No one left behind

Exploring thriving income among the Black population in the City of Toronto

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Introduction

"No one left behind" is the fundamental agreement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.[i] By adopting the 2030 Agenda, Canada has committed to take action to eliminate poverty and ensure prosperity for all people, now and for future generations.[ii] Ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being is essential to sustainable development, although traditional approaches do not account for the ways that racism and discrimination mediate health across the social determinants of health.[iii,iv]

Poverty is widely recognized as a major barrier to good health. Income and its distribution are also known to have a large effect on poverty.[v] Higher-income levels enable good health whereas lower-income levels result in poorer health.[vi] This phenomenon is referred to as the social gradient and represents the importance of income as a way to access various societal resources needed to live a healthy life.[vii] In Canada, racialized communities face high levels of poverty and tend to be at the lower end of the social gradient.[viii] The racialization of poverty is often attributed to systemic racism and racial discrimination, producing persistent racial inequality trends over generations.[ix] Systemic or institutional racism is known to be the most profound form of racism as it lies within the processes and policies of an organization, promotes racial inequity and persists as a result of inaction to effectively reduce them.[x] Due to its systemic nature, the link between racial justice and economic justice should not be ignored.

The Black Population in Canada

The Black population in Canada is among those most affected by historic and contemporary forms of racism. The Black population usually refers to persons who self-identify as African, Caribbean, and Black as some can trace their roots in Canada over several generations.[xi] As of 2016, Black communities represent 3.5% of Canada's total population, where immigrant residents account for 52% of its total population.[xii] Ontario is home to over half of the Black Canadian population, most (36.9%) of which live in the Toronto Census Metropolitan Area (CMA).[xiii] Previous studies show that overall health differences in the Black population are often linked to higher rates of child welfare, precarious work and low educational attainment. [xiv,xv,xvi,xvii] The ongoing patterns of discrimination and bias against Black communities have given rise to social movements such as Black Lives Matter in Healthcare, however, there is a need for race-based data collection in Canada to better identify barriers and opportunities to improve the health of Black communities.[xviii,xix] The relative lack of research and investment in the Black population can be linked to poor evidence of their needs compared to other populations. If left unchecked, the persistent signs of disparities faced by Black Canadians will continue to undermine targets of health equity in sustainable development.

Given the recent influx of immigration from African and Caribbean countries, this study aims to uncover the proportion of the Black population in Toronto who do not have access to the resources to thrive.

Are poverty measurements sufficient to address health differences in the Black population?

In 2018, Canada established its first official poverty line, which is calculated using the Market-Basket Measure (MBM).[xx] Before its establishment, Statistics Canada produced the Low-Income Cut Off (LICO) and the Low-Income Measure (LIM). All three approaches have been criticized to be inadequate measures to reduce poverty because LIM overlooks non-economic needs, LICO lacks sensitivity to regional differences and MBM measures a modest standard of living rather than the resources one needs to healthy, productive life.[xxi,xxii]

Wellesley Institute's Thriving in the City Framework offers a comprehensive measure of what is needed to live a healthy life.[xxiii] The framework accounts for the resources and income required to ensure that a broad range of needs is met across social, mental, physical and emotional dimensions of health. The costs of thriving for people age 25-40 single and living alone the Greater Toronto Area is estimated to be between $46,186 and $55,432.[xxiv] Although the thriving income is not race-specific, it can be seen as race-conscious in that it offers an opportunity to decrease the variance of systemic racism and benefit those most deprived of resources and opportunities.

By applying this framework, we will document the proportion of the Black population in the Toronto Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) who are not earning a thriving income by exploring the following questions:
1. How does the prevalence of having an income lower than the thriving income in the Black population differ from that of White and other racialized groups?
2. How does the prevalence among racialized groups differ by sex and education levels?

Methods

This study draws upon the national survey data from the 2016 Census of Population. The Census Program is a cross-sectional survey designed to provide statistical information about population demographics.[xxv] Our sample consists of individuals of the average working-age, 25 to 40 years old, living alone in the City of Toronto. The resulting sample size is approximately 106,690 individuals.

