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African American male unemployment in Mississippi's 50 most populous cities: findings and implications

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Abstract

This report examined African American male unemployment in Mississippi's 50 most populous cities. Research has linked chronically high African American male unemployment rates with many problems such as crime, blight, family disintegration, welfare, poverty, and social disorganization in urban areas. This study investigated whether similar links were present between African American male unemployment rates and selected socio-economic variables in Mississippi's 50 most populous cities. This study utilized a non-experimental, correlational design which incorporated the use of secondary data sources. Study findings indicated the average African American male unemployment rate (AAMUR) examined was 16.71%, with wide fluctuations in values ranging between 0% and 33%. Statistically significant relationships were found between AAMURs and the variables representing education, married couples, and poverty. There tended to be an inverse relationship between AAMURs, education, and the married couples variables. Although positive relationships were found between AAMURs and the manufacturing, services, violent crime, and property crime variables, these relationships were not statistically significant. Specific policy/programmatic implications suggested by this research included evaluating the effectiveness of current employment initiatives, strengthening programs that improve educational obtainment rates, promoting initiatives encouraging marriage, and promoting initiatives expanding transportation options in urban areas.

Introduction

This issue of *The MURC Digest* examines African American male unemployment in Mississippi's 50 most populous cities. African American males constitute approximately 18% of the state's population and represent a valuable resource for advancing the state's economic well-being (ACS, 2013). However, this group's participation in the state's labor force trails those of other racial groups in the state. For example, recent statistics show the labor force participation rate of African American males to be approximately 81.7%, in comparison to 92.7% for Caucasian males, 84.8% for African American females, and 92.3% for Caucasian females (Mississippi Department of Employment Security, 2012). From a historical perspective, African American males have higher unemployment rates and lower employment-population ratios than other racial groups (Soyars, 2010). Some researchers have found chronically high African American male unemployment rates linked with many problems such as crime, blight, family disintegration, welfare, poverty, and social disorganization in urban areas (Forstater, 2000; Schwartzman, 1997; Wilson, 1997; Wilson, 1999; Work, 1984). While these problems are not exclusive to urban areas, they tend to be linked with chronically high unemployment levels in urban settings. This study investigated whether similar links are present between African American male unemployment rates and selected socio-economic variables in Mississippi.

The purpose of examining this issue is threefold: (1) to increase the level of understanding regarding the extent of African American male unemployment in Mississippi's largest cities; (2) to increase the level of understanding regarding the relationship between African American male unemployment and selected socio-economic variables; and (3) to provide an empirical basis for developing, implementing, and evaluating policy decisions designed to reduce unemployment in Mississippi. The Mississippi Urban Research Center's (MURC) mission is to improve the quality of life in urban areas through basic and applied research into problems plaguing urban communities. MURC's goal is to provide Mississippi officials with better information needed to address the problem of African American male unemployment.

Unemployment: An Overview

Unemployment generally refers to the failure to obtain employment that earns wages or salaries paid in money (Forstater, 2001). Officially, it refers to those persons aged 16 years and older who had no employment during an established time frame, were

Continued on page 2

available for work except for temporary illness, and had made specific efforts to find employment sometime during a four-week period (USDOL, 2010). The unemployment rate is calculated monthly by dividing the number of unemployed people by the total number of labor force participants (Schiller, 1997). In the United States, teenagers, minority workers, and those with low levels of education typically have above-average unemployment rates (Schiller, 1997). Unemployment is generally classified as one of four types: (1) Seasonal – employment levels vary due to seasonal changes; (2) Frictional – employment levels vary due to people being between jobs while actively searching for a new job; (3) Structural – employment levels vary due to a mismatch between the "kinds" of jobs being offered by employers and the skills, experience, education, and/or geographical location of potential employees, or because of structural changes in the economy whereby certain jobs are no longer available or in existence; and (4) Cyclical – employment levels vary due to macroeconomic fluctuations in the overall level of aggregate demand (e.g., an economic recession) existing in a market, region, or country (Global Development and Environment Institute, 2013; Schiller, 1997).

