

Youth employment in the United States

Data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 show substantial work activity among 14- and 15-year-olds

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Today's youths commonly gain employment experience through working for a particular employer, such as a fast-food restaurant, or through a less formal arrangement, such as babysitting for a neighbor. The purpose of this article is to provide a detailed profile of the employment of today's youths using round-1 data from a new survey of youth: the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 (NLSY97). The article reports the incidence, intensity, and timing of youth employment (school vs. summer), shows the industries and occupations in which youths commonly work, and examines employment differences across gender, race, ethnic group, household income, and family structure.

Data and definitions

The data presented are from the first interview of the NLSY97, a nationally representative sample of about 9,000 young men and women who were born between January 1, 1980, and December 31, 1984.¹ The first interview took place in 1997, when these youths were aged 12 to 17 years. The NLSY97 collects extensive information on youths' labor market experiences, in addition to information on a wide array of other topics, such as schooling and family background. Members of the sample are interviewed annually.²

Early work experience can include "employee" jobs, wherein a youth has an ongoing relationship with a particular employer, such as a job working in a supermarket or restaurant, and "freelance" jobs, in which the youth does one or a few tasks without

a specific "boss," such as babysitting, mowing lawns, or working for oneself. The NLSY97 seeks to gather a longitudinal record of youths' employment experiences, rather than taking a snapshot of their labor market status at a particular point in time.³ In order to accomplish this, survey respondents aged 14 and older are asked to list all employee jobs they held from the age of 14 to the date of the interview. A calendar is filled out by the interviewer and is shown to the respondent to confirm all beginning and ending dates of employee jobs, as well as any gaps between those dates within which the respondent did not work. Respondents also provide other information about each employee job held, such as the industry and occupation into which the job was classified. Next, respondents 14 and older are asked to list all freelance jobs they held from the age of 14 to the date of the interview. Again, a calendar is used to confirm all beginning and ending dates of freelance jobs. Due to the sporadic nature of freelance jobs, however, data on periods of nonwork between those dates are not collected. Respondents also provide information on the characteristics of each freelance job they held.

Tables in the sections that follow describe youth employment in employee jobs and freelance jobs at some time during a specific period, including "at age 14" and "at age 15." When a youth is said to have worked "at age 14," for example, the reference is to the youth having worked at some time *during the entire 52-week period* between the youth's 14th and 15th birthdays.⁴ Because the NLSY97 collects data on all employ-

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Table 1. Percent of youths employed at ages 14 and 15 in 1994–97, by type of job, sex, race or Hispanic origin, household income, and family structure¹

Age in 1994–97 and characteristic	Percent employed at—					
	Any job	Any employee job	Any freelance job	Employee jobs only	Freelance jobs only	Both employee and freelance jobs
Total working at age 14	57.2	23.8	42.8	14.4	33.3	9.4
Sex:						
Male	55.2	28.1	36.8	18.5	27.1	9.7
Female	59.2	19.3	49.1	10.1	39.9	9.2
Race or ethnicity:						
White	64.3	27.5	48.3	16.1	36.8	11.4
Black	43.3	16.0	33.1	10.2	27.3	5.8
Hispanic origin	41.3	16.7	30.1	11.3	24.6	5.4
Household annual income:						
Less than \$25,000	48.6	20.5	34.7	13.9	28.1	6.6
\$25,000 to \$44,999	62.7	25.5	46.4	16.3	37.3	9.1
\$45,000 to \$69,999	63.0	26.5	49.3	13.6	36.5	12.9
\$70,000 or more	63.5	25.0	49.5	13.9	38.5	11.0
Family structure:						
Two-biological-parent family	61.5	26.0	46.4	15.0	35.4	11.0
Two-parent family	59.2	23.8	44.4	14.7	35.4	9.1
Female-parent family	53.9	21.4	40.3	13.6	32.6	7.8
Not living with parents	39.4	10.9	31.4	8.0	28.5	2.9
Total working at age 15	63.7	37.6	39.8	23.9	26.1	13.7
Sex:						
Male	63.4	41.5	34.1	29.3	21.9	12.2
Female	64.1	33.5	45.8	18.2	30.6	15.3
Race or ethnicity:						
White	71.8	44.0	44.8	27.0	27.9	17.0
Black	43.6	22.2	28.7	14.9	21.4	7.3
Hispanic origin	47.9	26.5	28.1	19.8	21.4	6.7
Household annual income:						
Less than \$25,000	52.3	32.3	30.9	21.4	20.0	10.9
\$25,000 to \$44,999	70.9	40.8	44.7	26.1	30.1	14.7
\$45,000 to \$69,999	69.4	39.8	46.9	22.5	29.6	17.3
\$70,000 or more	75.6	42.2	49.4	26.2	33.4	16.0
Family structure:						
Two-biological-parent family	68.0	38.6	44.1	23.8	29.3	14.8
Two-parent family	64.8	38.3	39.3	25.4	26.5	12.8
Female-parent family	63.6	38.2	40.2	23.4	25.4	14.8
Not living with parents	43.3	25.9	22.5	20.8	17.3	5.1

¹ When a youth is said to have worked “at age 14,” for example, the reference is to the youth having worked at some time during the entire 52-week period between the youth’s 14th and 15th birthdays.

NOTE: The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 surveyed male and

female youths who were aged 12 to 16 on December 31, 1996. Rows of the table referring to youths working at age 14 exclude individuals who were not yet 15 years of age when they were interviewed. Rows referring to youths working at age 15 exclude individuals who were not yet 16 years of age when they were interviewed.

ment spells in employee jobs, it is possible to determine whether a youth did any work at all while he or she was a particular age and also to determine how many weeks the youth worked at that age. The method the analysis that follows uses to determine whether an individual worked at a freelance job at a particular age is less precise than that used for employee jobs, because only data on beginning and ending employment dates are collected. If a period between any freelance job’s beginning and ending date spans any of the

weeks the respondent was 14 (for example), the respondent is defined as having worked in a freelance job at age 14. This approach may overstate youths’ incidence of employment in freelance jobs: the data do not allow one to calculate the number of weeks a respondent worked at such a job.