The data analysis was conducted by the researchers who are leading the Thriving Income project.[xxvi] The analysis includes extensive descriptive data on single and working-age adults in Toronto under three income categories, disaggregated by three socio-demographic variables: visible minority, sex, and education level. The Census visible minority variable (also referred to as racialized groups) denotes persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race and non-white in color.[xxvii] For this research, this variable has been categorized into three groups: Black, White and an aggregate of all other racialized populations. The racialized population category consists of South Asian, Chinese, Filipino, Latin American, Arab, Southeast Asian, West Asian, Korean and Japanese. The sex variable refers to whether a person is a male or female.[xxviii] The education variable refers to the highest level of education one has completed. The general hierarchy used in deriving this variable is high school, college, and university.[xxix]

The analyses was conducted based on weighted percentages calculated from this sample. Weighted frequencies and cross-tabulations were used to estimate the percentages of people in each of the three income categories, based on individual's after-tax total income: below Low-Income Measure after tax (LIM-AT; $22,133 which is 50 per cent of median adjusted after-tax income for one-person households in Canada), between LIM-AT and thriving income, and thriving income and above. Based on Wellesley Institute's previous Thriving in the City work, two thriving income thresholds for the Toronto CMA were established and ranged from $44,433 to $54,727. [xxx]
- $44,433 for Toronto homeowners;
- $54,727 for Toronto renters

The logit-transformed confidence limits were used to ensure that lower and upper bounds for confidence interval did not surpass 0 per cent and 100 per cent, respectively. The analyses were conducted at the University of Toronto Research Data Centre and are in compliance with Statistics Canada requirements.

1. Racial differences in low-income and thriving income
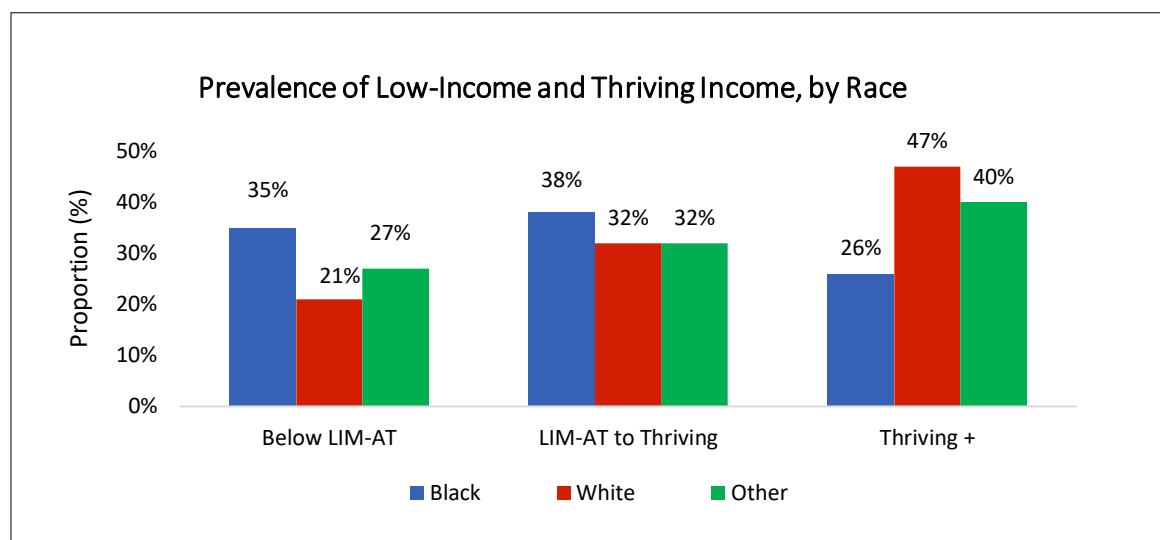

Figure 1: Prevalence of low-income and thriving income among Black, White and, other Racialized populations

Figure 1 shows the proportion of the Black, White and other racialized populations below the Low-Income Measure, After-Tax (LIM-AT), between LIM-AT and the thriving income, and above the thriving income. The graphs for both White and racialized populations show a linear increase across the income categories, however, there is a sharp decrease in the proportion of Black people making above the thriving income.

Data shows that the Black population is more likely to live in poverty (35 per cent), though there is a larger proportion of Black people (38 per cent) who are not living in poverty nor earning a thriving income. The data for the White population shows the opposite pattern, where almost half of the population (47 per cent) earns the thriving income, a third (32 per cent) between LIM-AT and thriving and makes up the smallest proportion (21 per cent) of the population living in poverty. Other racialized groups follow the same trajectory as the White population, computing an identical value of 32 per cent of the population not in poverty but not thriving. However, 27 per cent of the racialized population lives in poverty and 40 per cent thrives.