Problems found to be directly or indirectly associated with chronic unemployment (especially in urban areas) include: the loss of income, job-related insurance, pensions, and medical care entitlements; the loss of self-confidence and a sense of control; an increased fiscal burden on the part of government to support the unemployed; a tendency to breed more unemployment via the psychological transmission mechanism; a tendency to lower productivity growth via fewer contributors; increased financial insecurity by the unemployed which can lead to poverty and indebtedness; a tendency for increases in certain types of criminal activity; increases in family disruption, suicide, ill health (physical and mental); drug addiction, homelessness, malnutrition, poor prenatal care and school dropout rates; and increased racial and ethnic antagonism/tension (Darity, 1999; Forstater, 2000; O'Leary, Straits, & Wandner; Rose, 1999; Schiller, 1997; Work, 1984). Some reasons often listed to explain racial differences in unemployment rates, especially rates for African American men (AAM), include such factors as a greater population concentration of AAMs in the central cities of urban areas where job opportunities may be relatively limited, structural changes in the economy requiring more technical job skills, minority groups having limited social and community contacts to assist them with job search activities, higher incidences of racial discrimination regarding employment opportunities, a growing segment of hard-to-employ persons requiring more targeted and prioritized interventions, a tendency to be employed in occupations with higher levels of unemployment (e.g., manufacturing, textiles, service industries), lower levels of education rates including lower high school graduation rates, more limited transportation options needed to access and maintain a job (e.g., having no vehicles in the household), and higher rates of incarceration which serve to diminish or restrict viable employment opportunities (Baiman, et al., 2009; Ferman, Kornbluh, & Miller; Maloney, 2010; Forstater, 2001; Levitan & Gallo, 1988; Schiller, 1997; Schwartzman, 1997; Soyars, 2010; Sum, Khatiwada, Ampaw, Toba, & Palma, 2004; The Economist, 2009; Toussaint-Comea & Meyer, 2009; Work, 1984).

Unemployment in Mississippi

In Mississippi, for the years 1999-2011, the average state unemployment rate was 7.23% (Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS], 2013). By way of comparison over this same time period, the average unemployment rate for African American men was 13.71%. Table 1 provides a comparison of unemployment rates for the years 1999-2012, and the unemployment rate for all races against the unemployment rate for African American males. As can be seen in Table 1, the African American male unemployment rate has been consistently higher than the overall unemployment rate since 1999, and has nearly doubled the overall rate since 2008.

Table 1

Years	Labor Force Total	Employed Total	Unemployed Total	Unemployment Rate: All Races	AA Male Unemployment Rate
1999	1291684	1223725	67959	5.3	10.3
2000	1314154	1239859	74295	5.7	10.7
2001	1302564	1229884	72680	5.6	12.4
2002	1302235	1214631	87604	6.7	13.7
2003	1310099	1226293	83806	6.4	10.8
2004	1315664	1232139	83525	6.3	9.9
2005	1321735	1219135	102600	7.8	11.6
2006	1287234	1199871	87363	6.8	13.3
2007	1302204	1220039	82165	6.3	9.9
2008	1302212	1213516	88696	6.8	14.2
2009	1290133	1168581	121552	9.4	18.7
2010	1315879	1177276	138603	10.5	21.3
2011	1338176	1197641	140535	10.5	21.5
2012	1333046	1210986	122060	9.2	15.4

(BLS, 2013)

Continued on page 3

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According to U.S. Census Bureau statistics on urban/rural areas, Mississippi's population is slowly becoming more urban, ranging from being approximately 44.5% urban in 1970 to 49.35% in 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau, [USCB] 2010). In Mississippi, approximately 78.3% of the 2010 urban population resides in its 50 most populous cities (USCB, 2010). The implication of this population shift underscores the need to better understand those factors affecting the overall quality of life in Mississippi's urban areas. As discussed earlier, the problem of unemployment in general and African American male unemployment in particular, has been found to have widespread linkages to many quality-of-life factors present in urban areas. Thus, obtaining a better understanding of this problem may also be a link to addressing other social problems impacting Mississippi's urban areas.