Over the years, policymakers have been concerned about youth employment during the school term.⁵ The nature of the NLSY97 data on employee jobs allows one to calculate the percentage of youths working during the school year or dur-

ing the summer (or both). One can also calculate the percentage of school and summer weeks that youths work in employee jobs. It is convenient to depict the timing of youth employment (especially graphically) during a calendar year, rather than at a particular age. Tables and charts on the timing of youth employment are shown for calendar year 1996, for one birth year: 1981. These youths were 15 as of December 31, 1996, and thus ranged from 14 to 15 years old in 1996.

Unlike most data sets, the NLSY97 captures employment of the very young. The survey asks all youths aged 12 or 13 at the interview date about all of their work activities since the age of 12. The survey does not distinguish between employment in freelance and employee jobs for this age group, but the structure of the questions is similar to that of questions asked of older youths in the freelance section. In this article, the incidence of employment of the very young is measured over the year youths are age 12.⁶

Past research suggests that youth employment behavior varies by factors such as sex, race, ethnicity, household income, and family structure.⁷ Accordingly, the tables that follow tabulate youth employment by these factors. Household income is measured for calendar year 1996 and is broken down into four mutually exclusive categories. Family structure is decomposed into five mutually exclusive categories and is measured for the same period as are the youth employment variables (for example, at age 14 or during calendar year 1996).⁸

Incidence of youth employment

This profile of youth employment in the NLSY97 begins with an examination of the incidence of employment among 14- and 15-year-olds. When calculating employment experience, researchers often use age 16 as a starting point. However, as table 1 shows, a significant percentage of youths engage in employment activities at ages 14 and 15.⁹ More than half (57 percent) of all youths held a job at least sometime at age 14. The majority of working youths held only freelance jobs at that age. Almost two-thirds (64 percent) of youths had worked at least sometime at age 15. Accompanying this increase in youth employment was a shift away from freelance work and into employee jobs.

Overall, 55 percent of male youths and 59 percent of female youths worked at least sometime at age 14. At age 15, about equal percentages of male and female youths worked (63 percent and 64 percent, respectively). However, the mix between freelance and employee jobs differed considerably by gender: at both ages, female youths were much more likely to hold freelance jobs and less likely to hold employee jobs than were male youths.

Past research has consistently found substantial differences by race or ethnicity in the incidence of youth employ-

Table 2. Percent of individuals aged 14 to 15 in 1994–97 and aged 14 to 16 on December 31, 1996, who worked at an employee job, and average number of weeks worked, by sex, race or Hispanic origin, household income, and family structure¹

Age in 1994–97 and characteristic	Percent with an employee job	Average number of weeks worked
Total working at age 14	23.8	24.6
Sex:		
Male	28.1	24.6
Female	19.3	24.6
Race or ethnicity:		
White	27.5	26.3
Black	16.0	17.0
Hispanic origin	16.7	17.9
Household annual income:		
Less than \$25,000	20.5	21.0
\$25,000 to \$44,999	25.5	23.9
\$45,000 to \$69,999	26.5	27.6
\$70,000 or more	25.0	24.0
Family structure:		
Two-biological-parent family	26.0	26.2
Two-parent family	23.8	24.4
Female-parent family	21.4	21.1
Not living with parents	10.9	14.2
Total working at age 15	37.6	25.9
Sex:		
Male	41.5	27.2
Female	33.5	24.1
Race or ethnicity:		
White	44.0	27.1
Black	22.2	20.6
Hispanic origin	26.5	20.5
Household annual income:		
Less than \$25,000	32.3	23.8
\$25,000 to \$44,999	40.8	26.5
\$45,000 to \$69,999	39.8	30.1
\$70,000 or more	42.2	24.8
Family structure:		
Two-biological-parent family	38.6	28.2
Two-parent family	38.3	25.8
Female-parent family	38.2	24.1
Not living with parents	25.9	17.0

¹ When a youth is said to have worked “at age 14,” for example, the reference is to the youth having worked at some time during the entire 52-week period between the youth’s 14th and 15th birthdays.

NOTE: The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 surveyed male and female youths who were aged 12 to 16 on December 31, 1996. Rows of the table referring to youths working at age 14 exclude individuals who were not yet 15 years of age when they were interviewed. Rows referring to youths working at age 15 exclude individuals who were not yet 16 years of age when they were interviewed.

ment, and the NLSY97 data show this difference as well. Employment is much higher among whites at these ages than among blacks or Hispanics. At age 14, 64 percent of whites, 43 percent of blacks, and 41 percent of Hispanics had worked sometime.¹⁰ By age 15, 72 percent of whites and 48 percent of Hispanics had worked sometime, significantly higher percent-

Table 3. Top 10 industries of longest-held employee job of youths at ages 14 and 15 in 1994-97¹

Industry	Percent of youths
Age 14	
Eating and drinking places	17.4
Miscellaneous entertainment and recreation services	8.7
Construction	8.4
Newspaper publishing and printing	4.9
Agricultural production, crops	4.4
Private households (personal services)	4.1
Landscape and horticultural services	3.6
Agricultural production, livestock	2.9
Elementary and secondary schools	1.9
Services to dwellings and other buildings	1.9
Age 15	
Eating and drinking places	28.8
Miscellaneous entertainment and recreation services	9.0
Construction	5.3
Grocery stores	4.5
Newspaper publishing and printing	2.9
Landscape and horticultural services	2.3
Agricultural production, crops	2.0
Agricultural production, livestock	1.8
Automotive repair and related services	1.6
Private households (personal services)	1.5

¹ When a youth is said to have worked "at age 14," for example, the reference is to the youth having worked at some time during the entire 52-week period between the youth's 14th and 15th birthdays.

