdu
- Russian
- Persian (Farsi)
- Korean
- Gujarati
- Vietnamese
- Panjabi (Punjabi)
- Polish
- Greek
- Bengali
- Arabic
- Serbian
- Romanian
- Ukrainian
- Hindi
- Somali
- Other (please specify):  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Black
- Somali
- Aboriginal
- Chinese
- South Asian
- Latin American
- Arab

**4. What is your race/ethnicity? (Check all that apply)**

- Filipino
- Japanese
- West Asian
- South East Asian
- Korean
- White/Caucasian
- Race/Ethnicity Not Included Above (please specify):  
\_\_\_\_\_

**5. Were you born outside of Canada?**

- Yes
- No

**6. What is your current immigration status?**

- Canadian
- Permanent Resident
- Refugee
- Temporary Resident
- Other (please specify):  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Do not wish to answer

**7. How long have you lived in Canada?**

- Less than 1 year
- 1 year to less than 5 years

- 5 years to less than 10 years
- 10 years or more

**8. What is your sexual orientation?**

- Lesbian
- Gay
- Bisexual
- Heterosexual
- Other (please specify):  
\_\_\_\_\_

- Do not wish to answer

**9. Do you identify as a person with a disability?**

- Yes
- No
- Do not wish to answer

**10. What is your marital status?**

- Single
- Married or Long term/ Common law Partner
- Divorced or Separated
- Widowed
- Other

**11. What is the highest level of education you have completed?**

- Less than high school
- High School
- College certificate
- Other professional degree/designation
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- PhD

**12. What is your employment status?**

- Full time
- Part time
- Unemployed

**13. Do you identify as a person who is homeless?**

- Yes
- No

**14. What is the closest intersection to where you live?**

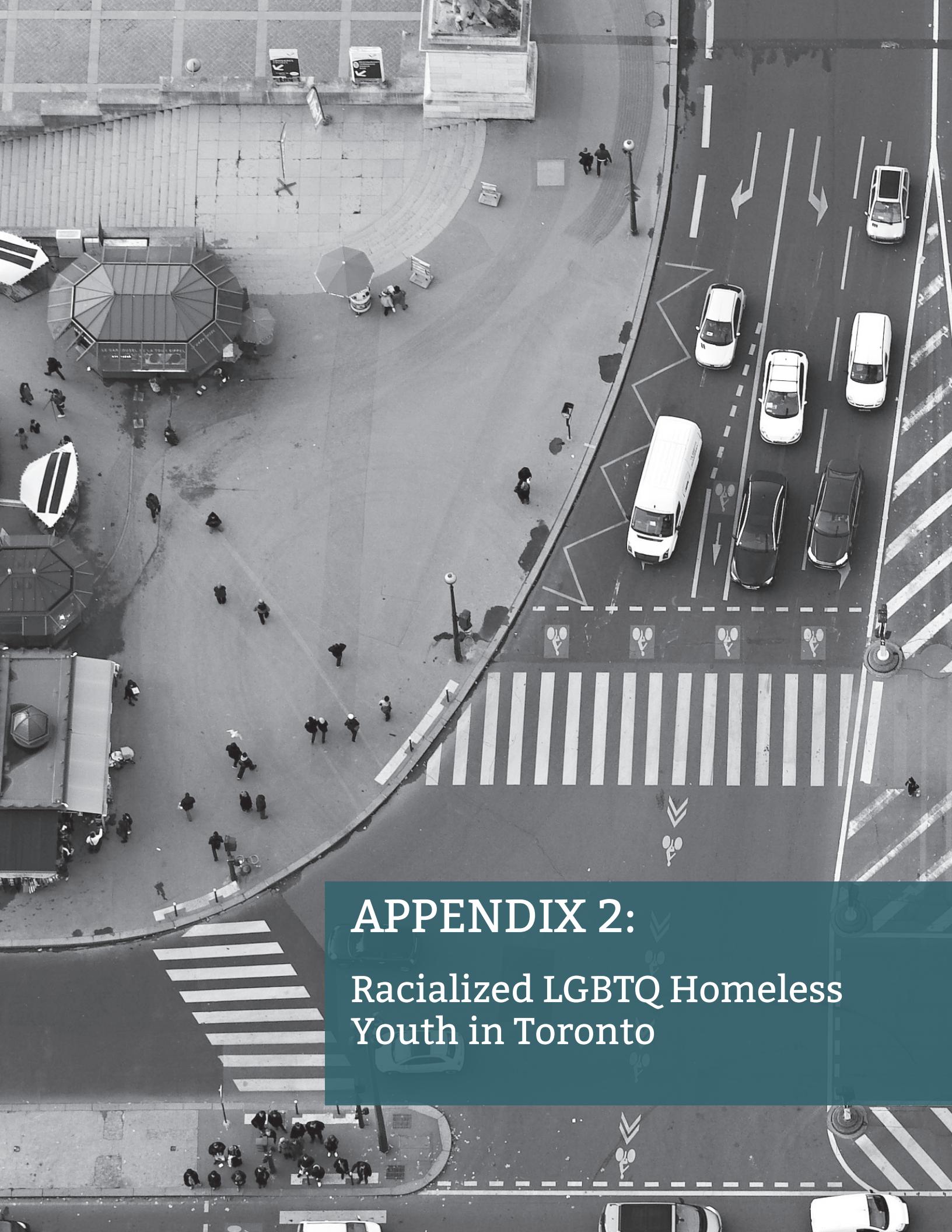
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**15. What is your postal code?** \_\_\_\_\_