Research Methods

Design. This study utilized a non-experimental, correlational design which incorporated the use of secondary data sources. The goal of this design was to identify any statistically significant associations between the variables selected.

Research Questions. Two research questions were used to help guide this study: (1) What is the extent of African American male unemployment across Mississippi's 50 most populous cities?; and (2) Are African American male unemployment rates significantly associated with selected socio-economic variables in Mississippi's 50 most populous cities for the time period 2007 to 2011?

Data Collected. This study collected secondary data from the U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey's 5-Year Estimates (2007-2011) on 50 Mississippi cities (American Community Survey [ACS], 2013). Additionally, secondary data from the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics, and the U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics were also collected (U.S. Department of Justice, 2013; U.S. Department of Labor, 2013). For all 50 cities, data were collected for the following variables: total population, number and percentage of African American males, African American male unemployment rates, percentage of persons completing high school or higher, percentage of household families who are married couples, percentage of persons employed in the manufacturing industry, percentage of persons employed in service occupations, five-year violent crime average per 100,000 population, five-year property crime average per 100,000 population, percentage of all families below poverty, and the number of households without vehicles available for transporting residents to work. These variables were selected based upon literature review findings identifying them as possibly being linked with chronically high African American unemployment rates in other urban areas (Forstater, 2000; Wilson, 1997; Wilson, 1999; Schwartzman, 1997).

Procedures. The procedures used to analyze data included producing descriptive (e.g., mean, standard deviation, range values, data normality values) and correlational statistics (e.g., Pearson and Kendall's tau) utilizing the Statistical Packages for the Social Sciences (SPSS, version.18) software. The statistical significance threshold (p-value) was established at the .05 level.

Limitations. The limitations of this study included the use of the American Community Survey data which is based upon a sample of the population and not an enumeration of the entire population; violent and property crime data not being available for 11 of the 50 cities studied; and a relatively small sample size of the 50 most populous cities in Mississippi.

Findings

The findings from data analysis activities are presented in two sections: (1) a summary of descriptive statistics tabulations; and (2) a summary of correlation findings among the selected variables. Table 2 compared data on the 50 cities selected for this study. As can be seen in that table, the average African American male unemployment rate (AAMUR) for the time period was 16.71%, with wide fluctuations in values ranging between 0% and 33%. Wide fluctuations in values were also noted for the population, married couples, violent and property crimes, and poverty variables. In concentrating on cities with AAMURs above 20%, those cities tended to be located in the Delta region (five cities), Gulf Coast region (four cities), and the East/ North East region (four cities). Not surprisingly, these higher unemployment rates also tended to be located in areas with higher percentages of overall African American male populations.

Table 3 provides a summary of the correlation analysis performed on the data. Prior to calculating the correlation coefficients, the data were tested to see if the datasets were normally distributed and thus reflective of the general population. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov (KS) scores revealed six of the eleven datasets were normally distributed, with five of the eleven being significantly different from the general population. Thus, results are reported using both the Kendall Tau-B correlation coefficient for non-normally distributed data, and the Pearson correlation coefficient for normally distributed data. In examining AAMURs in conjunction with the selected variables, statistically significant relationships were found with the education, married couples, poverty, and no vehicles variables. There tended to be an inverse relationship (i.e., as one increases, the other decreases) between AAMURs and the education and married couples variables. Although positive relationships were found between AAMURs and the manufacturing, services, violent crime, and property crime variables, these relationships were not found to be statistically significant.

Continued on page 4

Discussion

In comparing this study's findings to those in the research literature, several areas of similarities and dissimilarities were found. For example, the research literature found cities with larger minority populations, cities with lower educational levels, and cities with lower levels of married couples tended to have higher African American male unemployment rates (Forstater, 2001; Maloney, 2010; Soyars, 2010). This study's findings seem to be consistent with findings in the research literature on these points. However, this study's findings were not consistent with research literature findings regarding AAMURs tending to be significantly associated (from a statistical standpoint) with employment levels in manufacturing and services occupations. With manufacturing and services occupations becoming increasingly more technical and requiring higher skill levels, and African American males tending to have lower technical skill levels (Schwartzman, 1997), this finding may be reflective of the association not being as strong as in the past. Similarly, non-significant findings were also found between AAMURs, violent crime rates, and property crime rates. This study did find positive correlations between AAMURs, violent crime rates, and property crime rates. However, these correlations were not found to be statistically significant. Calculating these correlations using a larger sample size may produce more definitive findings regarding the statistical relationship of these variables.