NOTE: The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 surveyed male and female youths who were aged 12 to 16 on December 31, 1996. Rows of the table referring to 14-year-olds exclude individuals who were not yet 15 years of age when they were interviewed. Rows referring to 15-year-olds exclude individuals who were not yet 16 years of age when they were interviewed.

ages than those at age 14. Black employment, however, remained nearly constant, at 44 percent.

Youths in households with low income were less likely to work. One possible explanation for this finding is that they may have lived in areas with less economic opportunity and, consequently, may have had less access to transportation, which could have decreased their likelihood of working. At age 14, 49 percent of youths whose households had annual incomes of less than \$25,000 worked in an employee or freelance job or both. In contrast, about 63 percent of youths in households with higher levels of income worked at age 14. Similar differences are observed for youths aged 15: 52 percent of those in households with annual incomes of less than \$25,000 worked, compared with at least 69 percent in households with higher income.

Youths in two-biological-parent and other two-parent families were more likely to work at age 14 (62 percent and 59 percent, respectively) than those in female-parent families (54 percent). Youths in female-parent families may have faced relatively more obstacles to working due to issues related to their having a lower income or to having fewer adults in the household to provide them with transportation to a job. However,

employment differences between youths in these types of family structure were *not* significant for 15-year-olds.¹¹

With regard to the incidence and intensity (in terms of weeks) of youth employment in employee jobs, the percentage of youths working at such jobs increased substantially, from 24 percent at age 14 to 38 percent at age 15. In addition, at both of these ages, employed youths worked a significant portion of the year (about one-half of it; see table 2.)

Male youths were more likely than female youths to work at an employee job at age 14 or 15. However, of those who held an employee job at age 14, both sexes worked about half the year. At age 15, male youths with jobs worked slightly more weeks than did female youths (27 and 24 weeks, respectively).

At ages 14 and 15, whites were considerably more likely to work at employee jobs than were blacks or Hispanics. At age 14, whites worked 26 weeks, while blacks worked 17 weeks and Hispanics worked 18 weeks. At age 15, whites worked 27 weeks, and blacks and Hispanics worked about 21 weeks.

Youths in households with annual incomes of less than \$25,000 were less likely to work in employee jobs at ages 14 and 15 than were youths in households with higher incomes.

Table 4. Top 10 industries of longest-held employee job of youths at age 14 in 1994-97, by sex¹

Industry	Percent of youths
Male youths	
Eating and drinking places	15.8
Construction	11.4
Miscellaneous entertainment and recreation services	8.8
Newspaper publishing and printing	6.1
Agricultural production, crops	5.9
Landscape and horticultural services	5.4
Agricultural production, livestock	3.7
Elementary and secondary schools	2.4
Automotive repair and related services	2.3
Grocery stores	1.8
Female youths	
Eating and drinking places	19.8
Private households (personal services)	8.6
Miscellaneous entertainment and recreation services	8.5
Construction	3.8
Child day care services	3.5
Newspaper publishing and printing	3.1
Religious organizations	2.8
Services to dwellings and other buildings	2.1
Social services, N.E.C.	1.9
Agricultural production, crops	1.9

¹ When a youth is said to have worked "at age 14," for example, the reference is to the youth having worked at some time during the entire 52-week period between the youth's 14th and 15th birthdays.

NOTE: The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 surveyed male and female youths who were aged 12 to 16 on December 31, 1996. All rows of the table exclude individuals who were not yet 15 years of age when they were interviewed. N.E.C. = not elsewhere classified.

Table 5. Top 10 industries of longest-held employee job of youths at age 15 in 1995-97, by sex¹

Industry	Percent of youths
Male youths	
Eating and drinking places	27.3
Construction	8.3
Miscellaneous entertainment and recreation services	7.6
Grocery stores	4.7
Newspaper publishing and printing	4.2
Landscape and horticultural services	4.0
Agricultural production, crops	2.6
Agricultural production, livestock	2.5
Automotive repair and related services	2.0
Miscellaneous retail stores	1.5
Female youths	
Eating and drinking places	30.8
Miscellaneous entertainment and recreation services	10.9
Grocery stores	4.2
Private households (personal services)	3.0
Religious organizations	2.3
Child day care services	2.3
Services to dwellings and other buildings	1.7
Apparel and accessory stores, except shoe	1.6
Food stores, N.E.C.	1.5
Hotels and motels	1.4

¹ When a youth is said to have worked "at age 14," for example, the reference is to the youth having worked at some time during the entire 52-week period between the youth's 14th and 15th birthdays.

NOTE: The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 surveyed male and female youths who were aged 12 to 16 on December 31, 1996. All rows of the table exclude individuals who were not yet 16 years of age when they were interviewed. N.E.C. = not elsewhere classified.

However, only 14- and 15-year-old youths in households with annual incomes in the \$45,000-\$69,999 range worked a significantly greater number of weeks than did youths in households with an income of less than \$25,000 per year.

Youth industries and occupations

Fourteen- and 15-year-olds' employee jobs were concentrated in a small number of industries. Table 3 lists the top 10 detailed three-digit Census industries of employee jobs youths held at ages 14 and 15.¹² Nearly 60 percent of employed youths worked in one of these industries sometime at age 14 or 15. At both of these ages, eating and drinking places constituted the most common industry in which youths were employed, with 17-percent representation among 14-year-olds and a significantly higher 29-percent showing among 15-year-olds.

Male and female 14-year-olds shared 5 of the top 10 industries, while their 15-year-old counterparts shared only 3. (See Tables 4 and 5.) Not surprisingly, eating and drinking establishments were the most common employers of male and female youths at both ages 14 and 15. At age 14, male youths in employee jobs were nearly 3 times as likely to work in the construction industry as were female youths. Construction

continued to be a prominent employer of male youths at age 15, although it did not appear in the top-10 list for 15-year-old female youths. By contrast, work in private households was significant for 14- and 15-year-old young women, but did not appear in the top-10 industry list for male youths.

