Exploring Outcomes by Race and Ethnicity

Key Takeaway: Mobility Mentoring appears to work equally well across race and ethnicity.

We were not able to detect any meaningful ways in which participants of color had poorer outcomes or treatment in our programs.

Overview of Findings

We examined whether the impact and experience of Mobility Mentoring varied across participants’ racial and ethnic group and found that:

- Improvements in income, employment and, for participants in shelter, length of stay, did not differ across racial or ethnic groups.

- Participants rated their experience with Mobility Mentoring highly, with no significant differences across race and ethnicity.

- The only meaningful differences detected were some modestly better outcomes for participants of color:
  - In EMPath’s transitional housing programs, Hispanic/Latino participants achieved greater gains in Bridge to Self Sufficiency scores.
  - Hispanic/Latino participants also scored higher on an index of well-being.
  - Both Hispanic/Latino and Black participants were more likely to exit to permanent housing than White, non-Hispanic/Latino participants.

At a glance

EMPath is committed to advancing equity and economic opportunity for all people. But racism and bias are baked into US society and into the design and execution of human services programs. Unfortunately, there have been stark differences in treatment and in outcomes by race and ethnicity in many programs that have been previously studied. What about EMPath’s signature approach, Mobility Mentoring®? Are there differences in outcomes by race and ethnicity? Do people of color experience the approach differently?
Economic Mobility Pathways (EMPath) is a national non-profit that dramatically improves the lives of people striving to make ends meet. Because creating economic opportunity is multifaceted, our approach is too. We offer a unique combination of direct service, learning exchange, and research and advocacy for what works. This "virtuous circle" allows each part of our work to inform what we know, do, and share with others to seed systemic change.

- Using our research-backed method for one-on-one support (Mobility Mentoring®), we work directly with people living in poverty to help them climb the economic ladder.
- We lead a network of human service organizations (the Economic Mobility Exchange, or the Exchange) to help these organizations get better results and re-envision the systems that serve people experiencing poverty.
- We do research to inform our practice and advocate to take what works to scale.

What Works Series

EMPath rigorously analyzes outcomes from our own programs—and those of our Exchange member organizations—to figure out what drives better outcomes. We started the What Works Series to share these learnings broadly with those working in human services, philanthropy, policymaking, academia, and beyond. We know that there are many others out there who, like us, are always seeking to improve practice and ultimately drive better outcomes for families that are struggling.

Want Help Improving Outcomes in Your Organization?

EMPath's Exchange can provide:

- Training on Mobility Mentoring and Goal-Setting for staff
- Technical assistance on transforming the goal-setting culture at your organization
- Peer support and learning from over 145 organizations from across the country—and beyond.
- And much more

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Equity in Coaching: Exploring Outcomes by Race and Ethnicity


Centuries of legal and other forms of systemic oppression have resulted in Black Americans and Americans of Hispanic/Latino ethnicity experiencing higher levels of poverty and economic disadvantage than White, non-Hispanic/Latino Americans. If programs and services that seek to support people’s journeys out of poverty are to be effective in narrowing rather than exacerbating this inequity, they must be accessible and effective across all racial and ethnic groups.

Unfortunately, many human services programs may exacerbate rather than reduce disadvantage. A review of the Transitional Assistance for Needy Families program (TANF), the major federally funded “welfare” program administered by states, found that Black and Hispanic/Latino recipients are sanctioned more often; receive less work related supports such as child care, work readiness programs, and education and training; and are less likely to be hired. A recent survey found Black and Hispanic/Latino adults were more than three times as likely as White adults to report unfair treatment or judgment due to their race or ethnicity when applying for social services or public assistance.

Economic independence itself is a widely held goal across racial and ethnic groups in the United States. Social science research generally finds similar or higher levels of aspiration to economic sufficiency—adequate savings, high levels of education, home ownership and secure access to transportation—for low-income Black Americans and Americans of Hispanic/Latino ethnicity compared to White Americans.

EMPath’s mission is to disrupt poverty. EMPath’s coaching intervention, Mobility Mentoring®, rooted in the sciences of neurobiology (“brain science”) and behavioral economics, points participants towards economic self-sufficiency. This coaching approach builds on participants’ personal assets and strengths in a supportive, non-judgmental manner. By emphasizing participant efficacy and enabling participants to devise and achieve their own goals, Mobility Mentoring seeks to disrupt the traditional case worker/client hierarchy that often reinforces societal racism.