The finding of a moderate, statistically significant relationship between AAMURs and percent no vehicles in the household (i.e., Pearson correlation coefficient .383 / significance .006; and Kendall Tau B correlation coefficient .258 / significance .008) was consistent with some findings in the research literature regarding the linkage between lack of transportation and African American male unemployment rates (Forstater, 2000; Toussaint-Comea & Meyer, 2009; Wilson, 1997). This finding seems to suggest transportation is a significant factor influencing unemployment rates for this population group, and suggests further research is needed in examining transportation options in Mississippi's urban areas.

It is a well-known maxim in social science research that "correlation does not necessarily equal causation"; meaning changes in one variable do not necessarily cause changes in the other variable(s). There may indeed be other factors directly or indirectly impacting the relationship among the variables being compared. When considering relationships between variables, factors such as the strength and direction of the relationship, the possible presence of other influencing factors, and findings from other studies need to be considered. This study's findings regarding the relationships between the variables AAMURs, education, family structure, poverty, and no vehicles indicate that a significant linkage possibly exists among these variables in Mississippi's 50 most populous cities. It is this linkage that provides an opportunity for public and private officials to address the AAMUR problem in a way that also addresses related issues (e.g., increasing educational obtainment, strengthening family structures, lowering poverty rates, and improving transportation options).

Conclusions and Implications

Findings from this study indicate African American male unemployment rates were, on average, nearly double the state's overall unemployment rate, and had wide fluctuations in percentages across Mississippi's 50 most populous cities. These wide-ranging differences in rates suggest the possible presence of many factors potentially contributing to higher-than-average unemployment rates among this population group. They also confirm the presence of significant linkages between the variables AAMURs, education, family structure, no vehicles in household, and poverty that suggest the need to pursue an integrated approach in addressing these problems. Collectively, this study's findings indicate the targeting of some variables for interventions may prove useful in lowering high African American male unemployment rates and improving certain socio-economic conditions statistically associated with those rates. Therefore, specific policy and programmatic implications suggested by this research include: (1) examining and identifying methods for decreasing disparities in educational rates among urban school districts where completion rates ranged between 67% and 98%; (2) examining and promoting policies encouraging marriage as a viable family structure in promoting employment and reducing poverty based upon higher marriage rates being significantly correlated with lower AAMURs; (3) examining and promoting anti-poverty policies that encourage work and that provide an above-poverty wage based upon AAMURs and poverty rates being significantly correlated with each other; (4) examining and promoting employment and job training initiatives targeting areas with above-average unemployment rates; (5) researching those cities with "high minority populations" but "low minority unemployment rates" for the purpose of identifying those socio-economic factors contributing to low AAM unemployment rates in those cities; and (6) conducting additional research evaluating the effectiveness of current job training and employment initiatives (e.g., the state and local WIN program(s), vocational training programs, second-chance educational programs such as the GED and dropout prevention programs, ex-offender job training programs).

As was stated at the outset of this research brief, Mississippi's African American male population represents a valuable, but under-utilized resource for advancing the state's economic well-being. Within the last 40 years, Mississippi is becoming a more urbanized state with larger percentages of minority populations. Some research has shown a linkage between African American male unemployment rates and socio-economic factors impacting the overall quality of life in urban areas. If Mississippi is to significantly increase its

Continued on page 5

economic condition on a long-term basis, efforts are needed to more fully employ the approximately 15% of the state's work-force currently being under-utilized. The future quality-of-life for Mississippi citizens is dependent upon how successfully all groups can be integrated into the workforce in a way that increases, and not drains overall state and local resources.

