

# Enhancing Access to Post-Secondary Education for Male African Immigrant Youth in Southern Ontario: PHASE 1 FINDINGS



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## PURPOSE OF QUALITATIVE CROSS SECTIONAL STUDY

- 1) capture voices of male African immigrant youth and share their experiences of transitioning from high school to postsecondary education
- 2) gather data that can be used by academics, community stakeholders, and policy makers to design policies, services and programs that can assist African immigrant youth to access postsecondary education
- 3) analyse the importance of both 'ethnic' cultural capital and dominant cultural capital and the role of acculturation and masculinity in determining educational success or failure for male African immigrant youth
- 4) train and engage students and community peer researchers in knowledge production, translation and mobilization
- 5) recommend methods of engaging these youth in successful educational practices.

## INTRODUCTION

### OBJECTIVE

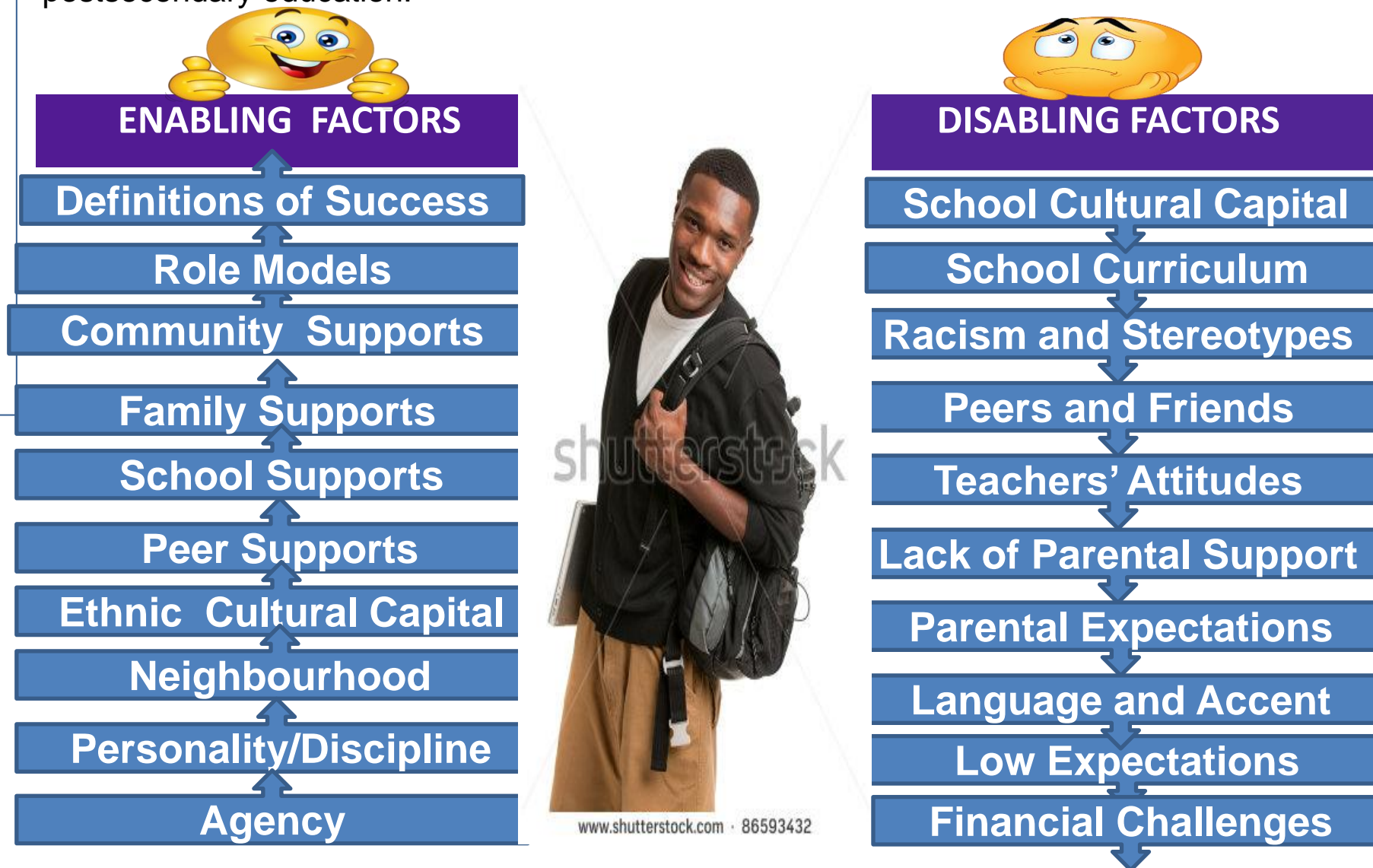
Our participatory research project aims to better understand the role played by acculturation, cultural capital, and masculinity in first generation male African immigrant and refugee youth's efforts to access post-secondary education in Southern Ontario.

