## Inequities in Navigating a Pandemic: Who Has to Go to Work?

A major narrative of the pandemic has been the question of who still had to leave the house in order to work, making it impossible for them to fully shelter in place. In our *Living in Boston During COVID-19* survey, we asked respondents to share how many days they physical went to work on the average week in April and in the previous week during the Summer. In Figure 1 we see that respondents' work schedules in April largely broke down into two types: those whose work schedules were entirely remote (59% of respondents) and those that required going out five or more days per week (21%); the remainder fell in between those two poles.

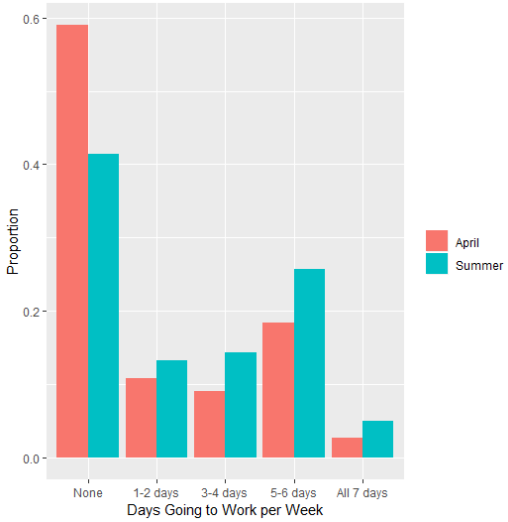


**Figure 1.** Proportion of individuals going to work by number of days per week, in April and Summer.

Mapping this variation geographically in Figure 2, we see that respondents from the city's southernmost neighborhoods—Mattapan, Hyde Park, West Roxbury, Central Dorchester—and East Boston were leaving the house to go to work more often than residents of other neighborhoods. Mattapan is the most striking, with nearly a third going to work 5 or more days per week and the average respondent going to work approximately 3 days per week.

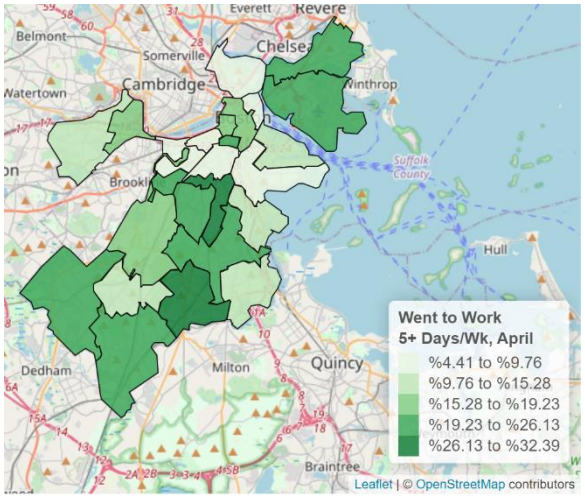


**Figure 2.** Proportion of individuals going to work 5 or more days per week in April, by neighborhood.

These geographic distinctions appear to reflect the different types of jobs that respondents from the neighborhoods held. For instance, over 50% of respondents from West Roxbury, Mattapan, East Boston, and Hyde Park reported having jobs that "put them in contact with the public" (compared to 46% across the sample); the majority (52%) of people with such jobs reported going to work 5 or more days per week. Healthcare workers, 78% of whom reported going to work 3 or more days per week, were also overrepresented in these neighborhoods (31-47% by neighborhood, relative to a global mean of 28%).

In breaking down these differences by race and socioeconomic status, we see that as many Latinx and Black respondents were going physically to work for a full work week as were working remotely, whereas the same was true for a small minority of White and Asian respondents (see Figure 3). Similarly, those in lower income brackets were far more likely to be going physically to work than those in higher income brackets. This points to themes noted throughout the early days of the pandemic that in our technologically-oriented age many of the jobs that require a physical presence are lower-income jobs often held by Black and Latinx workers, leading those populations to incur more risk of exposure.

