

Youth Employment

Indicators of Child
and Youth Well-Being

Employment rates for youth (ages 16-24) have rebounded slightly since 2010, but mainly for those youth not in school. Rates of employment for those enrolled in high school or college have shown little change since the recent economic recession.

Importance

According to recent data, nearly all young adults (97 percent) have held a job between leaving high school and age 22.¹ For some youth, employment after high school is a transitional experience, in support of plans for (or concurrent with) post-secondary education. For other young people, employment marks their entry into the adult workforce, and the beginning of a difficult path toward economic self-sufficiency. In either case, this period is typically marked by multiple jobs of relatively short duration. In one recent cohort of youth (those born between 1980 and 1984), the average number of jobs held between ages 18 and 22 was 4.4, and the majority of jobs lasted one year or less. High school dropouts were less likely to have ever held a job than were youth with more education, and more of the jobs held by dropouts were likely to end in one year or less.²

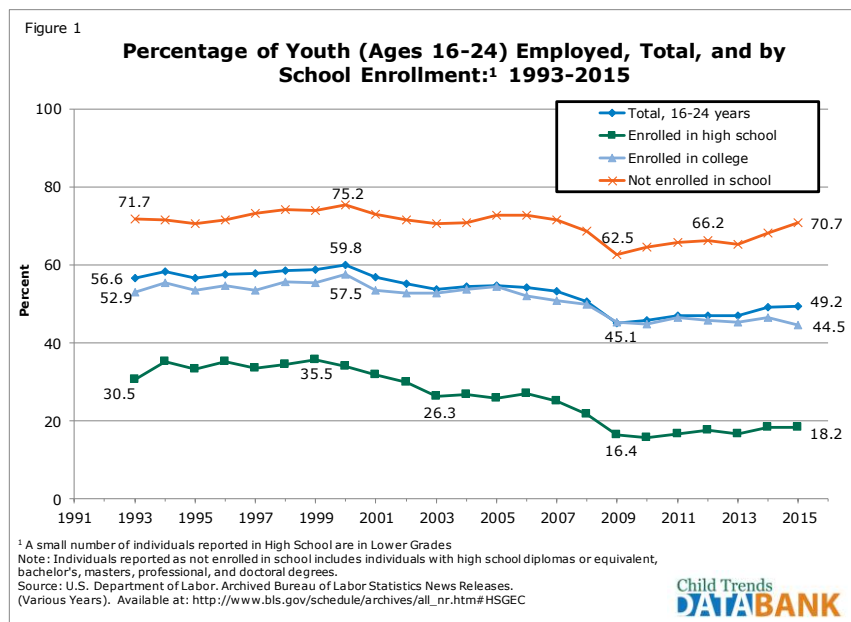
Employment can provide valuable experience for youth. It teaches responsibility, develops organizational and time management skills, and can help youth save money for post-secondary education. Jobs can also help youth form good work habits, gain valuable work experiences, and become financially independent. Youth—especially those who are black, Hispanic, or economically disadvantaged—who have some employment experience while in school are less likely to drop out than those who do not work during high school. High school “school-to-career” programs with a work experience component can increase the likelihood of students’ enrolling in college after graduation.³ Teen employment is linked to greater attachment to the labor market in the adult years, and to increased earnings.⁴ Summer jobs programs for youth have been found to increase the likelihood of high school graduation,⁵ and to reduce the likelihood of subsequent involvement in crime⁶ and the juvenile justice system.⁷ For those not enrolled in school, and often for students as well, employment is necessary for making ends meet.

However, employment can also interfere with academic achievement if work hours conflict with class schedules or interfere with a student’s ability to complete schoolwork. Work commitments also may lead students away from other (non-academic) beneficial school activities. According to studies, students who work more than 20 hours a week may have lower grade point averages and are more likely to drop out of school than those who work fewer hours.⁸ Students with jobs may experience stress due to pressure to perform well in both work and school settings. Overall, the negative effects of employment appear to be linked, not to whether students work, but to how often and how long.^{9,10,11,12} Some studies show that longer work hours are more prevalent among minority and other disadvantaged students.