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1 We have chosen to use the phrase “Hispanic/Latino” for this group to 1) reflect how this population tends to self-identify, which is most commonly “Hispanic,” plus 2) incorporate those participants we serve who are from Latin America but do not speak Spanish (mostly Brazilians). The term “Latinx” is not used here following research showing that people of Hispanic/Latino background largely do not use the term to self-identify. For a full explanation of these issues, see the research done by the Pew Research Center here: https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/2020/08/11/about-one-in-four-u-s-hispanics-have-heard-of-latinx-but-just-3-use-it/
Society places many more barriers to economic mobility for Black people and Hispanic/Latino people than it does for White people, including discrimination in education, differential wages, and ongoing bias in access to housing and mortgages. Mobility Mentoring is a strategy that focuses on the individual and not on tackling these systemic, societal barriers. Even if Mobility Mentoring’s design and execution were free from bias and the coaching helps individuals cope more effectively with the stress racism imposes, its effectiveness among participants of color might still be less than among White participants due to these societal constraints.

EMPath is committed to advancing equity. For this reason, we examined whether the impact and experience of Mobility Mentoring vary across participants’ racial and ethnic group.

Research Questions

For this study we set out to address the following questions:

- Does race or ethnicity impact participants’ outcomes in our programs: what they are able to achieve, such as increases in income, employment rates, finding permanent shelter, and well-being?
- Does race or ethnicity impact participants’ experience with our programs: how they report they feel about the services they received?

Whom did we study?

We looked at outcomes for two groups of EMPath’s participants. One group consisted of all participants who exited EMPath’s long-term programs (LTP) prior to December 30, 2020 (n=264 with race/ethnicity data). Participants apply to join EMPath’s LTPs. Participation takes place over a substantial period of time (median length 42 months), and the programs are not housing-based.

The other group included participants enrolled in EMPath’s transitional housing programs (THP) between January 1, 2016 and December 31, 2020 (n=473 with race/ethnicity data). Participants in EMPath’s THP are selected by the state (not EMPath) based on their eligibility for homelessness-related transitional housing. Everyone in the THPs receive Mobility Mentoring services, though for a relatively short time period (median length 14 months).

In a separate set of analyses, we assessed current (2021) EMPath participants’ experience with Mobility Mentoring through our annual participant survey. The results include responses from participants in all EMPath programs, with a 41% response rate. Respondents self-identify race and ethnicity.

As an organization, EMPath does advocate for changes in public policy to remove these barriers.
What outcomes did we examine?

Our main outcomes were overall self-sufficiency, monthly income, and employment status. **Overall self-sufficiency** was measured with the Bridge to Self-Sufficiency, EMPaTH’s cornerstone tool. The Bridge has a possible maximum score of 100 points, spread across five domains (each with a possible maximum of twenty points): Family Stability, Well-Being, Financial Management, Education & Training, and Employment & Career. While Bridge scores are not something discussed in the mentoring relationship, they are a useful way to track progress in the aggregate over time across programs.

**Monthly income** is the participants’ earned income during the month and excludes any money received through public benefits. **Employment status** is simply whether the participant was working for pay.

For participants in the THP’s, additional outcomes included **length of stay** in shelter and **exit to stable housing**—two of the main goals of transitional housing programs—as well as a measure of well-being.

For **well-being**, we used the Cantril Self-Anchoring Striving Scale which asks participants to indicate where they currently perceive themselves as compared to their “best life” on a scale of 0 to 10 and where they see themselves (on the same scale) 5 years in the future. We combined these scales to create categories of “thriving” vs. “struggling” or “suffering”.

**Key participant survey outcomes** include ratings of their interaction with their mentor and staff, helpfulness of the program, and an overall assessment of EMPaTH. (See additional Methods information on page 10).
What did we find?

**Long-term programs (LTPs)**

Sixty (23%) of the participants in the LTPs were Hispanic/Latino, while 82 (31%) were Black, non-Hispanic/Latino. Over one third (93, or 35%) were White, non-Hispanic/Latino and the remainder (29, or 11%) Other/Multi-racial, non-Hispanic/Latino.

For both income and employment, Black participants entered with higher levels than Hispanic/Latino participants, who in turn entered with higher levels than White or Other/Multi-racial, non-Hispanic/Latino participants. All groups showed improvements in these outcomes, and the amounts of improvement were not statistically different from each other. (Figures 1 and 2)

We found a similar pattern with overall self-sufficiency scores. Although the differences at baseline were narrower, the same racking was present and all groups improved a comparable amount. Given the relatively limited sample size, we cannot exclude the possibility that small differences did exist between these groups.

