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AMERICA'S YOUTH AT 18: SCHOOL ENROLLMENT AND EMPLOYMENT TRANSITIONS BETWEEN AGES 17 AND 18

At age 18, notable differences in the school enrollment status of men and women are apparent. Eighteen-year-old men are less likely to be enrolled in college than 18-year-old women and are more likely to either have dropped out of high school or still be enrolled in high school. Moreover, men who are enrolled in high school during the October when they are age 17 are more likely than their female counterparts to have dropped out by the following October.

These findings are from the first seven annual rounds of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997, which is sponsored by the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the U.S. Department of Labor. The survey includes a nationally representative sample of about 9,000 young men and women who were born during the years 1980 to 1984. These respondents were ages 12 to 17 when first interviewed in 1997, and ages 19 to 24 when interviewed for a seventh time in 2003-04. The survey provides information on the employment experiences, schooling, family background, social behavior, and other characteristics of these youths.

This release focuses on the school enrollment and employment experiences of these youths from the October when they were age 17 to the October when they were age 18. Respondents were age 17 in October during the years 1997 to 2002 and age 18 in October from 1998 to 2003. Highlights from the longitudinal survey include:

- By the October when age 18, a little over half of men had graduated from high school, compared with more than three-fifths of women.
- Nearly 7 percent of 18-year-old male high school graduates who had not enrolled in college had enlisted in the Armed Forces, compared with 2 percent of women.
- Youths who dropped out of high school between ages 17 and 18 were employed fewer than half of the weeks between the October when they were age 17 and the following October. By comparison, high school graduates who did not enroll in college were employed more than three-fifths of those weeks.
- Employed youths who were enrolled in school at age 17 but were not enrolled one year later had less employer attachment than those who were also enrolled at age 18. Among working 18-year-old youths, one-third of high school dropouts and 38 percent of high school graduates not enrolled in college worked for the same employer as they had a year earlier. By comparison, 55 percent of

those still in high school and 45 percent of those in college had the same employer as in the previous October.

Educational Outcomes at Age 18 of High School Students and Dropouts at Age 17

Ten percent of youths had dropped out of school by the October when they were age 17, while 86 percent were still enrolled in high school. Among 18-year-olds, 15 percent had dropped out of high school, 28 percent were still enrolled in high school, 22 percent had graduated without going on to college, and 35 percent were enrolled in college. At age 18, men trailed women in terms of educational attainment. By the October when they were age 18, men were slightly more likely than women to have dropped out of high school (17 compared with 14 percent) and were considerably more likely to still be enrolled in high school (32 compared with 24 percent). Men at age 18 were much less likely than women to be enrolled in college, with college enrollment rates of 29 and 41 percent, respectively. (See table 1.)

Non-Hispanic blacks and Hispanics were more likely than non-Hispanic whites to have dropped out of high school or to be enrolled in high school during the October when they were age 18. Non-Hispanic whites were much more likely than non-Hispanic blacks and Hispanics to be enrolled in college at age 18.

While the vast majority of those who were high school dropouts in October when age 17 were still dropouts one year later, 15 percent had either returned to school or obtained a high school diploma. Six percent of dropouts were reenrolled in high school in the October when they were age 18, seven percent had obtained a General Educational Development (GED) credential or traditional diploma but had not enrolled in college, and 2 percent of these former high school dropouts were enrolled in college by the October when they were age 18. (See table 2.)

Seven percent of youths who were enrolled in high school during the October when they were age 17 had dropped out of school by the following October. Six percent of non-Hispanic whites who were enrolled in high school at age 17 had dropped out by the following year, compared with 11 percent of non-Hispanic blacks and 10 percent of Hispanics. Regardless of race or ethnicity, men were more likely than women to have dropped out between ages 17 and 18, although the gaps in dropout rates between men and women were much larger for non-Hispanic blacks and Hispanics than for non-Hispanic whites.

Women who were enrolled in high school in October when they were age 17 were considerably more likely than their male counterparts to be enrolled in college the following October. This college enrollment gap was present for each of the three racial or ethnic groups examined. Nearly 50 percent of non-Hispanic white women who were enrolled in high school the October when they were age 17 were then enrolled in college the following October, compared with 35 percent of non-Hispanic white men. Among non-Hispanic blacks who were enrolled in high school in October when they were age 17, 35 percent of women and 21 percent of men were enrolled in college the following October. Among Hispanics, the college enrollment gap between women and men was smaller than for the other groups but still present (26 versus 21 percent).

