

An abstract painting featuring two stylized human figures. The figure on the right is larger and more prominent, rendered in a vibrant palette of red, yellow, green, and blue. It has a large, rounded head and a body with various geometric and organic shapes. The figure on the left is smaller and more fragmented, with a mix of red, yellow, and blue tones. The background is dark, making the colorful figures stand out. The overall style is expressive and somewhat cubist.

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# Out of School and “On the Wall”

A qualitative look into the lives of unemployed young Black Bermudian men and the gender gap in educational attainment

By Monique Jethwani-Keyser and Ronald B. Mincy  
Center for Research on Fathers, Children and Family Well Being  
Columbia University School of Social Work  
June 2011



Thank you to Bermudian artist Bill Ming for sharing his art used in this report

“Da Tattoo Three” © Bill Ming

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An abstract painting with vibrant colors like yellow, pink, blue, and green, featuring expressive brushstrokes and a textured surface. The colors are layered and blended, creating a sense of movement and depth.

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# Abstract

Since 2007, the Center for Research on Fathers, Families and Child Well-Being (CRFCFW) at the Columbia University School of Social Work has been conducting research in Bermuda to understand the employment and education gaps between Black males and their peers. Among other things, these studies revealed that Black males are less likely to graduate high school or obtain advanced degrees. They earn less than White Bermudian men and are almost twice as likely to be unemployed. In addition to poor earnings and educational outcomes, young Black Bermudian men are also highly over-represented among the incarcerated population in Bermuda and are more likely than their peers to commit drug-related offenses and violent crimes.

In order to shed additional light on these statistical findings, CRFCFW conducted a series of qualitative studies. First, interviews with graduating high school seniors revealed that boys owed much of their success to the encouragement they received from family members and teachers to go as far as possible in school. While these graduating seniors had aspirations for higher education and careers that are both financially and emotionally satisfying, the pathway for attaining those goals was ill defined, suggesting a need for greater professional guidance. Seniors identified a period of immaturity in early adolescence and suggested that perhaps this problem was unique to boys. However, we never spoke to girls, to boys who may drop out, or to the men already “on the wall”. For the present study, CRFCFW returned to Bermuda to learn more about why boys are less likely to choose an educational pathway and to qualitatively explore the educational and employment aspirations, challenges and experiences of “on the wall” Bermudian youth. The research literature on “disconnected youth” suggests that keeping men “off the wall” involves increasing the proportion of Black Bermudian males who complete their secondary education. High school dropouts are 3.5 times more likely to become disconnected from work and school for periods of three or more years, which leaves them vulnerable to significant social and economic hardship and generates substantial costs to society. Consequently, this study examines both the contributing factors to “disconnection” in the Bermudian context and the gender gap in educational attainment. Interviews with Black Bermudian men, ages 18-30, who were out-of-school and unemployed (n=22, mean age 22.3) reveal the risks that led this “on the wall” sample to become disconnected from formal employment and schooling, and what these men need to become reconnected. Interviews with both boys and girls in their first year at a public high school (n=35, mean age = 14.3) offer some insight into why boys might be more likely to drop out.

Findings reveal that men who end up “on the wall” often experience family stressors and high exposure to community violence. Dropping out of high school is a common result of these experiences. While in high school, the men in this study often experienced school relationships that emphasised disciplinary sanctions and left men feeling stigmatised. Most felt that no one would care if they stayed in school. As adults, fear of repeated failure inhibits their re-connection to formal institutions of work and school.





Among the high school students in this study, findings suggest that girls are receiving more disciplinary referrals and experiencing more detentions and suspensions than boys. However, there are no gender differences in grade point average (GPA) and interviews reveal a perception that boys are still more likely to get into trouble. Further, girls are perceived as more educationally focused than boys, and they are more likely to seek out and obtain social emotional support. All students are experiencing heavy exposure to community and familial conflict. If girls are more likely to talk about these challenges, they are also more likely to develop the connections in school that they need to stay.

Recommendations include ways in which programmes might provide a way for young men to process the challenges they experience both in and out of school. In school, we recommend the Safe Harbor and Career Academies models and repeat our earlier recommendation for more guidance counselling and job exposure. For out-of-school youth, we recommend one-on-one case management, more GED and academic tutoring services, more employment readiness training and Job Corps. We also encourage Bermudians to consider how Bermuda College might be a more effective component of Bermuda's workforce development system, especially how it might provide Black men with the skills they need to secure higher earning jobs. Together, these recommendations may help boys and men overcome familial and community barriers, their fear of academic failure, and acquire the skills they need to enrol in school, find employment and ultimately become productive members of Bermudian society.



# Chapter One: Introduction & Literature Review

According to the Census data of 2000, 14 per cent of young Black Bermudian males, ages 18-30, were not enrolled in school and were unemployed or unstably employed with very low wages. Today, it is anticipated that this percentage is much higher. These young adults are over-represented among those involved in crime and substance abuse, and they are filling prisons and jails at alarming rates (Bermuda Police Service, 2005; Regan, 2003). According to the Bermuda Police Service (2010), violent crime rose 6.2 per cent and firearm offences increased 82 per cent compared to the previous year. Many Bermuda residents are of the opinion, with good reason, that these are the same young men who are “on the wall,” an expression that, we believe, essentially means “disconnected”. U.S. studies use the term “disconnected” to describe young adults who are neither working, enrolled in school, in the military or participating in vocational-training programmes (Besharov & Gardiner, 1999). Young Black males in both the U.S. and in Bermuda are more likely to drop out of high school, be unemployed, and experience incarceration than their peers. Consequently, Black males are twice as likely to be “disconnected” as White males (Mincy, 2007; Mincy, Jethwani-Keyser & Haldane, 2009). Our recent study (Mincy, Jethwani-Keyser & Haldane, 2009) revealed that young disconnected men “on the wall” are not in school or in the military, and tend to be unemployed and single. They are also more likely to be Black Bermudians than White Bermudians.

The rapid increase of violent crime in Bermuda raises critical and pressing questions and concern regarding “disconnected youth”. Who are they? What do they need? How do we prevent Black men from ending up “on the wall” and how do we reconnect those already “on the wall” with Bermudian Society? This study begins to identify the unique challenges of disconnected Bermudian youth through the examination of interviews with unemployed and uneducated young adult Bermudian males (n=22; mean age = 22).

Educational attainment is identified in the literature as a primary predictor for disconnectedness (Besharov & Gardiner, 1998; Brown, Moore & Bzostek, 2003). High school dropouts are 3.5 times more likely to become disconnected from formal work and school for periods of three or more years (Besharov & Gardiner, 1998). Our findings suggest the same trajectory for high school dropouts in Bermuda. Therefore, closing earnings gaps and keeping men “off the wall” involves increasing the proportion of Black Bermudian males whom complete their secondary education efforts. In our previous study, interviews with Black Bermudian males on the eve of high school graduation showed that academic support and encouragement from an adult at home or at school helped keep boys focused on their educational goals, especially when they were less “mature” and had trouble taking school seriously (Mincy, Jethwani-Keyser & Haldane, 2009). However, these interviews only included males who made it through the maturity transition and they did not allow corroboration of views about the role of gender by girls.

To gain additional insight into why the boys might be more likely to leave school before graduation than girls, this study interviews boys and girls in their first year at a public high school (n=35, mean age = 14.3). Findings will be used to make recommendations for policy and programmes designed to support disconnected Black Bermudian youth and young adults and to prevent future disconnection.



This introductory chapter will begin with a review of what we know about men “on the wall” in Bermuda and how their experience relates to the “disconnected” syndrome among Black males in the U.S. This chapter will then review the literature on the risk factors in school, family and community contexts that predict disconnection (particularly educational attainment gaps) and conclude with the research questions for this study and its theoretical framework.

### Disconnected Bermudian Youth: What It Means to Be ‘On the Wall’<sup>1</sup>

Substance abuse and incarceration, coupled with low levels of educational attainment and academic skill, make it increasingly difficult for disconnected youth to become employed and self-sufficient as they get older (Besharov & Gardiner, 1998). Those who have been disconnected for three or more years suffer significant and long-term social and economic hardship and also generate substantial costs to society. Bermudians are rightly concerned about the over-representation of young Black Bermudian males among this disconnected group. Black Bermudian men are falling behind their peers in terms of earnings, literacy, and educational attainment (Mincy, Jethwani-Keyser & Haldane, 2009; Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey, 2006). For those who are disconnected, the consequences are likely to be costly for both themselves and for Bermuda. Young Black Bermudian men are highly over-represented among the incarcerated population in Bermuda and they are much more likely than their peers to commit drug-related offenses and violent crimes (Bermuda Police Service, 2005). Many in Bermuda believe, with good reason, that these are the same young men who are “on the wall”.

The recent study conducted by Mincy, Jethwani-Keyser and Haldane (2009) entitled, “On the Wall or On the Margins?” examined the employment, earnings and educational attainment gaps between young Black men and their peers in Bermuda. Utilising a special micro-database created by the Department of Statistics from the 2000 Census of Population and Housing (Census Office 2002) and statistics from the Ministry of Education, this study revealed that a relatively small proportion of Black Bermudian men are actually “idle”, meaning that they are not working, not in school, and not looking for work. Young Black and White Bermudian men have similar employment, enrolment, and labour force participation rates. The big difference between these groups is in their unemployment rates. The proportion of young Black Bermudian men who are looking, unsuccessfully, for work is 11 per cent; while the proportion of White Bermudian men who are looking, unsuccessfully, for work is 6 per cent. In other words, many of the men “on the wall” are unemployed and unenrolled in school, but are likely to be looking, albeit unsuccessfully, for work<sup>2</sup>. We also learned that Black Bermudian males were two times more likely to have low educational credentials or none at all. This section reviews the findings about the limited educational attainment and the high rates of unemployment among Black Bermudian males, two defining features of men “on the wall”.

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1 “On the wall” and “disconnected” are terms that will be used interchangeably throughout this report.

2 This finding informed the subject criteria for the “on the wall” sample in this study (unenrolled in school and unemployed).

## Limited Educational Attainment

For an economy with highly educated workers in much demand, many (more than a quarter of) young Black Bermudian men have no or low educational credentials (See Table 1, Row 1).<sup>3</sup>

**Table 1: Educational Attainment Distribution of Young Adults**

Credential	Black Bermudian Males	White Bermudian Males	Black Bermudian Females	White Non-Bermudian Males
No, or low, education	28%	23%	15%	13%
RSA	9%	6%	7%	6%
BSSC	29%	12%	30%	4%
GCEO	4%	20%	6%	4%
GCEA	6%	6%	6%	11%
Technical Degree	9%	8%	11%	16%
Associate's Degree	6%	7%	9%	6%
Bachelor's Degree, or more	9%	18%	16%	40%
	100%	100%	100%	100%

Columns 1 and 3 in Table 1 show that young Black Bermudian men and women have similar educational credentials, except that the proportion of the former with no or low education (28 per cent) is almost twice large as the latter (15 per cent). Moreover, young Black Bermudian men are less likely to have completed higher education (24 per cent) than young Black Bermudian women (36 per cent) or White Bermudian men (33 per cent).

More recent enrolment data collected from Bermuda's Ministry of Education reveals that Bermudian females are more likely to graduate high school and attend Bermuda College. In the class of 2008, almost half of the Bermudian males left the public high schools before completion, compared to less than one third of the girls<sup>4</sup>. In 2009, Bermuda College had 146 graduates, 72.6 per cent of them were female. From 2004-2009, Bermuda College graduated 225 men and 522 females.

In 2003, the Department of Statistics (2006) conducted an Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey. Among other things, this survey identified Black men at risk in job situations that required high literacy skills, because their scores on all domains used to measure literacy and numeracy fell below minimal standards. Among 16 to 30 year olds, Black men represented 34 per cent of young people who did not meet minimal skills standards, while young Black women represented 26 per cent of young people who did not meet these standards. White men and women represented 15 and 18 per cent of those who did not meet these standards, respectively.

<sup>3</sup> No or low education refers to people who have not obtained a high school certification of any kind, not passed any educational examination, nor achieved any academic qualification. RSA is the abbreviation for Royal Society of Arts. Level 1 and is the lowest form of a high school degree in Bermuda. BSSC is the abbreviation for the Bermuda Secondary School Certificate and the numbers stand for the grade point average. A BSSC 0 to 2 stands for Bermuda Secondary School Certificate with a grade point average less than 2.0. GCEO stands for the Cambridge School Certificate, third class. GCEA stands for the Cambridge School Certificate, first or second class; this is equivalent to a high school diploma. Technical, Associates and Bachelor's, Master's and Doctorate degree are equivalent to American educational system.

<sup>4</sup> The majority of students in the Bermudian public schools are Black. The majority of students who left either dropped out or reported that they were re-enrolling in alternative schools such as GED programmes.

## High Unemployment Rates and Low Earnings

Besides lower levels of educational attainment and literacy, young Black Bermudian men are concentrated in lower-paying industries.

**Table 2: Industrial Distributions of Employed Young Bermudians**

Industries	All Young Adults	Black Bermudian Males	White Bermudian Males	Black Bermudian Females	White Non-Bermudian Males
Business Services	10%	4%	8%	8%	20%
Construction	10%	25%	23%	1%	9%
Education/Health Services	8%	3%	1%	15%	3%
Hotel Industry	6%	8%	4%	6%	7%
International Company	8%	2%	6%	8%	17%
Other Services	6%	3%	5%	5%	2%
Retail & Wholesale Trade	10%	8%	11%	12%	7%
Other Industry	34%	37%	34%	37%	33%
Missing Responses	7%	10%	8%	7%	2%
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Note: "Other Industry" is a category made up of industries in which 4%, or fewer, young adults were employed.

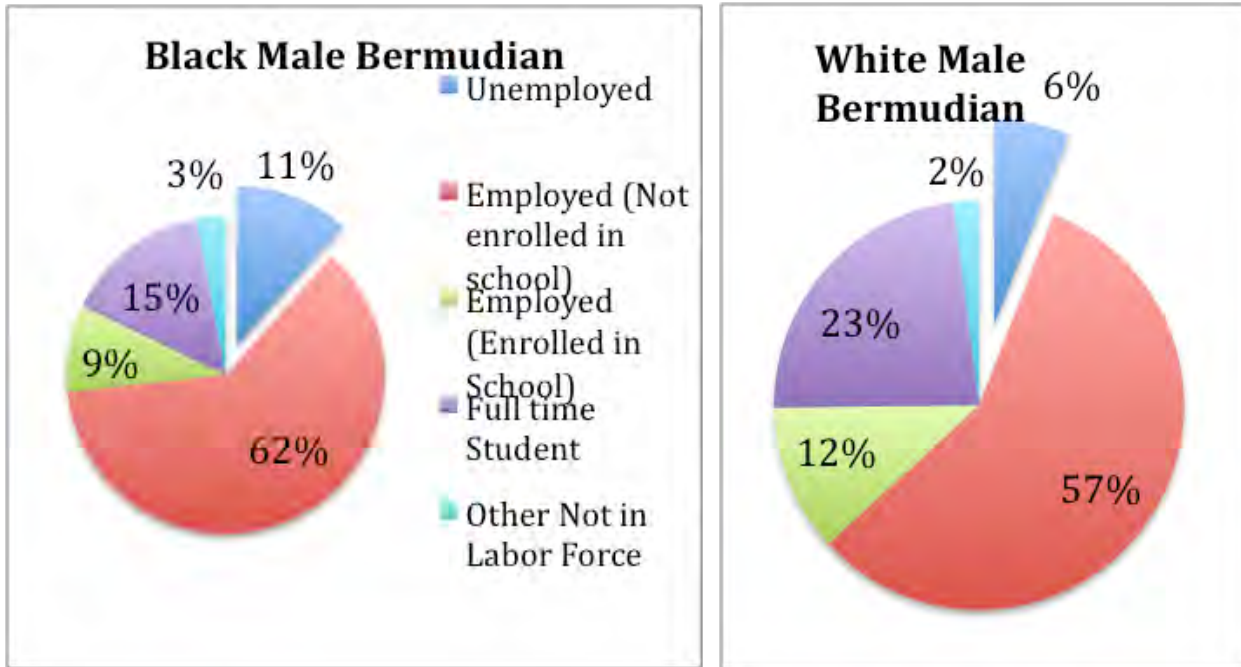
The most lucrative jobs in Bermuda are going to persons without Bermudian status (hereafter, non-Bermudians), who are recruited to work in international businesses. Column 5 in Table 1 shows that the educational credentials of White non-Bermudian men are distinct from those of the other groups. They are more than four times as likely to have a college degree or more than Black Bermudian men and approximately twice as likely to have a technical degree. Column 5 shows that the proportion of young White non-Bermudian men employed in international companies is almost nine times the proportion of young Black Bermudian men employed in this high-paying sector. In Columns 2 and 3 of Table 2, we can see that the proportion of White Bermudian men employed in business services is two times the proportion of Black Bermudian men. Further, many young White Bermudian men are foregoing higher earnings so they can continue schooling, as they are more likely to enrol and complete degrees of higher education than Black Bermudian men.

Column 4 in Table 2 displays gender differences in the industrial distribution of employment. Young Black Bermudian women are two times more likely to be employed in international business than their male counterparts and five times more likely to work in education and health services than Black Bermudian men.

Figure 1 (on the next page) shows that Black Bermudian men are approximately twice as likely as White Bermudian men to be unemployed. The proportion of young Black Bermudian men who are looking, unsuccessfully, for work is 11 per cent; while the proportion of White Bermudian men who are looking, unsuccessfully, for work is 6 per cent. You can also see that White Bermudian males are more likely to be enrolled in school<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> In 2000, the Bermudian population was 64,000 and approximately 7,000 Black Bermudian men were unemployed.

**Figure 1: Labour Force Status of Young Bermudian Males by Race**



In sum, Black Bermudian males have less schooling, are less likely to be employed in international and business service companies, and have lower predicted earnings than Black Bermudian females. Together, these findings reveal that what Bermudians call “on the wall” is really a manifestation of what researchers have deemed “disconnection” in that these young Black men are not in school, have experienced low levels of educational attainment and are unemployed.

These findings left us with several unanswered questions about the poor educational attainment and earnings of Black Bermudian males. Why are Black men less likely to stay in school and more likely to be unemployed? What are the contributing factors to disconnection in the Bermudian context? The recent upswing of murder and violent crime among Black Bermudian males has exacerbated local concern about young men who are “on the wall” (Bermuda Police Service, 2010). As a result, answers to the foregoing questions are urgently needed. By interviewing students, both male and female, in their first year of high school (before they drop out), and young adult Black Bermudian men who are “on the wall” about their high school and employment experiences, this study aims to better understand the service and policy needs of this underserved population. The following sections review what we know in the United States about disconnected Black men and Black boys in school<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> Because there is no research University in Bermuda, we have had difficulty finding a local scholarly trail of theoretical and empirical evidence to inform our work. Considering the similarities in the educational, earnings and crime statistics of Black males in Bermuda and the U.S., we considered the academic literature in the U.S. on disconnected Black men and Black boys in school as a viable framework for this study.

## Characteristics of 'Disconnected Youth' in the U.S.

Individuals who are out of work for a sustained period of time, not in school and not married to someone who is employed or attending school are considered “disconnected” in the U.S. literature. Youth are particularly at risk of disconnection if they are male, Black, high school dropouts, involved in the juvenile justice system, and/or have few community or family supports (Brown, Moore & Bzostek, 2003; Levin-Epstein & Greenberg, 2003; MaCurdy, Keating & Nagavarapu, 2006; Wald & Martinez, 2003).

MaCurdy, Keating & Nagavarapu (2006)<sup>7</sup> define “disconnected youth” as those youth who spend an extended period of time outside of roles within school, work and family contexts along the pathway towards adult independence. A misstep in any of these roles can put young people at risk of disconnection. Using data from the Child Trends Current Population Survey, Wald & Martinez (2003) conclude that the “vast majority” of disconnected male youth who do not make a successful transition to adulthood did not complete high school, are deeply involved in the juvenile system and/or experienced foster placement as adolescents.


High school dropouts are particularly at risk of disconnection and poor adult well-being. Dropping out of high school is associated with drug and alcohol use, low earnings, poor mental health and poor relationship quality (Brown, Moore & Bzostek, 2003). Further, early disconnection from school places one at risk for longer periods of disconnection and more than one spell of disconnection across the lifespan. For example, when compared to other students, those who are suspended or expelled from school are 3.5 times more likely to experience long-term disconnection (Besharov & Gardiner, 1998). Youths disconnected for three or more years suffer long-term social and economic problems, with over 44 per cent of these youths living in poverty (Besharov & Gardiner, 1998). The longer one remains disconnected from the labour force, the greater the likelihood of incarceration, which makes it even harder for him to reconnect (Besharov & Gardiner, 1998; Wald & Martinez, 2003). Mincy (2007) highlights the intergenerational social-economic mobility challenges of high school dropouts, and their children, and reveals that by age 22, the probability of disconnection for adolescent children of high school dropouts is twice the corresponding probability for children of college graduates.

The societal cost of the disconnected male youth population includes higher crime rates (40 per cent of disconnected youth are arrested), more young children in poverty, lower economic productivity, greater social support expenses, and lost tax revenues (MaCurdy, Keating & Nagavarapu, 2006). Disconnected men are twice as likely as females to use illicit drugs, and four times as likely to report heavy drinking (Brown, Moore & Bzostek, 2003). In the U.S., over 42 per cent of disconnected youth are participating in some form of government welfare (MaCurdy, Keating & Nagavarapu, 2006). Levin-Epstein & Greenberg (2003) estimates that disconnected youth are costing the U.S. government \$80 billion for each year's class of approximately 450,000 high school dropouts. The longer disconnected youth remain disconnected, the more likely they are to become involved in criminal and risk-taking behaviour. Even those disconnected youth who are able to make a successful transition to adulthood face some long-term penalties of their disconnection – such as lower earnings, shorter duration of employment, higher rates of drug and alcohol use, and poor mental and physical health (MaCurdy, Keating & Nagavarapu, 2006; Levin-Epstein & Greenberg, 2003).

Wald & Martinez (2003) note that the majority of individuals who have worked with disconnected youth agree that reconnection requires a transformation within the young adult. Challenges to reconnection include exposure to community violence and the feeling that they may get more “respect” on the streets than they would

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7 These authors define a “working” person as one that works at least one hour per month. They define “not in school” as an individual who has spent four months unenrolled from school. A youth is disconnected if he/she is disconnected for eight of 11 months following initial disconnection. A youth is connected if he/she is connected for three of 11 months following initial connection.



in low-earning formal jobs. These authors identify maturity, fatigue with criminal activity and the pressure of increasing responsibility as factors that motivate change among disconnected youth (Wald & Martinez, 2003).

In the U.S., Black males are significantly more likely than White or Hispanic males to experience episodes of disconnection, to have the longest first spells of disconnection and to re-disconnect (Mincy, 2007; Besharov & Gardiner, 1998; MaCurdy, Keating & Nagavarapu, 2006). For example, using data from the National Longitudinal Surveys of Youth, MaCurdy, Keating & Nagavarapu (2006) observe Black males to have the longest first spells of disconnection (7 quarters, or 28 months) and 20 per cent have spells that last 10 or more quarters. Twelve per cent of Black males with first spells have a second spell that lasts over three years. Further, Black youth who have committed a crime and/or dropped out of high school before first disconnection tend to end disconnection episodes later than White and Hispanics with the same characteristics. Unfortunately, one fifth of young Black men in the U.S. are not on the path to independence or self-sufficiency, and they are more likely to be in fair to poor mental and physical health, as compared to the rest of the population (Brown, Moore & Bzostek, 2003; MaCurdy, Keating & Nagavarapu, 2006).

Prison is a significant barrier to the transition to adulthood. For young Black males who do not attend college, incarceration or other involvement with the criminal justice system has become a normal part of the life course—similar to military service or graduating from college. The rate and risk of incarceration increased during the prison boom during the 1980s and 1990s and black men became six to eight times more likely to become incarcerated (Pettit & Western, 2004). In 2002, 13 per cent (1/8th) of Black males between 25 and 29 years old were incarcerated in America. Moreover, the percentage of Black, incarcerated males does not fall below 10 per cent until we explore the category of men over 40 years old (Brown, Moore & Bzostek 2003). Having a criminal record greatly restricts the employment opportunities of Black men. Pager (2003) reveals that a criminal record reduces the rate of callback from 34 per cent to 17 per cent for Whites and from 14 per cent to 5 per cent for Blacks. In other words, Whites with a criminal record have a higher rate of callback than Blacks without a criminal record (17 per cent to 14 per cent).

In sum, research in the U.S. reveals disconnected Black men are more likely to be high school dropouts, involved in the juvenile justice system, and to be living in poverty (Brown, Moore & Bzostek, 2003; Levin-Epstein & Greenberg, 2003; MaCurdy, Keating & Nagavarapu, 2006; Wald & Martinez, 2003). These studies demonstrate the associations among race, class, education, employment and incarceration, and how complex combinations of these factors contribute to the educational and employment gaps between Blacks and Whites in the U.S. It is likely that many of these factors also contribute to the educational and earnings gaps between Black Bermudian males and their peers (Mincy, Jethwani-Keyser, Haldane, 2009). Indeed, Black Bermudian males are more likely to drop out of high school, to be unemployed and to be criminally involved than White Bermudian males or Black Bermudian females (Mincy, Jethwani-Keyser, Haldane, 2009). The best way to prevent disconnection is to change the systems that create these circumstances. The next section examines how the educational system, particularly high school, can support and retain young Black males, thereby preventing long-term disconnection.



## Gender and Racial Disparities in U.S. Schools


In the U.S., a disproportionate number of those at risk for a range of school punishments are Black. In 1975 the Children's Defense Fund examined data on school discipline from the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) and found high rates of suspension for Black students. Of the nearly 3,000 school districts represented in the OCR data, more than two-thirds showed rates of Black suspension that exceeded rates for White students (Skiba & Peterson, 1999). Black students are disciplined/suspended at much higher rates and are more than likely to be suspended multiple times than White students. Black boys in particular are exposed to harsher punishment when they are referred for an infraction, as compared to girls and White boys, and these infractions are often subjectively defined offences, opening students up to discriminatory discipline practices (Skiba, Rausch & Ritter, 2004; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). A study of over 11,000 urban students in the U.S. revealed that Black boys are more likely to get into trouble than White boys, and boys in general are almost always more likely than girls to be referred to the office for disciplinary problems and to be suspended, expelled or subjected to corporal punishment. These race and gender disparities in office referrals and disciplinary sanctions remain even after controlling for socioeconomic status (Skiba, Michael, Nardo & Peterson, 2002).