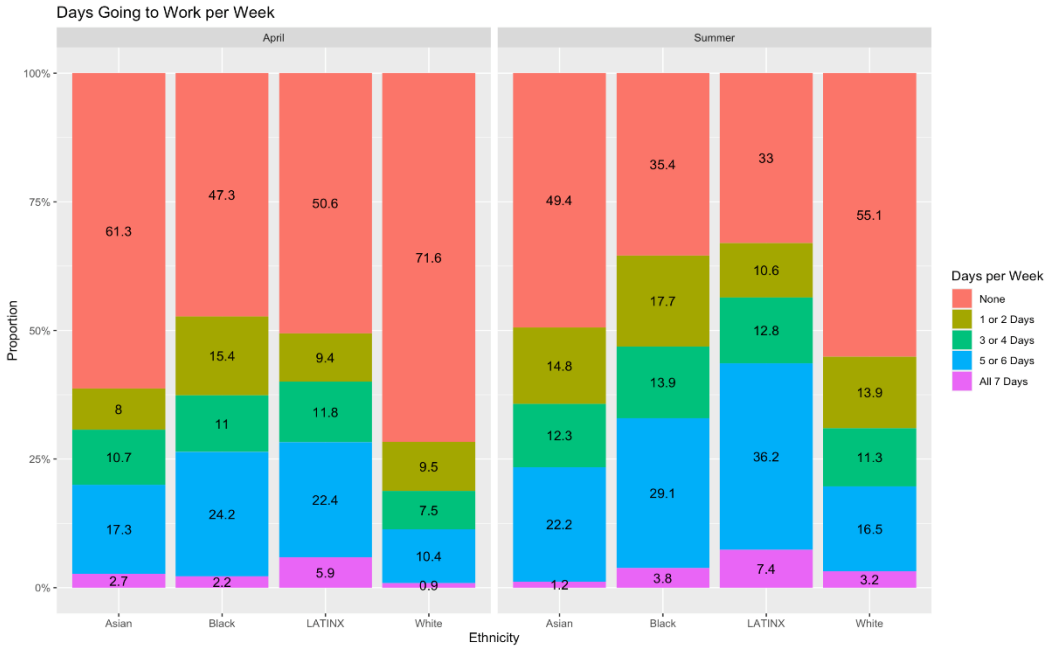


**Figure 3.** Proportions of individuals going to work different numbers of days per week in April (left panel) and Summer (right panel), by race.

Turning our attention to the Summer, the proportion of individuals going physically to work went up overall (41% worked entirely remotely and 31% went to work 5 or more days a week), but the disparities across neighborhoods and groups were the same, if not greater. The map across neighborhoods was nearly identical, with people living in the southern neighborhoods and East Boston most often going to work physically (see Figure 4). We do see a moderate increase in the amount of people working semi-remotely, going to work physically 1-4 days per week, and this

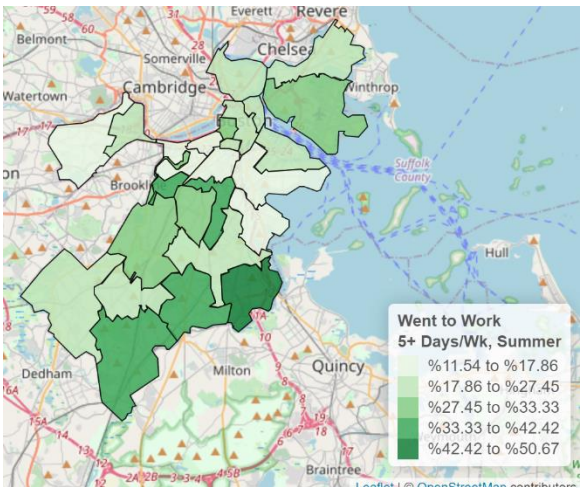


**Figure 5.** Proportion of individuals going to work 5 or more days per week in Summer, by neighborhood.

occurs for all racial groups and primarily those in middle- to low-income jobs (see Figure 4). More strikingly, the vast majority of Black and Latinx respondents appeared to be back in the workplace full time, meanwhile most White and Asian respondents remained predominantly or entirely working from home.

As cases rise again, these disparities merit our attention. Even if we were to return to an April-style shutdown, they would remain. Instead, it might be that we invest in testing and tracing specifically for those low-to-middle-income frontline workers in order to protect them, their families, and neighbors.

*The content of this post is drawn from the Living in Boston during COVID survey conducted by the Boston Area Research Initiative, the Center for Survey Research at UMass Boston, and the Boston Public Health Commission. It was funded by the National Science Foundation's Human-Environment and Geographical Sciences (HEGS) program through a grant for rapid-response research (RAPID; Award #2032384). The results presented here were part of a longer report on "Inequities in Navigating a Pandemic".*