Employment at Ages 17 and 18

At age 18, labor force status differed substantially between high school graduates not enrolled in college and high school dropouts. High school graduates not enrolled in school were much more likely to be employed than high school dropouts. Almost three-fourths of high school graduates not enrolled in college were employed, either in the civilian labor force or in the military, during the October when they were age 18, compared with a little over half of high school dropouts. Eleven percent of dropouts were unemployed, and

an additional 37 percent were not in the labor force. By comparison, 5 percent of high school graduates not enrolled in college were unemployed, and 22 percent were not in the labor force. (See table 3.)

Four percent of recent high school graduates not enrolled in school had enlisted in the Armed Forces by the October when they were age 18. Seven percent of male graduates had enlisted, compared with 2 percent of female graduates. Non-Hispanic blacks were more likely to have enlisted in the Armed Forces soon after graduating from high school than were non-Hispanic whites or Hispanics.

Among youths who were enrolled in high school during the October when they were age 17, employment status varied considerably by their school enrollment status the following October. Thirty-four percent of those still enrolled in high school the following October had not been employed in either October. Another 32 percent were employed in both the October at age 17 and the following October. Of those who had subsequently graduated from high school but were not enrolled in college by the October when they were age 18, 46 percent were employed in both Octobers. That compares with 35 percent of those who graduated from high school and then enrolled in college and 28 percent of those who had dropped out of high school by the October when they were age 18. (See table 4.)

Youths who were enrolled in high school during the October when age 17 and subsequently dropped out were employed fewer than half of the weeks, on average, between the October when they were age 17 and the following October. By comparison, high school graduates who did not enroll in college and those who did enroll in college were employed about three-fifths of the weeks between the October when they were age 17 and the following October. College students spent a much larger share of weeks working fewer than 20 hours than did high school dropouts or high school graduates who were not enrolled in college. (See table 5.)

Job Mobility between Ages 17 and 18

Youths still enrolled in high school or enrolled in college at age 18 were less likely to change employer, occupation, and industry than were youths not enrolled in school. Among working youths who were still enrolled in high school in October when they were age 18, 55 percent worked for the same employer as they had a year earlier, 55 percent worked in the same occupation, and 62 percent worked in the same industry. Of 18-year-olds who had graduated from high school and then enrolled in college, 45 percent worked for the same employer in October when they were age 18 as they had the previous October, when they were still in high school. These students may have attended college in the same geographic location where they attended high school or may have worked for the same retail chain in a different geographic area. By comparison, 33 percent of working 18-year-old high school dropouts worked for the same employer as they had a year earlier, 32 percent worked in the same occupation, and 43 percent worked in the same industry. Eighteen-year-old workers who had graduated from high school but had not enrolled in college were nearly as mobile as similarly aged dropouts; 38 percent worked for the same employer as they had a year earlier, 36 percent worked in the same occupation, and 44 percent worked in the same industry. (See table 6.)

Technical Note

The estimates in this release were obtained using data from the first seven rounds of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 (NLSY97). The NLSY97 collects extensive information on youths' labor market behavior and educational experiences. Information about respondents' families and communities also is obtained in the survey.

This survey is conducted by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago and the Center for Human Resource Research at The Ohio State University, under the direction and sponsorship of the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the U.S. Department of Labor. Partial funding support for the survey has been provided by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention of the U.S. Department of Justice, the Office of Vocational and Adult Education of the U.S. Department of Education, the U.S. Department of Defense, and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Sample

The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 is a nationally representative sample of 8,984 young men and women who were ages 12 to 16 on December 31, 1996. This sample is composed of the following groups:

- A cross-sectional sample designed to represent the noninstitutionalized, civilian segment of young people living in the U.S. in 1997 and born between January 1, 1980, and December 31, 1984.
- Supplemental samples of Hispanic or Latino and black youths living in the U.S. in 1997 and born between January 1, 1980, and December 31, 1984.

The seventh round of annual interviews took place between November 2003 and July 2004. This release examines the period from the October when respondents were age 17 until the following October when respondents were age 18. All results except the first six rows of table 1 are weighted using the survey weights from the round in which the respondents were age 18. The first six rows of table 1, which provide estimates of school enrollment status at age 17, use the survey weights from the round in which the respondents were age 17. The survey weights correct for oversampling of some demographic groups and nonresponse. When weighted, the data represent all 17- and 18- year-olds who were born in the years 1980 to 1984 and living in the U.S. in 1997. Not represented by the survey are U. S. immigrants who were born from 1980 to 1984 and moved to the U.S. after 1997.