Unequal disciplinary practices contribute to the disproportionate number of Black males who fail to complete high school. In Skiba & Peterson's study (1999), more than 30 per cent of sophomores who dropped out of school had been suspended; a rate three times that of peers who stayed in school. Further, dropping out of school is a primary contributing factor to "disconnectedness". In a study of disconnected youth that dropped out of school, Allen, Almeida & Steinberg (2004) reveal that conditions and cultures in school, including unfair disciplinary policies, make it difficult for adults and young people to form relationships.

Disciplinary actions taken against young Black males are probably threatening the quality of the relationships that these boys have with their teachers. Poor teacher expectations and relationships contribute to Black males' negative perceptions of school, their problem behaviour in school, and their poor academic performance in school (Noguera, 2009). For example, negative teacher expectations have been found to predict negative learning and aggressive attitudes among males (Swanson, Spencer, Dell'Angelo, Harpalani & Spencer, 2002). Educational and psychological research clearly demonstrates that teacher-student relationships are critical for academic, psychological and social outcomes among adolescents (Roeser, Eccles & Sameroff, 2000). Indeed, Black males are placed in special education or behavioural-problem classes and experience academic failure more than any other group in U.S. schools (Schott Foundation, 2010; Noguera, 2009).

A supportive relationship with a teacher is critical for the many high school dropouts that have personal, community and family circumstances that lead to sporadic attendance and poor concentration in school (Allen, Almeida & Steinberg, 2004). For those who have experienced adversity as children, a relationship with a caring adult can protect them from poor academic performance and school engagement, substance abuse, behavioural problems, and promote psychological well-being and pro-social coping strategies (Pittman, Irby, Tolman, Yohalem, & Ferber, 2003; Wolkow & Ferguson, 2001). Perceptions of teacher support and encouragement have been found to help young Black males to achieve graduation, higher school engagement, high educational aspirations and positive expectations for the future (Jackson & Meara, 1977; Roderick, 2003).

In sum, social scientists have identified compelling connections between school disciplinary patterns and the Black-White achievement gap. Disciplinary patterns that push students out of school often lead to poor performance in school which, in part, explains the higher dropout rates among Black boys, which in turn lead to higher rates of incarceration and the over-representation of Black males in the U.S. justice system (Monroe, 2005; Noguera 2009). The discipline gap has been attributed to gender (boys), race (Black) and socioeconomic



status (poor). In Bermuda, public high schools have adopted “zero tolerance” disciplinary policies. The code of conduct handbook at one Bermudian public high school states, “Students are immediately sent out of class for the following behaviours: abuse, threats, disruptions, unruliness, and destruction of property” (Ministry of Education, 2009). It is likely that boys are more likely to be committing these infractions that lead to detentions and suspensions. Research in the U.S. suggests that these disproportionate experiences of disciplinary sanctions are likely to contribute to the higher dropout rates among boys, as compared to girls. Reducing the gender discrepancies in rates of suspension will likely require increased attention to teacher-student relationships in school. For example, do “zero tolerance” disciplinary measures inhibit Bermudian teachers’ awareness of the social-emotional, community and familial challenges behind problematic school-based behaviours?

Together, this literature review suggests a challenging trajectory for Black Bermudian boys that drop out of school. They are more likely to be unemployed, disconnected and criminally involved and, in school, they are more likely to get into trouble and to experience low teacher expectations. However, little is known about how Black students make meaning of their experiences in school, including their perceptions of their relationships with their teachers and how they mediate/administer discipline, how these perceptions shape their attitudes and dispositions towards education, or how these perceptions might vary by gender. In order to reduce the number of men “on the wall”, this study aims to understand why some youth lose their way in adolescence and in the transition from youth to adulthood.

### Research Questions

Interviews with 22 young Black Bermudian men, ages 18-30, and 35 first-year male and female high school students, will examine the following research questions:

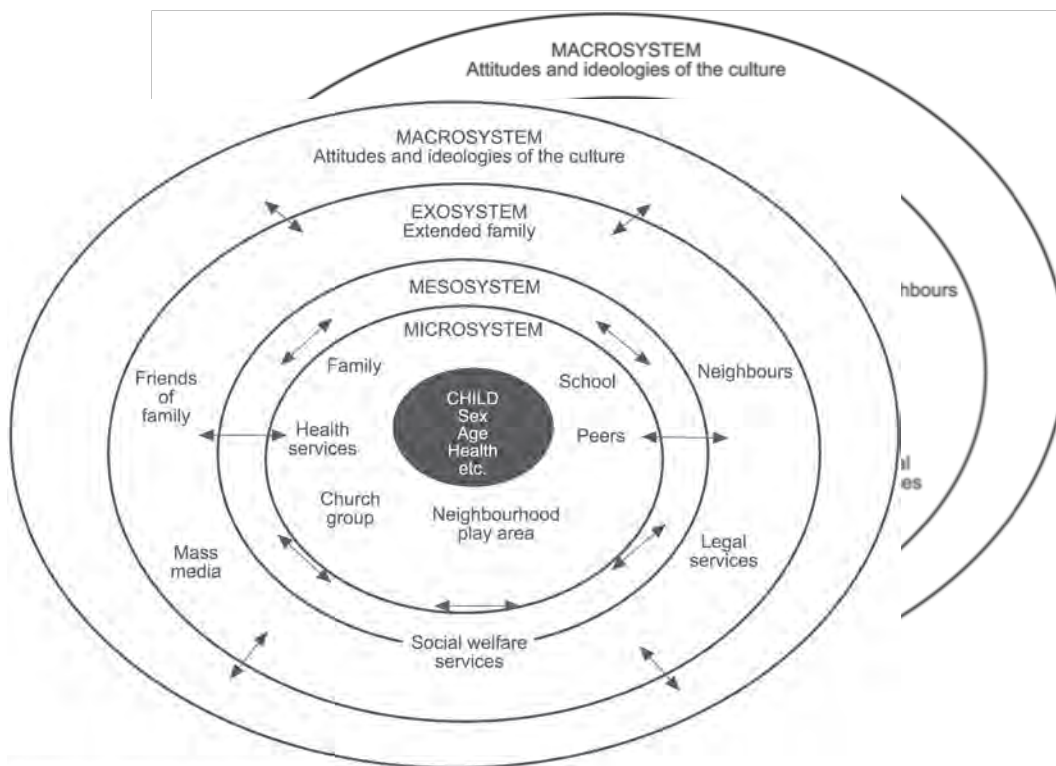
- 1- What contributes to “disconnection” in the Bermudian context? What are some of the predictors for being “on the wall”?
  - a. What are the educational and professional experiences, goals and challenges of Black Bermudian young adults that are out-of-school and unemployed/employed at very low wages/or not stably employed?
- 2- Why are Black Bermudian males more likely to drop out of high school?
  - a. How do Black Bermudian male and female high school freshmen describe and explain their educational experiences, including getting in trouble in school and their relationships with their teachers? Are there gender differences? How do these perceptions shape their educational attitudes and aspirations?

This study will produce knowledge about the risk factors experienced by disconnected youth, and provide Bermudians with the tools they need to both prevent disconnection and to create services that will aid Bermudian disconnected youth in becoming productive members of society.

## Theoretical Framework

Human ecology theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) identifies the social environment as a primary context for development and explains that the individual develops not only within his or her immediate interpersonal relationships, but also within the various environmental settings to which he or she is exposed. This theory allows for an understanding of human development that goes beyond behavioural observation, and considers how aspects of the environment and the larger social contexts inform individual development throughout the life span. The individual is embedded in multiple environmental contexts and these contexts explain variations in development.

**Figure 2. Bronfenbrenner's Human Ecology Model**



Source: Dockrell and Messer (1999, p. 139)

As seen in Figure 2, various contexts of development are like circles within circles, with the individual being at the centre. The outermost circle is the macrosystem, which holds the dominant values and beliefs of the culture in which the individual lives, and carries an ideology that endows meaning and motivation to particular roles and activities (i.e., racial and gender beliefs). The next level inward, the exosystem, includes the socioeconomic context of the society in which the individual lives (i.e., lower earnings and educational attainment for Black Bermudian men). The next level inward, the mesosystem, represents the interactions among major settings in the microsystem of the developing person (i.e., family, peer group, workplace, neighbourhoods and schools). This study examines the participants' perceptions of various macro and microsystems, including gender beliefs and family, work, school and neighbourhood contexts, to explore how these systems interact and contribute to disconnection for Black Bermudian men<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> The qualitative analysis strategy of "open coding" allows the prevalence of these various contexts to emerge from the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

**The integrative model for the study of development in minority populations** (Coll, et al., 1996) extends Human Ecology theory by emphasising the processes that lead to variation within minority populations. Rather than examining developmental deviations in comparison to white middle class populations, this theory encourages studies that examine normative developmental processes and outcomes among minority children. It also takes the stance that differences in physical, intellectual and psychological capacities are not innate, or due to a genetic or cultural deficiency. In other words, Black men are not “on the wall” simply because Black Bermudian males are deficient in some way. Instead, elements in the environment (poverty, social relationships, racial and gender beliefs) interact with the individual’s social position and personal beliefs to inform variations in development, including one’s social mobility and academic performance. This study of Black Bermudian youth and young adults allows us to examine the normative racial and gender specific perceptions and beliefs about work and school that they experience.

**PVEST: Phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory** (Swanson, Spencer, Dell’Angelo, Harpalani & Spencer, 2002) further extends Human Ecology Theory to consider how individuals make meaning of their experiences and asserts that these perceptions are in and of themselves critical contexts for development and inform developmental outcomes. For example, gender intensified behaviour such as hypermasculinity may be perceived as more effective in generating respect in the school environment, even though it may also undermine school connectedness and achievement. This current study aims to examine the meaning that Black Bermudian youth apply to experiences in various contexts and how these perceptions inform gender variations in education and disconnected status, including perceptions of the risks faced and the protective resources available.

Together, these theories are used to consider how multiple levels of social context explain variations in development among Black Bermudian youth. In this case, how gender and racial beliefs interact with experiences within various contexts in the individual’s microsystem, such as experiences with school discipline, community violence, and school and family relationships, to inform the negative developmental outcome of disconnectedness. An understanding of some of the common experiences of “disconnected” and in-school youth, and how they make meaning of those experiences, will allow us to identify the characteristics of the microsystem that are most critical for both preventing disconnection and for facilitating re-connection.

## Research Setting and Data Collection Procedures: ‘On the Wall’ Sample

(N=22, mean age=22.3)

Mincy, Jethwani-Keyser & Haldane (2009) revealed that the men “on the wall” are likely to be unemployed and unenrolled in school. Therefore, in order to understand Bermuda’s truly disconnected and “on the wall” youth, this study targeted Black men who were unemployed or unstably employed, not enrolled in any educational programme, and between the ages of 18 and 30. We worked with two Bermudian organisations to recruit 15-25 men that met our study criteria: Youth on the Move and the Hustle Truck<sup>9</sup>.

### Youth on the Move (N=15)

This not-for-profit organisation supports young disenfranchised Bermudians and advises disconnected youth on how they might access the resources they need to improve their lives through outreach, research and

<sup>9</sup> No differences were found between these two groups in terms of their demographics (age) or in the disconnected risk factors described in this report (i.e., exposure to community violence, incarceration, educational attainment).



# Chapter Two: Data & Methods

advocacy, and direct services, including job readiness, mentoring and referrals.

Recruitment for this study took place at Youth on the Move on two different occasions, the first trip was in March 2009 and the second trip was in April 2010. On each of these data collection trips, Mr. Simmons, Director of Youth on the Move, introduced the Principal Investigator (PI) of this study, Dr. Monique Jethwani-Keyser from the Center for Research on Fathers, Children and Family Well-Being at the Columbia University School of Social Work, to all of Youth on the Move's clients that met the "on the wall" study criteria (Black Bermudian males, ages 18-30, not in school and not steadily employed). Dr. Jethwani-Keyser introduced the study using a recruitment script and reviewed the contents of the assent form. Sixteen young men volunteered to participate in focus groups (n=4) or one-on-one interviews (n=11).

In 2009, Dr. Jethwani-Keyser conducted two focus groups (n=4) with "on the wall" Black men at Youth on the Move and one focus group with three Black men (mean age=27) who were formally employed at the time of the interview. These men had all worked with Youth on the Move in a professional capacity and offered some information about their educational and employment successes and challenges. This focus group is not used as primary data in this report but to offer a counterpoint to some of the experiences by the men "on the wall". In 2010, Dr. Jethwani-Keyser conducted one-on-one interviews (n=13) and each of the men who participated was given \$100, provided by The Centre on Philanthropy. Interviews and focus groups were conducted and audio recorded in the board room at Youth on the Move, a very private and safe location. The doors were kept closed to ensure the confidentiality of the data and to protect the privacy of the subjects. They were assured that their participation was completely voluntary and confidential and that they did not have to answer any questions that would make them uncomfortable. No coercion was involved. Each participant was assigned a code in order to match the assent forms with the interview data. Subject's names were not on the recordings themselves and in reporting the study, no individual identifiers were linked to the subjects.

## Hustle Truck (N=7)

The Hustle Truck is a government-sponsored programme that offers the unemployed temporary employment to do various odd jobs such as landscaping, cleaning and painting. On four different occasions over a period of three weeks during April 2010, Dr. Jethwani-Keyser presented the study to all of the men who reported to the Hustle Truck for work and were eligible for the study. Seven men volunteered to be interviewed at this location and signed assent forms. These interviews were conducted in private locations in and around the Hustle Truck building, or in the board room at Youth on the Move. The doors were kept closed to ensure confidentiality of the data and to protect the privacy of the subjects, who were assured that participation was completely voluntary and confidential and that they were not required to answer any questions that would make them uncomfortable. No coercion was involved. Each participant was assigned a code in order to match the assent forms with the interview data. Subjects' names were not included on the recordings and when the study was reported, there were no links to individual identifiers. Again, with support from The Centre on Philanthropy,

men were provided with \$100 in exchange for their participation in the interview. The \$100 created a high demand for study participation in both recruitment locations, and we experienced no difficulties in recruiting “on the wall” men for this study.

### Measurement: ‘On the Wall’ Sample

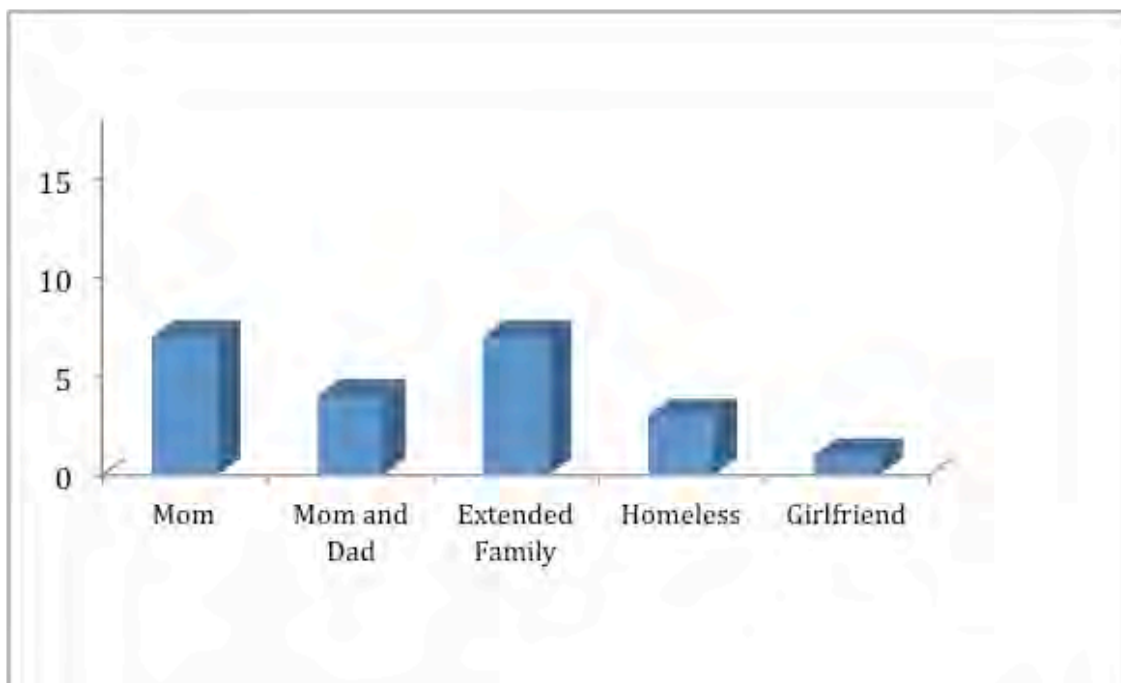
Qualitative semi-structured interviews and focus groups asked men to reflect on their educational and employment histories as well as their goals for the future, and explored their experiences at home, at work and in school (See Appendix A for the interview protocol). Interviews were conducted by the principal investigator of the study, Dr. Jethwani-Keyser, who designed the interview protocol and aimed to encourage spontaneous, rich, specific and relevant stories from the participants (Kvale, 1996). The interview protocol was used as a guide but specific areas of exploration and probing varied, based on the unique interests of each subject. Each interview conducted was audio-recorded and took approximately one hour.

### Participants (n=22): ‘On the Wall’ Sample

Participants, ranging in age from 18-29 (mean age=22) were Black Bermudian men who were not formally employed or enrolled in school at the time of the interviews. All were either hustling for odd jobs or selling drugs to make ends meet. Nineteen per cent of these men had children but none were married or living with their children. Table 3 presents the distribution of where these young men were living at the time of the interviews, an important context of their day-to-day lives to consider when assessing disconnectedness.

Table 3 shows that approximately half of the young men reported living alone with their mothers, while a third of them also live with their biological fathers. A third of the men were living with their grandmothers, aunts, or siblings, 14 per cent were homeless and moving from place to place, and one participant was living with a girlfriend. Strikingly, none were living independently.

**Table 3: Living Arrangements for ‘On the Wall’ Sample**



One or more of the following was prevalent in the lives of all men in our disconnected sample: experiences with drugs, alcohol, crime, gangs and/or violence. The majority of these men grew up in single parent households with their mothers (68.2 per cent) and had very little contact with their fathers and most of them in this sample dropped out, or were “kicked out” of high school (72.7 per cent). These statistics are explored in Chapter Three.

## Research Setting and Data Collection Procedures: High School Sample

(N=35, mean age=14.3)


In this study, a cross-sectional design was used to examine gender differences in school experience among Black male high school students. We returned to the same public high school where we interviewed high school seniors in our previous study (Mincy, Jethwani-Keyser & Haldane, 2009). In order to understand why boys are more likely to drop out of school, male and female students in S1 (first year) were recruited for this study. The selected high school serves approximately 650 students, ages 12-18, including approximately 200 first-year students. The purpose of the study, and a review of the findings from our previous study, was explained in presentations to the school administration and guidance department.

We aimed to recruit and interview 30-40 first-year Black students, both boys and girls, who represent a range of school experience and performance. With the help of the Assistant Principal, six high school English classes (one honours, three standard, and two learning support) were selected for the recruitment pool (approximately 80 students).

Over a period of two days in April 2010, Dr. Jethwani-Keyser used a recruitment script to present the study to these six high school English classes, answer questions, and review and distribute the parent consent forms. Dr. Jethwani-Keyser also provided her cell phone number and encouraged students, and their families, to call with questions about the study. She visited each of these English classes daily (at the beginning or end of the period) to collect forms and schedule interview appointments. The teachers of these English classes were supportive of the interview opportunity and encouraged students to participate. Dr. Jethwani-Keyser also attended a PTA meeting where she presented the study and, with student permission, called students and their parents to answer questions, to remind them to submit the parental consent forms, and advise that their disciplinary records would also be collected. All students who returned the parental consent forms, and signed student assent forms (n=35), participated in one-on-one interviews with Dr. Jethwani-Keyser or Serena Klempin, MSW, both staff members at the Columbia University Center for Research on Fathers, Children and Family Well-being.

Collecting parent consent forms from students proved challenging. Students reported that they were interested in participating but forgot to submit the form. Teachers reported that students frequently forget assignments and parents do not always check school bags. After the first week, having collected only a few parent consent forms, we began asking students who were interested in being interviewed if we could call to remind them to bring in the signed forms. They agreed and provided numbers where they, or their parents, might be reached. These calls successfully reminded students to submit the form and also provided an opportunity for parents to voice their concerns or questions. We scheduled interview appointments and brought Ms. Klempin to Bermuda to assist with completing these interviews in the third week of the data collection trip. This procedure was a great success and we interviewed 35 high school students (18 boys and 17 girls).

Interviews were conducted (approximately 45 minutes long), and audio-recorded, in private offices and



classrooms in the school. The doors were kept closed to ensure the confidentiality of the data and to protect the privacy of the subjects, who were assured that their participation was completely voluntary and confidential and that they did not have to answer any questions that would make them uncomfortable. No coercion was involved. Students were pulled from elective classes or during lunch break, with teacher permission, to participate in the interviews. All participants entered in a drawing for an Ipod, and one girl and one boy were selected to win a gift certificate to the Apple store. Each participant was assigned a code in order to match the assent forms with the interview data. Subjects' names were not included on the recordings and when the study was reported, subjects were not linked to individual identifiers.

## Measurement: High School Sample

**Interviews:** Semi-structured one-on-one qualitative interviews explored students' educational and professional goals, their experiences in school and at home, and their relationships with teachers. (See Appendix B for the student interview protocol). Interviews were conducted by the principal investigator of the study, Dr. Jethwani-Keyser, who designed the interview protocol and aimed to encourage spontaneous, rich, specific and relevant stories from the participants (Kvale, S., 1996). The interview protocol was used as a guide but specific areas of exploration and probing varied, based on the unique interests of each student.

**Grades and Behaviour:** To further understand the school experience of the students in our qualitative study, we also collected the third-quarter grades, attendance and discipline records for all interview participants.

## Participants: High School Sample

All participants in this study were first-year students in a public Bermudian high school (mean age = 14.3).

**Living arrangements:** Table 4 presents the frequency distribution of participating students' living arrangements. Sixty-nine per cent of the students in this study do not live with both parents; 20 per cent live with their mothers, either alone or also with siblings; 14 per cent live with their mother and stepfather; 20 per cent live with their mothers and extended family (aunts and uncles, stepfather, grandparents); 9 per cent live with extended family (no parents); and 6 per cent live with their fathers. See Table 4.

**Aspirations:** Eighty-eight per cent (94 per cent girls and 83 per cent boys) of the first-year students we interviewed indicated a clear desire to attend college. Boys were less likely than girls to entertain the possibility of enrolling at Bermuda College. In terms of careers, girls were more likely to identify a clear job title; functional knowledge of the chosen career, and/or a basic idea of how to map a trajectory that will lead them to that career. These findings corroborate the results in our previous report (Mincy, Jethwani-Keyser & Haldane, 2009) which revealed that graduating boys are not so clear about the steps they need to take to achieve their professional goals beyond high school.

**Challenges:** Forty per cent of the student sample expressed personal concerns about their exposure to the 'street life' of drugs and/or violence and 74 per cent identified a challenge in their family history. Chapter Four of this report examines these statistics.

## Qualitative Analyses

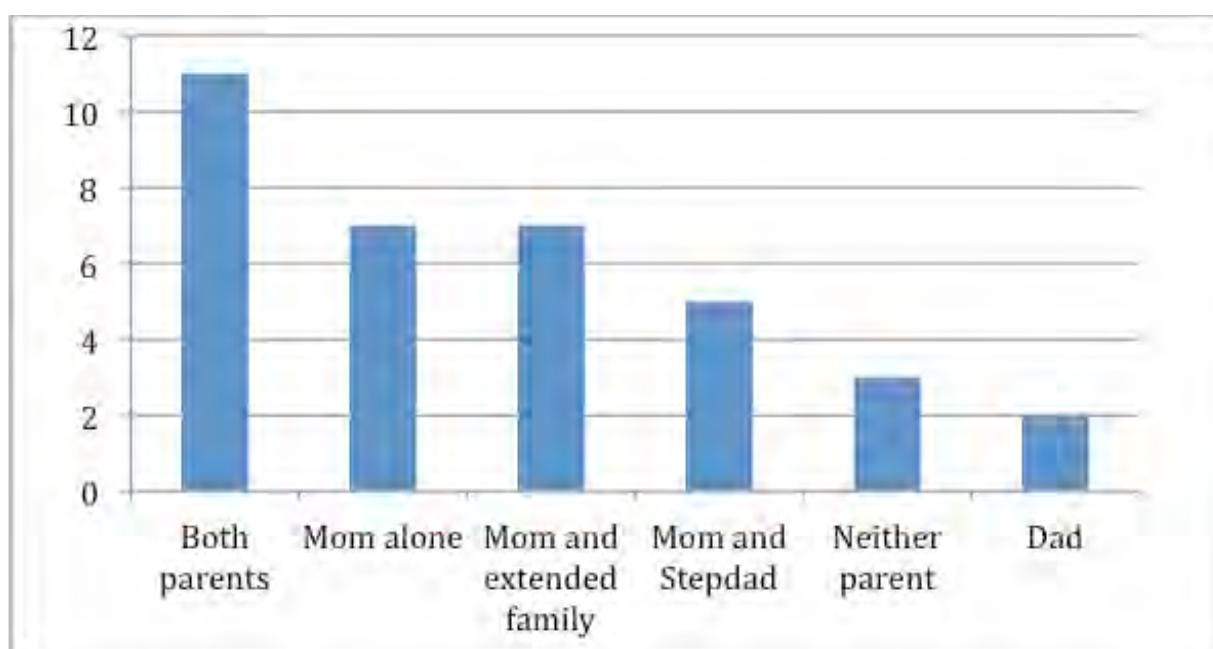
In order to conduct this analysis, Dr. Jethwani-Keyser led a team of one part-time research assistant and five graduate students in the masters of social work programme at the Columbia School of Social Work. Coding



of the qualitative data was nested in an interpretive approach, which aims to “understand the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it” (Schwandt, 1988, p.221). This study considers perceptions, and the meaning that individuals apply to experiences in various contexts, as critical contexts for development that inform developmental outcomes (Swanson, Spencer, Dell’Angelo, Harpalani & Spencer, 2002). Therefore, data analysis relied upon the qualitative methodology of open coding; a strategy that divides the data into discrete units of analysis reflective of the major themes that are embedded in the words of study participants (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Verbatim transcripts of the interviews (amounting to more than 1,200 transcribed pages) were read multiple times by members of the research team and coded with Atlas.ti software for qualitative analysis. Overlapping themes and patterns that identified common experiences and challenges at home, in school, in

**Table 4: Living Arrangements for High School Freshmen Sample**



the community or on the job were identified across transcripts. In the high school sample, the data was split by gender to allow for a comparative analysis. Networks were created to summarise, consolidate and organise the central themes regarding gender beliefs, educational and employment goals, family relationships, school relationships and neighbourhood experiences. Open coding allows the prevalence of these various contexts to emerge from the data. School-level data relating to student grades and behaviour was used as a point of comparison to student reports about their academic performance and behaviour in school. Themes are presented in this report with illustrative quotes drawn from the interview texts, staying true to the language of both the participants and the interviewer<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> Participants have been given pseudonyms to protect confidentiality. Throughout the report, italics indicate that one of the study participants is speaking and brackets indicate that the interviewer is speaking.