Youth employment also appears to be concentrated in a small number of occupations. Table 6 lists the top 10 detailed three-digit Census occupations of employee jobs youths held at ages 14 and 15;¹³ at each age, about 50 percent of employed youths worked in one of those occupations. The most likely detailed occupation for employed youths is janitors and cleaners at age 14 (9 percent) and cashiers at age 15 (10 percent). The latter is the third most likely occupation for 14-year-olds.

Male and female youths exhibit significant differences in occupations at the two ages studied. Male and female 14-year-olds shared only two common occupations in their top-10 lists, while their 15-year-old counterparts shared five. (See tables 7 and 8.) Cashier was the most common occupation of employed female youths: 11 percent worked as cashiers at age 14 and 16 percent at age 15. By contrast, the occupation of cashier did not even reach the top-10 list of employed male 14-year-olds and was the fifth most common occupation of employed male 15-year-olds. Male youths were most likely to

Table 6. Top 10 occupations of longest-held employee job of youths at ages 14 and 15 in 1994-97¹

Occupation	Percent of youths
Total at age 14	
Janitors and cleaners	8.7
Farm workers	5.9
Cashiers	5.5
News vendors	5.3
Groundskeepers and gardeners, except farm	4.5
Laborers, except construction	4.1
Construction laborers	3.9
Cooks	3.8
Waiters' and waitresses' assistants	3.5
General office clerks	2.9
Total at age 15	
Cashiers	10.0
Cooks	5.9
Miscellaneous food preparation occupations	5.7
Janitors and cleaners	5.5
Waiters' and waitresses' assistants	4.7
Stock handlers and baggers	4.5
Laborers, except construction	4.2
Sales workers, other commodities	4.1
Construction laborers	3.1
News vendors	3.0

¹ When a youth is said to have worked "at age 14," for example, the reference is to the youth having worked at some time during the entire 52-week period between the youth's 14th and 15th birthdays.

NOTE: The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 surveyed male and female youths who were aged 12 to 16 on December 31, 1996. Rows of the table referring to 14-year-olds exclude individuals who were not yet 15 years of age when they were interviewed. Rows referring to 15-year-olds exclude individuals who were not yet 16 years of age when they were interviewed.

Table 7. Top 10 occupations of longest-held employee job of youths at age 14 in 1994-97, by sex¹

Occupation	Percent of youths
Male youths	
Janitors and cleaners	9.4
Farm workers	7.1
Groundskeepers and gardeners, except farm	6.9
News vendors	6.7
Construction laborers	4.7
Laborers, except construction	5.9
Cooks	4.2
Waiters' and waitresses' assistants	4.1
Miscellaneous food preparation occupations	3.4
Attendants, amusement and recreational facilities	2.8
Female youths	
Cashiers	10.9
Janitors and cleaners	7.5
Child care workers, private household	5.9
General office clerks	5.8
Child care workers, N.E.C.	5.2
Waiters and waitresses	4.7
Receptionists	4.3
Teachers, N.E.C.	3.9
Farm workers	3.9
Secretaries	3.5

¹ When a youth is said to have worked "at age 14," for example, the reference is to the youth having worked at some time during the entire 52-week period between the youth's 14th and 15th birthdays.

NOTE: The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 surveyed male and female youths who were aged 12 to 16 on December 31, 1996. All rows of the table exclude individuals who were not yet 15 years of age when they were interviewed. N.E.C. = not elsewhere classified.

be employed as janitors and cleaners at age 14 (9 percent) and as cooks (8 percent) at age 15. Female 15-year-olds were about half as likely to be employed as cooks. Another interesting gender difference is that 14- and 15-year-old female youths were likely to be employed as waitresses, whereas male youths were likely to be employed as waiters' and waitresses' assistants.

Babysitting and yard work were by far the most common freelance jobs youths reported having worked at at ages 14 and 15. Table 9 shows that 43 percent of youths engaged in freelance jobs at age 14. Of these, 62 percent worked as babysitters and 38 percent did yard work.¹⁴ At age 15, 40 percent of youths worked in freelance jobs, of whom 60 percent worked as babysitters and 37 percent did yard work.

There are dramatic differences in freelance occupations by sex. At age 14, more than 91 percent of female youths who held freelance jobs worked as babysitters, compared with less than 25 percent of male youths. In contrast, almost 73 percent of male youths in freelance jobs did yard work, compared with less than 11 percent of female youths in freelance jobs. The pattern continues for youths who worked at age 15, with, again, about 91 percent of female youths in freelance

jobs having worked as babysitters, but only 20 percent of male youths having done so. At age 15, male youths who held freelance jobs were far more likely to do yard work (73 percent) than were female youths who held freelance jobs (9 percent).

Whites were more likely to hold freelance jobs at ages 14 and 15 than were blacks or Hispanics. At age 14, whites holding a freelance job were more likely to work as babysitters than were blacks.

Employment while in school

This section examines the timing of youth employment during school and during summer weeks. The analysis focuses on the employment during the year 1996 of youths aged 15 years as of December 31, 1996. Thus, the data are for one birth year, 1981, so that the youths in question were aged 14 to 15 during 1996.

Chart 1 depicts the percent of enrolled youths working at employee jobs over each week of the 1996 calendar year; shading marks summer weeks.¹⁵ The chart shows a general upward trend in the percent of youths aged 14 to 15 working

Table 8. Top 10 occupations of longest-held employee job of youths at age 14 in 1995-97, by sex¹

Occupation	Percent of youths
Male youths	
Cooks	7.7
Janitors and cleaners	6.9
Miscellaneous food preparation occupations	6.4
Waiters' and waitresses' assistants	6.0
Cashiers	5.8
Construction laborers	5.5
Stock handlers and baggers	5.5
Groundskeepers and gardeners, except farm	5.1
Laborers, except construction	4.8
News vendors	4.5
Female youths	
Cashiers	15.7
Waiters and waitresses	5.7
General office clerks	5.6
Sales workers, other commodities	4.7
Miscellaneous food preparation occupations	4.7
Receptionists	4.1
Cooks	3.6
Janitors and cleaners	3.6
Laborers, except construction	3.4
Teachers, N.E.C.	3.3

¹ When a youth is said to have worked "at age 14," for example, the reference is to the youth having worked at some time during the entire 52-week period between the youth's 14th and 15th birthdays.

