



# Survey Snapshot: Views and Experiences of Young Black Men

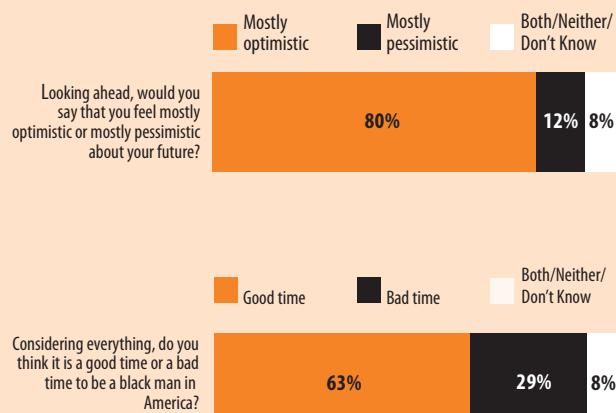
Findings from the *Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University African American Men Survey*

The *Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University African American Men Survey* was designed to explore the views and experiences of African American men and their outlook for the future by interviewing more than 1,300 African American men randomly selected nationwide. Results presented here are from the subgroup of 400 African American men ages 18-29 years.

## YOUNG BLACK MEN DON'T FIT COMMON STEREOTYPES

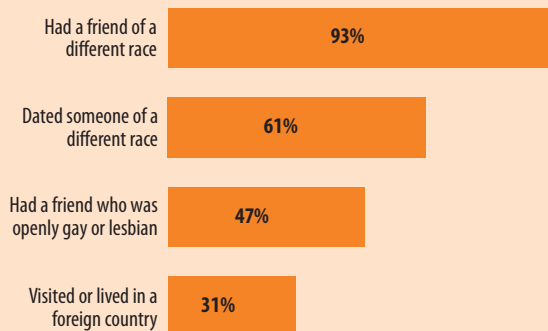
While a subgroup of young black men are living troubled lives, the survey found that young black men overall do not fit the stereotypes about them. They express optimism and hope, with eight in ten saying they are mostly optimistic about their own future, and two-thirds saying it is a good time to be a black man in America. Nearly nine in ten black men under the age of 30 say they are either employed (55% full time, 16% part time) or in school (16%); just 9% say they are unemployed or laid off, and 3% say they are disabled. Most young black men have experiences with diversity – nearly all (93%) have had a friend of a different race, six in ten have dated someone of a different race, and almost half have had a friend who was openly gay or lesbian. Three in ten say they have visited or lived in a foreign country.

### Optimistic Views of Young Black Men



### Experiences of Young Black Men

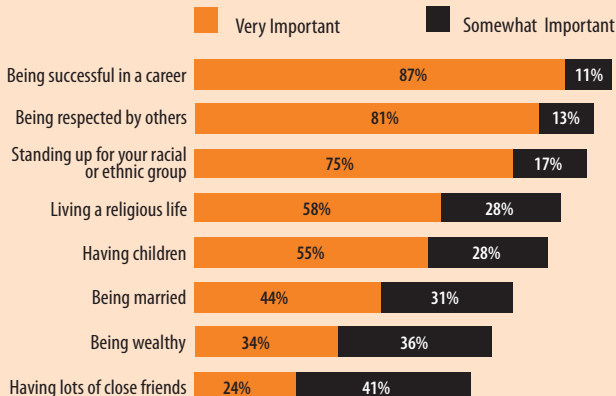
Percent of black men ages 18–29 who say they have ...



In terms of values and aspirations, young black men place the greatest importance on career success (87% say “very important”), respect from others (81%), and racial solidarity (75%). Most feel connected with other black men – 59% say that what happens generally to black men in this country will have something to do with what happens in their own life. Religion is very important to many – 58% say living a religious life is very important, 56% say they pray at least once a day, and 37% go to church at least once a week.

