



Social Mobility Patterns Among Black Emerging Adults in Suffolk County, MA

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KEY FINDINGS

- ▶ The percentage of Black emerging adult males with a bachelor's degree or higher in 2000 (17.5%) was the same in 2019.
- ▶ The employment-to-population ratio for Black emerging adult males and females grew from 2010 (56.9% and 59.5%, respectively) to 2019 (76.7% and 86.3%, respectively).
- ▶ Black emerging adult males experienced a 107% growth in median personal income from 2010 to 2019 in comparison to a 31% growth for Black emerging adult females.
- ▶ Although Black emerging adult females had higher rates for attainment of a bachelor's degree or higher and employment, their 2019 median personal income was \$8,314 lower than that of Black emerging adult males.

ABOUT THE LAB

The Racism-based Violence Injury & Prevention Lab examines racism, violence, and trauma among Black emerging adults 18 to 29 years of age. Our goal is to provide evidence-based science that informs the development of culturally relevant prevention and intervention practices that combat racism-based violence.

OVERVIEW

The social mobility of individuals has many dimensions. In essence, it is the change or movement of individuals from one social status to another over time. This movement can be upward or downward. From a global perspective, the U.S. is not on par with many other nations when it comes to upward social mobility, due to a myriad of systemic inequalities. When analyzing education, healthcare, access to technology, employment opportunities and social protection, a Global Social Mobility Report ranked the U.S. at 27 out of 82 countries, with ten European countries dominating at the top of the list (World Economic Forum, 2020). Higher education, employment, and income have long been identified as significant drivers of upward social mobility (Chetty et al., 2018; World Economic Forum, 2020). With an educated and skilled labor force being critical to a robust economy, a lack of upward social mobility can have negative implications for the overall economic growth of a society.

The attainment of a college degree provides individuals with better career prospects and higher wages that place them on a path toward upward social mobility (Irwin et al., 2022). Many individuals immediately enroll in college at the age of 18 after completing their high school diploma (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). This stage of life has been defined as emerging adulthood, a period where individuals 18 to 29 years of age are engaged in identity exploration, self-focus, transition, and perceived possibilities (Arnett, 2000). However, rising rates in interpersonal violence (e.g., homicide and police violence) for Black emerging adults in Boston, Massachusetts can serve as barriers to upward social mobility for this population (Joe & Motley, 2019; Motley et al., 2022).

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Black refers to a social, political, and culturally constructed ethnic group identity. In the United States, this group, like other ethnic groups, is heterogeneous (Graves, 2001; Sussman, 2014; Zuberi, 2001).

Emerging adult is defined in this brief as an individual with a reported age of 22-29.

Educational attainment was restricted to those individuals who self-reported having completed a bachelor's degree or higher.

Employment status was defined as employed at least one hour for pay during the week prior to the survey, worked at least 15 hours as an unpaid family worker, or had a job from which they were temporarily absent.

Employment-to-population ratio was estimated by dividing the number of Black emerging adults employed by the total population of that group.

Personal Income was derived by calculating the median personal income and converting these results to 2021 dollars using the CPI Inflation Calculator available from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Data from the Massachusetts Violent Death Reporting System revealed that Black emerging adults, particularly those in Suffolk County, accounted for 48% of homicide deaths in comparison to their Hispanic (32.5%), White (18.1%), and Asian (1.3%) counterparts between 2010 to 2019 (Motley et al., 2022). Furthermore, Suffolk County received a failing grade by Crime Grade (2022) for violent crime per capita in comparison to other surrounding counties.

The present report examines decennial trends in educational attainment, employment, and personal income among Black emerging adults 22 to 29 years of age in Suffolk County to gain a better understanding of social mobility for this population. We focus our analysis on this age group because most emerging adults would not have attained a bachelors' degree prior to 21 years of age. Furthermore, for consistency we also examine employment and personal income for this age group.