NOTE: The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 surveyed male and female youths who were aged 12 to 16 on December 31, 1996. All rows of the table exclude individuals who were not yet 16 years of age when they were interviewed. N.E.C. = not elsewhere classified.

Table 9. Percent of youths engaged in freelance jobs at ages 14 and 15 in 1994-97, by type of job, sex, race or Hispanic origin, and household income¹

Age in 1994-97 and characteristic	Percent with a freelance job	Percent of those with a freelance job engaged in—	
		Babysitting	Yard work
Total working at age 14	42.8	62.0	37.9
Sex:			
Male	36.8	24.6	72.8
Female	49.1	91.4	10.6
Race or ethnicity:			
White	48.3	63.3	37.4
Black	33.1	55.2	41.1
Hispanic origin	30.1	59.9	40.2
Household annual income:			
Less than \$25,000	34.7	58.7	35.1
\$25,000 to \$44,999	46.4	63.2	39.1
\$45,000 to \$69,999	49.3	61.5	41.1
\$70,000 or more	49.5	67.8	35.0
Family structure:			
Two-biological-parent family	46.4	62.5	38.5
Two-parent family	44.4	67.0	35.8
Female-parent family	40.3	60.6	32.0
Not living with parent	31.4	66.2	40.4
Total working at age 15	39.8	59.8	37.2
Sex:			
Male	34.1	19.6	72.8
Female	45.8	91.4	9.3
Race or ethnicity:			
White	44.8	61.0	37.2
Black	28.7	52.9	41.2
Hispanic origin	28.1	59.7	34.1
Household annual income:			
Less than \$25,000	30.9	52.3	33.0
\$25,000 to \$44,999	44.7	64.3	33.6
\$45,000 to \$69,999	46.9	61.1	42.8
\$70,000 or more	49.4	62.3	39.5
Family structure:			
Two-biological-parent family	44.1	61.2	38.7
Two-parent family	39.3	64.4	35.5
Female-parent family	40.2	59.6	30.8
Not living with parent	22.5	66.8	39.8

¹ When a youth is said to have worked "at age 14," for example, the reference is to the youth having worked at some time during the entire 52-week period between the youth's 14th and 15th birthdays.

NOTE: The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 surveyed male and female youths who were aged 12 to 16 on December 31, 1996. Rows of the table referring to youths working at age 14 exclude individuals who were not yet 15 years of age when they were interviewed.

at employee jobs during the weeks leading up to the summer. A peak in youth employment occurred during the middle of the summer. The trend line then became fairly flat during the fall school term, but still lay above its spring-term level.

This general employment pattern also held for male and female youths separately. (See Chart 2.) However, over the summer months, male youths experienced a steeper increase and subsequent decrease in employment than did female youths. Throughout the 1996 calendar year, male employ-

ment was higher than female employment.

Chart 3 shows the week-by-week incidence of employment separately by race and ethnicity. White, black, and Hispanic youths all exhibited a peak in employment during the summer weeks. However, while white youths experienced an upward trend in employment during the spring semester of 1996, the trend line of black and Hispanic youths remained fairly flat. Over the weeks of 1996, white youth employment was consistently much higher than employment for black and

Table 10. Percent of youths aged 15 as of December 31, 1996, with an employee job during 1996, by timing of employment, sex, race or Hispanic origin, household income, family structure, and grade attending school¹

Characteristic	Percent with an employee job	Worked during school-year weeks			
		Total	Worked during school-year weeks only	Worked during both school-year and summer weeks	Worked during summer weeks only
Total	31.9	24.9	5.8	19.1	7.0
Sex:					
Male	37.0	29.0	6.6	22.4	7.9
Female	26.6	20.6	5.0	15.6	6.0
Race or ethnicity:					
White	36.6	30.4	6.3	24.1	6.2
Black	22.9	14.1	6.3	7.8	8.8
Hispanic origin	20.1	12.4	4.0	8.4	7.6
Household annual income:					
Less than \$25,000	24.1	18.1	6.6	11.5	6.1
\$25,000 to \$44,999	33.4	25.0	7.5	17.6	8.4
\$45,000 to \$69,999	38.6	33.4	5.8	27.5	5.3
\$70,000 or more	38.9	30.3	5.9	24.4	8.6
Family structure:					
Two-biological-parent family	34.6	28.3	5.1	23.3	6.3
Two-parent family	38.5	29.5	9.7	19.9	8.9
Female-parent family	26.4	19.4	6.3	13.1	7.0
Not living with parent	24.5	21.1	3.8	17.3	3.3
Grade attending school, fall 1996:					
6th, 7th, or 8th	18.4	12.4	5.4	7.0	6.1
9th	28.9	21.6	4.8	16.8	7.3
10th	35.3	28.1	6.7	21.4	7.2
11th or 12th	35.0	32.9	4.2	28.7	2.1

¹ When a youth is said to have worked "at age 14," for example, the reference is to the youth having worked at some time during the entire 52-week period between the youth's 14th and 15th birthdays.

NOTE: The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 surveyed male and female youths aged 12 to 16 on December 31, 1996.