## Integration of the Data Analysis

In the final chapter, this report utilises the grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to look at the themes from our various qualitative studies together within the context of the research literature. Considering the similarities in the educational, earnings and crime statistics of Black males in Bermuda and the U.S., we consider the academic literature in the U.S. on disconnected Black men and Black boys a reliable source for furthering our understanding and interpretations of the findings. We review how our findings enhance our understanding of Black Bermudian males, and Black males in general, and the implications of our findings are discussed. We conclude with policy recommendations that respond directly to the themes that emerged in the data analysis.



# Chapter Three: “On the Wall” Results

## Introduction


This study begins to identify the unique challenges of disconnected youth through the examination of 22 interviews with unemployed and unenrolled young adult Bermudian males. This study reveals that some young Black Bermudian males have experienced many challenges that contributed to their current state of disconnectedness. Especially prevalent are high levels of exposure to crime and violence and experience with substance abuse. Most of those are from single-parent families and are also high school dropouts. Many experienced poor relationships at home and at school and are now struggling to find employment in order to support themselves. We begin with Daquan’s story to illustrate several of these themes. Then, this report will offer a more comprehensive analysis of the various risk factors contributing to their current “on the wall” status, including exposure to community violence, family conflict and school experiences that revolve around negative behaviours and label boys as troublemakers. Analyses will reveal how these men have internalised these challenges in a way that prevents them from being able to succeed in the area of education or employment.

Daquan is a 23-year-old young Black Bermudian man who is temporarily working with the Hustle Truck but is looking for more formal work in construction, specifically erecting dry wall and painting.

**He has a GED and aspires to attend the Bermuda College to study computer programming in order to be a better role model for his daughter, to support her, and to feel proud of himself.**

*I wanted to go to Bermuda College. I still want to go, um, my auntie says she’s going to help me and will try to get some classes for me. So I really appreciate that. [Why do you want to go to college?] Just to get a better job, have, um, what can I say, have more for my daughter, have more knowledge, so when she comes home with her school work, I ain’t there like I don’t know what to do. At least have some more knowledge so I can help her out. And plus myself, like the time I go get a job, they ask, ‘yeah, have you finished college?’ And I can say, ‘Yes, got my certificate, and I’m proud of myself’.*

Daquan’s limited educational attainment and current state of disconnectedness can be explained, in part, by his childhood experiences at home and in school. His own father left when he was only three years old, so he was raised by his mother. According to Daquan, “everything was alright until I hit 14” when he started high school at a Bermudian public school. He began getting into trouble in high school for fighting, smoking marijuana, and for skipping school. Daquan’s behaviour resulted in him being “kicked out” of both his home and his school when he was only 15 years old.



*When I was about 15, my mama kicked me out, I guess, because I was acting up at school and all of that. So she kicked me out... I won't blame it on my mama, because it's mostly my fault. I was in school doing good, but I like met people, started skipping school, started smoking weed, started coming home late. Sometimes I'll go out the whole weekend and don't come home until that Sunday night, and my mama would be like yeah, go back where you was, you won't tell nobody where you was, so you might as well go back. And ever since then, me and my mama - we're better now, because I go around and try to talk to her. But ever since then, she had a boyfriend. He always used to kick me out, and I tried to talk to her, but I can't blame her, because I was starting to steal from him and all that - steal money from him and - and he has taught me a lesson now. He has taught me a lesson, because it didn't make no sense for none of that, but me being peer pressured. I used to get kicked out for like months.*

Despite these challenges at home and in school, Daquan did have some social support. In school, he recalls having several memorable teachers that offered affection and encouragement to stay out of trouble.

**W***ell, basically what they used to tell me was stay out of trouble, um, keep your head up - because I was going through a lot of problems back then - and keep your head up. Um, I got a lot of hugs, like you know, and they made me smile, made me keep my head straight ... they always came through to try and help me, try to talk to me, tell me to stop fighting. I'm trying to tell them it's not me. They come at me and I'm just defending myself.*

Daquan believes that the teachers offered him chances to improve his behaviours, but that he went too far. Ultimately he was expelled.

*They [teachers] did give us chances ... I don't know why they [teachers] came at me, but I was in a lot of fights at school, a lot of them, and so I guess they couldn't deal with that... and plus, um, I got caught with like weed on me.*

A complicated relationship with his mother and her boyfriend left Daquan vulnerable. When he was kicked out of both school and home, the only people to whom he had to turn were his peers, an option that proved to be disastrous.

*I've been in trouble once, and never again. Yeah, for robbery. I stole this lady's purse and something bad happened to her that I didn't want to happen to her... One day I was playing football with a couple friends and, you know, I was real hungry. I asked friends; they didn't have nothing for me. So I just saw this old lady like and I must have went - I told one of my friends, yo, I'm going to rob her. And - and then two of, like grabbed her bag, and she held onto it. And like I just yanked it some more, the strap broke, I turned around and ran, they came running behind me telling me she fell. I was like, no, I didn't want all that to happen. And like she fell like right on her face, like and, you know, so for like three - three, four days, then I just turned myself in, and I told them what happened.*

In a great show of mercy, the victim felt sorry for him and dropped the charges. After six months in jail, Daquan was released on probation for three years. Now he is 23 years old and disconnected from employment and school. Daquan lives with his Aunt and has his two-year-old daughter to support. In order to meet his goals of attending Bermuda College and formal employment, he admits needing help with his resume. Daquan also describes himself as shy and has trouble talking to employers. He struggles with his feelings of confidence when

he gets no reply from would-be employers. He states, “I was calling and they said they would call me back. They don’t call me back. They don’t call me.”

Like many others in this sample, Daquan experienced a series of poor decisions, relationships and circumstances that worked together to adversely affect his life course. Exposure to street life, dropping out of high school, single-parent families and limited familial support all contributed to their current situations. Daquan’s story highlights these risk factors as well as the ways in which supportive adults at home and school, and improved communication with adults in these settings, can protect young people with these risk factors from experiencing negative outcomes. The following sections review men’s experiences with community violence and incarceration, the challenges they experienced at home and in school and the fear of failure that continues to stand in the way of their meeting educational and employment goals.

## Disconnected Risk Factors

### Street Life and Incarceration

**One or more of the following is prevalent in the lives of all men in our disconnected sample: experiences with drugs, alcohol, crime, gangs and/or violence. These encounters are the consequences of engagement with life, and peers, on “the street”.**

Like many men in this sample, Thomas, age 29, got into trouble as an adolescent for “affiliating with the wrong type of crowd... [I was] exposed to a lot of things that are just things you grow up with... you sell weed and you get props.”

Daniel, age 27, explains that being a “follower” in this wrong type of crowd resulted in his being expelled for fighting in high school. “I just see other guys around me, like [fighting] so I just followed in doing the same thing.” After being expelled, Daniel ended up in a juvenile prison and he is now “on the streets getting money”. Daniel states:

*I don’t have a full-time job - nothing like that - so, you know, I have to come out on the streets to get my money, basically. You know, um, selling drugs and stuff. Um, I made - I made high school to, uh, in the, uh, third year of high school - it’s five years there - but they changed it all up now than when I was at that age. It was five years and I made it to the third year... I got expelled out of all government schools, so, um, I had to - oh, I went to Co-Ed. That’s like a juvenile prison.*

Today, he tries not to get involved in the violence around him but says:

*It’s still around me, so like anything can happen. Like anything could happen today. Somebody could try to do something to me, and then I’ll be involved just like that, like so just because I grew up running with these guys mostly all my life, in a way you could say I am [involved].*

Daniel’s description of a typical day reveals how embedded in street life he truly is: “Just running around here, watching out for the police and - and other things and trying to make money - making money.” Daniel chose the street life path in high school and has not been able to get out. He consequently struggles with feelings of failure in the areas of both school and employment and finds it difficult to stay motivated towards his five year goal:



*I'd like to see myself in my own apartment with a job or a business, and my daughter living with me.*

**Daniel still has these goals, in spite of being deeply entrenched in the street life, which suggests the** possibility that with some support, he might still become reconnected to the formal worlds of school and employment.

Amir, age 22, acknowledges that he hung around the wrong crowd as a teenager and that he took “the easy way out” by dropping out of high school and selling drugs. He attributes this choice to his lack of role models. His mother did not encourage him to stay in school, and his brother had already succumbed to the street and seemed “happy”.

*I didn't really have nobody, you know, you know, finish this, you've got to go to school. My mama, she was a single-parent, and I never had my daddy there. So she was always working two jobs. And my brother raised me so, you know, he never finished school and he was home all day. And he was happy in my eyes... The only person I used to talk to was my brother and, you know, he was like do what you want. And I know what I want. I dropped out of school and started sitting on the streets. And, you know, selling drugs. My brother was like, well, it's up to you, man. That's all he said, it's up to you. And I said, okay, it's up to me, and I'm choosing this. You know, when we dropped out, my mama didn't really, you know, say, oh, I'm putting you back in that school. I'm going to take you back up there and re-enlist you. No, she was like you want to drop out? Oh, okay, you've got to get a job. And, you know, I made money by selling drugs, and I gave her money every week, and she was cool about it. She wasn't like, okay, you've got to do this -you've got to go back to school and get your GED. Uh-uh, more about money, bills, so. I don't know.*

Amir depicts how these various risk factors of street and criminal involvement, family context and school experience all interact and inform outcomes. He was raised by a financially troubled single mother in a home where education was not a priority. Instead, his brother who was out on the streets selling drugs offered a pathway to making quick money. However, the street life proved to be far less lucrative than Amir had imagined. He has been without a steady place to live since he was 16 years old and has to stay away from certain places to keep out of trouble. He makes ends meet through temporary work with the Hustle Truck, but is finding it extremely difficult to enter the formal job market.

Amir expresses his frustration over the challenges of finding employment: “Stuff is hard. There’s a recession; no jobs. You can’t get a good job like that. You know, money’s not as plentiful.” For disconnected youth without traction in the formal market and limited educational attainment, the recession served to exacerbate their challenges. Unemployment makes it all the more difficult to escape “the street life”. Amir advises younger boys not to turn to the streets:

*I tell them, look it's not the way man, it's not the way. You want to do the same thing I wanted to do at that age, drop out, make money this way and that way, go party and all that, it's all fun at the time, but when you get older, it's not fun. You get bills that you've got to pay, you know?*

Considering the earnings realities for young Black men in Bermuda with limited educational attainment, the financial rewards of street life can be great. However, there has been a recent surge in gun violence on the

Island (Jones, Bermuda Sun, July 23, 2010) and many are concerned about this added danger in their lives. Ethan, age 22, states:

*It's hard right now. It's hard with all this gang stuff going on. Idle time on your hands will get you in trouble, you know what I mean?*

Ethan is faced with “idle time” after being laid off from a government job where he was working as a mechanic. His limited educational attainment made him vulnerable to being laid off in a challenging economic.

*I was there for four years and they just laid me off, like I'll say four months ago... We had plenty of meetings before about people getting laid off and stuff, like because of the money that's getting held like. You know what I'm saying? Because right now there's a recession... there's a shortage of money right now to give out, like you know, there ain't no overtime or nothing like that.*

Ethan was never incarcerated, but by nature of where he lives, and the friends he has, he finds it is difficult to break away from his “thug” reputation. He explains how he became associated with being a “thug” in school:

*Because of the type of people I used to hang around. See what I'm saying? Like we all lived around each other, and we all go to the same school, you know what I'm saying? So because we all live in the same neighbourhood, we all hang in the same area, you know what I'm saying. We all go to the same school, and we're all in the same classes, you know what I mean, so it's just like that.*

Ethan was “kicked out” of high school in his sophomore year for fighting and he never achieved his GED.

Men frequently describe the prevalence of the street life of gangs, violence, drugs and alcohol in their neighbourhood, home and school environments. Those without a connection at home or at school are particularly vulnerable to the sense of community that Bermuda's gangs offer them. Most of the men in this study (n=22) admitted to being involved with drugs (72 per cent): using, selling or both.

But this pathway also carries severe consequences.

### **Many men in the sample have been shot, or have friends who have been shot.**

Connor, age 20, feels that he can't leave his five block neighbourhood.

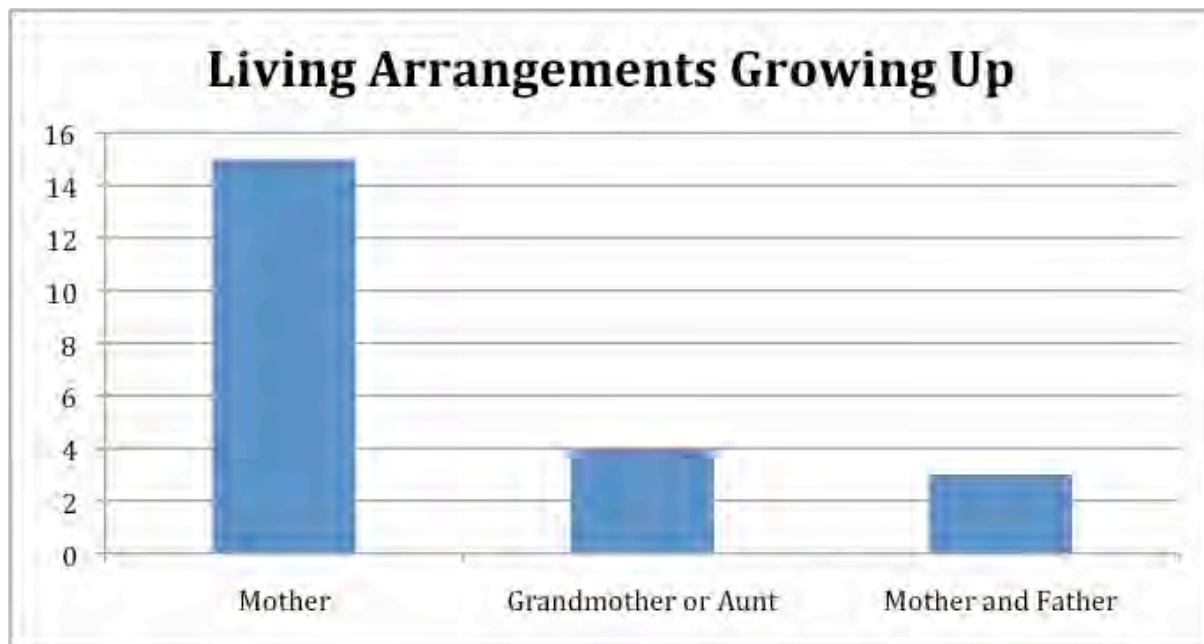
*If my job says we've got to go up to the country, I ain't going. In fact, I'm quitting that job then, you know? Because I ain't getting myself killed or something... I think it's just getting worse. Stuff's just getting started in Bermuda really. All those guns and all this, that stuff ain't gonna stop.*

Connor goes on to explain that this problem is more prevalent among men: The women, the girls, seem more focused. Well, the ones that are focused are more focused on what they want to do. Like, they ain't getting caught up in the social weed smoking, and you know, violence, or whatever. And, they know what they want, and they just go straight for it. Like, the guys gonna get, tend to get caught up in the street culture.

The majority of men admit that their criminal involvement resulted in probation or incarceration (57.1 per cent) with at least half of these arrests occurring in adolescence.

Drug involvement and incarceration before the age of 16 leaves young men particularly vulnerable to long-

## Family Conflict



term disconnection from the worlds of school and work, making educational engagement a powerful drug and crime prevention strategy. In sum, the lure of street life is powerful and pervasive, particularly for those without connection to school, or without family support. Men are disappointed with their current situations but do not see a way out.

In addition to this high exposure to gangs, violence and substance abuse, the men in this sample also experienced high degrees of family conflict and limited familial support. The majority of men in the disconnected sample ( $n=22$ ) grew up in single-parent households with their mothers (68.2 per cent) and with very little contact with their fathers. Only 13.6 per cent of the men in our sample grew up with their fathers living in the home. The other 18.2 per cent was raised by their grandmother or aunt. See Table 5.

Many Black children in Bermuda are living in single-parent households. According to the 2000 census, single-parent families account for 19 per cent of Bermudian family households (Bermudian Department of Statistics, 2006). In 2000, 23 per cent of Black Bermudian families were raised by single-parents, compared with only 9 per cent of White Bermudian families. Women were primarily responsible for these families in at least 85 per cent of both cases. Overall, Black children were more than four times more likely to live in a single-parent family than White children, with 37 per cent of Black Bermudian children under the age of 10 in single-parent families. In 2000, the Bermudian Census also revealed that the family income of single-parent households was less than half of the income of families with married couples.

A majority of men in this sample describe single family homes that were also full of strained relationships. Two thirds of the sample had highly strained, or non-existent, relationships with their fathers and 43 per cent reported having strained relationships with their mothers. When asked to reflect on family relationships, the men “on the wall” report having few close relationships with family members where they could find emotional support or guidance.



In spite of the challenges of having “idle hands” in the context of the heightened violence in Bermuda that Ethan describes above, he identifies his “family life” as the biggest challenge in his life. Ethan was very close with his grandmother who died when he was six. After her death, he lived with his grandmother’s friend but really missed the closeness he recalls having had with his nana.

*I used to sleep with my nana, everything, you know what I mean? And when my nana died, you know, I was at the hospital. I read her a book and the next day she was gone. You know, that really touched me, like when she left. Her friend took me, you know, and I really had to adjust to their type of living when I moved with them, meaning like I weren’t no longer sleeping with my nana. Like I really, you know, she weren’t cooking for me what I wanted, you know what I mean? You know what I’m saying? Like I was sleeping by myself type of thing, I mean, I didn’t have nobody waking me up. Like rubbing my back, you know what I mean?*

Ethan’s mother works in the airline industry and was not always available to him growing up. Now, he only sees his mother every two to three months.

*I don’t see my mom much often like, you know, how other people wake up in their house with their momma and stuff like....I love my mom even more, when I see her, you know what I’m saying, because I don’t see her much.*

Ethan sees his father every day because he lives nearby, but does not consider him to be a father figure in his life.

*It ain’t how like other families are, like you know. Like my daddy, like it’s just different. That’s all. It’s different like... I don’t really have conversations with him. You know. I wouldn’t even say he’s like a daddy type of thing. [What did he say in high school when you were having all of those troubles?] Nothing really, because I never really talked to him, you know?*

Ethan feels that he missed out by not having a close family and reports being jealous of other families when he was growing up. When asked what kind of family he wanted, he replies: Like spend more time with me like, you know? Let’s do things together as a family like how you see other families doing it, you know what I mean? Like just do family things. Like that’s what I was missing, you know what I mean? And how you would see your friends and their parents, you know, going out, doing things, you know, going places. You see them like as a family. I used to go to my friend’s house, right, and see how their families were, and see how they usually get treated and stuff like that, like, you know, like all fine and dandy... It was more like rough loving like, you know?

Ethan’s family experience is not so different from the other men in this “on the wall” sample. Many wished for more closeness and/or guidance from family members.

Amir enjoyed school but had no one pushing him to stay in school or to give him advice about his future, and he succumbed to the financially rewarding but risky job of selling drugs.

*High school I was more of a – I’ll say a follower. You know, I looked at my family and they didn’t finish high school. So I was like, well, if nobody’s worrying about finishing high school, why do I really have to worry about it. So I just never finished. You know, I dropped out of school. I didn’t even make it past my first year.*

Amir had no family members offering an alternative to dropping out of high school, and the financial needs of

the family were more pressing than his educational needs. Now, Amir is having trouble finding work and regrets his failure to attain a GED.

*I've been with the Hustle Truck for quite a while, because I can't get a full-time job. And I don't have my high school diploma, or anything equivalent to it, so it's hard finding a job.*

In addition to limited familial support or guidance, familial conflict was a prevalent theme in the sample. One-third of the sample reported having strained relationships with their mothers and many were “kicked out of the house” several times throughout adolescence. For example, in high school, Shane was on probation for possession of a controlled substance. He was arrested for violating his parole and his mother testified against him because “she felt that jail would calm me down”. Although he now lives with his mother, they have minimal interaction and he reports that they never talk about school or employment. “It’s just my momma and myself. ‘Hello, how are you doing? You all right? What you cooking? See you later.’”

Darryl, age 28, reports that his mother “couldn’t deal with me no more” so she sent him to a group home when he was 13 years old. He thinks that he could have benefited from having his father around or by having a mother who offered him more advice. He explains,

*Maybe if my father was around, I don't know, I probably would have been - had plenty of money, or my own business, or been more focused in life. You know? Because they say the father plays a key role, you know, in a relationship to their child. [When you were younger, what kind of advice did your mom give you?] She always tell me don't come home. That's the only advice I remember. Don't come home messed up over a girl and clinging to her. I expected her to say that, but I was just like geez, that's the only advice I get? I don't remember no other advice. That's the only thing I remember.*

Now Darryl feels “lonely” because he is by himself a lot. He is becoming more and more disconnected as his learning disability and drug and alcohol “habit” take over, limiting his housing and job prospects and his relationships with others, including his daughter.

*I didn't really care about nobody. Actually I still don't, besides my daughter. That's the truth. Because I was brought up so hard and I held everything in, the only thing helping me is this disease in my head because it makes me forget fast.*

Darryl not only needs a GED and a job, but also academic supports, substance abuse and mental health counselling and fatherhood services. He admittedly could use a mentor in his life.

*Mostly men, some people just want somebody to talk to them sensible, and just want them to be their friend. Like that's all. That's me. No bull crap, and like they're straight up.*

**Men were hungry for the family closeness and guidance that researchers have identified as crucial for adolescent development** (Dubow et al., 2001; Jackson & Meara, 1977; Roderick, 2003; Rumberger et. al, 1990). The literature also points to the critical role that fathers play in child development, especially for boys (Cabrera, Shannon & Tamis-LeMonda, 2007). Most men in this study experienced limited contact with their fathers. When asked how often he sees his father, Breon, age 18, states: I see him when I see him. It's no big deal. [How often do you see him?] I don't know. I used to look for him, like,

yeah, my daddy's not here, my daddy's gone. But now it's just like, why am I getting worried over this? That's the usual. You don't come all the time, so you know, you get used to it... We never talked about nothing like that [advice] on life... He don't come around, like that's his problem. No big deal.

Similarly, when asked about the last time he saw his father, Connor replies:

*A few years ago. I don't know. I see him...He sees me and acts like he don't see me like. Yeah, like just keep going. I don't have nothing to say to him, um, being that he really ducks out from me like that.*

Nathan, age 18, has some contact with his father but explains the volatility of this relationship:

*We have a love/hate relationship really, because like sometimes he would tell me come up to his house. I would come over there, I would stay there for a little while. Then I would do something wrong and he'd get mad at me. I was like 'you just kicked me out and now you want me to come back the following week after you kicked me out'? I didn't understand why. That's just how me and my daddy have a tendency of communicating to each other... One time, I had borrowed a phone that wasn't mine. It was in my room, I found it in my room. It happened to be his. He said go get the phone. So I go get the phone and I bring it back. He was mad and at that point he tried to fight me. I started fighting back. I didn't want to hit him, but I didn't hit him. I shoved him really and he shoved me back and that's when I picked up something to hit him with. He's like 'go ahead and hit me'. I said 'no', I didn't want to hit him so I just went into my room. I think this was like a year and a half ago. From that point on, it's pretty much been, you know, distance between us.*

Few sons reported having fathers that provided life advice and they never spoke of their fathers talking with them about life after high school.

A focus group conducted with a small group of employed Black Bermudian men revealed that these men were more likely to live in two parent families and to have family members who they turned to for guidance, support and encouragement. For example, George, age 29, had parents who "always told us to do the right thing, always told us to go the right way". Kenny, age 26, describes how his mother was deeply engaged in his education and future.

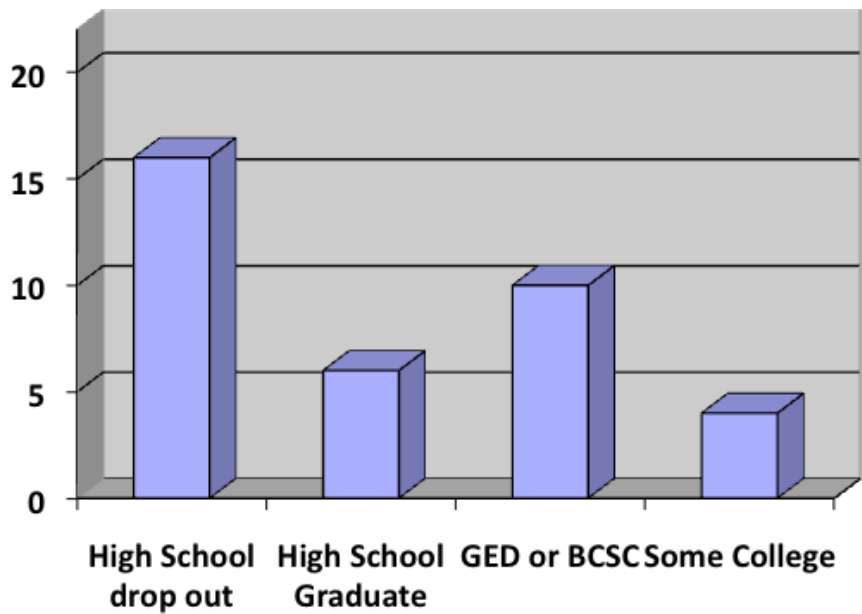
*She'd just basically tell me, my brother, and my sister that we didn't need to be out on the streets to make it ahead in life, you know what I mean? Stay in school and stuff and it will work out for you in the end, as opposed to hanging out in the streets. Even though she used to let me hang out, she always seemed to make sure that before I go out that my homework was done and she knew what schoolwork I was doing, what like me, my brother, and my sister were doing. Like, she got involved that much, you know? And also, she would pretty much know if I'm getting in trouble or something like that. She would always warn me what path I could go down if I decide to keep going that way.*

Kenny's mother would help him think through the educational consequences of various decisions he might have made. In contrast, the unemployed men in this study come predominantly from single-parent households and did not have family members who offered this level of support.