### BACKGROUND

- Male African immigrant youth face a number of challenges that include completing high school and transitioning to postsecondary education.
- Many of them feel being on the periphery of society. Their alienation results in negative outcomes, including: having the lowest high school completion rate, lowest postsecondary education participation rate and employment rate of all immigrants (Statistics Canada, 2011),
- For them to be successfully and effectively integrated into Canadian society, **higher education** is a key determinant.
- However, along with 'Black' students from the Caribbean, first-generation students from Africa are the least likely of all immigrant youth in Canada to pursue post-secondary education (Abada & Tenkorang, 2009) and the most likely to leave school early (Brown, 2006).
- Previous studies on African immigrants in Canada have identified educational access and completion as one of the barriers to successful integration into Canadian society (Dei & Kempf, 2013).
- However, what has not been adequately studied is the role of acculturation, African definitions of masculinity, the effect of both 'ethnic' cultural capital and the host society's cultural capital on school performance and completion rates of the male African immigrant youth.
- In fact, their experiences of transitioning from high school to postsecondary education have not been captured in previous studies.

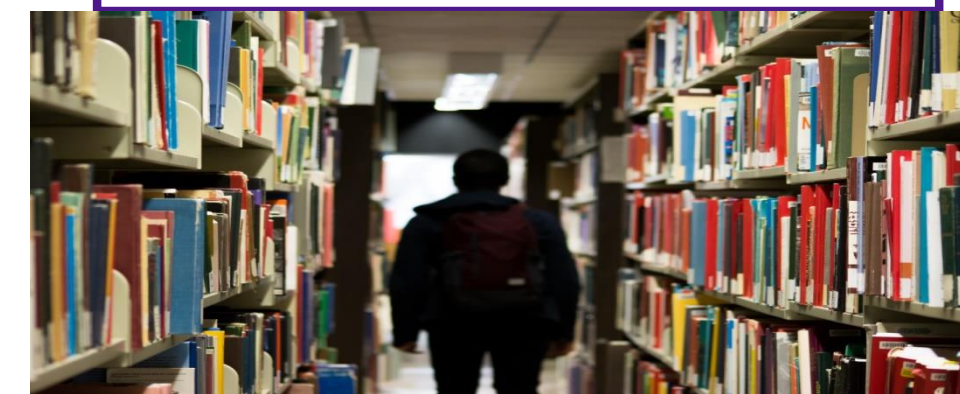
## FINDINGS

Preliminary findings highlight a number of key themes that were identified as enabling and disabling factors during high schooling when preparing for transition to postsecondary education among male African immigrant youth in Southern Ontario. Some of the factors were family and neighbourhood based, while others were school-related. Most of the themes fell into both categories of enabling and disabling factors. For example, family, peers, neighbourhood, school environment, parental expectations were identified as both enabling and disabling. Some key coping strategies that participants relied on include: avoiding confrontation with authority, using familial support to provide them with support and motivation, using available resources and information on accessing postsecondary education.



## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How do we characterize the cultural capital that male African immigrant and refugee youth bring to Canada?
2. How can we harness that cultural capital to enable these youth to achieve their educational and career goals in Canada?
3. Are the current programs and services in schools capable of enabling them to achieve their potential?
4. How does their definition of masculinity affect their approach to education and career aspirations?
5. From the point of view of the male African youth, what do they need to better enable them to access post-secondary education?



## METHODOLOGY

Recruitment was done across Southern Ontario through purposive and snowball sampling. In-depth one-on-one interviews were conducted with 30 participants and 4 focus groups with 20 male youth. Interviews were between 60-90 minutes in length.

Youth were asked about their family background, their friends and peers, high school programs and services, relationship with teachers, other students, counselors and principals (both positive and negative experiences), role models, their neighbourhoods, preparations for college or university, their definitions of being a male African youth and definitions of success.

### ELIGIBILITY FOR PARTICIPATION

- First and 1.5 generation male African immigrant and refugee youth (ages 18-24).
  - Male African youth in college or university or had completed postsecondary education
  - Came to Canada as an immigrant or refugee
  - Resided in Canada for less than 10 years.
- African youth make up a sizable proportion of the immigrant population in Ontario. The 2011 National Household Survey reveals that there were 23,200 African immigrants between the ages of 15 and 24 in Ontario.

## REFERENCES

- Abada, T., & Tenkorang, E. Y. (2009). Gender differences in educational attainment among the children of Canadian immigrants. *International Sociology*, 24, 580-608.
- Brown, R. (2006). *The TDSB grade 9 cohort study: A five-year analysis, 2000-2005*. Toronto, ON: TDSB.
- Dei, G. J. S., & Kempf, A. (2013). *New perspectives on African-centred education in Canada*. Toronto, ON: Canadian Scholars' Press.
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## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Cultural Diversity in High Schools

#### Inclusive Curriculum

"In high school, I don't think they are interested in educating the students about Africa. The only reason I was able to talk about Africa in grade 8 was because I had to do a presentation and at that time, I had just arrived and I could come up with great stories about Africa but they don't teach us about Africa particularly. However I think high schools should but they don't. So there should be courses even in the high schools when people can learn about Africa." - Appiah

#### Minority Teachers

"It's important to have teachers from my culture in the school. They will bring us all together. They are part of the community and should be in schools. I wouldn't mind having them to identify with and get support from" - Thomas

#### Understanding Minority Students

"Teachers should encourage students not to be shy but ask for help. Students come from countries where the education system is different even for me it was different. Sometimes it is good to understand the students and design ways that will make the transition easier for them." - Takawira

#### Community Mentorship

"We need this community centre so we have to figure this out. That African community centre could save so many lives. It would give these youth so many opportunities that they don't have now. I think it is just best to have as I said mentorship programs that help students bridge the gap between high school and post-secondary. That way by the time they are finishing high school diploma they are also getting ready to start university." - Abayomi

#### Community Role Models

"It is very, very important to have community role models. At one of the leadership summits that we just have had I was inspired by the speakers who came to that event. ...I was inspired to find out that there was a Ghanaian Chief Justice here in Canada, one of the few black chief justices and he is here and he is Ghanaian. If he tells you his story it is very inspiring." - Kwame

#### Parental Involvement

"The community needs to provide outlets or institutions for parents and kids to meet and work together in the aim of helping the African male youth in their education such as workshops to help kids with their homework. Having an institutions that belongs to Africans which offers services like after school program would go a long to help as well." - Mikael

#### Familial Support

"I would tell the parents to be supportive because what male Africans deal with coming here in the first place is actually a lot in terms of stereotypes and treatment. So the best thing you could do as a parent is to be supportive of your son here. And just try to encourage them because by the end of the day you are the only person they can rely on." - Daren

#### Be Informed

"You can ask teachers or guidance counsellors about what you wanna do but then if you don't know what you wanna do it doesn't help. You have to know what you want. If you don't know what you want yea, there is information but what you do with it is gonna end up being nothing. So before you end high school." - Paul

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