This figure illustrates a significant disparity in the Black community. There is an 8 per cent and 14 per cent difference in the proportion of racialized and White people below the LIM-AT, respectively. The gap between Black and White and racialized groups slightly decreases to 6 per cent within the LIM-AT to thriving income category. However, the majority of the disparity is captured in the thriving income and above grouping. The White population (47 per cent) is nearly twice as likely to earn a thriving income than the Black population (26 per cent). Overall, the Black community makes up less than a third of the total population in Toronto who earns a thriving income.

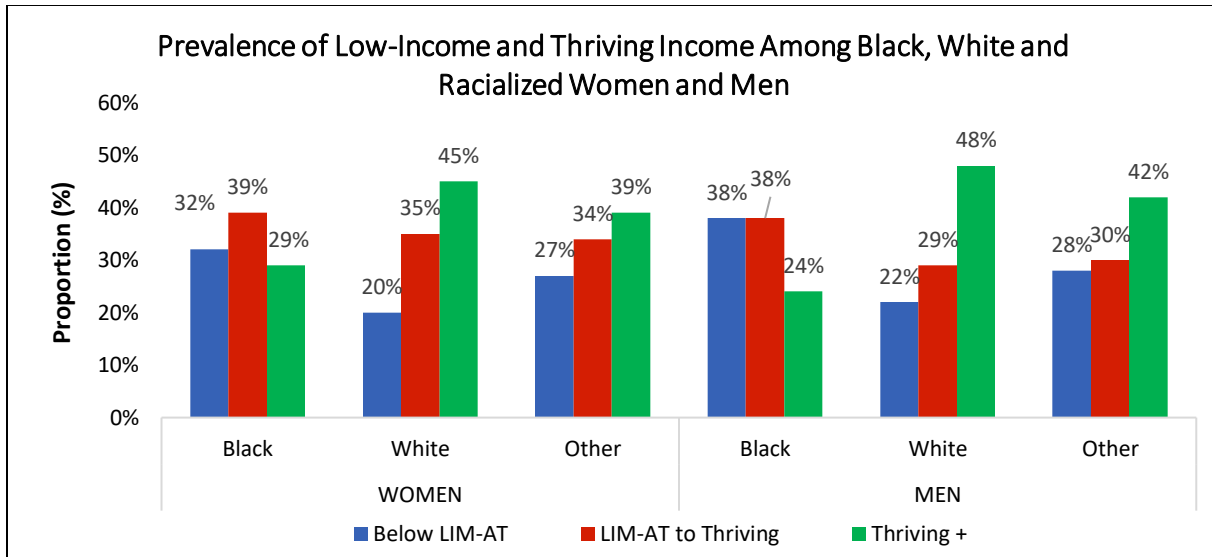2. Racial differences in low income and thriving income by gender

Figure 2: Prevalence of low-income and thriving income among Black, White, and Racialized Women and Men

Figure 2 illustrates racial differences across all three income categories by sex. Black men (38 per cent) account for the highest proportion of individuals living in poverty, followed by Black women (32 per cent). White women (20 per cent) are least likely to live in poverty compared to White men (22 per cent), who tend to have higher income rates on average. Racialized men and women have similar experiences with low-income.

Black women (39 per cent) are more likely to earn between LIM-AT and thriving income compared to White women (35 per cent) and racialized women (34 per cent). Similar patterns show among men. White men (29 per cent) and racialized men (30 per cent) are less likely than Black men (38 per cent) to sit within the LIM-AT and thriving income category.

Black men (24 per cent) make up a lowest proportion of those who are earning a thriving income and more, followed by Black women (27 per cent). White men (48 per cent) are twice as likely than Black men to earn a thriving income. The data also shows a 16 per cent and 10 per cent difference between Black women and white and racialized women, respectively.

Previous studies have shown that men are likely to earn more than women; however, the data illustrates otherwise for Black men compared to non-Black women. In every income category, White and racialized women outperformed Black men, but fall slightly behind White and racialized men. This finding demonstrates the realities of racism in the labour market, despite male privilege there is something unique about the obstacles Black men face.