### Young Black Men's Values and Aspirations

Percent of young black men saying each of the following is important to them personally...



## DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES

Young black men are acutely aware of a variety of problems facing black men today, and the number one problem they cite is “young black men not taking their education seriously enough.” A large majority of young black men say they have faced difficult personal experiences as well: three-quarters say they or a close friend or family member have been in prison, two-thirds say a close friend or relative was murdered, and nearly half have been laid off or fired from a job. Many report experiences with discrimination or racial slights and insults, and they are more likely than their older counterparts to say that people often act as if they are afraid of them because of their race (46% say this happens “very” or “somewhat” often, compared with 30% of black men ages 30 and older).

## Difficult Experiences Among Young Black Men

### Percent of black men ages 18-29 who report ...

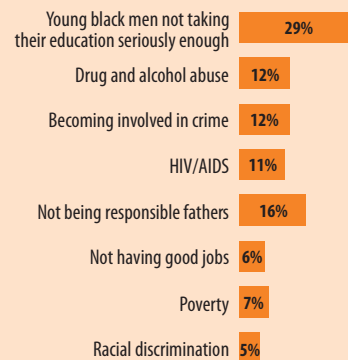


## Young Black Men's Views on Problems Facing Black Men

### Percent of young black men who say each of the following is a “big problem” facing black men today ...

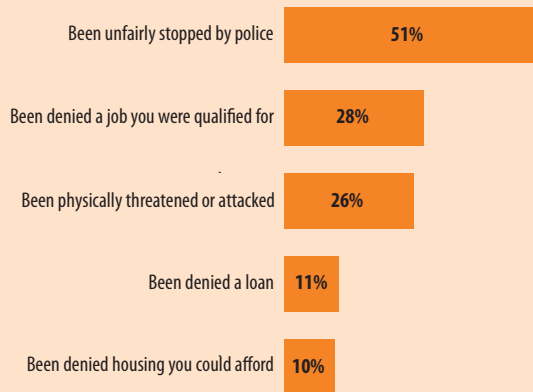


### When forced to choose, percent saying each is the BIGGEST problem ...

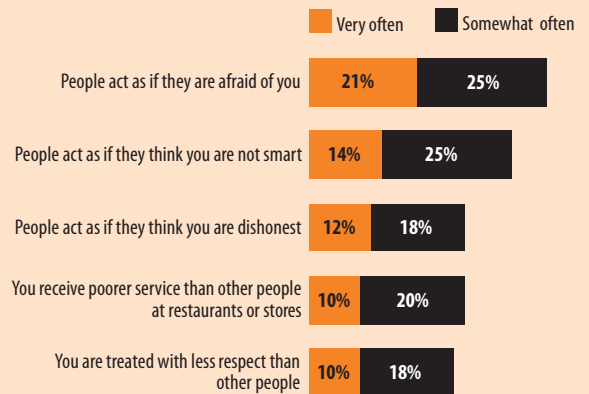


## Young Black Men's Experiences with Discrimination

Percent of black men ages 18-29 who say they have ever, because of their racial background ...



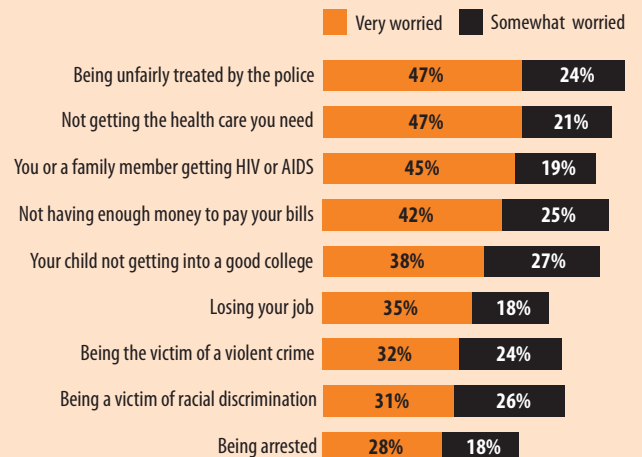
Percent of black men ages 18-29 who say the following happen to them because of their racial background ...