The high degree of family conflict experienced by the men in this study created an emotional void for them and many articulate a desire for mentors. Studies of urban Black adults in the U.S. reveal that perceptions of close family ties protect against the detrimental effects of chronic economic strain, including depression (Brown, Gary, Greene & Milburn, 1992). Coupled with the exposure to street life, “on the wall” men with low levels of support in the family were particularly needy for the protective factor of a positive school community.

Those without a GED are especially aware of the importance of “qualifications”. Nathan explains that business-oriented jobs are off limits without a GED: It’s very important. Most of the jobs, you can’t get a job without a GED - the majority of the jobs....I tried to get a job at Princess, you needed a GED. I tried to get

**Table 6: Educational Attainment of ‘On the Wall’ Sample**



Unfortunately, as we will see in the next section, few participants experienced feelings of belonging in school, instead the majority were “kicked out” of high school.

As Table 6 shows, the majority of men in this sample (n=22) did not complete high school (72.7 per cent). Of these high school dropouts, 62.5 per cent went on to complete a GED or BCSC certificate. Only four attended college and none of the participants have college degrees. In an economy that is becoming more and more knowledge-based, minimal educational attainment greatly reduces employment opportunities. As a result, further educational attainment is a primary goal of many men in the sample.

Paul, age 20, was incarcerated in high school and earned his GED in the detention facility. He has been working as a helper for plumbers and electricians and is currently working with the Hustle Truck. He explains the struggles he has experienced in looking for a job without an advanced degree.

*Nowadays you can’t really get a job without qualifications - not a decent job. You know? You can’t really make it with- - without no qualification. I’ve been trying to get a job for at least this - what is it now? April, May, June, July - almost a year now - nine months really.*

a job at mainly businesses really, because shops and companies, um, market place, I mean, any grocery store, construction companies, any type of, um, landscaping and all that type of stuff, they will give you a job if you don't have a GED. But any businesses, you won't be able to do it.

Without a GED, Amir has had trouble securing or holding down any type of employment. When his mom found him a job at ACE "filing and doing spreadsheets" he was soon replaced by someone with their high school diploma. He explains:

*I can't get a good job, you know? They look at that and, okay, he hasn't finished school, okay, let's put him to the side. When my mama used to work at Ace Insurance, I was working there for a period of time as a summer student, but I didn't have my high school diploma and all of that. And somebody else came there and they had their high school diploma. They just let me go and just put him right in my spot there. I was wondering why... I go okay, this - I'm really qualified to do this. I know how to do the work. I showed them I know how to do the work... but if somebody comes there with their papers and their qualifications that they really look for, they're going to let me go and hire them. I know that for a fact. Even I tried to get a job in government, and - well, at parks - and you need a high school diploma to cut grass. How - how - why - what - what does that have to do with cutting grass? But I went there to fill out the application, and I didn't have my high school diploma. Somebody else went there with their high school diploma, younger than me, and they got the job.*

The majority of men in this sample, especially the high school dropouts, are disappointed in their educational attainment and in their school experiences, and in the employment opportunities available to those with limited education.


The following sections qualitatively examine men's school experiences in an effort to understand why so many of them were "kicked out". Our analysis reveals that most men were expelled from high school for disciplinary reasons that included fighting or involvement with drugs and/or street life. These men recall interactions with teachers that centred on negative behaviour and disciplinary consequences and they interpret these in-school experiences as evidence of a stigma as a result of their street associations. These experiences left these now "on the wall" men disconnected from their school community – a powerful protective factor for boys exposed to the risks associated with familial conflict, crime and violence. Although more than half of these men went on to attain a GED, they exhibit limited academic motivation and as we have already seen, most have succumbed to the pressures of street life. Dropping out of high school left them with both a reputation for low productivity and the lack of self confidence they needed to go on to college or establish traction in formal employment.

## Getting 'Kicked Out' of School

The men in our sample who had dropped out of high school frequently recalled school as a place where they did not feel like valued members of the community. Many men in this sample report a long history of disciplinary problems, including suspensions and expulsions, and limited positive relationships in school.

Darien, age 20, is currently at the higher levels of one of the Bermudian gangs. In high school, he was kicked out of school after his first year for fighting.

*I had done my first year. When I came back my second year, they kicked me out... Why did I get kicked out?*



*I - we started a little riot in school. It was like a neighbourhood riot - different neighbourhoods. There was a lot of us. It was a big fight. That's why I got kicked out. That was like my last straw. I got kicked out of school.*

Darien reports that he had “no problems” with his teachers. “It was all right. You know, they just taught me.” However, he found school ‘boring’ and believed that his teachers were just waiting for him to turn 16 so that they could expel him.

*I never really wanted to talk about it [the fighting], because there really ain't nothing to talk about... I just got suspended and stuff like that... I knew they were trying to kick me out, so when they pulled me in, they gave me a paper to sign to like say I was finished. And that's when I just turn 16, so it's like, it was all right for them to kick me out then, so they kicked me out.*

Darien went on to achieve his GED and is now satisfied with his earnings “on the street” but his family’s deep involvement with gang activity makes him unable to envision where he will be in five years.

*It's hard to think five years down the line again. You don't know if you're going to make it five years down the line. It doesn't make sense thinking about five years. Five years is too far. I've got to think about tomorrow. Not even tomorrow - the next hour. Anything can happen.*

Without a school community, many of the high school dropouts recalled the pull of street distractions to earn money - or, they felt pushed into that trajectory. Shane, age 22, attended a public Bermudian high school before becoming incarcerated at age 15 for selling drugs and for violating his probation. When his mother testified against him, he was sent to a juvenile facility where he earned his GED. Although he “likes wherever books are”, he found the teachers at his high school uninspiring because they “didn’t want to be there”.

*I really love not knowing something and then knowing it. Like when I sit in school. But I lost a lot of respect for school when I found out that I was burdening a lot of my teachers. That's really not cool. I remember when we they used to get me up in front of the class and make me read books, like read them, read them, read them. And, you know, before I knew it, I started liking them. Then I'd find that she [teacher] would just be like go outside and play. I'd just go outside and bop somebody, make them cry and I could be punished for a whole month and I could just stay inside. We'd go to the book store and I'd buy books to read. Then it started getting fun bopping people.*

Although Shane enjoyed staying inside so that he could read, his relationships with his teachers were centred on the negative behaviour on the playground. Shane completed his GED while in prison and started courses at Bermuda College, but soon dropped out when he learned he could make more money in the streets selling drugs.

*You know, the streets is making more money. And it's hard to stay focused in school when I calculate how much money I'm losing. And at that time, I was just 16, so I wasn't looking at the bigger picture... so right now, I probably would have had a master's if I just would have stuck in there a while longer. But hey, that's life.*

Disciplinary actions that removed boys from the school setting – suspension and expulsion – especially without seeking to address or understand the cause of the problem, were deeply problematic for these men.

Daniel “made it” to his third year of high school before he “got expelled out of all government schools” for “fighting”. He explains that although teachers would tell him to stay out of trouble, they ultimately sent him away

to a group home, after which he ended up in the juvenile prison.

*They were just like, um, stop being rude, stop getting into trouble, like and, um, oh, you mean what type of - they'll say, oh, well, we're gonna send you to timeout at a different school, like when you get in trouble they send you. And they did do that too. Then I ended up going in the home - the kids' home. Then from there I went to Co-Ed - to the juvenile prison.*

One teacher whom Daniel did really like would pull him aside after class to discuss his behaviour.

*She just used to keep it real, like she didn't like me getting into trouble. She would talk to me and, like you know what I mean, tell me like I shouldn't do certain things, or what not to do - do this and do that. But she won't, um, look down on me or nothing, or like she wouldn't even try to get me in trouble. She would talk to me. That's why a teacher like that, I wouldn't even get in trouble in her class or nothing... Any other teacher would tell the principal - probably get suspended for three days - she wouldn't even worry about it. She just talked to me and I never had no problems with her in her class.*

Teachers who dealt with problems by threatening to expel students made Daniel feel “looked down upon”. But teachers who “talked” to him about how to improve his behaviour made him feel heard, and cared for, in school. High school dropouts indicated that they were motivated to show up at school each day when they were valued – as students and as individuals – by teachers, administration and peers. Like many in this study, Daniel thought school was important because “it shows you like a lot of things that you need – the skills and tools that you need to go through life,” but when he started hanging around older peers he was drawn into the street culture of fighting and selling drugs, and ended up in juvenile prison. Now, Daniel suffers from depression and is living in the streets.


Breon also exhibited many behavioural problems in school. Looking back, he is deeply cynical about the degree to which teachers cared about his academic or personal success. Breon articulates that he would have liked specialised attention and someone encouraging him to “take it serious”, but that he did not feel he was a valued member of his school. Instead, he believes the teachers were biased against guys from his part of town.

*I've got issues where I don't take school serious. I just need the motivation to take it serious. If I make them give me motivation, they're getting me out of there. They don't want to work. Anything that they don't have to do, they're not going to do. They're biased out there, man. They don't like guys from around here, honestly, because enough situations has happened like little scuffles and all this happened, and people from around here has been suspended one time. And people from the other side, they just go to school the next day and they're the ones that pop it off sometimes. They start the whole thing but they get away scot free.*

Breon believed that the teachers were not interested in working hard enough to engage him, and that the disciplinary measures were more extreme for him than they were for everyone else:

*[What was school really like for you?] Work, work, work, and then work, work, work, you piss somebody off, they exaggerate and hit you with five-day suspension for something like you're wearing sneakers to school instead of shoes, you know, school shoes - a five-day suspension. I don't like that school.*

Breon is left with the perception that the teachers did not care about him.



*They [teachers] don't care over there really. They really don't care. If you step out of line once, they send you. They don't care about students there... If you make them look good, they're going to keep you on. If you make them work, they're getting rid of you.*

Without a source of academic encouragement or in-school connection, Breon lacked the motivation to stay in school.

*High school teachers don't look at you like you're a human being. They just look as if you're a student slash prisoner so you know, unless you jump when they say jump, you don't belong there, you know what I mean?*

If the teachers had been able to connect with Breon, he might have told them that his family and living situation became unstable.

*I went to high school, got kicked out of the house while I was in high school, went to my nana's house, got kicked out of my nana's house when I was in high school - this was all in the same year, like within eight months. From my nana's house, I went back to my mama's house for a weekend. She purposely provoked this little dumb, little argument. So from there I went to the group home. From the group home - I was up there for a couple months - got into it with the guy up there. They sent me away.*

When asked if anyone in school knew that this was happening at home Breon says: No, it didn't matter. It was none of their business really... They didn't care. They worry about how you look; how you function in their school. All that other stuff, they don't care about that. Unless you're doing something that makes your school look good, like saying 'yes, I love my school, I work very hard, and all that type of stuff, then they'll praise you. [Who did you turn to for advice?] Myself. I just - I just - I just fall back. I - I was just battling everybody.

Breon was already disconnected from his family, and his behaviour in school left him disconnected from the school.

When boys experienced student-teacher relationships in school that emphasised negative behaviour, and discipline that removed them from their classrooms and was perceived as unjust or out of proportion to the offence, they developed the belief that no one cared if they stayed. Without a connection at home, Breon's only outlet was the street. He aimed to enter the Bermudian military but was incarcerated for drug possession and is now unemployed struggling to get by. His story demonstrates the importance of catching young men at risk before they leave school. In our study with high school seniors (Mincy, Jethwani-Keyser & Haldane, 2009), we learned that positive teacher relationships were often dependent on teachers' beliefs that the students were committed to working hard. Breon argues that the teachers just give up on those students who they do not believe possess this internal drive.

## The Thug Reputation

Many men in this study believe that throughout their school years, they were perceived negatively because of their choice of friends and where in Bermuda they were from. Some indicated that teachers labelled them as troublemakers, bad apples, gang members or thugs and, as such, treated them unfairly. Thomas explains: You're labelled and stereotyped and then they're more harder on you and they just pick you out. So they're more harder and you don't have that many chances.



This reputation fueled the emphasis on disciplinary sanctions that left men feeling that they were treated more harshly than other students.

Alex, age 22, describes high school as a good experience because he was a quick learner. However, he also describes how his teachers perceived him as a disruptive student.

*[How did you experience high school?] It was all right. Well, I catch on pretty fast. You know, if you show me something, I'll just catch on pretty fast, because I used to do my work, and then I'd be talking. And then people ain't doing their work, and then they think I'm causing the disruption, but the whole time, my work's done. So, I don't know.*

Alex had the potential to do well in school but was perceived as a 'troublemaker', both in and out of the classroom. He describes how he eventually got "kicked out" of school for fighting: I got kicked out from the old public school of Bermuda. I really couldn't go to school no more. You know, I got into a little altercation in the school. They pulled a couple of us out and I was one of them... It was a little fight. Well, two guys were fighting, you know? I got in the middle, and then I got hit, so then I started fighting. And they had it all on camera. That wasn't the first, you know, first piece of trouble I got into in school, so all the little small things just added up. And then they just pulled me out.

In spite of this altercation, Alex believes that his potential should have earned him another chance to achieve graduation. He states: [Would you have stayed if they gave you another chance?] Yeah, of course! The year was just started, and that's where I wanted to be. That's why I was there.


After high school, Alex went on to achieve his GED but is frustrated in his recollections of high school because he cared about school. He even suspects that his teachers cared about him which leaves him wondering why they wouldn't give him another chance.

*I cared. That's why I got my GED right after I got out. If they'd never kicked me out, I would have still graduated. I wasn't failing no classes. [Did you feel like the teachers cared about you?] Yeah, they cared. They cared about me. [But they weren't willing to give you another chance?] No. Not at all. I don't know why. I really don't.*

These young men all struggled in school and many fell to temptations in the community and experienced peer pressure and peer conflicts. These challenges translated into behavioural problems in school that could not be tolerated and influenced their teachers' perceptions and expectations of them.

Unjust disciplinary experiences, and feeling picked on, were often embarrassing for the men in our study. Some recalled uncomfortable situations when teachers "called them out" in front of the class and used embarrassment as motivation. Instead, these practices discouraged these students from working or trying hard in school. Ethan describes a class that he failed,

*I would ask [the teacher] something, and she would try to expose me, like making fun to the whole class, you know, say things to me... And it made me feel like I was different from the others. [What kinds of things would she say that made you feel that way?] She would say like, 'look, I don't think this class is for you because you're failing as it is' and, you know, stuff like that. I wanted to tell her you're not talking to me like that. She had no sympathy. Like, all right, I understand your struggle, let me just sit beside him and like help him with everything.*



Ethan's inability to talk to his teacher left him in a position where he did not ask for help and he consequently failed the class. Like many others, Ethan cites, "a lot of discrimination in the school" and feels that "they have their favorites." Ethan hung out with the kids from his neighbourhood and found that they were all getting in trouble for the same kinds of things.

*They like affiliate you, because we hang around, like you know what I mean? So they were like, oh, we don't want you in our school, because you're, like you're a different type of boy, like you know what I mean? It was like they just - I don't know. It's like they discriminate... It's like - it's like they have favorites, you know what I mean? Some teachers have favorites like. [How did you know that you were not the favorite?] Well, because how I used to get treated. I would tell the teacher things and it would go in one ear and out the other. Like she would act like she was in concern, like you know, like she was acting like she was concerned, but she's not. So like she would say something to me, but not really mean it... They would call me into the office, and were like, 'you've been a disturbance in this particular class' or something like that, but they wouldn't say nothing to the other boy.*

Ethan describes being devalued as a student, and getting unfairly blamed for things he didn't do. He wanted teachers to do more than just "give you work and tell you 'don't talk to me unless your works done'". Instead, he wanted a teacher to "walk around with you, see how you're doing, ask if you need help, you know, talk with you for a little while". The lack of personalised attention limited his motivation, "a lot of people tell you, promise you things, and never follow through. And that's what discourages a lot of the youth in Bermuda". Ethan reports that he would have taken "an opportunity for a scholarship to do football or mechanics or something like that to the full effect" but that he needed someone to help him "make it happen". It is not enough to "just say go get your scholarship and stuff like that". In school, Ethan's continued negative behaviour ultimately cost him his high school diploma.

Men interpret the inequalities in academic support and disciplinary sanctions that they observe as a lack of concern for their well-being. In spite of perceptions of biased treatment, desire for teacher support and encouragement courses through the narratives. But when teachers perceive them as troublemakers, and boys are instead disregarded or discriminated against, feelings of belonging and their relationships with their teachers are affected, putting these men at risk psychologically, academically, and socially and consequently putting them "on the wall".

Nathan offers another example. He reports enjoying school but had to miss school for an entire year after a serious bike accident. Upon his return he found that he was getting into trouble "arbitrarily".

*One time I was out in the courtyard. Me and another friend was having a dispute like. A teacher came and said that I had cursed, but everyone there said I didn't curse, and she was asking for my name and asked, 'Who's your advisory teacher'? And I didn't want to give it to her, because I knew I didn't curse. So I said whatever. I walked off and left, and she was following me down the hall, and I said I didn't say anything, get away from me, and I ended up going up to my next class, and that's when I heard my name on the intercom saying come down to the office. And the principal was saying, 'Were you being disrespectful to this teacher'? And I said, 'No, I wasn't'. She was asking me for my name and my advisory teacher, and she was saying that I was cursing, and she was going to write me up. And I said I didn't curse. And from there, she was then saying, well, from not listening to what the teacher had to say, I ended up getting suspended for the rest of the week. That happened on a Wednesday. Out of school suspension... And then another time was when we weren't supposed to be wearing like shirts underneath our school shirts. I had a white t-shirt underneath my*

school shirt, and I was walking through the hall. The same teacher, she was talking to somebody, like standing up talking to somebody right across from her that was another person I knew. It was a friend of mine, she was talking to him, and he had the same thing I wore. His shirt was - well, the shirt that he had on under his school shirt was hanging out, and she was talking to him. I was walking across and she saw that my shirt was hanging out, and she was telling me take the t-shirt off. Go to the office and take it off. I was like no, because I sweat a lot. I have to have a shirt on. I told her no and I kept on walking and she followed down the hall. I said, 'You know what, all right, whatever'. I went to the office, took it off, and as I was walking out of the office, she stopped me and asked me do I have anything to say to her. I was like what do you mean? You're not going to apologise? I was like apologise for what? You were being rude to me when I was telling you to take your shirt off. I said I wasn't, because one of my, um, teachers from my advisory class was good and said I could wear this shirt. Well, you have to get a notice from the principal to say you can. I didn't have that. So when I did take it off, I was coming out, like I said, she was asking for an apology, I said, 'No', because I didn't - I wasn't being rude to you. And I got suspended again for that.

Nathan did not feel the faculty were invested in listening to his side of the story and that he was unfairly disciplined. These experiences pushed Nathan out of the school community.


Considering the family turmoil that so many of these men experienced, a more intensive approach to understanding boys' behaviour may serve to keep them connected to school and off the streets. Kicking boys out of school puts the problem on an alternative "system" that, in Bermuda, does not exist. For example, Ian's father was killed in prison and he explains how his father's limited availability while incarcerated, and his death shortly before Ian's pivotal transition from middle school to high school, left him without a role model.

*My daddy weren't around. He was locked up but, you know, he was still my father, you know. We still got along. And then after that, ever since he died, like in prison... I was just about to leave the middle school and go to high school. Yeah. It was hard for me because, you know, ain't a role model, like you know what I'm saying?*

When his father died in prison, Ian did not talk to anyone at home or at school about what he was going through. He believes that someone in school should have "fixed" his problem, helping him to identify why he was struggling academically, or being disruptive. Ian was a part of a counselling group in school but did not perceive it as a sincere attempt to understand him, or his problems.

*[What could they have done in that counselling situation that would have been more effective for you?] Find out the problem like was, you know what I'm saying? Obviously you picked me out of the class, because you see that, you know, I'm a problem or something, or you think I'm a problem, but they never found out what the problem was. [Did they ask?] No. [If they did ask, what would you have said?] I would have told them I don't know. Some things are not right, right now in my life I feel like, you know, that I need someone to talk to. But again, there were some things at the time, you know, probably just lost my daddy in jail and, you know, so you know where my head was, you know. I weren't like - I just needed someone to talk to, like you know, someone to chill, you know.*

Ian interpreted their putting him in a counselling group as labelling him a "problem" and he never found the interpersonal connection and support he needed to process his father's death. He was expelled from high



school, turned to the street culture and has been shot. He currently finds shelter by moving from house to house and has two children to support. Disciplinary actions in school that are not accompanied by an authentic attempt to understand the problems behind the behaviours promote disconnection from school. Now Ian is so entrenched in the gang problems on the island that he is not so sure he will survive.

*I just wake up every morning, just - I pray. I pray before I, you know, go outside sometimes. I just try to take it easy; take one day at a time like, you know?*

Stage environment fit theory suggests that developmentally, early adolescents need opportunities in school where they might exert their growing need for autonomy within the context of close and supportive school relationships where they feel known (Eccles, et al., 1993). When adolescents do not feel that they are being compared to others in terms of their behaviour or academic performance and when they perceive the teachers as supportive and respectful, they are more likely to bond with school than with their peers who may already be disconnected (Roeser, Eccles & Sameroff, 2000). Inversely, the disconnected men in this study did not feel known in school and experienced student-teacher relationships that centred on problem behaviours and their thug reputation. Their developmental needs for connection in school simply were not met.


## The Turning Point

In stark contrast to high school dropouts, five out of five high school graduates reported the presence of an in-school community, evidenced by positive student/teacher relationships. These relationships facilitated the experience of a “turning point” for high school graduates where they received a clear articulation of the consequences of continued poor behaviour.

Thomas went to high school in the U.S. and faced many of the same high school dropout risk factors as males in Bermuda: using and selling marijuana, strong group affiliation/ social pressures and teacher bias against gang members. However the school provided him with a clear escalation of verbal warnings that allowed Thomas to recognise the consequences of his actions and turn things around.

*Well, you know, you get warnings that you're not gonna graduate, or you'll get kicked out. They always said, you know, you're going to have to leave this school if you, uh, keep messing up... So yeah, I most definitely turned it around on the last warning, you know, because the principal, you know, they find out. It's like they find out who the bad apples are, and who's in a group or a gang. And once they know what - that you're in a clique, and you're labelled and stereotyped, then they're more harder on you, and they just pick you out. So they're more harder and you don't have that many chances. But when - one time my principal, they, you know, got me to bring - they suspended me a couple times, and I had to come back with my family member. You know what I mean? So that's when I - when I came back with my mom, you know what I mean, I had to sit down and explain, you know, what's going on with me. So it was basically a last warning for me like that, and I didn't want to make my mom look bad, you know what I mean, like I was brought up to be a violent or bad person, so I straightened up. You know what I mean, and I got through it on a basic level.*

Thomas experienced the same biases that the high school dropouts experience, but teachers' warnings, and their engagement of his mother, who also encouraged Thomas to stay in school, helped him achieve graduation and a strong belief in the value of education.



*I think that education is the most important thing in a person's life because everybody would like to be successful or somebody that is seen as important in the world....The teachers used to say if you ain't part of the solution, you're part of a problem. So I would like to be just a productive member of society. Maybe I could help someone else, but I have to help myself first....I always looked up to teachers because they were telling me things that could benefit me in the long term.*

Similarly, Jacob, age 23, also had some altercations in high school but gained a clear understanding of the rules and **repercussions** of his actions before it was too late.

*I got in a little fight before school a couple times. You know what I'm saying. Got sent to the principal's office and, um, suspension. They usually come back and you talk about it - talk about the person you had the altercation with. And then that's really it. And then you can't really get into another altercation with that same person, because you get expelled and different things like that, so you got in trouble for that.*

High school dropouts, however, clearly maintain that they received no such warning before being kicked out of school. Cameron, age 25, reports that no one ever explained the consequences of smoking marijuana to him – “like three strikes and you're out” - and describes being very disappointed when he was kicked out school. “I actually cried. Not boo-hooing, but in tears of hurt and frustration”.

Similarly, Daquan was kicked out of school, but reports that he did not receive word of his expulsion until he arrived on the first day of school.


*I got caught by the principal fighting this guy in one of the hallways of the school. He didn't tell us that year, but the following year, when I tried to go back to school, he told me that, oh, you're kicked out. He just said you ain't going to school no more. I bought school clothes, everything, and he just said we can't go to school.*

Men interpreted this seemingly arbitrary discipline to be a product of teacher bias. They did not hear the messages of “stick with it, you can do it” that graduating Bermudian boys need to get through the turning point (Mincy, Jethwani-Keyser & Haldane, 2009). Amir notes, “I didn't really have nobody [saying] finish this, you've got to go to school”. When asked where he received advice as an adolescent, Tom says, “Nobody. I figured the odds were on me”.

The negative consequences of dropping out associated with a thug reputation and disciplinary problems in school can be averted not just by teachers, but also by family members who are invested in boys' educational lives and help them through the “turning point”. For example, while Joe (age 27) did not find the academic help he needed which fueled his tendency to skip school, he eventually graduated from high school with the support of his father. In school like, not to say that they don't care about you, but they don't really have a personal, you know, let me pull this one aside, I think I might be able to talk to him, and then he might, you know, change his ways, like it wasn't that type of vibe. It was just like, hmm, I'm here, I'm getting paid, no matter if you learn or not, like that type of vibe. You know what I mean? So there wasn't really no relationship in that regard, you know, told by a teacher.

Joe was suspended when he fell into “a vibe where I was ditching school”, but then turned his school behaviour and performance around with the support of his father.

*I got suspended and they kick you out of school for like a week. The first time in my whole career of school,*



*I got suspended. I go home and my daddy sat down and talked to me...man-to-man. After that, when I came back from the week, I went right back to school and I was a guy really doing well at school. So I just kicked right back in and just brought my grades back up and everything was lovely. And I went to the counsellor to sort out my, you know, from skipping so much school I failed a lot of classes. So I had to get my classes sorted out where it was going to graduate and things like that.*

One of his teachers expressed surprise by the change, once again demonstrating how a person's reputation for behavioural and academic problems in school follows them.