Interaction between time and age in a longitudinal survey

Because the NLSY97 is a longitudinal survey, meaning the same people are surveyed over time, the ages of the respondents change with each survey round. It is important to keep in mind this inherent link between the calendar years and the ages of the respondents. The youngest respondents in the sample (birth year 1984) turned 17 during calendar year 2001, whereas the oldest respondents (birth year 1980) turned 17 during calendar year 1997. Some respondents may not be used in all tables if information about their work history is incomplete.

Definitions

Employed. Respondents are classified as employed if they did any work during October as paid employees, as self-employed proprietors of their own businesses, or as unpaid workers in a business owned by a member of their family.

Unemployed. Respondents are classified as unemployed if they did not work during October but reported that they looked for work or were on layoff from a job.

Not in the labor force. Respondents are classified as not in the labor force if they did not work or look for work during October.

Enrollment status. If a youth was enrolled in high school or college at any point during the month of October, he or she is counted as enrolled. If a youth reported no school enrollment during October and also had not earned a high school diploma or General Educational Development credential, he or she is counted as a high school dropout.

Race and ethnic groups. In this release, the findings are reported for non-Hispanic whites, non-Hispanic blacks, and Hispanics or Latinos. These groups are mutually exclusive but not exhaustive. Other groups, which are included in the overall totals, are not shown separately because their representation in the survey sample is not sufficiently large to provide statistically reliable estimates. In other BLS publications, estimates are published for whites, blacks, and Hispanics or Latinos, but these groups usually are not mutually exclusive. The term "Hispanic or Latino" is considered to be an ethnic group, and Hispanics or Latinos can be of any race. Most other BLS publications include estimates for Hispanics or Latinos in the white and black race groups in addition to the Hispanic or Latino ethnic group.

Information in this release will be made available to sensory-impaired individuals upon request. Voice phone: 202-691-5200; TDD message referral phone: 1-800-877-8339.

Table 1. School enrollment status of youths during the October when age 17 in 1997-2002 and the October when age 18 in 1998-2003 by sex, race, and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity

(Percent distribution)

Characteristic	School enrollment status				
	Total	High school dropouts	Enrolled in high school	High school graduates, not enrolled in college ¹	Enrolled in college
Total, October when age 17	100.0	10.2	86.1	1.6	2.2
Men	100.0	10.3	86.8	1.3	1.6
Women	100.0	9.7	85.8	1.8	2.8
White, non-Hispanic	100.0	9.5	87.6	1.1	1.8
Black, non-Hispanic	100.0	12.2	83.2	2.0	2.6
Hispanic or Latino	100.0	12.1	82.2	3.0	2.8
Total, October when age 18	100.0	15.2	28.0	22.0	34.8
Men	100.0	16.6	32.2	22.2	29.0
Women	100.0	13.7	23.6	21.9	40.9
White, non-Hispanic	100.0	13.7	26.7	20.9	38.7
Black, non-Hispanic	100.0	20.3	33.3	21.1	25.3
Hispanic or Latino	100.0	18.5	30.6	29.2	21.8

¹ Youth who have received their General Educational Development (GED) credential are counted as high school graduates.

NOTE: The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 consists of young men and women who were ages 12 to 16 on December 31, 1996. Race and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity groups are mutually exclusive but not exhaustive. Other race groups, which are included in the overall totals, are not shown separately because their representation in the survey sample is not sufficiently large to provide statistically reliable estimates.

Table 2. School enrollment status of youths the October when age 18 in 1998-2003 by school enrollment status the October when age 17, sex, race, and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity

(Percent distribution)

School enrollment status the October when age 17	School enrollment status the October when age 18				
	Total	High school dropouts	Enrolled in high school	High school graduates, not enrolled in college ¹	Enrolled in college
High school dropouts	100.0	84.6	5.6	7.4	2.4
Men	100.0	84.6	6.8	7.7	.9
Women	100.0	84.7	4.3	7.0	4.1
White, non-Hispanic.....	100.0	85.4	5.3	6.6	2.7
Men	100.0	85.5	7.3	6.2	1.0
Women	100.0	85.3	3.2	7.0	4.5
Black, non-Hispanic	100.0	86.1	5.9	6.5	1.4
Men	100.0	87.4	5.0	6.8	.8
Women	100.0	83.9	7.5	6.2	2.4
Hispanic or Latino	100.0	79.8	7.5	11.0	1.7
Men	100.0	75.0	8.2	16.0	.8
Women	100.0	85.3	6.7	5.5	2.6
Enrolled in high school	100.0	7.1	31.8	23.1	37.9
Men	100.0	8.5	36.2	23.4	31.9
Women	100.0	5.7	27.3	22.7	44.4
White, non-Hispanic	100.0	5.8	30.1	22.0	42.2
Men	100.0	6.8	35.2	22.8	35.3
Women	100.0	4.7	24.7	21.1	49.5
Black, non-Hispanic	100.0	10.8	39.0	22.2	27.9
Men	100.0	13.0	43.8	22.4	20.8
Women	100.0	8.6	34.3	22.1	35.0
Hispanic or Latino	100.0	10.2	35.9	30.5	23.4
Men	100.0	12.9	37.1	29.2	20.9
Women	100.0	7.0	34.5	32.1	26.4

¹ Youth who have received their General Educational Development (GED) credential are counted as high school graduates.