Table 2

City	Pop.	AAM%	AAMUR%	HS+%	MCs%	Manf%	Servc%	VC	PC	Pov%	No Veh%
Bay St. Louis	9385	5.56	18.85	87.2	45.4	10.7	23	*	*	21	0.00
Biloxi	44256	8.80	9.30	85.5	38.4	5.9	27.6	495.7	478.7	17.6	1.48
Booneville	8776	10.47	10.94	78.2	52.4	19	15.9	*	*	30.2	0.57
Brandon	21430	9.36	6.43	90.5	53.9	6.9	9.9	60.5	63.1	10.5	0.29
Brookhaven	12581	25.52	14.74	78.2	33.2	13.9	16.3	185.8	200.2	33.6	0.53
Byram	10924	26.88	7.37	91.7	45.3	7.9	15.1	–	–	9.5	0.60
Canton	13184	36.60	16.10	67.6	30	10.8	26.9	681.3	681.3	31.4	1.30
Clarksdale	18092	35.46	21.04	78.4	25.8	6.9	30.4	712.7	707.9	40.2	2.65
Cleveland	12420	24.17	14.39	76.1	36.4	6.8	21.4	397.1	391.3	29.7	2.47
Clinton	25180	16.29	12.02	92.3	50.3	5.8	13.7	105.9	105.9	10.4	0.46
Columbus	23688	27.48	23.34	78.8	33.7	12.4	23.9	345.4	346.0	32.3	2.03
Corinth	14572	9.37	22.71	80	44.3	20	14.8	*	*	22.4	1.30
Diamondhead	8324	0.17	*	96.8	64.9	6.2	21.7	*	*	7.2	0.00
D'Iberville	9211	6.22	24.74	81.4	45.1	4.9	36.8	*	*	14	1.14
Flowood	7729	7.59	17.03	91.3	45.7	7.7	11.1	*	*	9.9	0.60
Gautier	18344	14.57	23.28	86.4	53.9	20.9	15.7	295.1	270.3	21.3	0.94
Greenville	34657	33.33	31.39	76	32.9	8.4	20.3	217.4	233.7	34.9	2.15
Greenwood	15542	33.53	30.56	69.9	30.2	14.3	21	670.1	632.6	38.9	1.85
Grenada	13270	22.22	11.84	77.6	36.8	24.2	15.2	464.3	464.3	25.8	1.70
Gulf Hills	8044	4.97	33.20	86.9	50.5	11.4	16.2	*	*	12.3	0.24
Gulfport	67322	17.42	12.23	81.1	36.8	7	23.5	244.2	254.6	20.1	0.98
Hattiesburg	46013	23.25	17.77	83.7	25.8	9.9	23.9	254.1	252.1	33.5	2.15
Hernando	13679	7.54	14.59	87.4	53.7	10.1	15.2	124.5	140.3	11	0.65
Holly Springs	7778	39.06	21.41	69.3	23.4	18.5	20.1	*	*	41.4	1.40
Horn Lake	25901	12.09	5.24	83.1	44.9	13.2	22.6	107.4	98.3	16	0.95
Indianola	10788	36.09	27.78	73.4	32.1	13	17.1	681.8	681.8	32.2	1.34
Jackson	174774	36.03	15.03	82.1	30.2	6	23.3	932.3	950.8	27.5	1.76
Laurel	18551	25.65	8.74	70.1	34.8	29.9	15.4	568.6	519.8	32.1	1.07
Long Beach	14872	3.98	0.00	90.4	51.2	5.8	19.5	65.8	73.5	7.7	0.21
Madison	23774	4.88	14.10	98.2	71.4	7.5	8.8	72.2	72.3	3	0.03
McComb	12881	30.74	10.00	75.1	35.3	20.7	21.5	545.7	572.2	29.9	1.86
Meridian	41089	27.15	20.70	80	31.8	9.3	21.5	573.1	545.1	32.6	1.70
Moss Point	13885	37.49	23.37	77.8	35.7	21.7	25	861.1	861.1	18.7	0.37
Natchez	16025	29.12	27.57	81.2	27.3	3.6	22.2	353.6	374.8	36.6	0.82
New Albany	8021	11.77	14.52	75	52.3	17	24.5	*	*	27.6	0.98
Ocean Springs	17379	6.17	10.93	90.7	53.9	12	20.3	132.3	135.6	10.4	0.21
Olive Branch	32796	10.53	12.14	91.1	61.2	13	11.9	272.1	272.9	5	0.39
Oxford	18480	8.97	23.23	90.6	31.1	6.9	17.7	55.0	48.7	31	2.13
Pascagoula	22765	13.29	9.77	84.6	40.3	24.8	16.8	344.9	354.2	21.7	1.21
Pearl	25190	9.36	7.37	86.7	45.6	8	15.6	260.6	252.6	12.5	0.60
Petal	10408	4.02	27.27	89.2	53.8	6.4	15.5	37.7	22.1	13.9	0.73
Picayune	11023	16.41	17.59	84.3	43.3	9.2	19.7	372.8	365.8	23	0.88
Ridgeland	23858	13.16	10.28	93.2	35.2	6	12.1	149.4	145.3	11.1	0.70
Senatobia	8040	11.82	10.75	84.2	39.5	10.4	18.2	*	*	22	0.82
Southaven	48005	9.43	9.50	88.4	52.8	8	13.7	244.8	265.6	10.5	0.28
Starkville	23639	16.13	23.95	89.3	28.6	6.1	22.1	223.8	211.1	36.3	1.08
Tupelo	34551	16.73	19.11	86.3	43.7	14.6	16.3	236.6	235.6	20	1.00
Vicksburg	23961	30.58	15.85	81.5	27.2	11.8	25.8	728.2	719.8	32.2	1.47
West Point	11384	25.67	22.58	80.3	44.9	12.4	16.8	380.6	418.2	24.6	1.40
Yazoo City	11540	37.74	32.89	68.5	28.9	14.4	27.2	398.0	348.6	45	1.72
Avg.	22959	18.61	16.71	82.9	41.3	11.6	19.4	355.1	353.0	22.8	1.06