*This one teacher, when I was skipping school and all that, I was really like goofing off, like not really paying attention and then in the next semester I got her class again in a different level. And I was just like shit - and then she told me I couldn't be in her class. But I told her I changed, like before I got suspended, I told her I changed. I was here to learn now, you know what I'm saying. And I showed her that. I was doing essays and stuff. She was like, whoa, why you didn't do this when you started, things like that, things like that. So I said, you know, now it's even us making myself even proud, like because I knew I had it in me, but I was just, you know, everybody goes through a little time or something. But, um, um, I caught myself pretty much.*


In spite of seemingly low expectations by Joe's teachers in school, his father's interest in his education motivated him to stay in school and he is proud of the changes he made, although he never achieved his goal to attend college. Because so few men in this sample had a family member to rely on as a protective factor, the need for academically and emotionally invested teachers is all the more pressing for "at risk" Bermudian males.

All three of the men in the employed focus group graduated from high school and describe teachers as encouraging and supportive. Perhaps even more importantly, these men perceive their teachers as believing in their ability to succeed, which helped them through the "turning point". For example, Richard, age 27, went to a public high school in Bermuda where he describes himself as a rebellious recluse. He only had a few friends but when he thinks about school, he remembers his teachers "consistently providing very positive advice". He thinks that their willingness to pass down their experiences to the next generation is admirable.

*I find a genuine desire among teachers - for those people who they're teaching not to have to make the same mistakes that they went through, or not to have the same unfortunate experiences that they had. So the advice was always there... Most of my teachers were very positive and instrumental and guided me the right way.*

Although Richard did not go to his teachers when he had a personal problem, he appreciated their "words of confidence and encouragement" and happily recalls being told by his teachers to "be the best you can be". In Richard's case, this meant finding a job in horticulture. He describes how school administrators helped to connect him to that field.

*I got put on the track to horticulture before I left high school, because we had career fairs, which had all different kinds of career information. And there was nothing to do with nature and agriculture, which is what I was interested in. I was always interested in nature and animals and stuff like that. I thought I might be a scientist when I was young, but this career fair didn't have anything to do with that, so I brought it to the attention of the school administration and, you know, to their credit, they made an effort to put me in touch with people who could lead me into that direction. And they did, and I ended up meeting some people at Bermuda's Botanical Gardens. And as a student, I started to work, I think, one day a week there. That was the*



*same year I actually finished high school, so when I finished high school, I started working more regularly in that field. And by September - I finished in June my school - by September, I actually, with the contacts I had established with the people at Botanical Gardens, I ended up taking a position as a horticultural apprentice, which lasted for two years, and then that got me into the field. And I was in that field for about five years in total.*

School administrators helped Richard pursue his own interests, even though some of his teachers and family members viewed his choice to put off higher education as “rebellious”. This level of teacher support and engagement has a great impact on adolescent well-being. George, also in the employed group, explains: I think that the teachers are actually in your family. You know, they are the ones who make an impact. You’re with them eight hours a day for a majority of your life so I’m sure that they make some impact.

Indeed, researchers have commonly found that perceptions of positive teacher-student relationships predict academic adjustment and educational attainment, even after accounting for demographic factors such as age and socio-economic status (Brand, Felner, Shim, Sietsinger & Dumas, 2003).

High school graduates were more likely to have a support network either in or out of school; more intrinsic motivation and more positive relationships with teachers. Instances of concrete, one-on-one attention resonated with the men who graduated from high school and they were able to clearly articulate exactly when they had a “turn-around” moment, further emphasising the significance this event had in their lives. Dropouts experienced teacher bias - the stigma associated with being a “thug” kept them from getting the help they needed and impeded the potential for much needed encouragement and guidance from the teachers. The lack of connection to school, and home, for the majority of men in this “on the wall” sample allowed these men to be distracted by peers and made them more likely to fulfil their need for belonging within the street-gang community (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

Studies in the U.S. corroborate the findings in this study. Black males often drop out of high school for at least one of the following reasons: personal and family circumstances that hinder attendance and concentration in school, conditions and cultures in school that make it difficult for adults and young people to form relationships and discipline policies that ignore the causes of problem behaviours (Allen, Almeida & Steinberg, 2004; Noguera, 2009). The next section offers some insight into how men have internalised these negative experiences at home, in school and the process that has rendered them unable to reconnect to work and school and alter their life trajectories.

## **Fear of Failure: A Challenge to Reconnection**

Men were asked to comment on their five- and ten-year goals. Most have a desire to have their own apartments or homes. They hope to have stable jobs (especially in the IT industry) that would offer them financial security and enable them to support themselves and their children (for the four that have them). In spite of their negative experiences in school, men are keenly aware that they need to go back to school in order to gain the “papers” necessary to achieve their employment aspirations, which most of them still hope to do. However, in addition to the recession and the more concrete risk factors previously discussed (limited education, family and teacher support, high exposure to crime, violence and substance abuse), men are experiencing a more subtle obstacle pertaining to their goals: self-confidence and a fear of failure.

Cameron’s limited educational attainment has kept him weakly tied to the formal labour market through the construction industry, which took the hardest hit in the most recent recession.

*[School] prepares you for the work that you need to do to survive in this world. Most times I was like, I guess you can't survive without, you know, high school, college, master's. [You can't survive without college?] Well you might be able to I guess. Well, I have been. Just barely... I need to go back to school. I need to go get some degrees, some papers, you know? And, go from there.*

When asked to describe how he felt after being expelled from high school and if he ever considered Bermuda College, Cameron states:

*At that moment, no. I was hurt. I was frustrated. I didn't know what to do. I was worried about what my Mom was thinking. But, now, I do want to go [to Bermuda College], but it's like something's holding me back from going there.*

Perhaps Cameron finds it hard to be motivated to go to school because he fears a similar “rejection”, or devaluing may occur again. Falling behind in high school and the stigma associated with street life makes it nearly impossible for these men to catch up. They fear re-visiting academia where they might have to re-live and re-face all of their shortcomings.

Many men in this study worry that the work in school will be too difficult, or that they will disappoint people if they do not succeed. Connor admits: If someone was to offer me to go to school, I don't even know if I would still do it. I probably wouldn't even do it because what if I mess up? Then I might have to owe them people and all this.

Negative school experiences are projected into the future, making them question going further.

Amir received detentions instead of the academic support he needed to succeed in school so he dropped out. Amir's failure to achieve in English contributes to his fear of failing the essay portion of the GED exam.

*It was in English. And we were reading all these stories and I, like I was stuck at one point. And I called the lady over to help me. I think she used to do essay writing too. I read the paragraph and all that, and there was a brainstorming part. Like you have your plot and all that, like I still don't know how to do all that properly. I tried to call her over and she said 'No,' so I was like aren't you the teacher, and you're supposed to come help your students, and figure out, at least not tell us how to do it, but give us pointers? And she just sat down in her chair and kept reading her book. So I was like, okay, you don't care either. Okay. I'm just not going to do it. I closed my book, closed my paper, and just sat there. And she was like, oh, you're not doing your work? No. And she's like, well, you're going to get detention. Give me a detention. I'll take the detention; I'm still not going to do your work... I think that's another reason why I dropped out of school, because a lot of the teachers, they were just the same way. Like if you need help, they wouldn't come help you. So I was like why, like if you're not going to help me - to teach me this stuff, then I'm going to fail anyways.*

Amir attempted to get his GED but when he hit a road block, he quit. He found the essay writing too difficult and did not think he could do it.

*I started the Seventh Day Adventist school then, since it's free, and I ain't got no money, I don't have a job to pay for my schooling now. But I struck a - a rough point, and I decided not to go back. [What happened?] Essay writing. I can't - for some reason I just - I used to know how to do it very well, and punctuations, and proper grammar, but I just can't do it. I just wasn't catching on, and so I just stopped going.*



A fear of failing continues to stand in Amir's way of returning to school for a GED.

*I just think of that. Why am I going to do that? I'm just not going to get that essay writing down. I'm just not going to get it. Since I've said that so much, I think I've drilled it in my head and I'm just not going to get it. But I know I can probably get it. If I sat down long enough and just, you know, my own blaming, I could probably write a little story. They'll probably give you little pointers like brainstorming and all of that, but then it's all up to you... I still want to get my dream [of passing the GED], but as I said, I've just got to get the mind frame to go back.*

A fear of failure makes men particularly susceptible to engaging in the street life. Amir struggles with committing to the educational pathway where he may not succeed. And the need to make money now further prevents him from making an investment in education, even though he knows that it would allow him to find better employment in the future.

*I can always go back, but right now I'm, you know, still looking for a full-time job, and a legitimate place to stay....I don't want to have to go back to school and listen to more people because, you know, they ain't going to help me make money right now. But in the future they are. That's the thing about it. I think about it all the time. You know, get that made, make money afterwards - more money. I think about, you know, I want to make money now and I ain't worried about it... I see that's [school] more of a future thing. I'm more about making it now, you know? I take life as it is, like day-to-day - day by day, you know? My Facebook quote today, 'Another day, another dollar'. That's all it is to me, you know? And I'm thankful to wake up every morning just so I can go work and make some more money, you know?*

In addition to the fear that the work might be too hard, men were also aware that their reputations as troublemakers followed them throughout their lives and are likely to continue to cause problems for them in future educational settings, such as GED programmes and Bermuda College. Paul thinks that his reputation as a criminal would follow him and set him up for failure, making Bermuda College "a waste of time."

*A lot of people on this Island, it's like they're critics. You know, they criticise a lot. It's hard. There's a lot of people related to my situation, and I ain't trying to be around this type of environment. Because I got locked up, you know, a serious thing, and it was a big topic on this Island, you know? I just don't like people talking about it and me being around it. I know that everywhere I go it's the same thing, so I know that the College would be no different.*

Paul believes that his reputation is also hindering his employment.

*There were 50 applications since I've been off. And that's since I got out last summer. I feel like I never even came close to getting a job. You know? I've sent applications. I've even done interviews and all that, and there still ain't nothing. [And you think it's because they know who you are?] I know that - I know it's because of that... I'm a high school dropout, and probably the way I carry myself or whatever. A person looking at me would probably look at me a certain way. But I just look at it as everybody from my generation dresses like this. That's how I dress... They [employers] said I looked like a hoodlum. I need to come in - next time I need to come in, I need to come in dressed different with my shirt tucked in and all that kind of stuff. That was the first - first time when I walked in trying to get a job at a supermarket....I came back dressed properly and all that, and I still didn't get the job though.*

Paul highlights the need that many men in this study have for “soft skills”. They need guidance on how to find a job, how to dress, what to say in an interview. Without these skills and the appropriate credentials, it is unlikely that Paul will secure formal employment. Paul has lost faith in his opportunity to get a fresh start and describes himself as lazy and unmotivated, suggesting a diminished sense of self-worth.

*I start calling in sick. That's with every job. I'll keep a job for a good three months, six months, seven months and that's when I just start getting lazy....I'm up, ready to go to work and I'm just like, I don't feel like going to work today. But in my mind, I know for a fact that if I don't go to work today, I'm going to get in trouble, I might get fired and then my other side is like, well, don't worry about it, you're cool. I don't know why I always think that way. That's why I'm lost and I just wish I got a job right now.*

A lack of self-confidence inhibits many men from accomplishing their goals. Darryl believes that if he had a GED, he'd be able to open his own painting business. But, he also knows that this aspiration would require personal motivation, accompanied by external services and supports. He states: “A lot of dedication and a lot of reading, yeah, I've just got to be focused. That's all up to me. So I have to be focused and then the rest is going to be up to the people to help me out”. Darryl does not have a history of having people who help him out. He was “kicked out” of high school in his fourth year when he started getting involved in drugs and stealing bikes and was “not attending classes”. Like many others in this sample, it was around this time that he was also “kicked out” of his house and sent to a group home. He explains that his “environment in the back of town” influenced his behaviour and that he, and some of his peers, needed more attention in school to “make sure we stayed in line”. Darryl also suffers from a learning disability that caused him trouble in school, and which is now exacerbated by a substance abuse problem. He never received the help he needed and suggests that he may never get “in the game”. He has internalised his previous failures and believes that men, in general, are weak.


*Women are focused. They stay focused more than males. They're way more focused than males, because that's just the truth. That's how they are. Women are stronger than men. Mentally like, you know, mentally wise. It's just in their genes.*

The frequent rejections, starting at home and in school and continuing into their search for employment, may explain the apparent poor work ethic or poor persistence among Black Bermudian males. Joe articulates this challenge.

*Black men, um, in general, black men just fail to put themselves in positions where, you know, in succeeding in things. They're always doubting themselves or doubting others. Like just because I'm up right now doesn't mean I'm going to be up, you know, for the rest of my life. You know, this life is just constantly challenged. You know?*

The cumulative effects of these challenges have worked together to chip away at the psychological well-being of these men, further inhibiting their ability to become reconnected through formal employment or schooling. Daniel complains that he rarely gets called back when he applies for formal employment.

*[So what's been really hard about finding a job now?] That they don't - they don't ask for me back. They don't call me back or nothing. [Do you follow up with them?] Yeah, but I got tired of doing that too, because that's what everybody says. Oh, keep following up. Keep telling them - let them know that you're serious. Drill it in their head, but that's going to get me even more upset if I have to - if I have to keep doing that, and*



*then they keep telling me, you know, keep telling me 'no'. Then I'll turn around, I'll find out somebody else that signed after me has got the job. [It sounds like you're kind of a little afraid of the rejection of it all.] Yeah.*

Daniel is admittedly depressed, fearful of rejection, and blames himself for his failures.

*I'm my biggest challenge. I'm my biggest problem. Trying to—now—now that I wasn't on that road all this time to live a normal life, trying to get—trying to get there, like to start like.*

In sum, men “on the wall” in Bermuda share several challenges including high exposure to street life and severed relationships at both home and school. Coupled with their “thug reputations”, these challenges limit their chances of reconnecting to the worlds of school and work, and fuel their connection to the alternative pathway of criminal activity. Further, men have internalised these challenges in a way that prevents them from being able to succeed in education or employment. Research suggests that for disconnected youth, educational regret and self-doubt are likely to be accompanied by poor mental health in early adulthood (Brown, Moore & Bzostek, 2003). A large majority of these men point to their failure to graduate from high school as a major turning point in their life trajectories. This suggests that

### **keeping Black Bermudian boys in school is a key strategy for preventing disconnection.**

This study identifies getting “kicked out” of school as a primary predictor of being “on the wall”. Men in this study were often expelled from school for disciplinary reasons that included fighting or drug involvement. The men in this sample suggest that an emphasis on negative behaviour over academic support and “care” forced them out of school. Teacher-student relationships that emphasised behaviour/discipline made them feel stigmatised, denied them feelings of belonging in school and left them with the perception that no one cares if they stay, thereby taking away a critical protective factor from the lure of street life. An internalisation of low expectations creates a fear of failure and prevents re-connection. Falling behind in high school and the stigma of street association makes it very difficult for men to alter their life trajectories.

Research on adolescent development confirms the reality of a ‘maturity gap’ in the pre-teenage and early adolescent years. The emotional and motivational changes that come with puberty occur before cognitive maturity and neurobehavioural systems for self-control and affect regulation (Conway, 2009). Early adolescents, with a high propensity for risk-taking behaviours, need help regulating their emotional and behavioural reactions to the demands of various situations. Experiencing a problem with maturity early in school is something we also heard from high school seniors in our previous study (Mincy, Jethwani-Keyser & Haldane, 2009). But teacher-student relationships that help boys through the “turning point” and offer academic support and encouragement, provide the school connection necessary to keep boys enrolled in school.

Considering the reality that more girls graduate from Bermudian public high schools, what is different about their high school experience? Are they more likely to experience encouragement and support from teachers? Are they less likely to get in trouble? Are they more “mature”? Why are boys more vulnerable to dropping out? The following chapter takes a qualitative look at the lives of both boys and girls in their first year of high school, when they are experiencing this vulnerable and “immature” period.

Mincy, Jethwani-Keyser & Haldane (2009) revealed that Black Bermudian boys who were about to



# Chapter Four: High School Results

graduate from high school experienced teacher support and encouragement that helped the boys through a challenging point of immaturity earlier in their high school years. As a consequence of this early support, the boys became engaged in high school and ultimately graduated with positive expectations for the future. Graduating boys reported that when they do their work on time, minimise classroom disruptions and make an effort to do their best work, teachers in turn will like them and support both their academic and personal endeavours.

Our analysis of unemployed men “on the wall” revealed that teacher-student relationships that emphasised harsh sanctions for problem behaviour, rather than on support and care, resulted in their being “kicked out” of school. In particular, certain boys exhibiting problem behaviour were considered “troublemakers”, especially if they came from neighbourhoods associated with gang activity. They got into fights, disrupted class and had poor attendance. Teachers rarely probed for information concerning the family and community problems that these boys often experienced. Instead, the teachers interpreted problem behaviours as a lack of commitment to school and tended not to offer as much support and encouragement as they offered to other students. As a result, these men believed that no one would have cared if they stayed in school, taking away an essential component of school connectedness and contributing to their dropping out of high school. In turn, being kicked out of school contributed to their associations with street culture, their limited employment options, and their lack of confidence and motivation when they became men.

Closing earnings gaps and keeping men “off the wall” involves increasing the proportion of Black Bermudian males who complete the secondary education efforts they begin. High school dropouts are 3.5 times more likely to become disconnected from work and school for periods of three or more years, leaving them vulnerable to significant social and economic hardship and generating substantial costs to society (Besharov & Gardiner, 1998). This chapter explores the gender gap in educational attainment and the contributing factors to the higher dropout rate among Black Bermudian males. Interviews with both boys and girls in their first year at a public high school (n=35, mean age = 14.3) offer some insight into why boys might be more likely to leave.

This chapter first examines the challenges of street life exposure and family conflict which were identified as primary risk factors for disconnectedness among the “on the wall” sample. Findings reveal that a significant portion of the first-year high school sample, both boys and girls, are already confronting these challenges. Forty per cent expressed personal concerns about their exposure to the “street life” of drugs and/or violence and 74 per cent identified a challenge in their family history. These pre-existing risk factors make the quality of their high school experience critical to whether or not they remain enrolled. This chapter then examines students’ school experiences and perceptions of school discipline and teacher support. Are boys more likely to get into trouble in school? Are there gender differences in perceptions of school discipline and the quality of their school relationships? We will see that despite having more discipline referrals than boys, girls are perceived as getting into less trouble and being more focused on school than boys; they are more likely than boys to get the social-emotional support they need to achieve their educational goals.

## Disconnected Risk Factors

### Street Life Exposure

Like many students, Tyler, a 14-year-old boy in his first year of high school, is concerned about the escalation of crime and violence in Bermuda in recent years. He believes that the best way to stay out of the street life is to keep occupied. He also looks at the problem from a historical perspective and doubts that it will ever go away.

*If you keep yourself occupied, you're not going to get into trouble. But see, they - they just have time to idle with nothing to do, and that's how they got into trouble. And then it just kept got - getting worse and worse. And they have their own children, and they put that value in them pretty much. Then that just got worse. And you're really going to have to start at the very beginning of the generation. You can't stop something that's been in the making for the last how many years.*

This epitomises what the feelings have been about the community violence in Bermuda. The young men and women feel the violence from gangs, guns and drugs seeping into their everyday lives. Boys and girls alike are aware and fearful of the violence around them and believe that boys are more susceptible to becoming involved. Boys expressed feeling limited by where they could go on the island and girls were particularly fearful and worried about their male family members. Boys were much more likely than girls to have already had direct experiences with the violence on the Island.

Tyler has experienced the gang conflict firsthand and describes how he successfully managed to walk away from a tense situation.


*One of my friends has been labelled as from this area, but that's just like where he's from. And another boy who is from a rival gang, I don't really think we have gangs, I just think we have cliques, um, yeah. But yeah, from a rival gang, and approached us when we were in town after school one day going to the store to get some candy. And he is approaching us, and he wanted to fight my friend. Now that was one thing for me. I was like okay, what's going on here, and I'm - I'm not going to leave my friend, because this guy's got like three other friends with him. And, you know, if I run away, then he's going to get mangled. And that's one thing, he's my boy, like I don't want him to get hurt. I love this guy. So, you know, that was one thing for me. I was like we'll just kind of walk away from this situation.*

When asked if that strategy was an effective one, he replies:

*Yeah, it did work. But then, you know, that's - that's just one thing you have to try and stay away from, because in Bermuda, like a majority of the guys who are in it, they flip-flop. They want to be out there getting money, and then they want to go home and sit safe at 5:00. You can't do that.*

Trying to “stay out of it” is a common strategy utilised by these young adolescent boys, but many of the girls are fearful for male family members because they believe that men are targets for violence.

Roxanne, one of the few girls in our sample with direct ties to the “street life”, states:



*It's scary, because I know that they go - they might be targeting my brother or somebody like that, because where he stays and because he's got family in 42 and he's always with them, so they think he's repping 42, so the Parkside guys are going to be after him. And my brother's always wearing black, walking on the street, like he's crazy, so like that's even more of a target for him. He's even more of a target.*

When asked how she copes with these fears, Roxanne replies:

*Like I just have to learn to live with it myself, because my family - all my family got to learn to live with it, because now with all this shooting and stuff going on, it's not going to get any better, because I've got a whole lot of guys in my family that are involved in the gang violence and stuff like that, so like I've just got to get used to it.*

The undercurrent of heightened gang violence makes many adolescents fear leaving their homes.

Fourteen year old Lillian states:

*Well, I just don't go places, like at nighttime. Getting on a bus ride or going there like and someone's going to shoot the bus and accidentally hit you. I don't know. It's scary. And like - you want to think like if your parents go out, like when my nana goes out and my uncle, I ask them where are you going, like what time are you going to be back, like that, because I'm scared. Because I have an uncle, he plays pool, and like the pool team, they go play at clubs and stuff, and I don't want my uncle to be out there playing pool and then someone shoot him just to shoot him like that. Yeah, like I just get scared. And then the guy who got shot at the club, my uncle had just left there and he had got shot. Like soon as he left, the guy got shot. So think if my uncle was next to him and they missed him and hit my uncle? That would have been scary.*


In addition to being fearful about where she and her uncle can go, Lillian is also concerned that what started as community violence is seeping into her school environment where the fights are primarily about “town and country”. She states:

*Like out of town, somebody will fight him because he's from country....It's scary with all the guns and stuff. Even if someone in school has a gun and they're going to blow off and accidentally hit you....I try to get on everyone's good side, so they won't get mad and just start firing off. Or I try to rush to class, so that if they do fire, I'll be safe, I'm going to be in class. I don't know.*

When asked how she manages her concern about gun violence, Lillian explains that she is very careful about who she hangs out with, both physically and in her social network.

*It's the people you hang around. Like if you hang around someone that's not good company, you can get in a fight because you hang around that person. Like that. And like if you have a Facebook, they say it's not good to have a picture with somebody and upload it, because if you hang around one person - the person you got the picture with - and people don't like him, then they'll come after you too, because like they're going after people - you and the people you hang around.*

Similarly, Emily explains that the “gang violence and the guys out sitting ‘on the wall’” is “a lot of craziness” and that her mother tries to keep her from getting hurt.



*Well, my mama tries to keep me in the house now, more, like, later hours she tries to pull me in because that's when these gun shots are happening and she don't want nothing to happen to me.*

Emily also worries that the gangs are moving into the school, “mainly between boys between East and West... It's crazy because this is a small island and why you fighting over something you can't have?” Although she thinks it's crazy, she also recognises that boys often have little control over where they live and therefore find it difficult to stay out of the conflict.

*Most times, like, um, peoples not really, they're forced to be in these gangs because of where they live, like, because previous things that have happened. Like, say someone had a gun that was from East and they shot someone out West, they are going to look at the whole East side now and say, like, that one person did it so you guys can too. And so they try to, like, keep their boundaries.*

Girls are generally more fearful and boys have more direct experience with the street culture. Boys and girls agree that Bermudian males are much more likely to get into physical and violent altercations than girls. Randall states, “Yeah, always get - guys always get in fights. They're shooting up other guys. Normally there's no girls in the newspapers.”

Boys were also much more likely to know people who had been shot or to have had personal experiences with the street culture. For example, Clay “was cool with the guy that got shot the one day. I used to hang around him because he was close friends with my daddy.” Clay's Dad encourages him to go away to England for school because “he don't want me getting in all this trouble, you know, and me getting mixed up in all of this fighting and stuff.”


Similarly, Stephen's brother was shot and he explains how he and his family worry that perhaps they too will get caught in the crossfire.

*It makes me and my family feel that if we're still here, then we might be like - some people might be next on the - on the list or something like that. So then the next thing you know, they'll be well, shootings down my way. Then you don't know if someone of my family might get hurt, and that makes me want to just get out of Bermuda. And I really don't like that. I mean one of my uncles got shot in his arm. That's the other thing, but it wasn't a really, bad thing, like it was just in his arm. At least it was nowhere on his, like here or up here, so it was just in his arm. And they say it was just - just a shooting. It wasn't really, but that's one thing I really want to get rid of in Bermuda - the violence, the gangs, all that.*

Lee explains that he tries to “stay away” from the violence but that he lives right in the middle of the “hood”.

*I try to stay away, but I live in like somewhere where they call it the hood or whatever like that. I live like almost smack dead in the middle, so that's like a gang right there. If I go outside and I say, oh, I live in town or whatever, I have another house in town, I might get beat up, so I have to - I have no choice but to say, oh, I live in country.*

Lee feels sympathy for the men who end up “on the wall”.



*I feel for where all these people are coming from, because I have people in my family who have either been to prison, or drugs, or whatever, and they can't find a job, because there are some people, 'oh, you're black', or 'oh, because you got caught with some weed, or crack, or something like that, I'm not letting you in my job'. How do you know that these people haven't changed yet?*

Students worry that getting “used to” the violence could hinder their goals for the future. Yvonne states:

*The violence could hold me back, because I could get hurt. And then it would scare me, and I don't want to leave my house or don't, you know, don't want to move forward. I just want to stay home.*

Similarly, Joseph worries that his friends who “smoke, do drugs, drink, curse” might distract him from his goals. He thinks that the “town and country” conflict is “a whole bunch of nonsense”.

*Like, I understand, like, being mad at somebody but that is no reason to shoot him. Like, I hate this guy but, like, say if someone gave me a knife to stab him, I wouldn't do it. Like, it's all just, like, Bermuda's too small to be having country and town and all that stuff. It's too small, like, you're fighting over something that's not even yours.*

Boys have more direct exposure to violence but the majority of students are doing their best to stay out of it, either by moving their location, finding a positive social circle or simply not being involved. Still, the influence of the violence and the heightened fear, for both boys and girls, is pervasive. These experiences, coupled with the prevalence of family conflict, put students' academic and psychological well-being at risk and could alter their life course. The “on the wall” sample demonstrates the consequences of the lack of intervention.