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**Figure 1:** Average earned monthly income at entry and exit by race/ethnicity

**Figure 2:** Employment percentage at entry and exit by race/ethnicity

**Figure 3:** Average Bridge scores at entry and exit by race/ethnicity
Transitional Housing Programs (THPs)

Two hundred (42%) of the participants in the THP were Hispanic/Latino, while 210 (44%) were Black, non-Hispanic/Latino. Only 45 (9.5%) were White, non-Hispanic/Latino and the remainder (18, or 4%) Other/Multi-racial, non-Hispanic/Latino.

Unlike in EMPath’s LTPs, Hispanic/Latino participants entered the THPs with higher monthly income and employment rates compared to all other groups. As in the LTP, gains in these two outcomes are comparable across all race/ethnic groups (Figures 4 and 5). Hispanic/Latino participants had a significant gain of 6 additional Bridge score points, on average, compared to White participants. Black participants gained 3.6 additional points compared with White participants, a difference at the margin of statistical significance.

Similarly, even though the duration in these transitional housing programs was similar across all groups, both Hispanic/Latino participants and Black participants were significantly more likely to exit to stable housing than were White participants. In addition, Hispanic/Latino participants were more likely than White participants to report a well-being score of "Thriving" vs. "Struggling" or "Suffering" at exit, after adjusting for well-being at program entry.
Participant Experience

Participants rated their experience with EMPath very highly with no significant differences across race and ethnicity.

**Figure 7: Participant Feedback Survey Table**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Overall, N = 139</th>
<th>Black non-Hispanic/ Latino, N=43</th>
<th>Hispanic/ Latino, any race, N = 65</th>
<th>Other or multi-racial, non-Hispanic/ Latino, N = 21</th>
<th>White, non-Hispanic/ Latino, N = 10</th>
<th>p-value¹</th>
<th>q-value²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have EMPath staff ever treated you unfairly because of your race or ethnicity? (% Yes/Unsure)</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My mentor assists me in addressing barriers to achieving my goals (% Agree/Strongly Agree)</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My mentor treats me with respect (% Agree/Strongly Agree)</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a participant at EMPath, my life is changing for the better (% Agree/Strongly Agree)</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would you recommend EMPath to others in similar situations? (% definitely or probably)</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Fisher’s exact test
² False discovery rate correction for multiple testing
Implications for Mobility Mentoring Practice

These analyses provide reassurance that Mobility Mentoring appears to be at least equally effective for Black and Hispanic/Latino participants compared with White participants. Given the high societal barriers that Black and Hispanic/Latino Americans face, these results reinforce the power that Mobility Mentoring unleashes by building on the strengths of those whom we serve. For other human service organizations seeking to advance racial equity through economic mobility in their programs, Mobility Mentoring may be a useful approach.

However, the journey to racial equity is ongoing. EMPath will continue to seek out ways to advance equity in practice and also through policy, within its own programs, with Exchange members’ organizations, among its staff and board, and in society as a whole. In addition, EMPath will continue to monitor program outcomes in the future for any racial/ethnic disparities.

Finally, opportunities exist for further research, including examinations of 1) racial/ethnic disparities in Mobility Mentoring in Exchange member organizations, and 2) differences in participants’ outcomes and experiences based on whether they have a mentor with the same race/ethnicity.
Methods

Many participants who reported “Hispanic/Latino” ethnicity did not respond to the race metric. Because of this, along with Census Bureau research and advocacy by Hispanic/Latino researchers for combining race and ethnicity into a single category, we categorized participants as 1. Hispanic/Latino, 2. Black, non-Hispanic/Latino, 3. White, non-Hispanic/Latino, and 4. Other/Multi-racial/non-Hispanic/Latino. That is, we collapsed the categories of a) Black, Hispanic/Latino, b) White, Hispanic/Latino, and c) Other, Hispanic/Latino, and considered the ethnic category of Hispanic/Latino as one category along the same dimension as the typical “race” categories.

We employed linear and logistic regression models to test whether this Race/Ethnicity indicator was associated with any of the outcomes, controlling for differences in participant characteristics. The analyses accounted for differences in education level, income, employment status, well-being, and the presence of a disability, all at entry. For participants in THPs, we also accounted for documented immigration status at entry; all participants in the LTP have documented immigration status.
References:


ii. Dulce Gonzalez, Genevieve M. Kenney, Marla McDaniel, and Laura Skopec, Perceptions of Unfair Treatment or Judgment Due to Race or Ethnicity in Five Settings. Urban Institute August 2021


xii. Jorge González-Hermoso, Robert Santos, Separating Race from Ethnicity in Surveys Risks an Inaccurate Picture of the Latinx Community. Urban Wire Research Methods and Data Analytics (Urban Institute Blog) https://urbn.is/2IT1g5w, downloaded 10/4/21