NOTE: The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 consists of young men and women who were ages 12 to 16 on December 31, 1996. Race and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity groups are mutually exclusive but not exhaustive. Other race groups, which are included in the overall totals, are not shown separately because their representation in the survey sample is not sufficiently large to provide statistically reliable estimates.

Table 3. Employment and Armed Forces enlistment status of youths not enrolled in school the October when age 18 in 1998-2003, by high school graduation status, sex, race, and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity

(Percent distribution)

High school graduation status the October when age 18	Employment status the October when age 18				
	Total	Employed	Unemployed	Not in the labor force	Enlisted in Armed Forces
High school dropouts	100.0	51.5	11.3	36.8	0.5
Men	100.0	54.5	12.7	32.0	.8
Women	100.0	47.6	9.4	42.9	(¹)
White, non-Hispanic	100.0	58.1	10.3	31.1	.5
Black, non-Hispanic	100.0	35.5	15.2	49.2	.1
Hispanic or Latino	100.0	50.9	8.4	40.0	.7
High school graduates, not enrolled in college ²	100.0	68.9	5.3	21.5	4.3
Men	100.0	67.3	6.1	20.0	6.6
Women	100.0	70.6	4.3	23.1	1.9
White, non-Hispanic	100.0	73.9	4.5	17.7	3.9
Black, non-Hispanic	100.0	57.3	8.4	27.5	6.7
Hispanic or Latino	100.0	63.7	3.7	28.0	4.5

¹ Less than 0.05 percent.

² Youth who have received their General Educational Development (GED) credential are counted as high school graduates.

NOTE: The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 consists of young men and women who were ages 12 to 16 on December 31, 1996. Race and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity groups are mutually exclusive but not exhaustive. Other race groups, which are included in the overall totals, are not shown separately because their representation in the survey sample is not sufficiently large to provide statistically reliable estimates.

Table 4. Employment status the October when ages 17 and 18 in 1997-2003 of youths enrolled in high school at age 17 by sex, race, and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity

(Percent distribution)

School enrollment status the October when age 18	Employment status the October when ages 17 and 18				
	Total	Not employed in either October	Employed at age 17, but not age 18	Employed at age 18, but not age 17	Employed both years
High school dropouts	100.0	32.2	12.8	27.6	27.5
Men	100.0	29.7	13.6	28.2	28.5
Women	100.0	36.1	11.5	26.6	25.8
White, non-Hispanic	100.0	23.1	12.7	32.2	31.9
Black, non-Hispanic	100.0	46.4	14.3	22.0	17.3
Hispanic or Latino	100.0	35.1	12.2	27.0	25.7
Enrolled in high school	100.0	33.9	11.1	23.4	31.6
Men	100.0	34.1	10.7	22.8	32.4
Women	100.0	33.6	11.7	24.2	30.6
White, non-Hispanic	100.0	28.0	11.5	22.8	37.7
Black, non-Hispanic	100.0	49.5	9.4	22.2	18.8
Hispanic or Latino	100.0	41.2	11.7	25.1	22.0
High school graduates, not enrolled in college ¹	100.0	16.3	9.8	27.6	46.3
Men	100.0	16.9	8.8	29.5	44.8
Women	100.0	15.6	11.0	25.5	47.9
White, non-Hispanic	100.0	12.7	9.6	25.1	52.6
Black, non-Hispanic	100.0	27.6	7.5	30.7	34.2
Hispanic or Latino	100.0	18.1	12.3	34.3	35.3
Enrolled in college	100.0	26.0	22.8	16.4	34.8
Men	100.0	29.9	23.1	16.7	30.2
Women	100.0	23.0	22.6	16.1	38.3
White, non-Hispanic	100.0	23.5	23.7	14.9	37.9
Black, non-Hispanic	100.0	33.2	26.1	18.2	22.5
Hispanic or Latino	100.0	29.7	11.6	25.4	33.3

¹ Youth who have received their General Educational Development (GED) credential are counted as high school graduates.