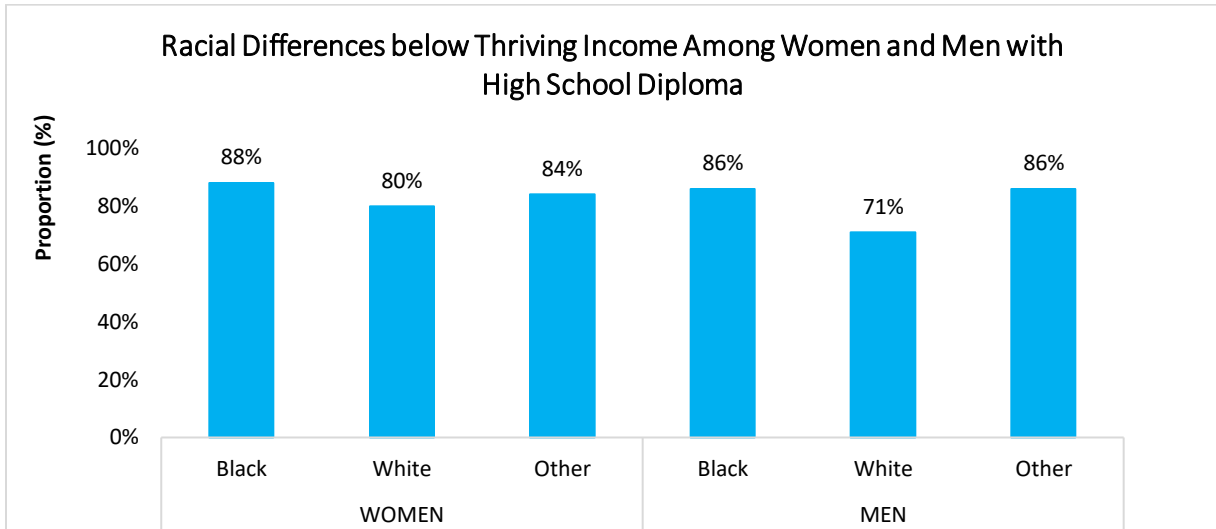3. Racial differences below thriving income by gender and education

Racial Differences below Thriving Income Among Women and Men with High School Diploma

Proportion (%)

	WOMEN			MEN		
	Black 88%	White 80%	Other 84%	Black 86%	White 71%	Other 86%

Figure 3: Racial differences below thriving income by sex and high school level of education

Racial Differences below Thriving Income Among Women and Men with College Diploma

Proportion (%)

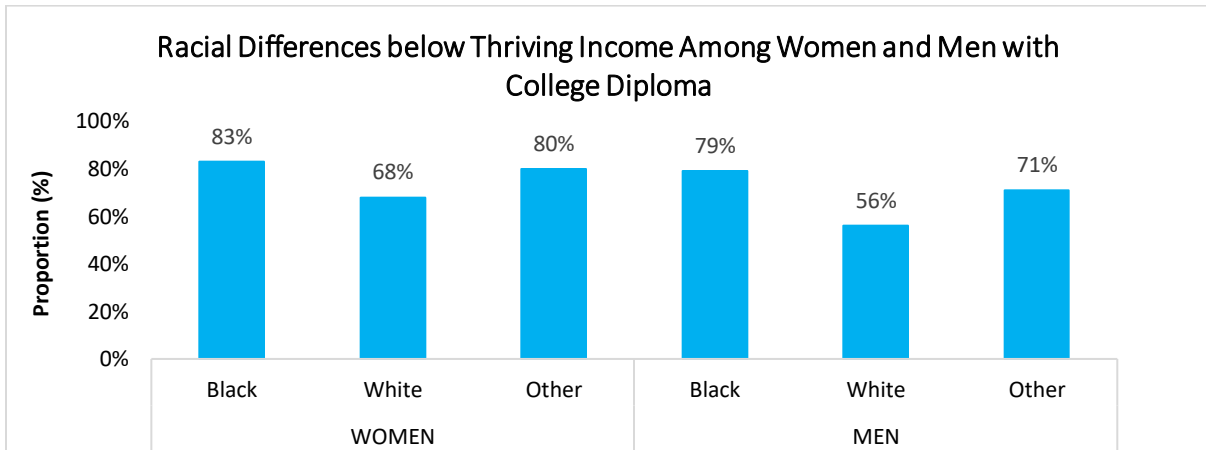|	WOMEN			MEN		
	Black 83%	White 68%	Other 80%	Black 79%	White 56%	Other 71%