Trends

As of October 2015, 49 percent of all youth ages 16-24 were employed in any work, either full- or part-time. Youth enrolled in high school had an employment rate of 18 percent, while the rate for those in college, either full- or part-time, was 45 percent. (Figure 1)

Those not enrolled in school had an employment rate of 71 percent. (Figure 1) Thus, 29 percent of this group was not employed, down from a peak of 37.5 percent in 2009. (Appendix 1) However, only 9 percent of youth not enrolled in school (in 2015) were considered “unemployed”; another 20 percent were not in the labor force.¹³



Between 1993 and 2000, employment among youth in all groups generally increased slightly, followed by a general decrease between 2000 and 2003. At that point, employment rates held steady until 2006, when they again began to decline. After a steep drop in 2008 and 2009, youth employment has

gone up for those youth not enrolled in school, from 63 to 71 percent between 2009 and 2015. Employment among high school students has increased only slightly since 2009 (from 16 to 18 percent), and has remained fairly steady for college students. (Figure 1) While the rate of employment for white, Asian and Hispanic college students followed the general pattern (rising slightly after 2009 without fully rebounding), and declined in 2015, employment for black students followed a different pattern (increasing after 2009, and even surpassing its 2007 level in 2015). (Appendix 1).

A number of factors may account for the recent stagnation in youth employment. Current economic conditions have reduced employment prospects for both students and others. Among students, there may be greater pressure and competition for academic achievement. Furthermore, college enrollment rates have been rising since 2001. With real wages for this age-group falling in recent years, workers may be motivated to enhance their earning power by acquiring further education.¹⁴



A 2013 survey of young workers (ages 18-30), conducted by the Federal Reserve, provides additional insights. Among those respondents who were currently working, only 42 percent were in a job that was closely related to their field of study. One factor here may be inadequate job counseling: 24 percent reported that they had received no information about jobs or careers while in high school. There is also significant mismatch in employment, with 28 percent of respondents saying they are overqualified for their current job.¹⁵

Working youth (ages 16-18) who lack a high school diploma and are not enrolled in school (about 30 percent of all “early high school leavers”) may be an important subgroup to reach with programs intended to boost economic self-sufficiency. As a group, they are disproportionately male, older, Hispanic, and not living with their parents. They are less likely to be engaged with federally-sponsored safety-net programs.

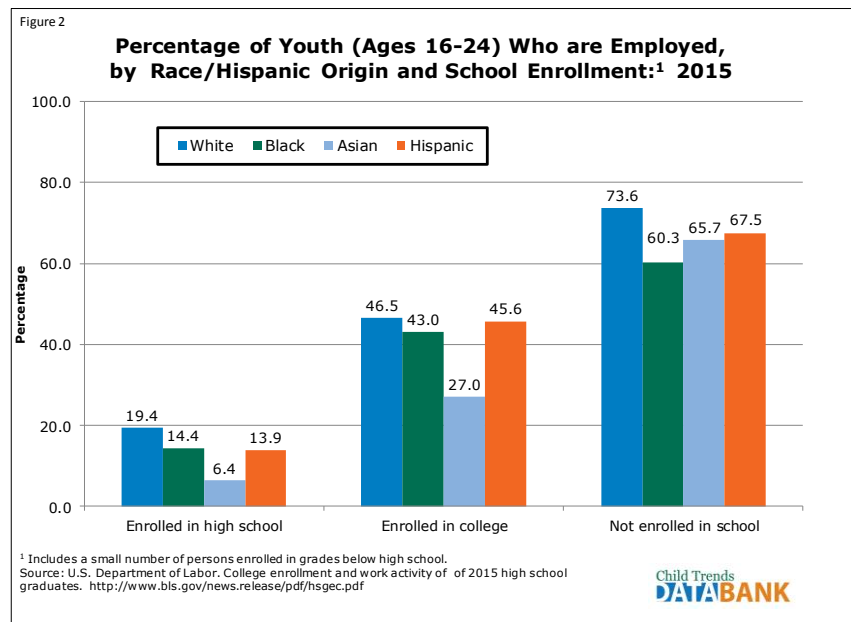
Nevertheless, more than one-third of these youth contribute at least 20 percent to their households’ annual income.¹⁶