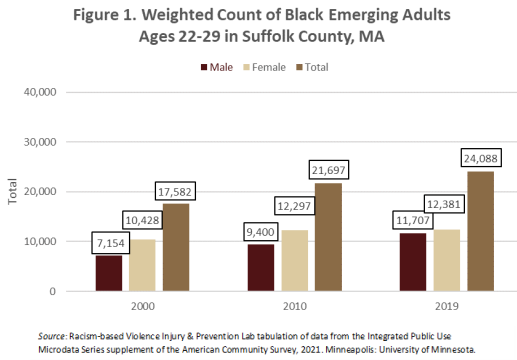
This report disaggregates the data to reveal any disparities in educational attainment, employment, or personal income by gender. Data for this report was gathered from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) supplement of the American Community Survey (2021). This data was used to estimate educational attainment, employment, and personal income for Black emerging adults in Suffolk County, MA by year (2000, 2010, and 2019). To obtain a representative sample statistic of all Black emerging adults 22 to 29 years of age, sample weights were applied to adjust the sample composition of Black emerging adults to be reflective of the population's composition for each decennial year. Black emerging adults ages 22 to 29, including those with no personal income, are included in these estimates.

DISCUSSION

Black Emerging Adults in Suffolk County, MA

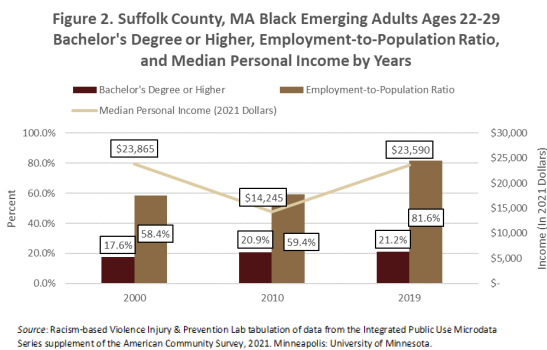
Suffolk County is located in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and has a population of roughly 771,245 residents (United States Census Bureau, 2022). The Black emerging adult population in Suffolk County grew by 37% between 2000 and 2019 (see Figure 1). There was also a notable 63.6% increase in the Black emerging adult male population between these two time periods. The Black emerging adult female population grew by 17.9% between

2000 and 2010, peaking at 12,381 in 2019, which represents a change of only .06%.



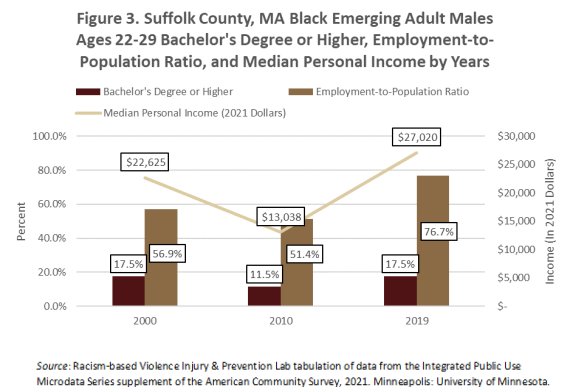
Educational Attainment, Employment, and Income Outcomes for Black Emerging Adults in Suffolk County, MA

As a group, the proportion of Black emerging adults who have attained a bachelor's degree or higher increased across time from 17.6% in 2000 to 21.2% in 2019 (see Figure 2). After starting at an employment-to-population ratio of 58.4% in 2000, this figure increased to 81.6% in 2019. Finally, median personal income in 2021 dollars began at \$23,865 in 2000, then dropped to \$14,245 in 2010 after the recession of 2008-2009 and increased to \$23,590 in 2019. Despite the 39.6% increase, the 2019 median personal income for Black emerging adults in Suffolk County translates to an average living income of \$64 a day for Black emerging adults to take care of their responsibilities which could include housing, food, clothing, transportation, healthcare, and possible childcare expenses.