## Family Conflict

Because so few of the “on the wall” men had a family member to rely on as a protective factor, the need for academically and emotionally invested teachers was vital for “at risk” Bermudian males. In this sample of first-year high-school students, 74 per cent have experienced some significant change or challenge at home including death, divorce, abuse and violence. Only 31 per cent of these students lived with both parents at the time of these interviews, making the issue of positive school relationships and the support of other family members all the more pressing.

Sheila is 14 years old and lives with her mother and stepfather. She describes how her relationship with her biological father influenced her behaviour when she was in middle school.

*In middle school I was a very, very troubled child. I didn't listen to nobody. Everything revolved around me, and if it didn't revolve around me, I got an attitude... the in-school suspension (ISS), that was my homeroom... I was like that in middle school, because my daddy wasn't in my life. And it was so terrible that I've been in counselling for four years straight because my daddy, he wasn't in my life, and I used to think that it was because of me that he didn't want to be in my life. So I was in counselling. Then I was in ISS, and I was fighting, and I just did a lot of stuff. So I said, okay, I'm not going to do this no more when I get to high school because I don't want to end up doing jail, or prison, or you know, because that's an embarrassment on my family. And I'm a very bright, young lady. And everybody tells me. It's just that it's probably not sinking in yet. But I'm a leader.*

With support from her mother who “kept coming down” on her, she managed to graduate from middle school.



When she got to high school, she hoped to make a change but recently spent three days in in-school suspension for being consistently late to her classes.

*Sitting in ISS, I'm thinking, I sort of let myself down, because I said I'm not going to be in ISS in high school... I made one mistake and then having the security guard escort me, I sort of looked like, you know, I'm like I did something bad. And so, yeah, I really don't want to go back there, because it makes me look like I'm like a criminal.*

Sheila has a 59 grade point average and has had 10 disciplinary infractions in school. However, she has teachers that encourage her and her mother reminds her that she needs to stay in school if she is going to reach her goals of becoming a psychiatrist.

*It's just that all the teachers tell me 'instead of leading your friends and the crowd in that direction, you know, go towards the education direction' and that's why basically the teachers always are coming down on me, because they see I'm a leader.*

Sheila's tenuous relationship with her biological father has been difficult for her. She has decided to not "worry" about her biological father and is trying to change her behaviour in school. She will continue to need support at home and in school to stay on the education track.


Several students have also had family members pass away or suffer from life threatening illnesses. These experiences can cause psychological trauma and alter one's life trajectory in a negative way without the proper attention and support (Hutchinson, 2007). For example, Dennis has gotten into a lot of trouble in school, eight discipline referrals and three suspensions, but has never spoken to anyone about why he acts out in school. He describes a time when he came to school "high": In the beginning of the year, I, um, came to school and I was high. I was high. And the teacher must have knew. She must have knew I was stoned. She, um, kept me in after advisory was over and asked me why I was late and stuff. And then afterwards she talked to me and told me not to do it no more and stuff like that if I'm in school or whatever, and not to do it at all. And she didn't tell. She was nice.

The teacher did not discipline him but also did not uncover that Dennis only sees his mother every other weekend because she is dying of cancer.

*My mama tells me that she's sick and stuff, and she had one of her breasts removed because of the cancer. And she's been through chemotherapy and things like that, so she's been through a lot, so. Her kidney's been removed, and her, yeah, she had a lot wrong with her, so... I used to live with her when I was a boy. She had custody of me and my sister. And after she got cancer - she's had cancer for a while - that's when the doctor tell her she didn't have much time to live, but she lived over the extent of that. So that's when my daddy took her to court and got custody of us, and ever since he's been having that. And my mama just like - we just see her not as much as we used to.*

Dennis' experiences at home and his community may explain some of his negative behaviours in school. He explains that he got caught up in using drugs because of the neighbourhood in which he used to live.

*I used to live up in the neighbourhood, um, where it's known - 42 - where the shootings are. It's town. And up there, well, I used to have anger management... We always used to light up and stuff like that.*



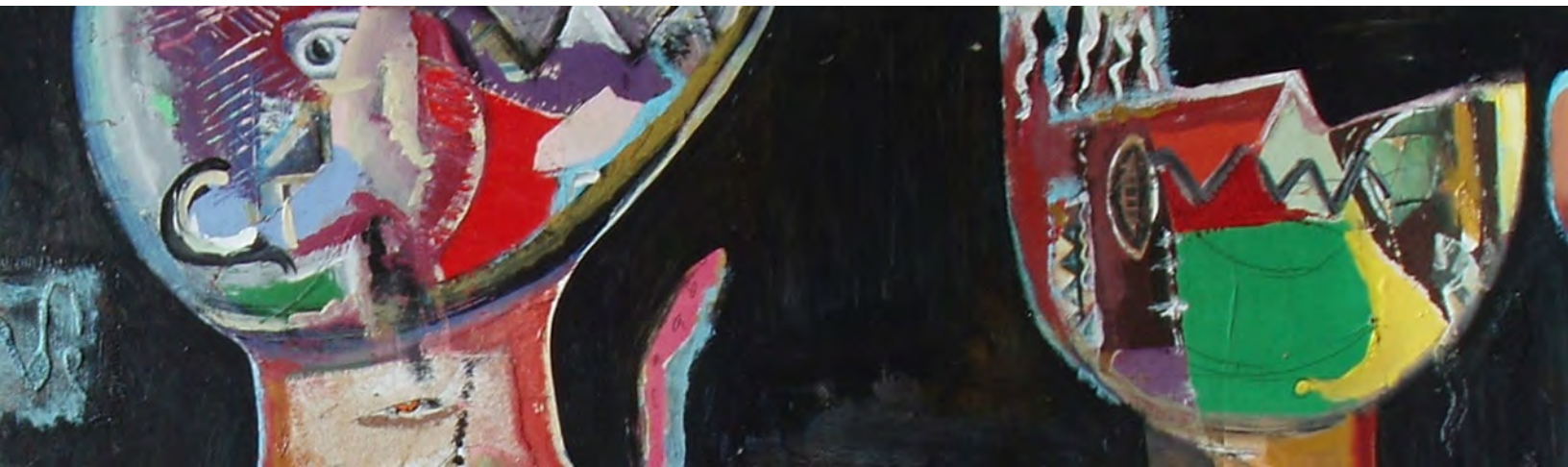
Similarly, Allison identifies not seeing her mom as the hardest challenge she has experienced in her lifetime. She starts to explain that she lives with her grandparents because her mom lives in the U.S. but she is unable to continue. She begins to cry and states:

*I miss my mama... I haven't seen her in like five years... She has been out there for a long time and I used to go to visit her a lot of times, like for three weeks, and then I would come back and go back again. And then there was one time I went up there and I didn't want to come back because I wanted to stay out there. And then I did but I came back for my auntie's wedding. And when I went to go back away they said I can't.*

Her father lives in Bermuda with his girlfriend but she only sees him “whenever he decides to come over”. Allison’s mother has a baby now and she can’t even remember the last time she spoke with her. Allison reports that she does not speak with anyone in her family aside from her sister.

Students without familial support, as illustrated in the “on the wall” study, suffer from poor psychological well-being and academic achievement and are heavily reliant on their relationships in school. Unfortunately, challenges at home might cause students to behave poorly in school, thereby hindering their chances of experiencing positive school relationships. The five students not living with their mothers in this high school sample, including Dennis and Allison, are identified as some of those most “at risk” for dropping out of school due to poor grades and frequent behavioural problems that have led to detentions and/or suspensions. Allison has been suspended six times, has a GPA of 62, and thinks that the teachers do not like her.

Together, these insights into students’ familial stressors and their exposure to community violence highlight the need for school staff to understand some of the problems that may be behind a student’s behaviour. Zero tolerance for behaviour problems and the resulting sanctions, such as suspensions, only serves to keep kids out of relationships with those in the school community. The next section explores gender differences in students’ disciplinary experiences and perceptions of their relationships with teachers.



## Behaviour and Discipline: Who Are the Troublemakers?

Our analyses of the “on the wall” data suggested that when they were boys, these men experienced teacher-student relationships that emphasised disciplinary sanctions for behaviour problems. This made them less likely than other students to receive the guidance they needed to stay focused on their educational and career goals during early adolescence. These men identified certain types of discipline that were particularly problematic: 1) suspensions and expulsions that removed them from the school setting, 2) sanctions that were perceived as unjust or out of proportion to the offence, 3) sanctions not accompanied by efforts to reveal or address the causes of their behaviour problems.

To explore one important dimension of the issue of teacher-student relationships—gender, we collected school reports of disciplinary actions and asked first-year high-school students about their experiences with getting in trouble in school. This section begins with a review of the school data on disciplinary referrals and consequences for the 35 students in this sample. Then, we analyse the transcripts to explore possible gender differences in perceptions of discipline and teacher-student relationships. Though we expected that boys would experience more incidents of disciplinary problems, school data show that girls get into more trouble than the boys. In fact, girls have twice as many infractions and suspensions as boys.

### School Disciplinary Data

According to the school data, the majority of students of both genders had received discipline referrals over the course of the 2009-2010 academic years. According to the discipline referral data for each student, as reported by the school administration, 78 per cent of the 18 boys interviewed received discipline referrals and committed a total of 61 infractions. Of the 17 girls interviewed, 88 per cent received discipline referrals and committed a total of 122 infractions. More girls were getting into trouble; they committed twice as many infractions as the boys.

Disciplinary actions for both genders were due to violations ranging from disruptions in class and disobeying rules to fighting or drug use in school. Boys were more likely to be involved in theft or destruction of property (four incidents compared to zero) and had one more incident of sexual misconduct than girls. Three of the boys compared to four of the girls got into trouble for fighting in school but as groups, each gender committed the same number of infractions for fighting. Generally, girls committed twice as many total infractions as boys and in almost every type of infraction, girls committed more offences. See Table 7.

All participants in the sample had both unexcused absences and unexcused lateness. However, girls had almost twice the number of unexcused absences as boys and slightly more unexcused lateness than boys. See Table 8.

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**Table 7: School Report Disciplinary Referrals, High School Sample\*\***

	Male	Female	Total
Disrespectful/ Rude to teachers	13	32	45
Disrupting Class/ Disobeying school rules	16	27	43
Theft/ Destruction of Property	3	0	3
Drugs/ Alcohol use	0	1	1
Fighting	7	7	14
Profanity/ Verbal abuse	2	8	10
Sexual Misconduct	2	1	3
Unexcused Absences (that resulted in discipline referrals)	18	46	64
Total number of discipline referrals	61	122	191

\*\*This table does not include disciplinary referrals for uniform infractions.



**Table 8: School Report Absences and Lateness, High School Sample**

	Male	Female	Total
Unexcused Absences	70	138	208

In addition to getting into trouble more frequently than boys, the consequences for these infractions were also greater for girls. The girls were sent to detention slightly more than the boys and, strikingly, 53% of girls compared to 22% of boys had been suspended, either in or out of school. See Table 9.

**Table 9: Disciplinary Consequences, High School Sample**

	Male	Female
Number of Suspensions	11 incidents (4 boys)	23 incidents (9 girls)
Number of Detentions	16 incidents (8 boys)	12 (12 girls)
Number of Parent Notifications	14 (8 boys)	24 (13 girls)

The relatively higher incidents of behavioural problems among the girls suggest a greater risk of school failure for girls, but there were no gender differences in GPA. In this sample of 35 students, the average GPA for the first three academic quarters of the 2009-2010 school year was 71 for both boys and girls. According to the Ministry of Education in Bermuda, an average of 80 or above is considered “honours” and a failing average is 59 or below. For the boys in this sample, the range of grades was 61-91, and for the girls, 59-85. But the percentage of boys with a GPA on the lower end of the spectrum with a 69 or below was higher (56 per cent) than the percentage of girls with a GPA of 69 or below (35 per cent).

While girls were getting into more trouble, a greater percent of boys was in danger of failing their first year. The following analysis of the student interview transcripts examines gender differences in their experience with discipline referrals and their perceptions about getting into trouble in school. Findings reveal that boys generally believe that they get into trouble more often and that girls get away with more. Boys are perceived by both genders as being immature and more likely to play around in class, whereas girls are more educationally focused. Both boys and girls are receiving academic support and encouragement, which is especially critical for boys experiencing the “immaturity phase” of early adolescence. However, girls are more likely to also receive social-emotional support in school.

## “Boys Get in Trouble Always”

The interviews revealed a general perception that boys get into more trouble in school, even though this was not the reality in their formal school records. Students were asked if they had ever received discipline referrals in school and all of the boys stated that they had, including the four boys who, according to school reports, did not have any discipline referrals. However, only 65 per cent of the girls reported receiving a discipline referral when, according to school reports, 88 per cent had received them. This discrepancy is a thread throughout the students’ narratives. Although the girls may be getting into trouble more frequently in school, students believe that boys are actually the ones committing more infractions. Many believe that girls cause trouble in school but get away with it more frequently. Lewis states,

*Boys get in trouble always. [Why do you think that is?] Because boys are just - I don’t know. They just like talking a lot and like conversating with our peers in class... But when the girls talk a lot, they don’t talk out loud like the boys, so the teachers really can’t hear them.*

Several boys share Lewis’ perception. Anson reports that girls get away with talking more in class. He offers an example of a time that he was talking in class to respond to a female student’s question and got in trouble for it.


*Like some girls can get away with more. And some boys just got to be there, be quiet like me, because today I walk in, and a girl asked me a question, and I was trying to answer it, and the teacher started yelling at me to be quiet. But the girl told her that it was her. She goes okay, just sit down [to the girl], but she kept yelling at me.*

Trevor also thinks that the school staff and faculty expect the boys to cause more trouble and offers examples where girls are favoured over boys.

*Every time, you know, they will favour the girls. Let’s say they did something or you did something, and then you will tell the teacher, or the teacher will come into it, and they just take the girls’ side. Like they automatically feel that the girls’ not lying or anything... And so that happened in the cafeteria. She’s not a teacher, but the cafeteria lady, um, I was right behind my friend the whole time, and he just went in front of me. Then this girl cut in line in front of me, and she goes, ‘Oh, you just cut in line, you just cut in line’. I told her ‘No, it was her’. She said ‘I know you boys do that all the time, da-da-da-da, I know you came’ - like she’s telling me I know you did that. And then I had to get out of the line. Luckily my friend just gave me some of his lunch and he went back in line. She just sent me out of the line for no reason, and it wasn’t me, so.*

In the following example from his social studies class, Trevor suggests that teachers also believe the girls should be doing better academically than the boys.

*They [teachers] will just favour the girls. That’s what it seems like to me. Like, I’m doing well in social studies, right? So, uh, she - she doesn’t think - I don’t know if that’s - this is considered that, but she doesn’t think, um, I’ve been student of the month in social studies for a while - for these last few terms - and she was like trying to say like - I don’t think she meant it to hurt me or anything, but she was just trying to say, come on you girls, these are boys, you know, students of the month, you’re girls and, I don’t know.*



Trevor thinks his social studies teacher is trying to motivate the girls by asking how they could let a boy become student of the month for so long. The teacher was trying to encourage the girls to keep up with Trevor, who does very well in school and has a GPA of 91, but he feels put down. He thinks the teachers seem surprised when boys perform, and behave, better than girls.

*Today we had an assembly, you know, they were calling people for discipline stuff. They were calling them for notes and to send to their parents, and it was mostly girls so, you know, there was an advisor saying, 'Oh, these are the girls!' You know, almost like they expect 'boys will be boys', but that's everywhere.*

Trevor is not surprised that the girls are getting more discipline referrals because “guys get in as much fights as the girls now. Um, I think the girls, they're - they're rude.” But the teachers' surprise enforces a message that boys are more likely to get into trouble.


Lee agrees that teachers expect the girls to achieve more academically and that boys are more likely to get into trouble.

*We have women teachers, and some of the women teachers don't think that us boys can do it. They always rely on the girls like for academics, because us boys are just strong and stuff, and women learn faster and things like that...We have girls in our school who, like they know they can get away with a lot of stuff, because they're girls. Like I have girls, or people in my class that will hit off of me. And then the teacher's watching them and just says, oh, you don't do that or whatever. But as soon as I touch anybody else or anything like that there, I get sent down to the office, or I got a phone call to my mama.*

Lee has a GPA of 65 and four discipline referrals. He describes a situation that escalated into a detention and a phone call to his mother.

*My math teacher, the new one, she was arguing because of the test, right? And she was saying how there was something on the test, but we was telling her it was not. And she didn't look at the test, and she was getting angry. So I was trying to tell her what was on the test or whatever, and I was putting up my hand. And I was telling her all the stuff that was wrong that wasn't on there that I didn't think was fair or whatever. Then finally she told me to put my hand down and she said she don't want to hear nothing from me at all. So then I put my hand down and I had - it was just after lunch and I had chicken all over my teeth. And I took a knife and I was scratching it, and I went [imitated the sound], like that, and she told me that's not nice, I'm being disrespectful in her class, because I'm doing that deliberately, but I wasn't, because someone had told me earlier about stuff in your mouth still. I said okay, so I just did that behind the book, and she thought I was - she was telling me that's disrespectful. So she called the office and told the head teacher - my year level teacher what I was doing, and she kept trying to switch it up. The teacher said, 'oh, he was picking his teeth in class or whatever like that, and I told him that wasn't nice'. So she called my mama and told my mama that the teacher told her I sucked my teeth at her, and I was being disrespectful, I was being rude in her class, I was sucking my teeth at her, and calling her names or whatever, but that wasn't the case. So I got in trouble.*

Lee believes the teacher exaggerated the situation and was trying to get him into trouble.



Some of the teachers stretch the truth and try to get you in trouble. It's irritating. I went back to the same teacher, and I had to write her an apology letter or whatever. I was giving it to her, and she said, 'No, I don't want to see that paper'. I said, 'Why? If I *don't* give it to you or whatever, I'm going to get in trouble'. She said, 'I don't care. I'm writing you a discipline referral and you're getting Saturdays'. I said, 'well, they already gave me the discipline referral on Saturday'. And she said, 'So what, I don't care, I'm going to write you more'. What is this?

It may appear to Lee's teachers that he does not care about school but he reports trying hard to improve his grades by going to "tutorials and stuff, and asking teachers for help". When he finds the help he needs, he is confident that he will be able to succeed because he has in the past. Lee explains that his previous math teacher was giving him all the support he needed.

*I was getting all the help. I had an 89 when I was in her class, and she moved away. As soon as she moved away, my grades dropped, because I had a new teacher. And that teacher, she would get mad at me, because that teacher that went abroad to school, she would teach us one way, it was an easier way, and the teacher that's there now, she teaches you a different way. She gets mad at you when you don't get it the first time, because she - she doesn't like how that teacher taught us something a different way. So now she's not understanding it either, and she's getting mad at us children, she starts yelling. And then when you try to say something, she just doesn't want to hear you, or whatever, so. I'm right at a 72 right now, but I'm trying to bring it up. Second quarter, I had a 60-something and I brought it up.*

Lee lives in "the middle" of the gang violence and perhaps he is experiencing the thug reputation described by the sample of men "on the wall". This reputation gets in the way of the type of encouraging and supportive student-teacher relationships boys need to achieve in school.

Joseph shares a similar experience that escalated into a school suspension. He was not paying attention in class and missed something. When he asked the teacher a question,

*She started screaming at me about my grades and she blacked out my grade in front of everybody and since I'm not, I'm not the smartest child, and I have a low grade, that caused everybody to look at me different, like a dumb child. And, she just, she just sent me to the office because I end up getting mad, cause when teachers say the wrong things I just, I get mad and say the wrongest stuff... I don't like in front of the whole class, because then this crazy student goes, 'that's dumb, everybody knows, blank, blank, blank is the answer'.*


Joseph worries about looking like "a dumb child" and felt "Really bad. Like it stayed on my mind." Joseph was embarrassed, lost control, and received an out-of-school suspension.

Because he is afraid of being perceived as "dumb", Joseph tends to pose academic questions to his friends, but talking in class is against the rules.

*Like so if I ask my friend, he knows, like, how I am in class and he will just answer it for me. But the teacher looked at us, like, we was talking, and then we went outside, and then he was like, 'you guys are just playing around'. Then, he sent us to the office and I got like two DRs from that one day. Security guard came, it's just dramatic.*

On the other hand, when Joseph gets praised for correctly responding to a question in class, he is motivated to perform better.





*If I get a question right in the class, like, they will praise me. They will just pat my back, like, they'll say, 'see what happens when you pay attention?' And, just, like, keep my head up. [How do you feel when they say those things to you?] I feel good, like I want to do it some more.*

Joseph concludes, "I think girls have it easier than the boys... like, everybody thinks the boys are going to be, like, immature and stupid, like, like, we get judged". Joseph is at risk of failing with a GPA of 61.

Although girls are less likely to think there are any gender differences in terms of behaviour, performance or teacher relationships, some girls also stated that the boys are more likely to get in trouble. Louise is on the honour roll, has excellent attendance and is proud of her athletic and academic achievements. She thinks the boys are a nuisance and more likely to get in trouble.

*Sometimes the boys are a nuisance. Because I don't know. They just want attention, so I guess they have to do stuff so that they can stand out from everybody else. So they - the teachers want them to do - do their work, like be quiet as they focus, because they try to act out a lot and do different things to, yeah... [Do you think that the boys and girls are treated differently by teachers?] Sometimes. Sometimes the girls say things that the teacher believes, but most of the time girls are manipulative, so they try and say things like, oh, well, I didn't do it, and like that, and the boy gets in trouble.*

While the students feel that the boys are getting in trouble more often, there are higher discipline referrals for girls overall, and similar instances of fighting. The perception that boys get into trouble more often and that girls are favoured is problematic because the experience of bias has been found to impede the experience of belonging in school (Jethwani-Keyser, 2008). These findings suggest that not only are some boys being labelled and treated as "thugs", but also teachers seem to have stereotyped all boys, which influence teaching methods and treatment. Girls are considered to be more educationally driven.


### **'Girls Have More of an Educational Brain'**

Girls, they have more of an educational brain than the boys... I don't think that they [teachers] think that the boys will pass as fast as the girls in certain classes, because in science I was learning about how the girl's brains develop differently from the boy's brains and so that's why boys are more technical and girls, well, they get better grades than the boys most of the time.

In this quote, Jordan suggests that girls are "wred" to perform better in school and this perception is confirmed by his teachers, his family and his peers. Jordan has a GPA of 67 and knows that he needs to raise it to a 75 in order to go to college. His friends worry that he may not stay in school.

*Cause, some of my father's friends were having trouble keeping up to standard and they kept staying back so they dropped out. And, I think that's what they think is going to happen to me... I have a history of not having good grades and just skating by school and just getting to, like, a 60. Cause I used to have to get a 60 to pass, I just had a 60. And now I need a 75.*

Jordan currently goes for extra help after school and finds that this support is helping to improve his grades but he knows that he is at risk of losing his motivation. When asked what might keep him continuing to go for that help, he replies,



*If the classes get boring and the teachers just yell for no apparent reason. [Then you might get frustrated and maybe not try as hard?] Yeah, uh-huh, might get to sleep more.*

Boys and girls alike agree that boys are more likely to play around in class and girls are more likely to be educationally focused. Tanya complains about the boys in her class, “Like they act all childish, like they like jump - they walk around in class and stuff like that, and they like disrespect the teacher for no reason.” Emily believes that girls perform better at school because they learn faster, are more organised and/or are more likely to be committed to school.

*I think females have a better learning skill than guys. Like I think guys are meant for more hands-on stuff and females have more academic likes, and most of these young guys around here they just sit ‘on the wall’ and just sell weed or whatever, yeah.*

And Amy explains that teachers treat boys and girls equally but expect more from girls because they “get it faster”.

*I don’t know what to say. But I think they expect more from the girls, because we generally get it faster. No offence, but we get it faster, so yeah.*

These stereotypes are quite pervasive. However, the boys in our study would like to be more focused on their education. Eighty-three per cent of the boys indicated a clear desire to attend college. Many consider a shift from goofing around to working hard in school a sign of “maturity”. According to Reggie, one might demonstrate maturity in school by being “more responsible...You do the right thing and follow your teacher’s rules and not be distracted by your peers.” The “right thing” is to stay on the educational track and avoid distractions from peers, especially those who represent the “street life” that so many men in their lives are experiencing.

## Teacher-Student Relationships

### The Turning Point

In our “on the wall” sample, men who graduated from high school described a turning point where they, like the girls, were able to be more educationally focused. This turning point usually occurs with the support of an adult in the school or family. Dennis, age 15, lives with his father and his stepmother because his mother has been living with cancer for many years. He has received eight disciplinary referrals in school but is currently passing with a GPA of 78. Dennis is experiencing this turning point, due in part to the encouragement he receives from his friends and family and because his brother was recently held back in school. He articulates the process of becoming more “mature”.

*Maturing means like a change in a way like how you do - how you carry yourself in that way, like time to - like basically grow up like. I still joke around and stuff, but not in the sense that I’m failing, and, yeah, things like that.*

Dennis believes that “guys are sometimes serious, but the girls are like they know what they want to do and stuff like that”. He has witnessed this dichotomy firsthand. His father did not graduate from high school and his brother was held back in his first year of high school; however, his sister attends a different public high school

on the Island and is very “focused”. Dennis admits to having smoked marijuana before school in the past but states he has not used drugs “in a while” because when his family moved, he changed his “mentality”.

*My parents moved far away from the violence. They moved because of the gun violence. They didn't want us to get caught up in that... So since I moved from there, like my mentality and everything has changed, like no more.*

Dennis is experiencing that shift in maturity that both the “on the wall” sample and the sample of high school seniors describe. Dennis attributes his ability to make this shift to his parents’ move away from town. He also does not want to get held back like his brother and thinks he needs to start behaving in a way that will keep him from failing in school.

*I just have to work on my, um, behaviour, because I like to joke around and - and stuff like that, so I'm trying to balance it out. Because my previous four years wasn't so good....In middle school and primary school I was always, um, joking around, but now I'm working on my academics and they're pretty good. I've just got to bring up like some of my grades.*


Dennis knows what he has to do and is currently not failing. However, he often gets in trouble for going too far in physical altercations.

*Fighting. Yes, once. We was playing volleyball. And he said something to me I didn't like, and we fought. Most of my suspensions and trouble has been fighting, because I do kickboxing, and I also have done jujitsu, so and with that, um, like a weapon, and I, well, I ain't kind of like fighting, but for some reason I like a little contact. So if anything, like - well, I was having a bad day that day - but previous, I've got suspended - most all my suspensions have been on fighting, because I take - I do, to an extent, that I beat - I hurt people, and because it just goes a little overboard like.*

According to the school data, Dennis had eight disciplinary referrals, including three for fighting, and has already spent five days in TEC. He explains that he has trouble controlling his anger.