Table 11. Percent of youths aged 13 engaged in work activities at age 12 sometime during 1995-97, by type of job, sex, race or Hispanic origin, and household income¹

Age in 1995-97 and characteristic	Percent with a work activity	Percent of those with a work activity engaged in—	
		Babysitting	Yard work
Total	49.6	55.6	39.7
Sex:			
Male	48.3	26.3	65.8
Female	51.0	84.9	13.6
Race or ethnicity:			
White	56.5	54.6	40.1
Black	36.2	46.9	41.7
Hispanic origin	36.0	61.3	37.0
Household annual income:			
Less than \$25,000	48.7	50.1	45.9
\$25,000 to \$44,999	52.2	51.2	41.5
\$45,000 to \$69,999	53.8	55.6	39.1
\$70,000 or more	53.9	61.5	39.1
Family structure:			
Two-biological-parent family	52.2	55.2	41.3
Two-parent family	50.9	53.7	39.8
Female-parent family	51.6	56.4	38.8
Not living with parent	41.2	49.5	32.0

¹ When a youth is said to have worked "at age 14," for example, the reference is to the youth having worked at some time during the entire 52-week period between the youth's 14th and 15th birthdays.

NOTE: The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 surveyed male and female youths who were aged 12 to 16 on December 31, 1996. All rows of the table exclude individuals who were not yet 13 years of age when interviewed.

Hispanic youths. Black and Hispanic youths experienced fairly similar rates of employment during the spring and summer of 1996. However, during the fall semester, the trend line for Hispanic youth employment was above that of black youth employment.

Most youths who worked at employee jobs did so during both the summer and the school term. More specifically, 19 percent of enrolled youths aged 14 to 15 worked at an employee job at some point during both the summer and the school term in 1996. (See table 10.) Six percent of youths worked in an employee job only during the school year in 1996. Thus, 25 percent of youths aged 14 to 15 worked at an employee job at some point while school was in session during the 1996 calendar year. An additional 7 percent worked in an employee job only during the summer, but not the school term, of 1996.

The 19 percent of enrolled youths who worked during both the summer and the school year worked much more intensively, in terms of percent of weeks worked, than students employed only during the school months or only during the summer (numbers not shown in table). That is, this group of youths worked in employee jobs about 61 percent of school weeks and 80 percent of summer weeks; in con-

trast, those who worked only during the school year worked under 20 percent of the school weeks, and youths who worked only during the summer worked slightly under half of the summer weeks.

A higher percentage of male youths than female youths worked in employee jobs at some point during the school term (29 percent and 21 percent, respectively). However, among youths who worked, there was little difference by gender in the percent of weeks worked (numbers not shown in table).

Whites were much more likely to work in employee jobs at some point while school was in session (30 percent) than were blacks (14 percent) or Hispanics (12 percent). Almost a quarter of whites worked in employee jobs during both the summer and the school year, compared with about 8 percent of blacks and Hispanics. Employed whites in this group worked significantly more school and summer weeks than did blacks—about 62 percent of school weeks and 81 percent of summer weeks, compared with 46 percent of school weeks and 67 percent of summer weeks (numbers not shown in table).

The timing of youth employment also varies by household income and family structure. Youths in households with

Chart 1. Percent of school-enrolled youths aged 15 on December 31, 1996, who worked in employee jobs during 1996, week by week

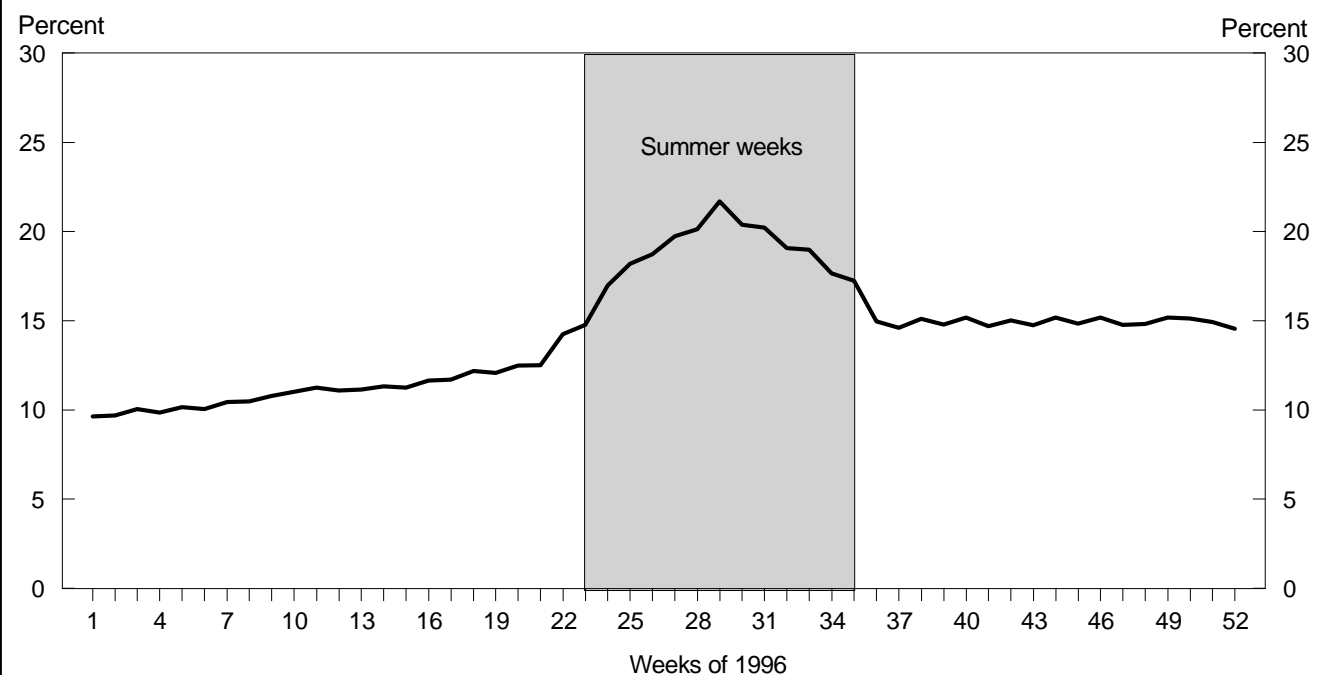


Chart 2. Percent of school-enrolled youths aged 15 on December 31, 1996, who worked in employee jobs during 1996, week by week, by sex

