

Anti-Black racism in the early years: The experiences of Black families and early childhood educators in Nova Scotia ^[1]

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Abstract

Introduction

Anti-Black racism is a social determinant of health that has significantly impacted Black children and families. Limited research has examined anti-Black racism during the early years—a critical period of development. In this study, we sought to understand the manifestations of anti-Black racism in early childhood and explore its impact on Black children and families.

Methods

This qualitative research project was informed by critical race theory, Black Critical Theory and interpretive description. Early childhood educators (ECEs) and parents with Black children between the ages of 18 months and 5 years (n=15) participated in virtual, semistructured interviews.

Results

Awareness of and protection against anti-Black racism was a constant in Black families' lives. Parents felt as though they had to remain hypervigilant and overprotective of their Black children, knowing they were liable to encounter racial violence. The early learning environment was a source of heightened stress for families, given the significant amount of time young children spend in child care. Black children were often "othered" in predominately White spaces and had been objectified by White ECE staff and children. Parents worked to instill a strong sense of self-confidence in their children to counteract the negative impacts of racial discrimination.

Conclusion

Results from this study suggest that children as young as 18 months are experiencing racial violence and adverse childhood experiences. Findings may contribute to antiracist policy development and a focus on more inclusive early childhood education for Black children and families.

Related link: Challenging anti-Black racism in early childhood environments ^[3]

Region: Nova Scotia ^[4]

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