What is this research about?
There are concerns about the educational outcomes for black youth in North America. Black youth in the US tend to have lower academic achievement than their peers and the same is true of Black youth in Canada. In Canada, there are key cultural and historical differences between Black youth in different regions. Those in Halifax, Nova Scotia have a presence in Canada dating back hundreds of years and hence a longer history of disadvantage. In contrast, those in Toronto, Ontario have a more recent history and are mainly immigrants or descendants of immigrants from the Caribbean and Africa. As a result, due to their unique historical experiences and backgrounds these two groups may hold different beliefs about the value of academic achievement.

This research compared the academic and achievement-related beliefs of Black Canadian high school students in Toronto, Ontario and Halifax, Nova Scotia.

What did the researchers do?
Smith, Schneider, and Ruck (2005) conducted a quantitative research study looking into Black Canadian student beliefs about education and academic achievement. The researchers conducted a survey of Black high school students in Toronto and Halifax, ranging in age from 14 to 22, in grades 9 to 12. In total, 430 Black students (287 in Toronto and 143 in Halifax; 221 females and 209 males) answered survey questions on factors that the researchers believed influence educational achievement, including, among others:

What you need to know
Although Black Canadian students tended to have positive beliefs about education and the positive influence academic achievement could have on their life in the future, Black students generally had lower levels of academic achievement than their peers. Why this is so, however, was not addressed in this study.
• Socio-economic status (SES);
• Parental emphasis on academics;
• Parental value of academic success;
• Parental educational aspirations and expectations; and
• Peer support for academics.

The surveys were anonymous and self administered. Students were asked questions about:
• The demographics of their families;
• Socioeconomic status (which was determined based on what they reported to be the occupation of their parents);
• How important education was to their parents;
• How much their parents valued educational success;
• What kind of education their parents desired for them (law school, trades etc.);
• How they think their parents felt about their grades;
• Whether or not their peers supported them academically;
• Whether or not the students believed that hard work pays off in school and life;
• How important school was compared to their friends;
• Whether or not they believed Black students could do well in school;
• How far they wanted to go in school;
• How much they value academic success;
• What their average marks were.

The researchers used statistical analysis to help determine and illustrate the findings of the survey.

What did the researchers find?
Generally, the students held pro-education attitudes, possessed an optimistic educational outlook and believed that education could help one achieve success in life. However, gender and regional differences were noticeable. Females and Toronto students reported greater faith in an achievement ideology and more positive educational outcomes than did males and Halifax students. Perceived parental support was a strong predictor of academic outcomes while peer group influence proved to be a less significant predictor than expected.

How can you use this research?
Black Canadian students tended to underachieve despite their beliefs that academic achievement is possible, and doing well in school can lead to success in other aspects of life. This provides more questions rather than answers, as
there could be many causes for the underachievement of Black Canadian students including systemic discrimination and oppression as well as their own behavior.

Educators who want to support Black youth in their academic development may want to be aware that there is a difference between the beliefs of Black Canadian students and their educational outcomes and look for answers in their own classrooms and schools as to why this difference occurs.

References

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About this summary
The Ontario Education Research Exchange (OERE) is a project of the Knowledge Network for Applied Education Research, an Ontario network promoting the use of research in education. The OERE’s clear language summaries of academic research aim to support this mandate.

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