



Addressing the Mental Health Needs of African Canadian Pregnant and Parenting Adolescents and their Children

Ekua Asabea Blair

Chief Executive Officer

Massey Centre for Women



Centre canadien de l'agrément
L'excellence en matière de services communautaires



Canadian Centre for Accreditation
Excellence in community services





Massey Centre – A Brief Summary

- Established in 1901 as the Door of Hope then became the Victor Home in 1904
- Created to provide refuge for stigmatized immigrant and unwed mothers
- Named the Massey Centre in 1989
- We serve two populations:
 - Pregnant and parenting teens 13 – 25 years old with moderate to severe mental health and substance use challenges
 - Infant and children (prenatal to 6 years old) of the young women who require early identification, targeted prevention, intervention, and treatment programs to reduce mental health symptoms and provide optimal growth and development
- We provide wrap around supports for the pregnant and parenting teens.



What we know about pregnant and parenting adolescents

Significant numbers of adolescent mother/baby dyads and the adverse outcomes for the babies, make it a significant public health issues.



The public health issue is one that continues from generations to generation



Communities stigmatize these young families and they impose unnecessary stresses on them that contribute to adverse outcomes

About pregnant and parenting teens

- Adolescent pregnancy in Canada is highest among disadvantaged socio-economic groups
- Little or no family support
- Young aboriginal women:
 - 4 x higher among First Nations adolescents
 - 12 x higher in Inuit communities
 - 18 x higher on reserves than in the general population
- Adolescents who have been involved in the child welfare system are more likely to become pregnant
- Children of adolescent mothers are at greater risk of abuse and neglect and are more likely to be taken into care

(Canadian Institute of Child Health, 2000 as cited in E. Ordolis, First Peoples Child and Family Review 2007)



What are some of the root causes of mental health issues in the communities you serve

Institutionalized Racism and Discrimination – reduces employment opportunities, wages, loans, housing, quality and quantity of education and health care – reduced resources leads to poor health

Stigma – can affect many life changes, causes social isolation; low self esteem poor self regulation, smoking and substance use





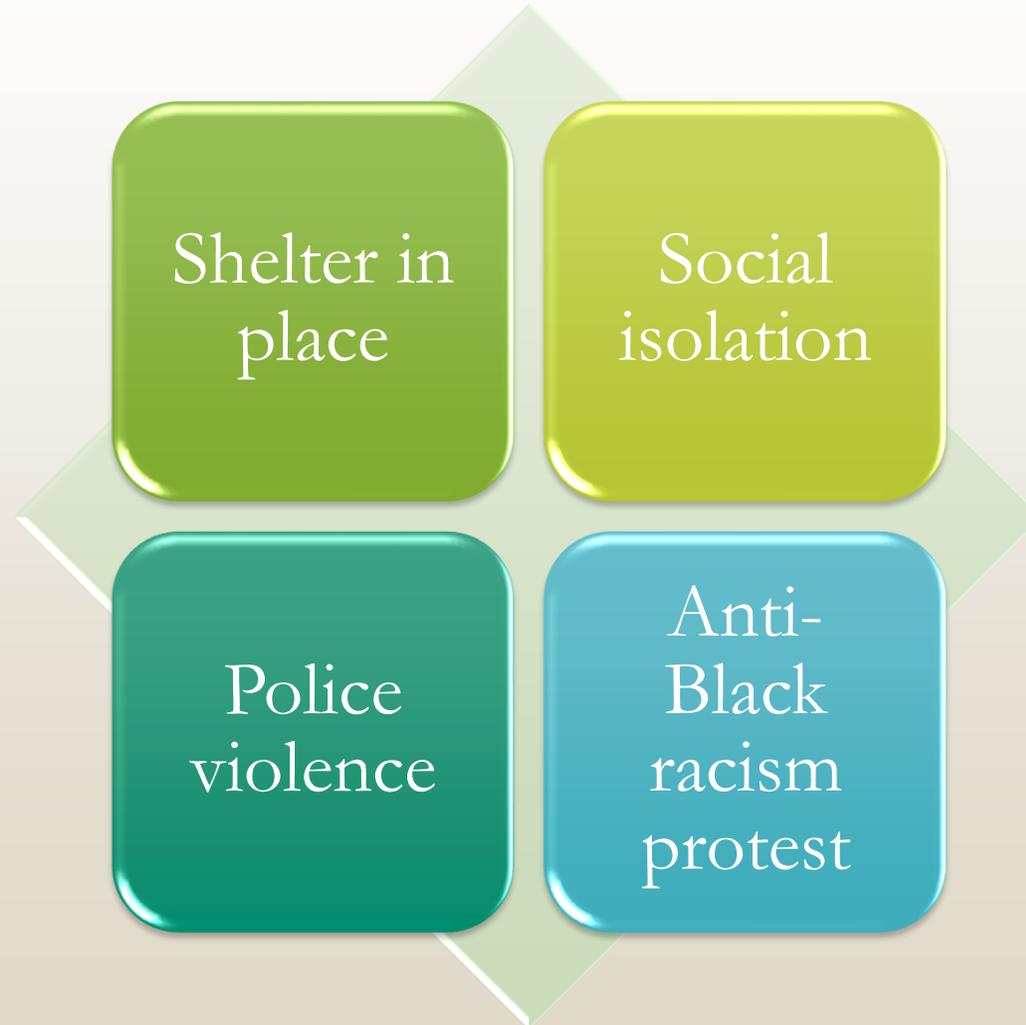
Stigma is a Threat

“Adolescents are able to make reasoned decision about their health and medical treatment (usually with the support and guidance of their families) but at the same time they are liable to faulty judgement when it comes to situations in which they feel attacked, threatened, misperceive the degree of danger involved to themselves or others, or fail to appreciate the consequences of their actions.” (Flaherty, 2014)





Impacts of COVID-19





How can we help African Canadian Young Parents?

Supports for mothers and babies to reduce stress and protect them from stigma

E.g., supports and funding for protective, therapeutic mother and baby resources and residences

E.g., schools for both mother and baby

Address the child protection system, especially for indigenous peoples and African Canadians

E.g., protective care that is not stigmatizing, supports both mothers and babies without costing them their cultural supports

Review government and professional policies seeking out manifestations of power differentials and bias

What interventions do you provide or recommend to support mother and baby dyad's mental health

Evidence-based screening for early identification and social and emotional issues

Screening for mental health issues at intake – CANS-PPY evidence based tool

Occupational Therapy support

Prevention intervention – Baby Love – evidence-based attachment prevention program for the mother and baby dyad

Teach life skills – guided by an empirical supported tool – Inventory for Independent living for young mothers and their babies.

Clinical supervision – to build and support the therapeutic milieu