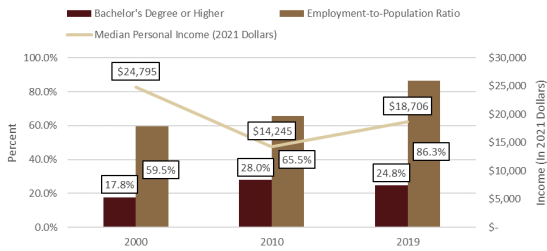
Educational Attainment, Employment, and Income Outcomes by Gender

Figure 3 shows that the percentage of Black emerging adult males who attained a bachelor's degree or higher in 2000 (17.5%) was the same in 2019. However, the employment-to-population ratio of Black emerging adult males grew by 20% from 2000 (56.9%) to 2019 (76.7%). Black emerging adult males experienced a 42.3% decrease in median personal income from 2000 (\$22,625) to 2010 (\$13,038) after the recession of 2008-2009. Although Black emerging adult males experienced a 51.7% increase in median personal income in 2019 (\$27,020), this translates roughly to an average living income of \$74 a day for Black emerging adult men to take care of their responsibilities (e.g., housing, food, clothing, transportation, healthcare, and possible childcare expenses).



Finally, Figure 4 below shows the same results for Black emerging adult females. Unlike their male counterparts, the percentage of Black emerging adult females with a bachelor's degree or higher was the highest in 2010 (28%) after the recession of 2008-2009. Notably, the proportion of Black emerging adult females with a bachelor's degree or higher decreased by 4% in 2019 (24.8%). Similar to their male counterparts, the employment-to-population ratio of Black emerging adult females grew by roughly 27% from 2000 (59.5%) to 2019 (86.3%). Despite an increasing employment-to-population ratio, Black emerging adult females' median personal income decreased by 33% from 2000 (\$24,795) to 2019 (\$18,706), translating to an average living income of \$51 a day for Black emerging adult females to take care of their responsibilities (e.g., housing, food, clothing, transportation, healthcare, and possible childcare expenses).

Figure 4. Suffolk County, MA Black emerging adult Females Ages 22-29 Bachelor's Degree or Higher, Employment-to-Population Ratio, and Median Personal Income by Years



Source: Racism-based Violence Injury & Prevention Lab tabulation of data from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series supplement of the American Community Survey, 2021. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota.

CONCLUSIONS

Higher education has long been identified as a significant driver of upward social mobility. The unemployment rate for individuals 25 and older who have at least a bachelor's degree has consistently been about half of the unemployment rate for individuals without a degree (Ma, Pender, & Welch, 2020). This report highlights the stagnant social mobility for Black emerging adults in Suffolk County, MA. Despite increases in employment, 2019 rates for bachelor's degree or higher for the total population of Black emerging adults ages 22-29 (21.2%), males (17.5%), and females (24.8%) are much lower than national estimates (39%, 36%, and 42%, respectively; National Center for Education Statistics, 2022).

It is plausible that lower rates in educational attainment among Black emerging adults are indicative of their enrollment in college later, rather than immediately after graduation from high school. For instance, a recent report by the Postsecondary National Policy Institute (2022) revealed that the number of Black high school students enrolling in college right after graduation decreased from 2.5 million in 2009 to 2.1 million in 2019.

Previous research also shows that adults with a bachelor's degree earn \$1.2 million more during their careers than workers with a high school diploma (Carnevale, Cheah, & Wenzinger, 2021). This suggests that the low median personal income among Black emerging adults in Suffolk County could also be a result of low bachelor's degree or higher attainment for this population.

Boston, MA ranks as the 25th most expensive place to live among 150 metro areas in the U.S. (U.S. News, 2022). Thus, there is a pressing need for regional transformative interventions to ensure the upward mobility of Black emerging adults in Suffolk County so that they can thrive and create intergenerational wealth. It is imperative that we continue to track and monitor the social mobility patterns of Black emerging adults in Suffolk County and our collective investment in their educational, employment, and income pursuits.

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