The difficult experiences faced by young black men are reflected in their worries and stress levels. The top three worries among young black men are being unfairly treated by the police (47% say they are “very worried”), not getting needed health care (47%), and themselves or a family member getting HIV or AIDS (45%). Many fewer young white men in a similar age range say they are very worried about these things (14%, 26%, and 6%, respectively). More than one-third (35%) of young black men say they “frequently” experience stress in their daily lives.

## Young Black Men's Worries

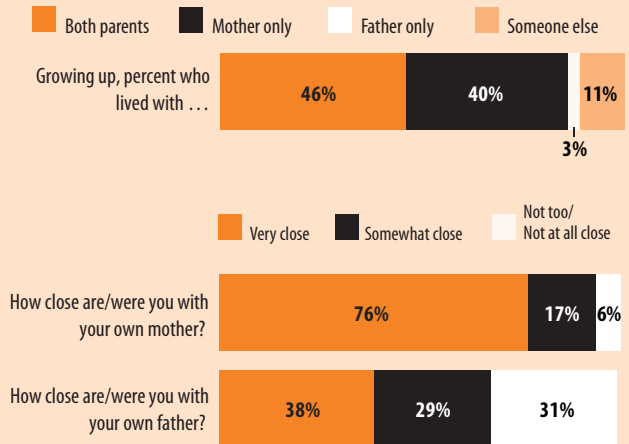
Percent of young black men who say they are worried about ...



## A COMPLICATED PICTURE OF FAMILY AND FATHERHOOD

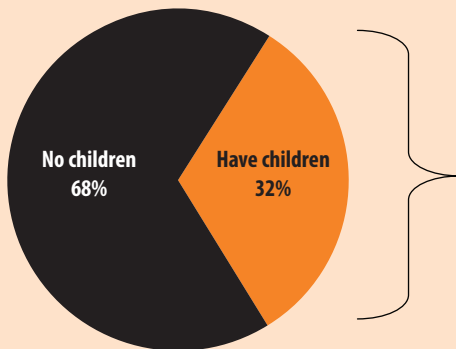
Fewer than half of black men under the age of 30 say they lived with both of their parents growing up, and young black men overall are much more likely to say they are very close with their mothers (76%) than their fathers (38%). The picture of fatherhood painted by young black men is somewhat complicated. One-third say they have fathered a child, and of this group, 42% say they have never been married, and 30% say they are currently married. Four in ten young black fathers say at least one of their children is not currently living with them.

### Young Black Men's Relationship with Parents

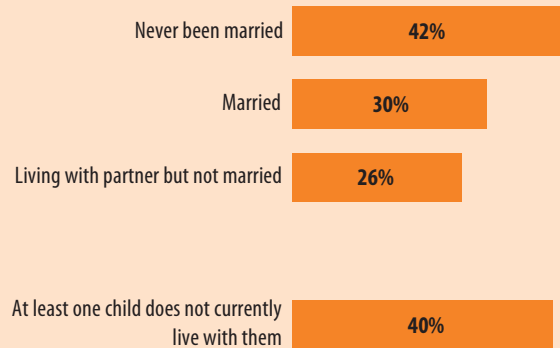


### Young Black Men and Fatherhood

Percent of young black men who have any children, either from a current or previous relationship ...



Among the 32% of young black men who are fathers ...