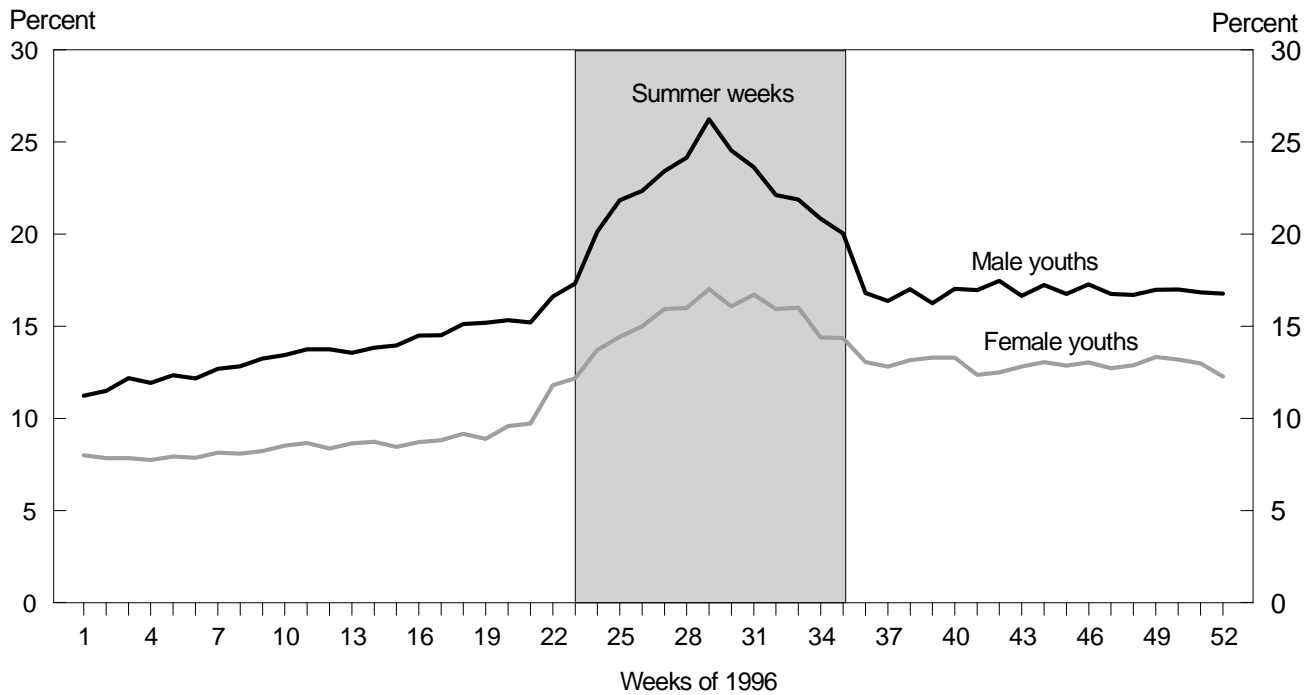
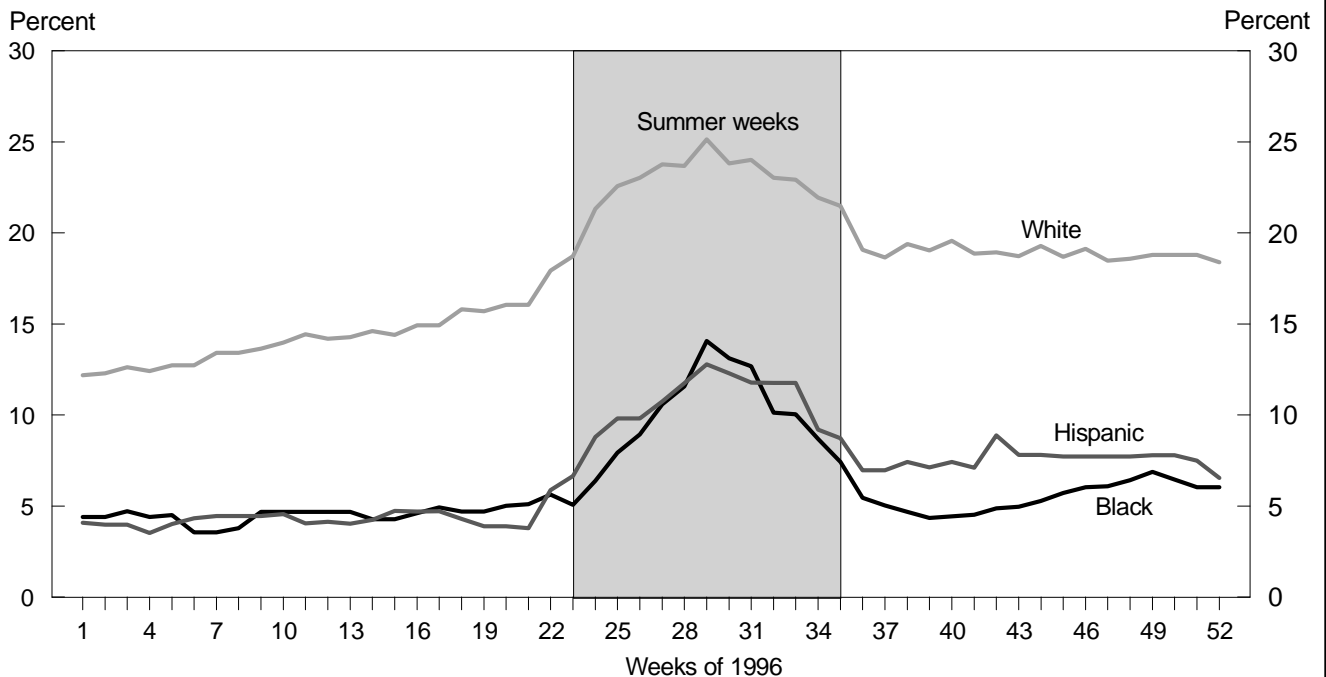


Chart 3. Percent of school-enrolled youths aged 15 on December 31, 1996, who worked in employee jobs during 1996, week by week, by race and Hispanic origin



yearly incomes of less than \$25,000 were less likely to hold employee jobs during the school year (18 percent) than were youths in households in higher income categories (from 25 percent to 33 percent). Youths in two-biological-parent families and other two-parent families were more likely to work while school was in session than were youths in female-parent families.