# APPENDIX 1B:

## FOCUS GROUP AGENDA

<b>6:00-6:30</b>	<b>Assigning Participants to Tables [4 tables, 4-5 per table]</b>
	<b>Eating &amp; Completing Consent Forms</b>
<b>6:30-7:00</b>	<b>Introduction: Identity Questions in Small Groups</b>
	<p>1. What issues or challenges do Somalis face in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA)?</p> <p>(a) Are there particular issues faced by Somali Canadians in the black community, and if so what are they?</p>
<b>7:00- 7:30</b>	<b>Transition to Full Group: Discussion around Identity Questions</b>
	<p>[e.g., Ask participants to share 1 important aspect of their small group discussion with the larger group, then move into the focus group question #5]</p> <p>2. How are Somalis portrayed in the media (including newspapers, television, radio)?</p> <p>(a) What affect does this have? Please explain.</p>
<b>7:30-8:30</b>	<b>Full Group: Focus Group Questions</b>
	<p>3. What issues or challenges do people face in school?</p> <p>(a) What is the school system like in the GTA? Please explain.</p>
	<p>4. What is it like looking for and keeping a job in the GTA? Please explain.</p>
	<p>5. What is it like seeking healthcare for physical and mental health issues in the GTA? Please explain.</p>
	<p>6. What is it like trying to find and keep safe, affordable housing in the GTA? Please explain. What is it like interacting with the police, courts, and/or the criminal justice system in the GTA? Please explain.</p>
<b>8:30-9:00</b>	<b>Wrap Up &amp; Conclusion</b>
	<p>7. What positive experiences do people have living in the GTA?</p>
	<p>8. Based on what we've discussed today, what can be done to improve the experience of Somalis living in the GTA?</p>



## APPENDIX 2:

### Racialized LGBTQ Homeless Youth in Toronto

# APPENDIX 2A:

## LGBTQ QUESTIONNAIRE

### INITIAL QUESTIONNAIRE

**Background Information:**  
These questions ask for background information about you. This information will be kept confidential

**1. In what year were you born?**

---

**2. What is your gender?**

- Female
- Male
- Trans
- Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
- Do not wish to answer