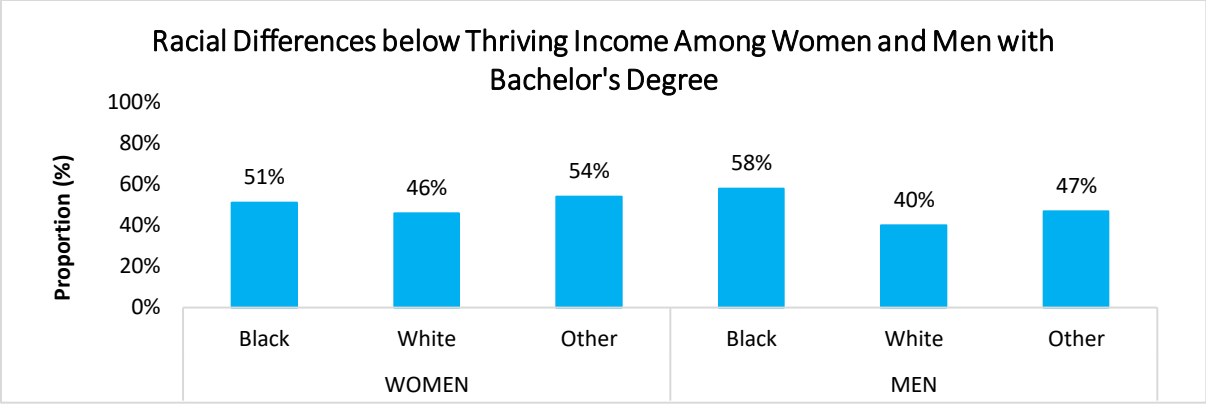Figure 4: Racial differences below thriving income by sex and college level of education

Figure 5: Racial differences below thriving by sex and university level of education

Figure 3, 4, and 5 illustrate the proportion of people in each racial category not making the thriving income, disaggregated by sex and high school, college, and university levels of education. The values on the graphs are a sum of the proportion below LIM-AT and between LIM-AT and thriving.

In Figure 3, Black women (88 per cent) are most likely to not earn a thriving income with a high school diploma, followed by Black men (86 per cent) and racialized men (86 per cent) and women (84 per cent). White women (80 per cent) are less likely to earn a lower income in high school than Black and racialized men and women; however, White men make up the smallest group (71 per cent) to earn less than the thriving income.

Figure 4 shows similar results in the distribution of income for the college level of education. The proportion of Black women (83 per cent), racialized women (80 per cent) and Black men (79 per cent) not earning a thriving income have slightly decreased compared to the high school level. Racialized men (71 per cent), White men (56 per cent) and women (68 per cent) demonstrated significant improvements with a college degree. This reveals that pursuing post-secondary education at the college level enables a greater advantage for racialized men, White men and women than for those who are Black and women of colour. This finding reveals how racism and gender differences can work together to create alternate realities for Black people and racialized women.

Figure 5 highlights a more significant disparity at the university level of education. Black men (58 per cent) make up the highest proportion of those not earning a thriving income, followed by Black women (51 per cent). Although Black women seem to benefit more than Black men from a degree, it is important to note that for each educational level more than half still do not earn a thriving income compared to White men and women. Among racialized populations, women (54 per cent) are more likely than men (47 per cent) to earn less than the thriving income. Consistent with Figure 3 and 4 White men (40 per cent) and women (46 per cent) are least likely to earn less than the thriving income than Black and racialized groups. Overall, these findings show that regardless of educational background, Black men and women face greater barriers to earning a thriving income, whereas White men tend to be more likely to earn a thriving income than all other groups.

Discussion
In this study, we aimed to quantify the number of Black people, aged 25-40 years old, living alone in Toronto and are not earning a thriving income. Three key findings were found. First, the Black population disproportionately represents the largest group to earn below the thriving income. Second, Black women

are more likely to earn less than the thriving income than Black men, White, and other racialized populations. Third, when education is accounted for, Black men experience the greatest disadvantage to earning a thriving income. These findings point to ways racial and gender discrimination interplay in the labor market and workplace and create real consequences for Black men and women's earnings.

This research demonstrates that current poverty measures alone are not enough to end all forms of poverty and ensure good health for all. The data shows that the situation is much worse for the Black population, where the majority sit just above the poverty line and under the thriving income. Although most people may have access to their basic needs, the findings show that other areas of health and well-being may be adversely affected. Exclusively using economic and relative measures to assess poverty underestimates health and security issues faced by Black communities and will only continue to perpetuate racial inequities.

How can the Thriving in the City Framework offer a more adequate approach to address health differences in the Black population and beyond?