Being in a higher grade in school was also associated with a higher incidence of youth employment. In the fall of 1996, the cohort born in 1981 was mostly in the 9th and 10th grades. Youths in 10th grade were more likely to work during the school term than were youths in lower grades. Tenth graders were also significantly more likely to work both during the school year and during the summer than were youths in lower grades.

Employment of the very young

The NLSY97 also provides data on the work activities of youths who have not reached their teenage years. Nearly half of all youths aged 13 years at the time of the survey were engaged in work activities at some point while they were age 12. (See table 11.) Of these, 56 percent worked as babysitters and 40 percent did yard work.¹⁶ Female youths were about equally as likely as male youths to engage in work activities at age 12. However, gender differences in the types of work activities youths participated in at that age were substantial, with 85 percent of working female youths engaged in babysitting,

compared with 26 percent of male youths. Conversely, about two-thirds of working male youths performed yard work at age 12, compared with only 14 percent of working female youths. Whites are much more likely to engage in work activities at age 12 (57 percent) than are blacks (36 percent) or Hispanics (36 percent). There is little difference by household income level.

YOUTHS ENGAGE IN SUBSTANTIAL WORK ACTIVITY across the various measures of youth employment examined in this article. From age 14 to 15, youths appear to shift more toward working in employee jobs and less in freelance jobs. At both of those ages, gender and racial differences in employment are significant. At both ages, female youths are more likely to hold freelance jobs than male youths, but less likely to hold employee jobs. In addition, significant gender differences exist in the types of employee and freelance jobs held by youths. Finally, whites are more likely to engage in work activities than are blacks or Hispanics.

An examination of the timing of youth employment indicates that youths who hold employee jobs at ages 14 to 15 are likely to work during school weeks. Youths who hold employee jobs during both summer and school weeks tend to work a higher percentage of weeks in each of those periods than those who work only during the summer or only during the school year. □

Footnotes

¹ Data include oversamples of black and Hispanic youths. Subsequent to the release of round-1 NLSY97 data, some duplicate observations were discovered, and the sample size for that round then fell from 9,022 to 8,984. Sample weights at the time this article was begun were based on all 9,022 observations, and the tables that are presented use the full round-1 sample, as well as round-1 sample weights to adjust for differing sample rates; this approach ensures that the data are nationally representative of U.S. youths born in the years 1980–84.

² A number of the tables in this article also appear in *Press Release USDL 99–110* and *Report on the Youth Labor Force* (Bureau of Labor Statistics, November 2000).

³ However, the round-1 survey also contains a “cps Section” containing questions from the Current Population Survey that can be used to determine a youth’s labor force status in the week prior to the interview. The article “Youth employment: results from two longitudinal surveys school” (this issue, pp. 25–37) uses data from the “cps Section.”

⁴ Youths are aged 12–16 as of December 31, 1996. The round-1 interview occurred in 1997, when most youths had not yet turned 17. Because the number of youths for whom data were collected for the entire year they were 16 is small, the article does not show tabulations for 16-year-olds.

⁵ See, for example, National Research Council, *Protecting Youth at Work* (Washington, DC, National Academy Press, 1998).

⁶ As just stated, only youths aged 12 or 13 at the date of the interview report employment at these young ages. Thus, it is not possible to use round-1 NLSY97 data to calculate youth employment for the entire year that youths are age 13.

⁷ Mark Schoenhals, Marta Tienda, and Barbara Schneider, “The Educational and Personal Consequences of Adolescent Employment,” *Social Forces*, December 1998, pp. 723–62, provide a brief summary of this research.

⁸ The categories are (1) families with two biological parents or two adoptive parents (called, for simplicity, two-biological-parent families), (2) families with one biological parent and one step- or adoptive parent (called simply two-parent families), (3) families with one female biological parent and no other parent (female-parent families), (4) families with one male biological parent and no other parent (male-parent families), and (5) families consisting of children living with foster parents, grandparents and no parents, or other relatives and no parents; families of children living in group quarters; and other family arrangements (all lumped together as children not living with parents). Due to the small sample size of male-parent families, the tables that follow exclude that category.

⁹ Robert T. Michael and Nancy B. Tuma, “Youth Employment: Does Life Begin at 16?” *Journal of Labor Economics*, October 1984, pp. 464–76, point out that significant percentages of youths in the NLSY79 work before age 16.

¹⁰ In all tables and charts in this article, the racial and Hispanic groups are mutually exclusive. Totals include American Indians, Alaskan natives, and Asians and Pacific Islanders, not shown separately.

¹¹ At ages 14 and 15, youths who do not live with a parent work less than youths who live in the other family structures listed in table 1. Youths who do not live with a parent live in varied arrangements, including living with foster parents, grandparents, and other relatives, as well as living in group quarters.

¹² The industry shown in this table and in tables 4 and 5 is for the employee job the youth held for the most weeks at a particular age.

¹³ The occupation shown in this table and in tables 7 and 8 is for the

employee job the youth held for the most weeks at a particular age.

¹⁴ Yard work includes mowing lawns, shoveling snow, landscaping, and gardening. In explaining the concept of freelance jobs to youth respondents, NLSY97 interviewers used babysitting and mowing lawns as examples. Youths who have more than one freelance job at the age of 14 or 15 may appear in both the babysitting and yard-work columns of table 9.

¹⁵ Summer is defined as the 13-week period from June 2 through August 31, 1996.

¹⁶ Youths who had more than one work activity at age 12 may appear in both the babysitting and yard-work columns of table 11.

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