

Illinois is worst state in Midwest for black male employment



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“CHICAGO – Illinois is the worst state in the Midwest for black male unemployment, new data reveals.

The employment rate for black men is 47.9 percent, placing it lowest among all Midwestern states in this category.

According to numbers from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Illinois ranks behind Nebraska, Minnesota, Kansas, Iowa, Missouri, Wisconsin, and Indiana – all of which have black male employment rates above 50 percent – as well as Michigan and Ohio.

Bob Woodson is the founder and president of the Center for Neighborhood Enterprise, a non-profit inner-city development and activism organization. He says high black unemployment is caused by a variety of factors.

“First is probably home life education,” Woodson said. “Many black students grow up in families and communities that don’t take vested interest in them attending school and completing assignments.”

Woodson says the constant threats and fear of violence at many inner-city schools prevent even willing students from achieving education success and that hurts them down the road when they’re looking for steady employment.

“Many kids don’t go to school, don’t graduate and make decisions that lead to jail time,” he said. “That combination makes it awfully tough to get a decent job even for the ones who’ve straightened out.”

Data isn’t available for all 50 states, but for the 37 (plus Washington, D.C.) that have turned in employment estimates for black males, only three rank lower than Illinois. Arkansas, Mississippi and Alabama each employ African-American men at a slightly lower rate than does the Land of Lincoln.

Black Illinoisan males are employed at a rate of less than 50 percent — a full 10 percentage points lower than eight years ago.

Brent Hickman is an assistant professor of economics at the University of Chicago and says poor cultural influences as well as bad policies often affect black males more than other groups.

“I think we can look at a combination of factors, like unstable upbringings as well as laws that make it less appealing to look for work,” Hickman said. When they’re aren’t a ton of good jobs available, especially in urban settings, people often choose other routes.”

Hickman argued that a low minimum wage and lack of manufacturing jobs hurts black males in the city.

“We need to make more appealing jobs available,” Hickman said, “so more people will work and crime will go down.”

Black male employment in the state is lower than all of the other major demographic groups, including Hispanic men and women, white men and women, and African-American women.

The national unemployment rate for African-American males is 54.5 percent.”