*Data Not Available Source: (ACS, 2013)

Continued on page 6

Correlation Results

Table 3

Kendall B Correlation		AAMU Rate	HS Grad+	Married Couples	Manf	Serv	V. Crime	P. Crime	Poverty	No Veh.
AAMU Rate	Corr. Coeff.	1.000	-.253**	-.286**	.062	.184	.163.	.155	.369**	.258**
	Sig.(2-tailed)		.010	.003	.525	.060	143	.164	.000	.008
	N	50	50	50	50	50	39	39	50	50
Pearson Correlation	Corr. Coeff.	1	-.396**	-.397**	.011	.246	.250	.236	.522**	.383
AAMU Rate	Sig.(2-tailed)		.004	.004	.942	.085	.124	.149	.000	.006
	N	50	50	50	50	50	39	39	50	50

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Legend: **Pop.**= Population / **AAM%** = Percent African Amer. Male Population / **Pov%** = Poverty Rate / **MCs** = Percent Married Couples / **Manf%** = Percent Employed in Manufacturing/ **Servc%** = Percent Employed in Service Occupations / **VC** = Violent Crimes per 100,000 population / **PC** = Property Crimes per 100,000 population / **HS+** = Percent Finished High School or Higher / **AAMUR%** = African Amer. Male Unemployment Rate / **NoVeh** =Percent No Vehicles in Household (By Total Population)

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Continued on page 7

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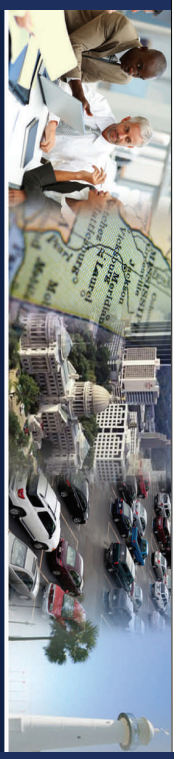

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