The Thriving in the City Framework can be seen as a useful alternative to reduce levels of poverty. The nine parameters that form this framework allow for a comprehensive understanding of one's needs across physical, mental, social and economic dimensions of health and well-being.[xxxi] For individuals living on their own, the model estimates that costs of thriving are between $46,186 and $55,432 after-tax,[xxxii] whereas the Official Poverty Line ranges from $16,436 to $20,389.[xxxiii] Current poverty measures focus on basic needs and vaguely describes other items that support personal development and community engagement. The significant difference between the thriving and poverty thresholds clearly shows that current measures underestimate the poverty issue and may consequentially breed new challenges without responsive, combative solutions in place.

For instance, a recent report shows that Black youth have higher educational aspirations but lower levels of education than other youth.[xxxiv] Black adults are also less likely to be employed, and over 15 years, the gap in wages increased between Black people and the rest of the adult population.[xxxv] The professional development domain in the framework provides a means to effectively address disparities in education and the workforce. The cost of $2,492 per year supports expenses to ensure ongoing opportunities for educational training and career advancement.[xxxvi] It also accounts for the ability to cope with the changes in employment dynamics, especially immigrants and racialized people who disproportionately experience precarious work. Canada's poverty line does not acknowledge costs related to investments in one's education and career, rather all other goods and services beyond basic needs are grouped for a total of approximately $5,000 per year.[xxxvii] By classifying personal care, telecom services, recreation, entertainment, and school supplies as one cost, the poverty line oversimplifies social and economic circumstances individuals and families face.

The framework is also flexible in its application. The value associated with thriving could be met through increasing income and access to resources. The education and labor inequalities experienced by Black youth, for example, can be reduced through policies that invest in effective tutoring models or preparatory courses with workplace integration experience or incentivizing school boards to create grant programs that fosters learning outside the classroom. Improvements in programs and resources available in the education system that reflect the thriving value offers a solution not only to youth but the broader economic challenges in the labor market.

The Thriving in the City framework can be a valuable tool used to improve health equity. It provides clarity on is thriving and what is required to ensure all areas of health are well supported. This model captures the essence of sustainable development in that its universal nature makes it adaptable to distinct individual needs and socioeconomic environments. It is also aspirational as it encourages us to move beyond conventional actions and co-create transformative solutions. The current poverty line measures a modest standard of living and does not allow us to envision a sustainable society where all parts are flourishing. The success of 2030 Agenda relies on combined efforts of multiple stakeholder, an integration of diverse resources and recognizing how all dimensions of health and society are mutually reinforcing.[xxxviii] By adopting a more inclusive, resource-based approach to poverty, Canada may be a step closer to achieving sustainable development.

Limitations

There are some limitations that are essential to be mindful of in the interpretation of this research. The results are descriptive and describe the differences in income by race, gender, and education but cannot determine cause and effect explanations. The study also does not account for other confounding variables such as immigration status, health conditions, and employment status among other correlated variables.

In addition, the data analysis was not controlled for age. The rates also do not take into account the differences in the number of single-aged people among the different population groups. Additionally, thriving income thresholds have not been estimated for people not living alone, so the household structure could not be controlled. Therefore, the data represents bivariate associations between the number of variables being considered.

Importantly, grouping all Black people in one category discounts the nuanced experiences of the diverse Black populations in Toronto navigating the labor market. Another issue associated with data limitations is the focus on those who are single and living alone. Studies in the United States have shown that unmarried Black people who live alone, especially women, make up a significant proportion of the Black middle class compared to Black couples with children.[xxxix] These findings suggest that the focus on one demographic of the Black population, particularly the group that tends to earn a higher income may result in an overestimation in the number of people thriving in Black communities.

Conclusion Acknowledgments

To leave no one behind, it is imperative policymakers take on models that promote social and economic inclusion to address systemic racism. Studies of racism as a contributor to poverty and income disparities should be significantly expanded to affirm that inequities rooted in systems and processes are barriers to good health and sustainable development.

Ongoing efforts should better document the diverse experiences of Black Canadians. Without reliable research and data, Canada is far behind countries like the United States in tracking how race is implicated in the labor market, health care, education and justice system.[xl] The collection of longitudinal race-based data should be considered to better understand and characterize long-term trends and associated economic consequences. Future research should explore other correlated variables such as type of occupation, to delve deeper into where discriminatory policies and practices exist across Canada's workforce.

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