

Study: Gendered impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the proportion of youth neither in employment nor education at the start of the school year

Released at 8:30 a.m. Eastern time in The Daily, Tuesday, May 25, 2021

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic and changing pandemic restrictions, youth had to make difficult decisions in the fall of 2020. A new study released today shows that, at the start of the 2020/2021 school year, when faced with unprecedented youth unemployment and postsecondary education moving online, young women aged 17 to 24 responded by enrolling in postsecondary institutions at a higher rate than a year earlier. There was no increase among young men.

These decisions, which can be influenced by available resources and previous educational attainment, affected the proportion of youth who were not in employment, education or training (NEET). The proportion of NEET youth is closely monitored, as these youth may be at increased risk of low income and social exclusion, particularly if the NEET situation persists over time.

For young women aged 15 to 29, the year-over-year increase in postsecondary attendance from September-October 2019 to September-October 2020 resulted in a smaller increase in their rate of NEET (+1 percentage point), compared with same-aged young men (+4 percentage points). Consequently, in the fall of 2020, young women were less likely than young men to be neither employed nor enrolled in school (12% versus 14% for young men).

As the school year progressed, the rate of young women's postsecondary attendance continued to be higher than in the 2019/2020 school year, with their NEET rate remaining lower than that of young men.

Young women's postsecondary attendance increased, while that of young men remained stable

The participation of young women aged 15 to 29 in postsecondary school increased to 32% at the start of the 2020/2021 academic year, compared with 29% at the start of the 2019/2020 school year. By comparison, young men's participation stayed constant at 23%.

This increase in young women's postsecondary enrolment was driven by those aged 17 to 24. Specifically, postsecondary attendance rose from 48% to 53% for young women aged 17 to 19, and from 46% to 50% for young women aged 20 to 24.

Meanwhile, there were no significant changes among young men for any age category. Postsecondary attendance, which is typically lower among men than women, hovered around 38% to 40% for young men aged 17 to 19, and around 35% to 36% range for young men aged 20 to 24.

Increase in postsecondary studies only seen for young Canadian-born women

While the postsecondary attendance rate of young Canadian-born women increased, the proportion of young immigrant women attending postsecondary schooling remained constant. The stability in the rate of postsecondary attendance among immigrant women cannot be explained by factors related to the pandemic, including any drops in international students or changes in immigration patterns during this period, as both foreign nationals with study permits and newly arrived immigrants were excluded from the study. Further research will be necessary to better understand differences in postsecondary attendance patterns between young immigrant women and Canadian-born women.



Partly because of the difference in postsecondary patterns at the start of the 2020/2021 school year, the NEET rate remained constant for young Canadian-born women, at 11% compared with 10% in the previous year. By contrast, the NEET rate rose from 13% to 17% for young immigrant women, widening the gap in the NEET rate between the two groups. The NEET rates of young Canadian-born men and young immigrant men were similar during early fall 2020.

The employment rate of female postsecondary students fell sharply

One important economic effect of the COVID-19 pandemic that is not captured in the NEET rate is the decline in student employment among women. Young women attending postsecondary schools are typically more likely to be employed than young men. Before the pandemic, from September to October 2019, 56% of women and 45% of men aged 15 to 29 attending postsecondary school were employed. These jobs can help students fund their studies and provide work experience.

As a result of the pandemic, the employment rate of students declined year over year from 56% to 49% for young women, while it remained stable for young men. This was predominantly due to decreases in employment in the accommodation and food services sector for young women.

This disparity continued through the second wave of the pandemic from November 2020 to February 2021 and proved to be a leading contributor to the greater employment losses among women, compared with men during this period. Indeed, gender differences in employment declines were smaller for non-student youth and for people aged 30 to 54.

Note to readers

This release summarizes findings of the article released today, "[Gendered impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the proportion of youth neither in employment nor education at the start of the school year](#)." The article examines the impact of the pandemic on the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training (NEET), an indicator related to current and longer-term economic and social well-being.

Rates and characteristics (gender, age groups, immigrant status, belonging to a designated visible minority group, Indigenous identity and province of residence) are presented for three mutually exclusive categories: young people who are NEET, young people attending school, and young people who are working and no longer attending school. The article is based on data from the Labour Force Survey.

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [3701](#).

The article entitled "[Gendered impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the proportion of youth neither in employment nor education at the start of the school year](#)" is now available as part of *Insights on Canadian Society* ([75-006-X](#)).

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca) or Media Relations (613-951-4636; STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca).