

ACCESS TO PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION AND PATTERNS OF CAREER DEVELOPMENT AMONG AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

Current research indicates that African American women are more likely to be rearing children alone, to be poor, and to be dependent on public transportation than their counterparts in other ethnic groups. Specifically, the National Personal Transportation Survey (NPTS, 1990-91) found that minority women account for the majority of transit users. This dependency on public transportation is aggravated by the limitations of public transportation in small urban areas. These limitations affect children who are handicapped by mothers unable to model career development and planning and employers heavily dependent on the female work force of 2010 and beyond.

This study examined access to public transportation among African American women and the relationship between public transportation and career development using a definition of career which included work and leisure ($C = W + L$). The sample was taken from an urban area in the southeast where a three year old municipally operated transit system was functional. In the first phase of data collection, 415 women who were either dependent on fixed-route public transportation or who had access to private transportation participated in a fixed-route survey or focus group process. Participants were asked how they travel within the city to work and leisure activities, and to describe their work histories and career development in the context of transportation.

Sixty percent of fixed-route transportation dependent respondents identified the bus as a good way to get to desired jobs compared to only 13% of transportation independent women in the focus groups. Among transportation dependent respondents, 47% reported having refused or quit a job because of lack of transportation and 67% stated that in the past, they had taken a job just because they could get there by bus. Women who experienced fewer work interruptions due to transportation expressed greater satisfaction with bus service whereas having to refuse or quit a job due to lack of transportation influenced the attitude that the bus is not a good way to get to work. Importantly, most transportation dependent women described their work experience as a lot of different jobs as opposed to a career while almost all of their transportation independent counterparts in the focus group process identified their work experience as a career. There were also important difference in the patterns of career development between women in the two groups. Fixed-route respondents indicated more fragmented and unstable work histories.