Differences by Gender

In October 2015, 19 percent of females enrolled in high school were employed, compared with 17 percent of males. College-enrolled women also had a higher employment rate than their male counterparts: 47 percent compared with 41 percent. However, among youth not enrolled in school, males had a higher employment rate (74 percent) than females (67 percent). (Appendix 1) This largely reflects their higher rate of participation in the labor force, because unemployment numbers in 2015 were similar for males and females.¹⁷

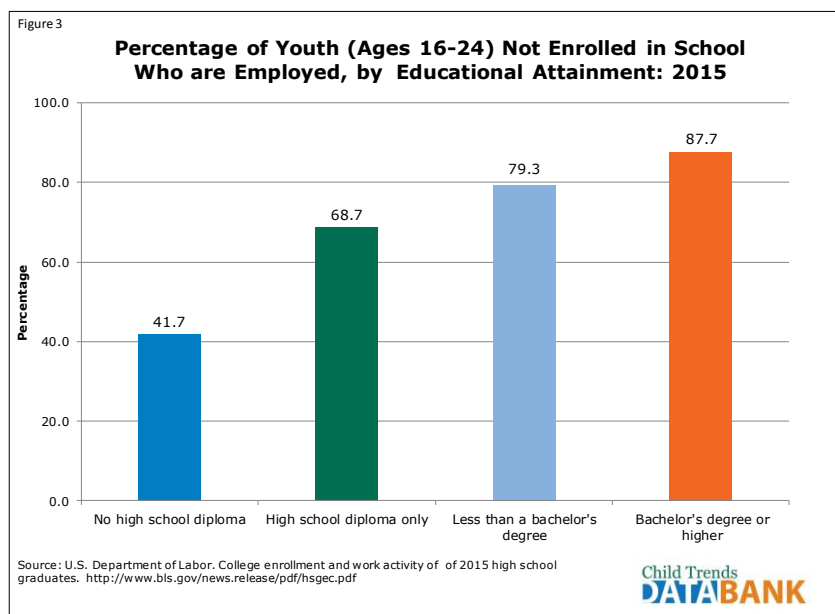
Differences by Race and Hispanic Origin¹⁸

In 2015, among youth enrolled in high school, white students had the highest employment rate (20 percent), followed by black and Hispanic (14 percent each), and Asian students (6 percent). Among youth enrolled in college, employment was again highest among white students (47 percent), although Hispanic students had similar rates (46 percent). Black students had lower rates of employment (43 percent), and Asian youth had the lowest (27 percent). Among youth (ages 16-24) not enrolled in school, whites and Hispanics had the highest employment rate (74 and 68 percent, respectively); next were Asian (66 percent), and black youth (60 percent). (Figure 2)



Differences by Educational Attainment

The education a person receives affects their employment status; in addition, the gender gap in employment rates narrows with higher levels of education. In 2015, among youth (ages 16-24) not enrolled in school who did not graduate from high school, 42 percent were employed, either full- or part-time. The employment rate for high school graduates with no college attainment was 69 percent; for those with some college or an associate degree, 79 percent; and for those with a bachelor's degree or higher, 88 percent. (Figure 3)