*Like people say stuff. Some people call names and well, he said some things to me that really made me mad. Like he snuck punch me in my eye, I had a black eye, and I saw the blood, and then I kicked him in his nose. And I just kept on beating him... He called me the 'P' word. Yes. And that, uh, that just triggered me. [What did the teachers do?] Well, um, two men pulled me off of him. And then he ran - he got his bag and he ran. Like he was scared; he was traumatised. I was really mad, so I was like, yeah. I came in the next day and I got in trouble, because he is a runner for the school and he was injured pretty bad. He got in trouble. He was in-school suspension, but since I took it overboard, I was down in TEC [for five days].*

Nonetheless, Dennis “felt really bad” about getting suspended and has been trying to think about alternative conflict resolution strategies.



*After you do something, you think and see what you could have done to avoid that situation, so that was the situation I was in. So I thought I should not have did that. I should have left him alone and that's it, you know, I have to do that.*

Like high school graduates in our other samples, Dennis has family members encouraging him to stay in school, and helping him through this turning point. In school, Dennis has never spoken to anyone about the challenges he experiences in his community, or because of his mother's illness. However, he explains how public praise in school motivates him.

*The merits. I like that. It makes you feel like you achieve something like, and it makes you want to continue doing what you're doing so you get more... At the S1 assembly, they were calling down the people who got honour roll and academic merits. Academic merits is just below honour roll, so they call that out. And my name was called and I was like, oh, mercy. So I was up there smiling and I went up and got my award, so... I got academic math, and that was nice, yeah, I was surprised too.*

As reported by many students in the study, public praise and merits are especially appreciated and make students feel cared for, an important indicator of belonging in school. With a network of academic support and encouragement, at home and in school, throughout this immaturity phase, Dennis, and other Black Bermudian boys are more likely to achieve their goals of high school graduation and college enrolment.

## **Boys Need More Academic Support and Encouragement As They Mature**


Helping boys through this the transition from middle-to-high school is required to increase their high-school graduation rates. Because it is believed that girls have more of "an educational brain", Jordan concludes that teachers know they will have to "help the boys more than the girls". And indeed, almost all of the boys in this sample offered examples of times when they received academic support from teachers in school. Like many boys in this study, Clay appreciates the school's willingness to help him stay in school. He notes, "This school, they help you out a lot with the school work...They'll help you bring your grades up". Similarly, Lewis states that his teachers make themselves available outside of the classroom and will try different ways of teaching the same material in order to enhance understanding.

*There's more help, like if you need help, the teachers are there like at lunchtime and after school, and stuff like that. Yeah, if you don't understand it this way, she will help you understand it in another way.*

The boys sense that greater attention is being paid to them and to helping them achieve in school. Miles explains that the teachers are worried about "young men growing up and making nothing of themselves again". Consequently, "they like basically made this whole assembly based on boys have to like do better. Like they expect more from them I guess". Miles is in danger of failing with a GPA of 65 and 15 disciplinary referrals, but he gets extra help in school because he aims "to graduate".

*I go to my English teacher at lunchtime to get extra help...my grade's going up now. I always go to most of my teachers for extra help. They give it to me. They instruct it better. One-on-one, I can actually see what she's doing.*

Miles thinks the teachers tell him to "keep your grades up and work hard" because they want him to make



something of himself. Sometimes this message is interpreted as teachers having high expectations of them, and others see it as the girls don't need the help, but boys do. Tyler sums up these seemingly conflicting interpretations, "They expect the boys to do better, but they still got the feeling in their mind that the girls are going to do better".

Although some boys suspect that the teachers don't actually believe that the boys could do better than the girls, many appreciate, and benefit from, the academic support they receive. Through these interactions and words of encouragement, students feel that teachers care, and this sense of caring contributes to students' overall sense of community and relationship with school. Perceptions that teachers are willing to help with school work make them feel cared for, a strong predictor of high school retention (Fine, 1991; Noddings, 1992).


These findings reveal perceptions that boys cause more trouble and girls are more educationally focused. Boys need more academic support and encouragement in order to make the maturity transition necessary for reaching their educational goals. But is it enough? The next section reveals that girls are more likely to seek out social-emotional support when needed, to help them through situations, including community violence and familial conflicts that might derail them from their educational goals.

## Girls Seek More Social-Emotional Support

Having at least one caring adult in a student's life is a leading protective factor associated with high school graduation and resilience over the life course (Pittman, Irby, Tolman, Yohalem, & Ferber, 2003; Walkow & Ferguson, 2001). Boys and girls alike identified teachers who offer academic support as ones who "care". However, girls were more likely to also talk with those caring adults in the school about social-emotional concerns. This type of support and communication serves to connect the multiple contexts in which the child lives, raises awareness of the personal challenges the girls are experiencing and, consequently, informs a deeper understanding of the behaviours teachers and faculty observe in school. Many boys in this sample have had direct experiences with community violence and serious challenges at home that may result in behaviour that is not "educationally focused". However, few boys identify instances of their teachers providing support outside of an academic context, suggesting that teachers are less likely to be aware of these challenges and the boys' social-emotional needs.

Pearl has committed 16 disciplinary infractions and received two out-of-school suspensions for being disrespectful and not following school rules. Despite her disciplinary problems, Pearl still believes the teachers like her and she turns to them for help with both academic and interpersonal problems.

*Like one day I wanted to fight a girl. I went to her and I was like teacher, I want to fight a girl; I want you to give me some advice. And then she was like 'don't fight her, because the wrong things could happen, you could get injured, she could get injured, and you could get expelled. And fighting goes on your record and is not a good thing that colleges want, because you could go there and start fights too'. Even though she has more discipline referrals than any of the boys in our sample, Pearl still states, "Um, mostly boys get in trouble" Pearl is passing with a GPA of 70 and she is confident that she will graduate high school, go to college and become a teacher. When she won an award for "achieving 80 and higher", she reports, "I was happy, because I knew I was achieving, and I could get into good schools". Findings in this study suggest that girls' disciplinary problems are less likely to interfere with their academic performance because they are more educationally focused AND they are more likely to get social-emotional support when they need it. Boys reported getting more generic life advice and were less likely to seek out social-emotional support.*



Dennis, who is experiencing the maturity turning point, is working hard to stay educationally focused, but he struggles with his anger. When he sees his mother, who is dying of cancer, he tries not to burden her with his troubles.

*I'll tell her like how I'm doing in school, because that - that makes her proud, like to see her son doing good. And mostly we don't really talk about the bad stuff. We'll just spend time together while we still can, as we always - it's like get hugs and kisses from her and spend that time with her.*

Dennis does not talk to his dad about his feelings either: "I haven't talked to my dad. Well, my dad knows about it. We haven't really sat down and talked about it". Both parents are emphasising the need to do well in school and Dennis is passing with a GPA of 78 but he has never spoken to anyone in school, or at home, about his family or community experiences; and his behaviour is likely to get in the way of his relationships with his teachers and his connection to school.

Girls, however, are more likely to also seek out support for more social-emotional concerns, allowing themselves to be "known" in school. Lillian lives with her uncle and names her auntie's death as the biggest challenge in her life so far.

*She's like my mama. It's like if I really needed someone to talk to, but like advice or something, I'll come to auntie. Like I would stay in her house 24/7. Like I went to her house more than I was home. Yeah, I would like to have her back. But she was like young, so it's like, you know? [Have you been talking to anyone about it?] Like how I feel? Yes, my school counsellor.*


Lillian has received eight disciplinary referrals but members of the school community are aware of the challenges in her life. Earlier in this chapter, Lillian spoke about the fear that she feels regarding the violence in her community. She worries about her safety when she leaves her home and is also worried that the gun violence may seep into her school. Talking with the school counsellor about these social-emotional needs is likely to keep her connected to the social supports she needs to attain her goals of attending college and becoming an accountant.

Girls' disciplinary problems do not appear to hinder their relationships in school. Isabel is failing with a grade point average of 63 and has 12 disciplinary referrals but reports that teachers are empathetic and responsive to students' emotional and social needs. She says:

*[Teachers] understand what it's like for teenagers and what they go through. When you're having a bad day they talk to you about it. I go talk to them....They'll be like come talk to me outside....And we just go and talk outside for a while... and then she'll make hot chocolate or something. Like if I got in trouble the night before and my mama is mad, or something like that. I'll just come to school irritated. Or even in the morning time, sometimes we argue, so I just go to them and talk about it.*

Isabel admits to having trouble concentrating in school but that she is working hard to pull up her grades so that she can go to college overseas and become a forensic scientist.

Findings suggest that girls' disciplinary problems are less likely to interfere with their educational goals because they seek out, and receive, both academic and social-emotional support when they need it. Helping



boys through the maturity transition period also includes guiding them through social emotional challenges and the consequences associated with various choices during this critical period. If they obtained the social emotional support they needed and teachers were more aware of the factors leading to behavioural problems, we suspect fewer boys would be “kicked out” of school because of behavioural problems, and fewer would ultimately end up “on the wall”.

## Chapter Four Conclusions

Boys and girls alike were experiencing high levels of exposure to community and familial conflict. Unexpectedly, we learned that the boys in this study committed fewer disciplinary infractions in school than the girls and the girls were experiencing higher rates of detentions and suspensions. However, while girls were getting into more trouble, a greater percentage of boys were in danger of failing their first year. Findings revealed that boys still believe that they get into trouble more often and that girls get away with more, even though this was not the reality. Boys were perceived by both genders as being immature and more likely to play around in class, whereas girls were considered more educationally focused. Both boys and girls are receiving academic support and encouragement, which is especially critical for boys experiencing the “immaturity phase” of early adolescence. However, girls are more likely to also receive social-emotional support in school.

The results in this chapter reveal that Black Bermudian youth are experiencing dimensions of “toxic stress”, including chronic conditions such as exposure to violence, repeated extended separations from caregivers and the accumulated burdens of family hardship (Shonkoff, J, 2006). Research suggests that when these stressful events are accompanied by supportive and responsive relationships at home and/or school, negative academic and social-emotional outcomes may be alleviated. The opportunity to process their social, academic and psychological needs in school may prove invaluable. Interventions aimed at promoting supportive relationships in the context of toxic stress have the potential to alleviate the effects of toxic stress on Black Bermudian boys.

*If we want the best academic outcomes, the most efficient and cost-effective route to achieve that is, counter intuitively, not to narrowly focus on academics, but to also address children’s social, emotional and physical development (Diamond, A. 2010, p. 780).*

The next chapter summarises the cumulative findings of our research in Bermuda and offers a series of recommendations for both in-school and out-of-school youth.

This chapter summarises and interprets our findings and suggests their implications for future research and for programmes and policies designed to prevent disconnection and to reconnect men already “on the wall”. First we review the characteristics of the men who are “on the wall” and the personal and environmental characteristics that contribute to their current state of disconnection. Next we review the gender specific experiences and perceptions of the students in our high-school study. These results begin to explain why Black boys and men in Bermuda are less likely to attain their educational goals. Next, we identify specific programme recommendations for keeping Black Bermudian boys in school and for reconnecting men already “on the wall”. The chapter concludes with the limitations of this study and suggestions for future research.



# Chapter Five: Conclusions and Implications for Policy, Youth Service, and Future Research

## Who Are These Men ‘On the Wall’?

Bermudians are rightly concerned about the influx of gang violence in Bermuda, which is increasingly becoming known as a “Black male” problem. Findings reveal that exposure to, and involvement in, community violence is indeed central to the lives of Bermudian men “on the wall”. The unemployed and out-of-school men in this study shared three key characteristics that led to their current status of “disconnection”: Community violence and incarceration; family discord and limited familial support, and getting “kicked out” of school for disciplinary reasons that included fighting or involvement with drugs and gang affiliation.

This study reveals that an individual’s state of disconnection is a multifaceted developmental process made up of cumulative experiences beginning with a child’s earliest educational and familial experiences. This process is best understood through Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model of development (1977) where experiences in the child’s social environment influence the development of the child in an ongoing way. By the time a child reaches the developmental stage of adolescence, he brings with him cumulative experiences from home, neighbourhood and school that have largely shaped his academic track record, behavioural reputation in school, self-esteem in the school environment, peer and teacher interactions and relationships, and in turn his connection and attachment to school. He also brings with him a sense of self and his role in these nested contexts which frame and determine his developmental trajectory.

Experiences within various contexts in the individual’s microsystem (i.e., unfair disciplinary practices in the school setting) informed their perceptions about themselves, their relationships and the opportunities available to them and led to the negative developmental outcome of disconnectedness. These negative experiences within multiple social settings worked together to cumulatively create a context of “toxic stress” that altered their life course (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Coll et. al, 1996; Shonkoff, 2006). For many, the consequences are manifested in poor school performance and behaviour that ultimately leads to dropping out of high school.

After dropping out of high school, “on the wall” men in our study find themselves in situations demanding even more responsible and independent behaviour, but they lack the necessary skills, credentials or supports. They hustle for work, suffer the violent and legal consequences of being involved in the drug trade, are stigmatised for their associations with the street, and fear that it may be too late for them to achieve their goals. Further, fear of failure continues to block their efforts to meet their educational and employment goals. Researchers agree that when the possibility of success seems unlikely and when social encouragement is weak, a sense of inadequacy and inferiority may be fostered, potentially impeding academic accomplishment and future job marketability (Jozefowicz-Simbeni, 2008; Swanson, Spencer, Dell’Angelo, Harpalani, Spencer, 2002). Our recommendations below consider this psychological dimension of the disconnectedness as well as the more specific educational, employment and social service needs.



## Why Are Black Boys and Men Less Likely to Attain Their Educational Goals?

This study revealed that boys were more likely to drop out of high school for three core reasons: (1) teachers and fellow students believe that when compared to girls, boys get into more trouble and are less educationally focused, (2) boys experience a critical maturity period in early adolescence and as a result may require more structure and support to succeed in school, and (3) boys are less likely to seek and obtain social-emotional support than girls.

The decision to drop out is typically made during a highly vulnerable time when adolescents do not necessarily consider the consequences of their decisions (Hernandez Jozefowicz-Simbeni, 2008) and are increasingly vulnerable to engage in risky activities associated with school failure, dropout, and disconnectedness (Blumer & Werner-Wilson, 2010). Indeed, male high-school graduates experience a turning point in early adolescence where, often with the help of a caring adult in the school, they became more committed to their educational goals. There is some indication that the part of the brain that processes information expands during childhood and then begins to thin, peaking in girls at roughly 12 to 14 years old and up to two years later in boys (Urion & Jensen, as cited in Harvard Magazine, 2008). In other words, puberty may occur before adolescents are able to fully comprehend the associations between risk-taking behaviours and long-term consequences, especially for males, which would explain their significant need for supportive adult guidance. Support and guidance that explicitly links boys' educational decisions to their goals for the future in the early years of high school is likely to keep many more Bermudian boys in school.

Although girls in the high school sample were actually getting into trouble more frequently, the perception that boys get in trouble, and girls do well in school, was pervasive. In the sample of unemployed men, perceptions of unfair discipline policies led to feelings of discontent, alienation, disengagement and incompetence. Their perceptions regarding gender stereotyping and the thug reputation of males in high school prevented the establishment of social and academic supports during this "critical period" of early adolescence. As a result, boys, many of whom faced challenging family circumstances and exposure to community violence, were alienated from school which represents a viable source of both academic and social-emotional support. When disconnected from both school and home, boys may end up ultimately "on the wall". Instead, boys need encouraging relationships with caring adults, especially in early adolescence that help them problem solve and think through the consequences of their actions and a school environment that encourages boys to seek non-academic support (Pittman, Irby, Tolman, Yohalem, & Ferber, 2003; Roeser, Eccles & Sameroff, 2000; Wolkow & Ferguson, 2001).

Girls experience disciplinary sanctions but because they seek and obtain social-emotional support, these sanctions do not pull them away from school. Instead, adults in the school are more likely to become aware of some of the personal challenges that are being manifested in their observable behaviour. Further, girls are believed to have more of "an educational brain" and to be inherently more committed to school. When this expectation becomes internalised, boys are less likely to believe that they can do well in school or be successful in the higher earning industries that demand degrees in higher education. And because boys have greater access to "short money", meaning decent-earning jobs not requiring a college education (Mincy, Jethwani-Keyser & Haldane, 2009), they are better able to justify the decision to abandon an educational trajectory. In sum, the lives of young Black Bermudian males are defined by a complex intersection of race, gender, rich short-term gains and poor motivations to invest in the long-term. Perceptions of a gender bias in school, coupled with the maturity challenge that boys experience, the tendency for boys to be less likely to obtain social-emotional supports in school, and the lower returns to college education for Black Bermudian males, may explain why they are less

likely to invest in education. Perhaps the problem is not with the boys but with the systems in which they exist.

## Policy Recommendations for In-School Youth:

### Preventing Disconnection and Keeping Boys Connected to School<sup>10</sup>:

In a recent statement to the House of Assembly (May 2011), The Minister of Education, Hon. Dame Smith noted, “Far too often, students are being suspended for such incidents as ‘disrupting class’, ‘profane language’, ‘disrespect’ and ‘bad behaviour’.” She concludes:

*Locking students out with no hope of their engaging in our education system will not solve indiscipline or any other problems in schools....The Department of Education has a responsibility to support our principals and teachers to effectively do their jobs. We must assist them with interventions where and when children have behavioural issues that are outside the scope of schools to handle.*

We agree with these insightful words and in this section offer a review of the literature on “zero tolerance” policies as well as an alternative, or complementary, school-based response: The Safe Harbor model.

The “zero-tolerance” approaches to disciplinary concerns have been adopted by 94 per cent of U.S. public schools but are not proving to eliminate inappropriate behaviours, or make schools safer (Monroe, 2005). Instead, these measures serve to alienate youth and push them out of school (Alexander, Entwisle & Steinberg, 2001), and many believe that these policies have contributed to the higher dropout rate, incarceration rate and disconnectedness among Black men (Skiba & Peterson, 1999; Besharov & Gardiner, 1998). One of the male students, Warren, age 15, in our high school sample said it best:

*I don't feel that suspension is like appropriate. I think because when – if you just get suspended, you're really just missing out on school. Because, I used to think if you got suspended, are you really getting punished, or are you really just going home and doing whatever?*

Students’ experiences with “in-school suspension” (ISS) reveal poor educational engagement. Dennis, age 15, describes his experience:

*Teachers from your school send you work and you have to complete it and get it back and things like that. Well, when I was there, all of my work was very simple. Sometimes I didn't get no work, so I'll go in this little box room. It's this little like desk, but it's like a box, and I'll just go there, put my head down, and go to sleep.*

In order to lower suspension and expulsion rates, teachers need the resources and training to address behavioural issues in their classrooms, which our results suggest are often rooted in family or community trauma

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<sup>10</sup> In our previous report (Mincy, Jethwani-Keyser, Haldane, 2009), we recommended that the Ministry provide more guidance counsellors in the public schools in order to identify students’ interests and allow students to begin to articulate educational and professional goals right at the start of high school. This relational connection applies perhaps equally well to students who are at risk of dropping out and students who are likely to graduate and go on to higher education. Students who are thinking about dropping out can receive guidance in the consequences of alternative pathways, and students who are thinking about higher education can identify the steps they need to take to achieve their goals. Guidance counsellors might help students understand college requirements, the college application process and help students identify scholarships, internships and more. Counsellors who guide students through decisions and problems not only send the message that the school sees their education as a priority but also helps students conceptualise the long-term consequences of various actions before it is too late. Personalised guidance and ongoing monitoring of student progress are likely to promote school engagement, confidence and motivation among Black males because their efforts in school are placed in the context of their own goals. We believe the recommendations made in this report complement this guidance recommendation by serving to also meet students’ social-emotional needs and prevent problem behaviors in school.

and violence. For example, Keisha, who had five disciplinary infractions, experiences high levels of exposure to community violence.

*[Me and my friends in school] just talk and like if something happens, we'll talk about it. Like if you was to get into an argument with somebody, like when the shootings happen we talk about it. [What do you think about all the shootings that are happening?] It's crazy. Now it's just normal to hear somebody got shot. It's happening like almost weekend, like sometimes it can happen near me.*

Keisha is fearful of the violence and has not had her mother to rely on.

*Like my mama was in the hospital for a while, and I'll stay with my sister. Sometimes I'd have to leave school to get my brother, so I wasn't in school that much.*

Keisha's fear and familial problems are likely to be contributing to her poor behaviour in school.

The “on the wall” men frequently recalled serious familial conflict that occurred at the same time they were experiencing problems in school. School staff were unaware of students' circumstances and, consequently, students were suspended, resulting in their disconnection from home, school and future employment. According to the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1995), youth facing family, neighbourhood or school risk factors are in need of safe places to congregate where they can socialise, process challenging experiences, and be nurtured by adults in trusting relationships (Ahmed & Ezzedine, 2009). Until youth process the trauma in their lives, they are unable to concentrate in school (Jozefowicz-Simbeni, 2008).

For example, Allison, age 15, sees a social worker outside of school. She reports, “I get to let stuff out, instead of holding it inside”, and explains that when she used to hold it in, it would get her “upset and stuff, and then I wouldn't do no work”. In contrast, Ian, age 22, did not have this experience and chose the “wrong road”.


*Not going to school and getting in trouble. I could have been a quiet little boy....Once you be sitting out there, you get caught up and you're on the wrong path, you're going to take the wrong road.*

Ian's father was killed when he was in middle school, his brother is a gang leader and in S2, Ian was expelled from school. Now he is homeless, does not have a GED and has young children to support.

Skiba, Rausch & Ritter (2004) introduced an alternative to zero tolerance disciplinary policies that has three primary components: (1) building a safe and positive school environment, (2) early identification/intervention for students at risk for violence, (3) effective and appropriate responses to violence. We recommend the Safe Harbor model to fulfil these needs.

## **The Safe Harbor Model**

A primary prevention strategy for keeping men “off the wall” is to increase the proportion of Black Bermudian males who complete high school. School engagement is a drug and violence prevention strategy in and of itself. The Safe Harbor model provides schools with the opportunity to improve academic performance and reduce dropout rates by addressing the social and emotional difficulties that lead to disruptive behaviours in the classroom. It creates a context in which boys at risk are more likely to seek, and obtain, the support they need to cope with the challenges they struggle with in their lives - not only in school but at home and on the streets. Through discussions, counselling, guidance and skill building, young people can begin to understand their choices, recognise the links between family, community and school violence, and receive the support they need to stay in school. This approach creates a school climate that accommodates gender differences in help



seeking behaviour, offers teachers the opportunity to observe boys' out-of-school problems as easily as they observe girls' personal challenges, and provides the support that all students need to succeed in school.

The Safe Harbor programme was developed by Safe Horizon, a not-for-profit in New York City, to respond to the underlying causes of school violence and the impact of family and community violence on adolescents. A four-year programme evaluation demonstrated improvements in preferred conflict resolution strategies, positive social control strategies and attitudes against gangs, especially when students received several components of the programme (Nadel, Spellmann, Alvarez-Canino, Lausell-Bryant, Landsberg, 1996). The Office for Victims of Crime (OVC), a division of the U.S. Department of Justice, identified the Safe Harbor as an effective response to school violence and supported its national replication. Teachers and school administrators that participated in the national replication reported that the programme helped to alleviate some of the problem behaviours they were observing in their classrooms.

The core of this model is a room in the school that is designated as a safe space where students, families and staff of the school community are welcome to visit and simply relax and cool down, or to participate in conflict resolution, counselling or curriculum classes. School personnel can refer students throughout the school day for conflict resolution, or to discuss what is on their minds before disciplinary action is taken. The room is staffed by a full-time social worker and is preferably large, attractive and decorated like a family room, equipped with comfortable rugs, sofas, lamps, games, and curtains. By addressing issues of family discord and community violence, the Safe Harbor model frees teachers of the responsibility to address the source of problem behaviours in their classroom, while offering students the social-emotional guidance and support they need to achieve in school.

This model consists of multiple recommended components:

- Curriculum lessons invite students into conversations about their attitudes and beliefs about violence, and may be particularly effective for boys who are less likely to seek out social-emotional support on their own. Lessons and discussions should demonstrate how life circumstances, situational dynamics and underlying emotions influence their behaviour. Through role-playing, modelling and feedback, students are engaged in thinking about their own life experiences and gender beliefs, and explore the changes they can make in their own lives. Lessons should provide the opportunity for both boys and girls to think about various choices and consequences and to practice new skills, especially how to transfer these new skills to their own real life situations and settings. The PEARLS (People Empowered to Address Real Life Situations) curriculum is one such victim assistance/violence prevention curriculum that includes topics such as the effects of violence and victimisation on individuals, families and communities; developing safety and conflict resolution strategies; building communication and support skills; and the influence of peers, family and culture on attitudes and beliefs about violence. Bermuda might adapt this curriculum to meet its particular needs.
- Individual counselling supports students' social-emotional needs. Counselling might follow up with students in the curriculum classes or might be a response to a classroom conflict that may have otherwise resulted in immediate disciplinary action. Again, this may be particularly effective for boys who are less likely to seek this type of support. Considering the high levels of family stressors in the lives of Bermudian high school students, this component might include parent involvement when necessary. Counsellors might aim to improve parent-child communication and offer referrals to family counselling and other community-based services.

- Parent and teacher trainings that strengthen family and school supports for Black Bermudian males by raising awareness about their developmental needs.
- Peer mediation/conflict resolution activities.
- Schoolwide antiviolence campaigns and safety support teams that include teachers, students, parents and administrators.

Safe Harbor offers an effective means to identify and support students' socio-emotional needs, while maintaining vigilance about school safety and sanctioning infractions when students fail to seek the help that is available. It can therefore supplement "zero tolerance" and meet the holistic needs of the student, thereby supporting school achievement, especially for Black Bermudian males. We recommend that the Ministry of Education in Bermuda partner with a not-for-profit agency with expertise in youth development, conflict resolution and case management to staff and operate this model in collaboration with school personnel.