NOTE: The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 consists of young men and women who were ages 12 to 16 on December 31, 1996. Race and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity groups are mutually exclusive but not exhaustive. Other race groups, which are included in the overall totals, are not shown separately because their representation in the survey sample is not sufficiently large to provide statistically reliable estimates.

Table 5. Percent of weeks employed or not employed between the October when age 17 in 1997-2002 and the following year for youths enrolled in high school at age 17 by school enrollment status the October when age 18, sex, race, and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity

(Percent distribution)

School enrollment status the October when age 18	Between October when age 17 and 18, percent of weeks:				
	Total	Employed			Not employed
		Total	More than 20 hours	20 hours or less	
High school dropouts	100.0	48.3	42.6	5.7	51.1
Men	100.0	50.6	45.0	5.6	48.7
Women	100.0	44.7	38.8	5.9	55.0
White, non-Hispanic	100.0	56.5	49.3	7.2	43.0
Black, non-Hispanic	100.0	36.5	33.5	3.0	63.2
Hispanic or Latino.....	100.0	39.4	36.0	3.5	60.2
Enrolled in high school	100.0	49.1	32.2	16.9	49.8
Men	100.0	49.1	33.4	15.7	49.5
Women	100.0	49.0	30.4	18.6	50.2
White, non-Hispanic	100.0	55.0	35.7	19.3	43.4
Black, non-Hispanic	100.0	35.7	23.9	11.7	63.9
Hispanic or Latino.....	100.0	40.4	27.8	12.6	59.4
High school graduates, not enrolled in college ¹	100.0	62.0	50.7	11.3	37.1
Men	100.0	61.4	52.6	8.8	37.6
Women	100.0	62.7	48.5	14.2	36.6
White, non-Hispanic	100.0	67.0	54.1	12.9	31.9
Black, non-Hispanic	100.0	48.6	42.8	5.9	50.7
Hispanic or Latino.....	100.0	55.1	45.1	9.9	44.8
Enrolled in college	100.0	58.9	36.6	22.3	39.9
Men	100.0	54.0	35.8	18.2	44.4
Women	100.0	62.6	37.2	25.5	36.4
White, non-Hispanic	100.0	62.5	38.5	24.0	36.3
Black, non-Hispanic	100.0	47.1	33.2	14.0	51.6
Hispanic or Latino.....	100.0	50.9	33.0	17.9	47.1

¹ Youth who have received their General Educational Development (GED) credential are counted as high school graduates.

NOTE: The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 consists of young men and women who were ages 12 to 16 on December 31, 1996. Race and Hispanic-origin groups are mutually exclusive but not exhaustive. Other race groups, which are included in the overall totals, are not shown separately because their representation in the survey sample is not sufficiently large to provide statistically reliable estimates. Totals do not sum to 100 percent because it is impossible to determine the employment status of respondents during some weeks.

Table 6. Job mobility of working high school students the October when 17 in 1997-2002 compared with the following year, by school enrollment status the October when 18, sex, race, and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity

(Percent)

School enrollment status the October when age 18	Percent of those working both the October when age 17 and the following year with similar job characteristics		
	Same employer	Same occupation	Same industry
High school dropouts	33.4	32.1	42.8
Men	37.2	35.0	42.8
Women	26.9	27.1	42.7
White, non-Hispanic	33.0	29.0	41.0
Black, non-Hispanic	52.3	55.1	59.7
Hispanic or Latino	25.7	30.8	39.3
Enrolled in high school	54.8	55.4	62.0
Men	54.8	53.8	62.8
Women	54.7	57.8	60.8
White, non-Hispanic	54.2	55.1	61.4
Black, non-Hispanic	63.7	63.6	70.8
Hispanic or Latino	51.2	50.7	58.9
High school graduates, not enrolled in college ¹ ..	38.3	36.3	43.6
Men	37.5	33.4	42.1
Women	39.1	39.3	45.0
White, non-Hispanic	37.1	34.5	42.3
Black, non-Hispanic	32.9	34.0	38.8
Hispanic or Latino	42.4	39.0	47.9
Enrolled in college	44.8	44.3	50.5
Men	46.7	46.2	50.8
Women	43.7	43.2	50.4
White, non-Hispanic	44.7	43.8	51.1
Black, non-Hispanic	42.0	44.0	47.6
Hispanic or Latino	49.1	53.2	50.1

¹ Youth who have received their General Educational Development (GED) credential are counted as high school graduates.

NOTE: The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 consists of young men and women who were ages 12 to 16 on December 31, 1996. Race and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity groups are mutually exclusive but not exhaustive. Other race groups, which are included in the overall totals, are not shown separately because their representation in the survey sample is not sufficiently large to provide statistically reliable estimates.