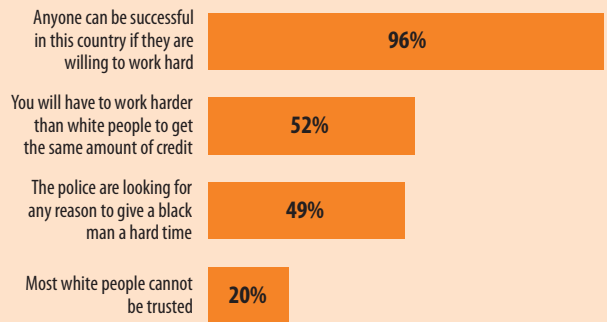


## YOUNG BLACK MEN HAVE SOMEWHAT MIXED VIEWS ON “THE SYSTEM”

Nearly all black men ages 18-29 say that black parents should tell their sons that anyone can be successful in this country if they're willing to work hard (96%). However many also say black parents should warn their sons that they will have to work harder than whites (52%), and that the police are looking for any reason to give a black man a hard time (49%). Their views on “the system” and who is responsible for the problems facing black men are also somewhat mixed. Two-thirds say the problems facing black men are more a result of what they have failed to do for themselves rather than what whites have done to blacks, but half say America's economic system is stacked against black men (compared with four in ten who say it is fair to everyone).

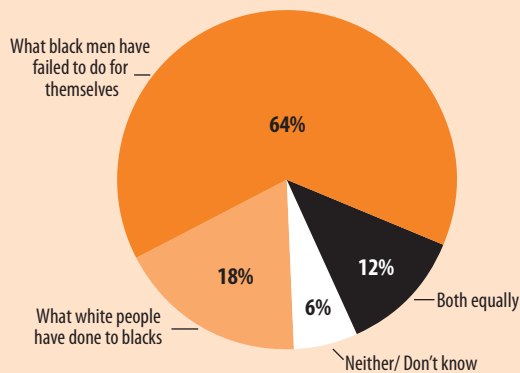
### Young Black Men on What Black Parents Should Tell Their Sons

Percent of young black men who say each of the following statements is something that black parents should be telling their sons...

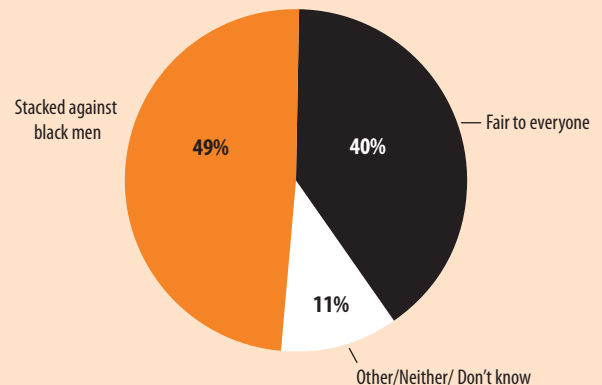


### Young Black Men's Mixed Views on “The System”

Percent of young black men who say the problems facing black men are more a result of ...



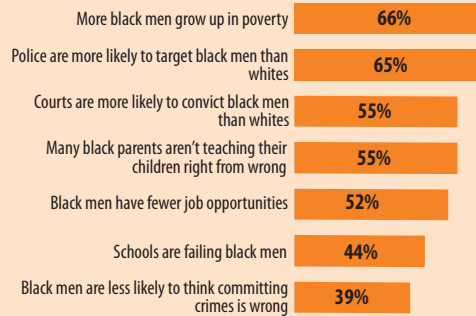
Percent of young black men who say America's economic system is ...



Young black men say a variety of factors are “big reasons” contributing to higher incarceration rates of black men, the most frequently cited being poverty (66%) and police targeting of black men (65%). When asked about reasons for declining marriage rates among blacks and for the achievement gap between black men and black women, young black men see crime and prison as playing a big role. The factor named by the highest share of young black men as a big reason for the declining marriage rate is that too many black men are in prison or have been killed (68%), and the factor they are most likely to name as a big reason for the male-female achievement gap is that black women are less likely to have a criminal record (53%). Comparatively, black women in this age range are most likely to say that big reasons for the male-female achievement gap are that black women work harder (56%) and that there is more discrimination against black men (49%); black women being less likely to have a criminal record ranks third among young black women as a big reason for this gap (45%).