*The Safe Harbor means not being a fool in your life. Not to kill, smoke, disrespect or do nothing bad. It's also like when you have problems you just go to a place where a person talks to you about it and would probably change your life from being bad. Safe Harbor to me is when you can go to someone and tell them problems. A place where you can feel safe. --- Seventh grader, Brooklyn, New York*

*I think Safe Harbor is important because we need to express our feelings like what's going on at home and what's going on in the streets that you think is affecting you and your family. Also, it's important because we need to learn that drugs are the thing to say 'no' to. Safe Harbor is important so that we can know about violence and important stuff like fighting and killing. --- Seventh grader, Brooklyn, New York*

In sum, we recommend this model because of its empirical evidence of effectiveness, its flexibility in application and its responsiveness to some of the specific problems identified in this study, including a need for more social-emotional support in schools and more collaborative, and less punitive, disciplinary policies. We have seen it work and are confident in the programme's ability to enforce a schoolwide climate of support and safety, and to reach students that are otherwise likely to fall through the cracks.

## Job Exposure

In our previous report, we recommended that guidance counsellors work with local businesses to increase the exposure that Black boys have to high earning jobs. We recommend that the Safe Harbor host "Everyday Heroes", a component of the Children's Aid Society's programme for Black boys and their families entitled "Steps to Success". These "everyday heroes" are ordinary Black men, as opposed to sports or movie stars, whose paths to achievement can be discussed and emulated. These Black male mentors would speak with Black boys about their work, educational backgrounds and interests in ways that lead to conversations in which boys might expose some of the challenges they are experiencing both in- and out-of school. This component might be especially effective with boys who have limited access to adult male role models at home or in school. The research literature states that mentoring relationships that offer long-term and consistent emotional closeness, while offering personal and academic assistance are most effective, especially for low-income youth



(Dubois, Holloway, Valentine & Cooper, 2002). However, in order to narrow the earnings gaps between Black and White Bermudian men, we believe that it would also be beneficial for Black boys to simply be exposed to job opportunities, especially jobs in the financial industries, that they may not have otherwise considered.

## Career Academies

Some of the high school boys in this study are already engaged in street life, even though they are still in school. For such boys, the Career Academies model, which we recommended in our earlier report might be particularly effective. Career Academies was developed in the United States in 1969 to promote school-to-work transitions for urban youth who thrive from work-based learning opportunities. Over 2,500 Career Academies, each involving 100-200 students, operate in U.S. high schools and organise students' experiences around specific career-based themes. In pursuing a theme, students take academic, career and technical courses, while participating in job-shadowing experiences organised by school-local employer collaborations. A rigorous, long-term, multisite evaluation has shown very positive impacts of the Career Academy model on school completion and earnings, especially for at-risk Black males (Kemple & Willner, 2008). This places Career Academies in a class of its own and should be of particular interest to Bermudians.

## Policy Recommendations for Out-of-School Youth:

### Reconnecting Men 'On the Wall'

The "on the wall" participants in this study shared stories of homelessness, drugs, violence, being kicked out of school and out of their homes. Men had few supports, lots of self-criticism, and trouble envisioning what they would be doing in five years. However, men were still thinking about their goals for further education, employment and self-sufficiency, and the next steps that they needed to take to accomplish those goals. In order to actualise these goals, young Black Bermudian men, especially those who have dropped out of high school, need one-on-one case management that will address social-service needs such as depression, homelessness or problems with substance abuse. Case management services can also connect young men to job training and educational services so that they may ultimately obtain and retain stable, well-paying jobs (Brown, Moore & Bzostek, 2003).

Research suggests that the most effective programmes for disconnected populations combine case management, technical training, employment preparation and placement, educational services with caring adults and environments that provide camaraderie with peers and staff, wraparound services and long term follow up (Social Issue Report, 2011; Levin-Epstein & Greenberg, 2003). Just as high-school youth need to process their personal challenges at home, at school and in the street to achieve academically in school, unemployed men have certain basic needs that must be met before they can secure formal employment. This study begins to identify some of the primary needs that not-for-profit, government and business programmes serving disconnected youth might address.

First, we echo our prior recommendation (Mincy, Jethwani-Keyser & Haldane, 2009) where we suggested that Island officials create a new agency tasked with making "positive" youth development policies for out-of-school youth between 16 and 30 years old who lack a GED certification and are most likely to be "on the wall", (e.g., not enrolled, unemployed or employed at very low earnings) and involved in criminal behaviour. The agency would coordinate the most innovative services available through youth service organisations on the Island while

also supporting research and the development of partnerships with the business sector, government services and not-for-profits serving disconnected youth. We recommend a strong collaborative effort involving schools, businesses, government agencies and non-profit organisations to implement the policies and programmes that can support Black Bermudian males both in and out of school. Collaborative services provide clients with many benefits: coordinated work/education schedules, streamlined communication between the various services in their lives, the opportunity to feel heard and to be known within the context of consistent and supportive relationships, and the ability to experience belonging in a pro-social, yet like-minded, community. The following key programmatic needs: case management, education and work readiness skills are reviewed below.

## Case Management

Disconnected men have a history that is likely to psychologically paralyse them and their visions for the future. Throughout their lives, the unemployed men in this study have had limited networks of social support and guidance and little experience with programmes that offer counselling or family services. Among the few that did have experiences with social service programmes on the Island, the reviews were mixed. Some felt blamed for their situations.

*They put it to everything was my fault, I was bad and all this...You could see it was my mama. They were like, look young man, sometimes in your life, you know, they gave me that speech. [I wanted them to say] we'll try to work with your mama. --- Breon, age 18*

Men were most grateful for programmes that offered a safe and confidential space where they could talk, be heard and express different things that might be on their minds without being judged.

*I guess like a big brother or something like that, like one of those organisations where you interact with somebody older who's like successful, or like has his head on straight kind of thing. I think if there was like a lot of positive people, like men, around me, things could have turned out a little different. --- Tony, age 22*

Men need a safe space where problems in the street, at home and/or in school can be addressed and where solutions can be explored. Many disconnected youth come from troubled homes – they may live with parents who are neglectful, unemployed, addicted to drugs, emotionally or physically abusive, or all of the above. Programmes must offer safe and supportive environments that are in sharp contrast to problematic home and street environments. In this way, effective programmes for disconnected youth meet the immediate need to have a welcoming and supportive place to go (Latin American Youth Center, 2007).

Research suggests that regular contact with a steady, positive adult can be extremely powerful in helping disconnected youth set goals and overcome obstacles (Pittman, Irby, Tolman, Yohalem, & Ferber, 2003; Wolkow & Ferguson, 2001). Research at the University of Minnesota shows that for every dollar spent on one-to-one case management services, the community sees a \$2.72 return in juvenile crime and truancy reduction. Case management that offers long-term and consistent emotional closeness, combined with personal, professional and academic guidance, have been found to be extremely effective for reconnecting low-income youth. By meeting young people where they are and responding to their individualised needs, case managers effectively help them build the skills and confidence necessary to become productive and successful young adults (Dubois, Hallaway, Valentine & Cooper, 2002). Effective case managers would follow these steps:

1. Listen. Welcome young people into a relationship with a caring adult who will simply listen to the experiences that these youth have had and what got them to where they are now, and help them



to identify where they want to be.

2. **Identify Need.** What does this person need to satisfy his/her goals? Some possibilities might be a GED, college or other educational certification, insurance, housing, tutoring, drug treatment, employment or college readiness skills, mental health counselling, economic guidance (opening a bank account, working with the credit bureau), family services and transportation.
3. **Link Up to Service.** Once the need is identified, mentors/case workers will link clients up to services that will address the unique needs of each individual served. Services might include a work readiness programme, GED programmes, stipends for on-the-job training, information sessions about scholarships and college applications, links to employers, national training board or business groups, or links to drug treatment or counselling services at agencies such as the Family Centre.
4. **Follow-up.** Effective caseworkers will follow up with clients to ensure that they pursue the pathways that are presented to them and initiate inter-agency connections that serve as a net for this often-disenfranchised population.

One programme in isolation, no matter how strong the programme, is not enough. Case management that connects men with critical educational, psychological and employment-related supports is vital to success (Latin American Youth Center, 2007).

## GED and Academic Tutoring


Findings suggest that a large portion of disconnected youth in Bermuda have less than a high-school education. Therefore, there must be sufficient low-cost and easily accessible GED programmes available to meet the basic educational needs of disconnected Bermudian youth. In this study, those without the GED all aimed to still attain this educational goal to secure even low-paying formal employment. We recommend that more funding be allocated for GED programmes and that, considering the financial constraints of men “on the wall”, they be provided free of charge for participants. Considering the prevalence and territorial nature of gang violence among this population, we also recommend that GED and tutoring opportunities be made available to men throughout the island (in both “town” and “country” locations). Findings suggest that many in this population have internalised the reputation that they are “thugs” and may fear repeated failure in their educational or professional endeavours. Therefore, it is likely that men will present a need for additional tutoring or self-paced learning strategies to get them past their academic obstacles.

## Employment Readiness Services

*“They don’t ask me back. They don’t call me back.”*

Men need more than an interview. They also need training on how to secure and retain a job. Daquan, age 23, shares his lack of confidence in his job search. “[I need help on] like meeting the boss, what I’m going to say... I don’t even know how to do a resume”. In order to meet the expectations of the Bermudian workplace, educational skills must be accompanied by job-training services. Behaviours that got these young men into trouble in school, such as poor attendance and difficulties with managing conflict in an appropriate manner, are likely to follow them into the workplace. In the work place, these behaviours translate into the same “soft skill” deficits that reduce the employability of less-educated young adults in the U.S. (Moss & Tilly, 1996; Pager &





Shepherd, 2008). Individuals with poor soft skills are less punctual, exhibit poorer workplace attitudes, are less able to work as members of a team, and are more likely to violate (written and unwritten) rules than their peers. Employers in Bermuda report that these factors are partly responsible for the unemployment and earnings gaps between young Black Bermudian males and their peers (Richardson, 2009). Interview skills such as how to talk or ask questions in an interview, what language and demeanour is appropriate on the job, why it is important to be punctual, how to dress for work, creating a resume, and protocols and expectations while at work, are critical to re-engaging this population in the workforce. Individuals who have never been taught the correct way to behave on the job will not be hired or will be unable to retain jobs without this basic employment knowledge.

The not-for-profit community, in partnership with the Bermudian Government, is well suited to provide these services, which would prepare out-of-school youth to make a successful transition to adulthood, including school re-entry, higher education, and preparation for work. The Bermuda Employer’s Council’s WorkReady business skills programme, Mirrors, Youth on the Move, Pride, Turning Point, the Adult Education School, the Seventh Day Adventist Church, the Hustle Truck, Impact Mentoring Academy and Chewstick (it is likely that there are others not included on this list) have all been identified as serving the disconnected population. It is essential that these programmes establish strong linkages so that disconnected youth experience a continuum of care. For example, government programmes can partner with not-for-profits that offer specialised services through referrals, financial supports and marketing efforts.

However, it is important to note that these organisations do not have a stable funding base and, therefore, their capacity is underdeveloped and the services they provide are untested, though well-meaning. What Bermuda lacks are comprehensive and evaluated programmes with secure funding, that serve the social, academic, psychological, and employment needs of disconnected youth. Therefore, we re-iterate our earlier recommendation for the development of Job Corps, a well-established model for preventing and serving “disconnected” youth in the United States (Mincy, Jethwani-Keyser, Haldane, 2009). This programme has been rigorously evaluated and focuses on the barriers to work and self-sufficiency typically faced by disconnected young adults, including housing, education, substance abuse, interpersonal support and incarceration. Bermuda might replicate components of this programme with a strong emphasis on case management.

## Job Corps

In the U.S., Job Corps is the largest, federally funded, vocationally focused education programme for disadvantaged youth. It primarily serves non-White, high-school dropouts between 16 and 24 years old, especially many Black males with criminal records. The primary services include vocational training in more than 75 trades, with input from local businesses and labour unions that provide information about specific competencies required by the training. Individualised and self-paced academic instruction in math, reading and writing skills leads to the GED certificate. These services are accompanied by counselling, social-skills training, substance abuse support and health education. Following participation, Job Corps also provides job-placement services or assistance with additional training. A recent rigorous evaluation with a four-year follow-up showed that Job Corps had large and statistically significant impacts on GED training and average weekly earnings, and reduced criminal activity (Schochet, Burghardt & McConnell, 2008). We recommend a Job Corps programme with a sufficiently large and committed partnership—among business, government, schools and nonprofits—to make the replication in Bermuda work.

## Limitations and Future Research

Although this study offers information about Black Bermudian males, the generalisability of the results are limited. This study took place in particular geographic locations and at a particular point in time. Future research seeking to understand the experiences and aspirations of Black Bermudian males might include other samples of the Bermudian population such as White males, women, public school teachers, or private school students and teachers. Our programme and policy recommendations address efforts to close the observed educational attainment, unemployment and earnings gaps by changing the work-related characteristics, including soft skills and educational attainment, of Black Bermudian males (supply-side strategies). Future research might examine the ways in which employers interact with and hire youth and young adults, especially Black Bermudian Males (demand-side strategies). An understanding of the role of Bermuda College in preventing disconnection and reconnecting men “on the wall” is also especially crucial at this point in time. A qualitative look at all Bermudian schools would add to our understanding of the systemic factors that contribute to this issue.

Filling the Education Gap: The Role of Bermuda College in Bermuda’s Workforce Development System and Violence and Drug Prevention Efforts Educational engagement is a violence and drug prevention strategy in and of itself. In order to prevent their involvement with drugs, gangs and other crimes, research is needed to understand how Bermuda College might effectively recruit and graduate more young Black men with the skills they need to find formal employment with earnings comparable to their peers.

Bermuda’s knowledge-based economy demands higher education, and many young Black Bermudian men cannot afford to study overseas, making Bermuda College the only option. Nevertheless, few Black Bermudian men attend and graduate from Bermuda College. In 2009, Bermuda College had 146 graduates, 72.6 per cent of which were female. From 2004-2009, Bermuda College graduated 225 men and 522 females<sup>11</sup>. Interviews with both high school students and men “on the wall” expose a great deal of reticence about Bermuda College as a viable option for young Black men.

In the high school, 88 per cent of the first-year students we interviewed indicated a clear desire to attend college – 94 per cent girls; 83 per cent boys. Thirty-nine per cent (28 per cent boys; 41 per cent girls) indicated a willingness to attend Bermuda College, either as a stepping stone to other collegiate plans or as a means to employment. However, the majority preferred to attend college overseas. Boys were less likely than girls to entertain the possibility of enrolling at Bermuda College. For example, Warren, age 15, wants to be an artist and to go to college overseas. He is not considering Bermuda College because “I guess you have better opportunities somewhere else. We only have one college here”. However, Warren’s family struggles financially and his father recently passed away, leaving Bermuda College as the most likely place for him to achieve his goals for higher education.

Many of the high-school seniors we interviewed in our previous study (Mincy, Jethwani-Keyser & Haldane, 2009), who were in a position to graduate, also expressed concern that Bermuda College would limit their opportunities and that the academic climate would not be rigorous enough to aptly prepare them for their careers.

*I think Bermuda College is like, I guess, is meant for work in Bermuda. You can’t, you know, do your four years at Bermuda College and then expect to work in some big bank or exempt company away, like because it’s more, like I said, it’s probably more rigorous out there. That’s why I believe that if you go away, like to*

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11 Statistics from the Ministry of Education and Bermuda College.

*college out there, they teach you like how it is out there, and so you can be more, you know, preferred. --- Age 17*

In spite of their concerns about Bermuda College preparing them for the workforce, the high-school students we interviewed did view it as a viable stepping stone to college overseas and the majority of them were definitively planning to attend Bermuda College in the 2010-2011 academic year. Future research might follow the 18 high school seniors from that study to see if they attended Bermuda College and for those who did, were they successful or were their fears about the social and academic climate actualised?

In the “on the wall” sample, 28 per cent indicated a desire to attend Bermuda College. For these men, all of the themes identified in Chapter Four (fear of failure, engagement with street life, familial conflict) got in the way of enrolment and completion, and continue to obstruct this educational goal. For example, Cameron, age 25, states:

*I wish I got to go to college and get that experience and those degrees and stuff... I do want to go, but it's like something's holding me back from going there and I, it's, it's like, I just haven't got there yet. [What do you think is holding you back?] Life on the streets. And then, it's, like I told you, I don't have a fixed abode.*

However, the majority of men in the “on the wall” sample are not interested in Bermuda College at all and think that if they were able to consider college, they would only want to go overseas. Black men report a fear that Bermuda College would simply be a repeat of high school with the same people, the same academic and interpersonal challenges and the same failures.

*I went to Bermuda College for a little while, like a year, and then I really didn't want to be down there too long because I wanted to get off the island; just because it gets boring down here, you know what I mean? And plus, if I wanted to go to college, I'm not going to go to Bermuda College, because I want the real college experience. I don't want to just be at Bermuda College. It's like another high school. It's nothing too serious, so I went away to school in Canada. --- P6, Age 29*

This young man did not have enough money to complete a college degree in Canada so he returned to Bermuda and is now unemployed. He would like a job working with computers but admits that he needs to go back to school in order to secure a job in that industry. Like many young Black men we interviewed, he is aware that Bermuda College has open enrolment and would offer him a certificate enabling him to find a job in his industry of choice, but he still believes that going to Bermuda College is “a waste of my time”. Future studies might seek to understand how Bermuda College might play a role in reconnecting these disconnected men. There are jobs in the island’s economy requiring more than a high-school diploma, but less than a four-year degree and these positions go begging. The college is a natural candidate for serving this market. What are these jobs? What course/career offerings could Bermuda College provide to enable more young Black Bermudian men to secure them? What is Bermuda College doing to make higher education more appealing to Black boys, to ensure their success and to address the concerns of young Black Bermudian males relating to rigour and negative peer pressure? Put differently, what changes would make Bermuda College a more effective piece of Bermuda’s workforce development system, especially in ways that give young Black men the skills they need to secure higher paying jobs?




## Conclusions

The overwhelming majority of young Black men work or look for work, but they are less likely than their White Bermudian male or Black Bermudian female peers to combine work with education, and are more likely to be involved in crime and drugs (Mincy, Jethwani-Keyser & Haldane, 2009). Perhaps the most important place to start is to recognise that there is indeed a disconnected population in Bermuda that is in great need of services. Youth and young adults who are unemployed, high-school dropouts, involved in the justice system, without housing or suffering from substance abuse, will all generate financial and other costs in the long run if society can't find a way to keep them in school or help them to obtain and retain meaningful employment. The recent emergence of gang violence in Bermuda makes it essential that programmes keep Black Bermudian boys in school and urgently respond to the needs of disconnected youth in a timely manner. Bermuda must commit itself to a multisector collaboration among schools, businesses, government and the nonprofit community. We hope that this report informs and supports these efforts.

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# APPENDIX

## Appendix A: 'On the Wall' Interview Protocol

Before we begin, I want to thank you for your time and make sure a few things are clear.

1. This interview will last about one hour. I'll be asking you questions about your experiences at home, in your community and in school, as well as your goals for the future. If any of the questions are unclear, just let me know and I'll try to explain better.
2. You definitely do NOT have to answer ANY question that makes you feel uncomfortable. Just let me know and we can move on.
3. It is very important to remember that there are absolutely NO right or wrong answers to these questions. I want to know what you *really* think and feel.
4. Everything you say will be strictly confidential (secret). Only myself, and my fellow researchers in New York, will be able to hear this interview. The reason I am recording the interview is so I do not have to take notes while you are talking or miss anything you have said. Your name will not be on the recording.
5. The only exception to this confidentiality rule is if you tell me that you are planning to hurt yourself or another person, or is someone else is hurting you. Then I will need to report that to the proper authorities.

Thank you for your participation in this project! Do you have any questions before we begin?

### Introduction

Tell me a little bit about yourself. Please tell me how old you are, who you live with, and a little bit about what you do now (school, job).

### Educational Aspirations

- a. Tell me about high school. How far did you go? How did you do academically?
- b. What were your relationships with your teachers like?
- c. Tell me about a time that you got into trouble in school.
- d. Tell me about a time that you were really enjoying school.
- e. What kind of advice did your teachers give you about your future?
- f. Who did you turn to for advice in high school or after high school?
- g. Did you have plans to go to college? Why or why not? What happened?
- h. Did you meet your educational goals? Why or why not?
- i. How have your educational choices impacted your employment? Your wages? Please explain.
- j. Do you think school is important? Why or why not?
- k. How could the educational system in Bermuda better serve you?

## Professional Aspirations

- l. Tell me about your school to work transition. What was challenging about this transition? Who helped you with this transition?
- m. If employed, tell me about your current employment. What do you like about the work you do? What don't you like?
- n. What has been challenging about finding and/or maintaining a job?
- o. What kind of job were you hoping to get after high school? Have you been able to get the jobs you want? Why or why not?
- p. What do you need to secure a more satisfying job/career?

## Family

- f. How far did your parents go in school?
- g. What do your parents do for a living?
- h. Who do you talk to in your family about your plans for the future? What kind of advice do they give you? (Probe for advice from mom, dad and other family members and for academic or professional advice either in the past or present)

## Comparisons

- n. How do your professional goals compare to those of your sisters? Please explain.
- o. How do your educational goals compare to those of your sisters? Please explain.
- p. Do you think the opportunities available to girls in Bermuda are different from those available to men? If yes, please explain. Probe for examples.
- q. Do you think the opportunities available to White or other non-Black Bermudians are different from those available to you? If yes, please explain. Probe for examples.

## Challenges and Recommendations

- r. In your opinion, what are the challenges facing young Black males in Bermuda? How has this been a challenge for you (probe for examples)? How have you coped with these challenges?
- s. Tell me about any government or community organisations that you have been involved with. How did they help you? What more could they provide?

## Closing:

Where do you see yourself in five years? In 10 years? In 20 years?

Do you have any questions or anything else you would like me to know?

Thank you for your time, patience and honesty!

## Appendix B: High School Interview Protocol

Before we begin, I want to thank you for your time and make sure a few things are clear.

1. This interview will last about 45 minutes to an hour. I'll be asking you questions about your experiences at home and in school, as well as your goals for the future. If any of the questions are unclear, just let me know and I'll try to explain better.
2. You definitely do NOT have to answer ANY question that makes you feel uncomfortable. Just let me know and we can move on.
3. It is very important to remember that there are absolutely NO right or wrong answers to these questions. This is not a test and this interview is in no way connected to your standing at school. I just want to know what you *really* think and feel.
4. Everything you say will be strictly confidential (secret). Only myself and my fellow researchers in New York will be able to hear this interview. **NO ONE FROM YOUR SCHOOL WILL BE ALLOWED TO HEAR THIS.** The reason I'm recording the interview is so I do not have to take notes while you are talking or miss anything you have said. Your name will not be on the recording.
5. The only exception to this confidentiality rule is if you tell me that you are planning to hurt yourself or another person, or is someone else hurting you. Then I will need to report that to your school principal.

Thank you for your participation in this project! Do you have any questions before we begin?

### Introduction

Tell me a little bit about yourself. (How old are you? Who do you live with? What do you like to do? What do you plan to do after high school?)

### Future Aspirations:

- a. Do you think school is important? Why or why not?
- b. Do you plan to graduate high school? Why or why not?
- c. Do you plan to attend college? Why or why not?
- d. What kind of job are you hoping to get after you finish school?

### School Experiences

- a. How would you describe this school? Probe for specifics (Can you tell me more about that? Can you give me an example of that? What happened that made you think that?)
- b. Tell me something that you like about school. Describe a recent good experience that you had in school. What happened? Who was involved? How was it positive for you?
- c. Tell me something that you do not like about school. Describe a recent negative experience that you had in school. What happened? Who was involved? How was it negative for you?

## Teacher Relationships

- d. Tell me about your relationships with your teachers. Who is your favorite teacher? Why? Who is your least favorite teacher? Why?
- e. Tell me about a time that you got into trouble in school. What happened?
- f. What qualities do teachers like in students? Are you like that? Why or why not? Do teachers like you? Why? What teachers *don't* like you and why?
- g. What do your teachers expect from you in school?
- h. In what ways do the teachers expect different things for girls and for boys? How do you know? Probe for examples.
- i. Do you think you are treated differently from the girls/boys in your school? Why or why not? If yes, in what way? Probe for an example.
- j. Tell me about what it means for you to be “mature” in school. Do you think that there are maturity differences between boys and girls? Are there behavioural differences? If yes, can you give me an example? (Note to Interviewer: Trying to understand how different behaviours might elicit different responses from the teachers)

## Guidance

- k. Who do you talk to in school about your plans for the future? What kind of advice do they give you?
- l. Who helps you decide what classes to take? Do you know what you need to do to get the kind of job you want? Do you know what you need to do to go to college?

## Peers

- m. Tell me about your friends in school. What kinds of things do you talk about? What do you do together?
- n. Do you ever talk to your friends in school about your plans for the future? If no, why not? If yes, what kind of advice do they give you?

## Performance and Climate

- o. How are you doing in school? How do you feel about that?
- p. What are you learning in school? Do you feel that it is helpful information to you? Why or why not?
- q. How has the curriculum prepared you for what you want to do?
- r. If you didn't have to come to school, would you come anyway? Why or why not?
- s. Do you feel connected to school? Why or why not? Can you give me an example?
- t. What would you change about your school if you could?
- u. Do you think that students in private schools have different opportunities than you? Why or why not? If yes, in what way?

## Family Experiences

- a. Tell me about your mom. What role does your mother play in your life?
- b. What do you like about this relationship? Why? Can you give me examples?
- c. What don't you like about this relationship? Why? Can you give me examples?
- d. Tell me about the disagreements you have with your mom. What are they typically about?
- e. How does your mother want you to be? What kind of education does she want you to get? What kind of job does she want you to get?
- f. How far did your Mom go in school? Does she have a job now? If yes, tell me about her job.
- g. Tell me about your dad. What role does your father play in your life?
- h. What do you like about this relationship? Why? Can you give me examples?
- i. What don't you like about this relationship? Why? Can you give me examples?
- j. Tell me about the disagreements you have with your dad. What are they typically about?
- k. How does your father want you to be? What kind of education does he want you to get? What kind of job does he want you to get?
- l. How far did your Dad go in school? Does he have a job now? If yes, tell me about his job.
- m. Who lives in your home? Is there anyone else in your family that gives you advice about your future or helps you with school?

## Closing:

- a. Do you think the opportunities available to girls in Bermuda are different from those available to black boys? If yes, please explain. Probe for examples.
- b. Do you think the opportunities available to White or other non-black Bermudians are different from those available to Black Bermudians? If yes, please explain. Probe for examples.
- c. Where do you see yourself in 5 years? In 10 years? In 20 years?
- d. Is there anything that you didn't have a chance to talk about that you think would be helpful for me to know?
- e. Do you have any questions?
- f. How was this experience for you?

Thanks again for your time, patience and honesty!