Among those that had not graduated high school, the employment rate gap between males and females was 13 percentage points (48 percent for males, and 35 percent for females). For high school graduates the gap was also 13 points (74 versus 61 percent). For those with some college, the gap was three points, and those with a bachelor's degree

or more, six points (81 versus 78, and 91 versus 85 percent, respectively). The pattern of difference between males and females is even less consistent when looking at rates of unemployment rather than employment.¹⁹

State and Local Estimates

State-by-state figures for unemployed teens (16-19) are available at the KIDS COUNT Data Center from 2008 through 2015: <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/5051-unemployed-teens-age-16-to-19?loc=1&loct=1>

International Estimates

In 2008, estimated youth employment (the employment-to-population ratio, ages 15-24) globally declined from 55 percent in 1998 to 51 percent. More information is available at:

<http://unworldyouthreport.org/media/pdfs/WYR2011.pdf>.

The Youth Civic Engagement report also has information on youth employment and gender disparities therein:

http://www.unworldyouthreport.org/images/docs/un_world_youth_report_youth_civic_engagement.pdf

National Goals

None.

What Works to Make Progress on This Indicator

Because the evidence for the value of employment for students (particularly high school students) is mixed—particularly when long work-hours are involved—this review is restricted to those programs and strategies aimed primarily at out-of-school youth.

- The following information is drawn from Heinrich, C. J., and Holzer H. J. (2010). *Improving education and employment for disadvantaged young men: Proven and promising strategies*. Institute for Research on Poverty. Discussion Paper no. 1374-10.
 - Career academies (CAs) are a form of career and technical education where students interested in a particular career take courses together and supplement their classroom education with summer and year-round employment. In an evaluation of CAs, participants had significantly higher monthly earnings, months worked, hours worked per week, and hourly wages than the control group.

- The Youth Opportunity Program offers comprehensive services to both in-school and out-of-school youth to encourage schooling and employment. Participation in this program was associated with gains in overall employment along with higher wages, especially among minorities and teens.
- The Job Corps program includes a residential component, in which youth receive intensive vocational training along with other life skills. Participants in the program saw improved earnings, mostly from older young adults 20-24.
- Career and technical education (CTE), formerly known as vocational education, has the potential to improve student's post-school employment outcomes. By law, "secondary-level CTE programs that receive federal funds must . . . demonstrate that they teach academic skills while simultaneously preparing youth for and adult learners to enter pathways to high-skill, high-paid, or high-demand occupations."²⁰ Some studies show that students who take CTE courses are more likely to fulfill academic requirements, be in the labor force, and have higher earnings, than those who had just academic coursework.²¹
- "Sectoral employment" programs have been shown to increase the likelihood of employment, and to lead to higher wages and jobs that offer benefits. For more information on sector-focused training see a report from Public/Private Ventures: http://www.issuelab.org/resource/tuning_in_to_local_labor_markets_findings_from_the_sectoral_employment_impact_study.
- Also see Hadley, A. M., Mbwana, M. S., and Hair, E. C. (2010). *What works for older youth during the transition to adulthood: Lessons from experimental evaluations of programs and interventions*. Child Trends Fact Sheet. Retrieved from <http://www.childtrends.org/?publications=what-works-for-older-youth-during-the-transition-to-adulthood-lessons-from-experimental-evaluations-of-programs-and-interventions-2>.
- And, Lippman, L. H., Ryberg, R., Carney, R., & Moore, K. A. (2015). *Key "soft skills" that foster youth workforce success: Toward a consensus across fields*. Child Trends. <http://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/2015-24WFCSoftSkills1.pdf>



Related Indicators

- Youth Neither Enrolled in School nor Working: www.childtrends.org/?indicators=youth-neither-enrolled-in-school-nor-working
- Educational Attainment (Youth): www.childtrends.org/?indicators=educational-attainment
- Volunteering: www.childtrends.org/?indicators=volunteering
- Children in Working Poor Families: www.childtrends.org/?indicators=children-in-working-poor-families
- Secure Parental Employment: www.childtrends.org/?indicators=secure-parental-employment
- After-School Activities (archived): www.childtrends.org/?indicators=after-school-activities

Definition

The Bureau of Labor Statistics defines employment as any paid work by anyone over 16 years old. Those who are jobless, available for work, and actively looking for jobs are classified as unemployed. Youth employment/unemployment refers to ages 16-24. Some youth are neither employed nor unemployed: e.g., those in the armed forces, those enrolled in school and not looking for work, parents taking exclusive care of young children, and “discouraged workers.”