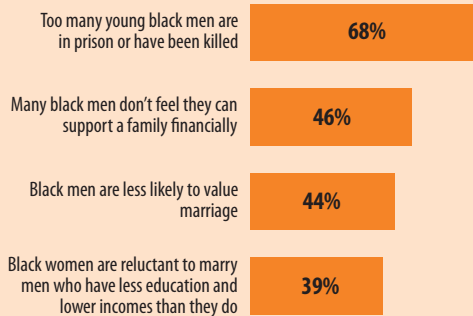
## Young Black Men’s Views on Prison

Percent of young black men who say each of the following is a “big reason” why young black men have a higher chance than most people of winding up in jail...



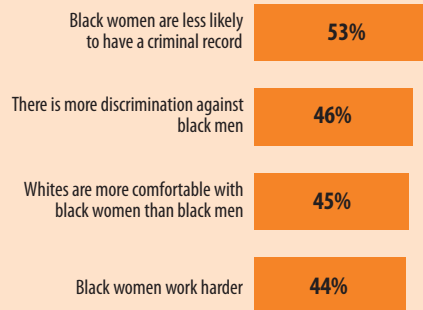
## Young Black Men’s Views on Declining Marriage Rate

Percent of young black men who say each of the following is a “big reason” why the black marriage rate is declining ...



## Young Black Men’s Views on Discrepancies Between Black Men and Black Women

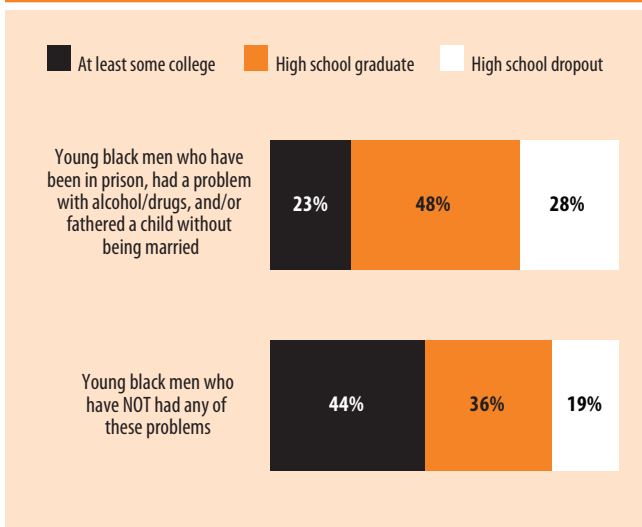
Percent of young black men who say each of the following is a “big reason” why the average black woman is better educated and makes more money than the average black man ...



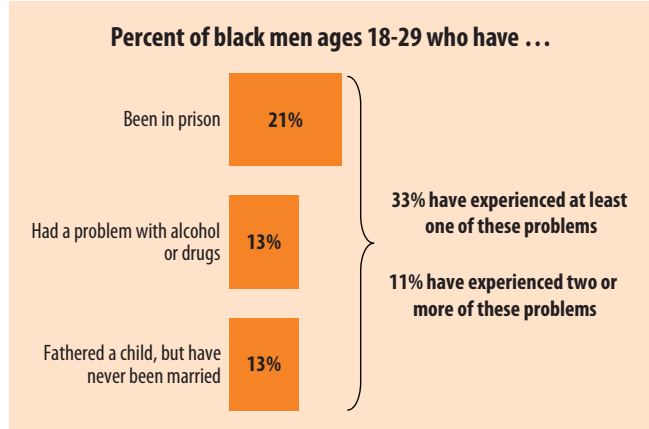
## YOUNG BLACK MEN WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED PROBLEMS

While most young black men don't fit the stereotype, there are some who have experienced the types of problems that their critics often point out: 13% say they have had a problem with alcohol or drugs, 13% say they have fathered a child but have never been married, and 21% say they have been in prison or jail (note that this is likely to be an underestimate of the share of all young black men who have ever been in prison, since the survey does not include the approximately one in ten who are currently incarcerated). A third (33%) have had at least one of these problems, while a much smaller share – 11% – have had two or more of these problems. Young black men who have experienced at least one of these problems are less educated than those who have not: just 23% have at least some college education (compared with 44% of those who haven't had any of these problems), and 28% are high school dropouts (compared with 19% of those who haven't had any of these problems).