**3. What languages can you read, write and speak? (Check all that apply)**

- English
- French
- Chinese

- Cantonese
- Tamil
- Italian
- Spanish
- Mandarin
- Portuguese
- Tagalog (Pilipino, Filipino)
- Urdu
- Russian
- Persian (Farsi)
- Korean
- Gujarati
- Vietnamese
- Panjabi (Punjabi)
- Polish
- Greek
- Bengali
- Arabic
- Serbian
- Romanian
- Ukrainian
- Hindi
- Somali
- Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
- Black
- Somali
- Aboriginal
- Chinese
- South Asian
- Latin American
- Arab

**4. What is your race/ethnicity? (Check all that apply)**

- Filipino
- Japanese
- West Asian
- South East Asian
- Korean
- White/Caucasian
- Race/Ethnicity Not Included Above (please specify):  

---

**5. Were you born outside of Canada?**

- Yes
- No

**6. What is your current immigration status?**

- Canadian
- Permanent Resident
- Refugee
- Temporary Resident
- Other (please specify):  

---
- Do not wish to answer

**7. How long have you lived in Canada?**

- Less than 1 year
- 1 year to less than 5 years

- 5 years to less than 10 years
- 10 years or more

**8. What is your sexual orientation?**

- Lesbian
- Gay
- Bisexual
- Heterosexual
- Other (please specify):  

---

**9. Do you identify as a person with a disability?**

- Yes
- No
- Do not wish to answer

**10. What is your marital status?**

- Single
- Married or Long term/ Common law Partner
- Divorced or Separated
- Widowed
- Other

**11. What is the highest level of education you have completed?**

- Less than high school
- High School
- College certificate
- Other professional degree/designation
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- PhD

**12. What is your employment status?**

- Full time
- Part time
- Unemployed

**13. Do you identify as a person who is homeless?**

- Yes
- No

**14. What is the closest intersection to where you live?**

---

---

**15. What is your postal code?** 

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# APPENDIX 2B:

## FOCUS GROUP AGENDA

<b>6:00-6:30</b>	<b>Assigning Participants to Tables [4 tables, 4-5 per table]</b>
	<b>Eating &amp; Completing Consent Forms</b>
<b>6:30-7:00</b>	<b>Introduction: Identity Questions in Small Groups</b>
	<p>1. What issues and or challenges do homeless youth face in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA)?</p> <p>2. What issues and or challenges do racialized youth face in the GTA?</p> <p>3. What issues and or challenges do LGBTQ youth face in the GTA?</p>
	<p>4. What unique issues and or challenges are faced by individuals who describe themselves using more than one of the previously discussed categories (homeless youth, racialized youth, LGBTQ youth)?</p> <p>(a). Are there particular issues faced by LGBTQ individuals in the black community, and if so what are they?</p>
<b>7:00- 7:30</b>	<b>Transition to Full Group: Discussion around Identity Questions</b>
	<p>[e.g., Ask participants to share 1 important aspect of their small group discussion with the larger group, then move into the focus group question #5]</p> <p>5. How are racialized youth, LGBTQ youth, and or homeless youth portrayed in the media (including newspapers, television, radio)?</p> <p>(a) What affect does this have? Please explain.</p>
<b>7:30-8:30</b>	<b>Full Group: Focus Group Questions</b>
	<p>6. What issues or challenges do people face in school?</p> <p>(a) What is the school system like in the GTA? Please explain.</p>
	<p>7. What is it like looking for and keeping a job in the GTA? Please explain.</p>
	<p>8. What is it like seeking healthcare for physical and mental health issues in the GTA? Please explain.</p>
	<p>9. What is it like trying to find and keep safe, affordable housing in the GTA? Please explain. What is it like interacting with the police, courts, and/or the criminal justice system in the GTA? Please explain.</p>
	<p>10. What is it like interacting with the police, courts, and/or the criminal justice system in the GTA? Please explain.</p>
<b>8:30-9:00</b>	<b>Wrap Up &amp; Conclusion</b>
	<p>11. What positive experiences do people have living in the GTA?</p>
	<p>12. Based on what we've discussed today, what can be done to improve the experiences of homeless youth, racialized youth, and or LGBTQ youth living in the GTA?</p>



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