Data Sources

Bureau of Labor Statistics. {various years} *College enrollment and work activity of high school graduates*. Available at: http://www.bls.gov/schedule/archives/all_nr.htm#HSGEC

Raw Data Source

U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey.

<http://www.census.gov/cps/>

<http://www.bls.gov/cps/>

Appendix 1 - Percentage of Youth (16-24) Employed, by School Enrollment Status, Gender, and Race/Hispanic Origin: Selected Years, 1993-2015

	1993	1995	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Total	56.6	56.6	59.8	56.8	55.2	53.6	54.4	54.5	54.0	53.2	50.6	45.0	45.7	46.8	46.8	46.9	49.0	49.2
Enrolled in any school	42.3	43.6	46.2	43.1	41.7	40.1	41.1	40.8	39.4	38.8	37.0	32.5	32.1	33.5	33.1	32.8	34.2	33.0
Enrolled in high school¹	30.5	33.2	33.8	31.8	29.7	26.3	26.6	25.8	26.8	24.9	21.7	16.4	15.7	16.5	17.4	16.6	18.2	18.2
Gender																		
Males	29.5	32.4	32.7	29.9	26.9	26.0	25.6	24.7	25.4	23.5	19.2	15.3	13.8	14.1	15.8	15.9	17.0	17.2
Females	31.7	34.2	35.0	34.0	32.8	26.7	27.6	27.0	28.3	26.4	24.3	17.6	17.8	19.1	19.1	17.3	19.6	19.2
Race/Hispanic Origin²																		
White	35.2	37.7	37.3	36.0	33.4	29.8	30.1	29.0	29.7	27.9	23.8	18.8	18.1	18.9	19.4	19.6	19.7	19.4
Black	12.7	17.5	20.5	16.7	16.2	14.8	14.0	12.1	18.6	14.0	14.7	8.8	8.2	10.1	12.4	9.1	14.3	14.4
Asian	-	-	-	-	-	11.4	11.9	20.4	14.0	16.3	16.4	6.3	5.9	7.6	6.9	3.6	8.9	6.4
Hispanic	20.7	21.2	19.9	23.1	17.6	17.1	19.4	17.7	16.1	18.2	13.2	10.4	9.4	9.7	10.4	12.5	12.6	13.9
Enrolled in college	52.9	53.3	57.5	53.3	52.6	52.7	53.6	54.3	51.9	50.8	49.8	45.1	44.7	46.3	45.6	45.1	46.3	44.5
Gender																		
Males	51.8	51.6	56.3	50.5	49.8	51.9	50.7	52.0	49.9	48.0	45.9	40.0	42.1	44.1	44.2	40.9	42.6	41.4
Females	53.9	54.9	58.4	55.7	54.9	53.4	56.1	56.3	53.6	53.2	53.2	49.5	47.0	48.3	46.7	48.7	49.6	47.2
Race/Hispanic Origin²																		
White	56.7	55.6	60.3	55.6	55.1	54.9	56.2	56.7	53.8	53.4	52.8	48.3	47.0	49.3	47.6	47.9	49.9	46.5
Black	34.5	41.4	47.3	44.5	41.2	41.8	45.0	44.2	43.2	42.7	39.1	34.5	38.7	37.1	39.8	40.1	38.6	43.0
Asian	-	-	-	-	-	40.9	37.0	43.5	41.7	33.4	32.7	29.5	33.3	28.9	36.3	29.1	31.1	27.0
Hispanic	54.4	48.7	66.8	56.8	54.8	54.0	56.2	51.6	56.6	56.6	49.2	46.0	44.2	43.9	45.3	47.0	49.2	45.6