### Education Differences Between Young Black Men Who Have Had Problems and Those Who Haven't

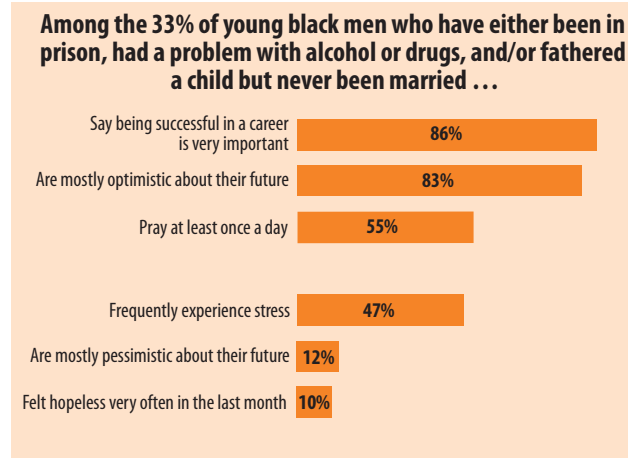


### Young Black Men's Experiences With Problems



Even among those young black men who have experienced one or more of these problems, their responses to this survey do not paint a uniformly bleak picture. Large majorities say they are optimistic about their own futures (83%), career success is very important to them (86%), and it's a good time to be a black man in America (62%). More than half (55%) say they pray at least once a day. However, there are some troubling signs for some of the 33% who have had at least one of these problems. Nearly half of them (47%) say they frequently experience stress (compared with 29% of those who haven't had problems). A small group of this 33% may be truly on the edge: 12% of them say they are mostly pessimistic about their future, and one in ten say that in the last month, they "very often" felt like they were losing hope.

### Profile of Young Black Men Who Have Experienced Problems



## ABOUT THE SURVEY

The *Washington Post*/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University Survey Project is a three-way partnership combining survey research and reporting to better inform the public. The three partners work together to choose the survey topics, design the survey instruments, and analyze the results. The *African American Men Survey*, the 15th in a series generated under the partnership, was conducted by telephone from March 20 to April 29, 2006 among 2,864 randomly selected adults nationwide, including 1,328 African American men. Results presented here are from 400 interviews with African American men ages 18–29 years. One limitation of this telephone survey is that it does not represent the views of the approximately one in ten black men in this age range who are currently incarcerated. The project team included Richard Morin, *Washington Post* director of polling and Claudia Deane, assistant director of polling; Drew E. Altman, president of the Kaiser Family Foundation, Mollyann Brodie, vice president and director of public opinion and

media research, and Elizabeth Hamel, associate director of public opinion and media research; and Robert J. Blendon, professor of health policy and political analysis at the Harvard School of Public Health and the John F. Kennedy School of Government, and John M. Benson, managing director of the Harvard Opinion Research Program in the Harvard School of Public Health. Michael Dawson, the John D. MacArthur professor of political science at the University of Chicago, served as a consultant on this project. Telephone interviews were conducted by ICR/International Communications Research. The margin of sampling error for results based on African American men ages 18–29 is plus or minus 6 percentage points, and the margin of sampling error for African American men overall is plus or minus 3 percentage points. Margin of sampling error for subgroups may be higher. Please note that sampling error is only one of many potential sources of error in this or any other public opinion poll.



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