	1993	1995	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Not enrolled in school	71.7	70.6	75.2	72.8	71.5	70.6	70.8	72.6	72.7	71.5	68.5	62.5	64.5	65.7	66.2	65.2	68.1	70.7
Gender																		
Males	80.2	78.8	80.5	77.9	77.7	75.9	76.9	77.8	78.1	77.1	71.2	64.6	67.1	69.3	69.3	67.7	72.2	74.2
Females	63.6	62.6	69.4	67.4	64.7	64.9	64.2	66.8	66.6	65.3	65.6	60.2	61.7	61.7	62.7	62.3	63.6	66.9
Race/Hispanic Origin²																		
White	75.2	73.7	78.3	75.5	74.7	74.4	73.5	75.1	75.5	74.1	71.8	66.0	68.0	68.6	70.1	68.3	71.2	73.6
Black	55.4	56.0	59.5	59.3	55.9	54.9	60.2	61.5	59.9	59.8	54.5	46.2	51.6	53.3	50.7	53.4	56.4	60.3
Asian	-	-	-	-	-	63.8	69.7	74.9	69.4	74.0	68.3	64.4	58.6	64.2	60.9	68.2	69.3	65.7
Hispanic	59.2	61.0	70.7	70.3	68.8	67.5	68.6	68.4	71.2	66.0	64.5	57.7	59.9	64.1	61.4	61.7	65.2	67.5
Educational Attainment																		
Less than high school	48.9	48.9	56.9	58.2	57.4	53.5	53.0	56.9	56.1	55.5	46.9	43.2	45.8	50.4	44.8	41.1	44.7	41.7
High school or GED	72.9	73.4	76.6	71.6	71.2	70.3	71.2	72.2	71.1	69.4	66.3	58.2	60.0	60.6	61.6	61.2	64.7	68.7
Some college or associate's degree	86.8	81.8	84.3	83.4	80.6	81.1	80.3	79.9	82.9	80.1	79.3	73.5	74.7	74.6	75.8	74.8	77.8	79.3
Bachelor's degree or more	91.0	88.2	91.0	89.6	86.8	86.2	87.3	90.0	87.8	89.2	87.7	85.7	85.0	85.8	87.3	86.9	85.2	87.7
Age-group																		
16-19	59.0	58.4	63.4	60.7	60.1	56.6	57.9	58.3	58.5	58.3	52.1	43.3	47.8	48.5	47.7	47.9	52.4	55.0
20-24	74.7	74.0	78.6	76.4	74.5	74.1	74.0	75.7	76.0	74.8	72.7	67.2	68.4	69.5	70.4	69.4	71.8	74.4

"-" Indicates data not available.

¹Includes a small number of persons enrolled in grades below high school.

²Hispanics may be any race, and estimates for whites, blacks, and Asians include Hispanics.

Source: U.S. Department of Labor. *College enrollment and work activity of high school graduates*. {Various Years}. http://www.bls.gov/schedule/archives/all_nr.htm#HSGEC



Endnotes

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¹² Warren, J. R. (2002). Reconsidering the relationship between student employment and academic outcomes: A new theory and better data. *Youth & Society*, 33(3), 366-393.

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¹⁷ Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2015). Op. cit.

¹⁸ Hispanics may be of any race. Estimates for whites, blacks, and Asians include Hispanics.

¹⁹ Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2015). Op. cit.

²⁰ National Research Center for Career and Technical Education. (undated). *Major research findings 2000-2007: Engagement, achievement, transition*. Retrieved from <http://www.nrccte.org/resources/publications/major-research-findings-2000-2007-engagement-achievement-and-transition>

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