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Out of School and Out of a Job: Figuring Out What's Happening with Disconnected Youth in Hawaii Executive Summary

June 19, 2019

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Disconnected youth, also known as unattached youth, are young adults who are disconnected from society by not being attached to an educational institution or a job. Broadly speaking, disconnected youth are not attending school and are not employed. The age range for disconnected youth can vary, but generally the range is 16 years old to 24 years old. Some research on disconnected youth add other characteristics to narrow the definition, such as whether the young adult has a spouse who is in school or employed.

Focusing on decreasing the number of disconnected youth is important, as being unattached to education, employment, or training at such a young age can have a persistent effect through an individual's life. This is particularly true in Hawaii, which has one of the highest percentages of disconnected youth in the nation; detachment is an even bigger problem for female youth in Hawaii.

Disconnected Youth in Hawaii

Hawaii has the 17th highest disconnected youth population as a percentage of young adults in the nation, behind the southern and Appalachian states and Alaska. Approximately **14.5%** of people aged 16-24 in Hawaii are neither in school or at work, compared to the national average of **13%**. A major reason for such a high rate of disconnected youth is the low rate of school attendance. The low unemployment rate in Hawaii means a larger percentage of disconnected youth in Hawaii are not in the labor force (as opposed to unemployed), which could be a concern. Though the school enrollment numbers might suggest otherwise, high school graduation rates are higher and college attendance and graduation rates are lower in Hawaii compared to the US.

In Hawaii, 49% of youth aged 16-24 were not in school, compared to the national average of 47.1%. While Hawaii had more youth out of school, Hawaii had slightly more employed youth. Thus, Hawaii's disconnected youth can be broken down into **4.1%** not in school and unemployed (i.e., out of work but looking for a job), and **13.3%** not in school or the labor market (i.e., out of work and not looking for a job). In comparison, the US's disconnected youth were more likely to be unemployed, **5.1%**, and less likely to be out of the labor market, **11.1%**.¹

The rate of disconnectedness is even worse for females in Hawaii. However, this is not due to school attendance, as female youths in Hawaii have higher school attendance rates than males. Instead, females that are not in school are far less likely to be working (though females are less likely to be unemployed than males). Almost half of young males in Hawaii are out of school (**49.4%**); young females are slightly less likely to not be in school (**48.6%**). However, **34.4%** of male youths are not in school and employed, compared to **28.9%** of female youths. Disconnected female youths are primarily not in the labor force: **10.4%** of male youths are out of school and not looking for work, compared to **16.1%** of female youths.

Reasons for Being Disconnected

Hawaii disconnected youth were far more likely to not have searched for a job in the past four weeks due to family responsibilities compared to the national average: **24.5%** in Hawaii, compared to the **15.8%** national average. Hawaii disconnected youth were far less likely to have stopped their job search due to difficulties with

¹ This breakdown of unemployed versus not in labor force does not equal the totals in the previous paragraph because the CPS counts "not in school" differently. Respondents who are on summer vacation are considered "not in school" even if they are attending school during the school year. Thus, respondents who are "not in school" but who are not looking for employment because of or whose major non-labor force activity is school or training are not considered disconnected.

finding employment opportunities (“couldn’t find work” and “believes no work available in area of expertise”): **33.2%** national average compared to **25.6%** in Hawaii.

Disconnected Youth and Family Responsibilities

Hawaii’s disconnected youth are far more likely to stop looking for jobs due to family responsibilities, compared to the nation as a whole, but this could be due to having more family responsibilities, being more likely to stop school and work because of the family responsibilities, or a combination of both. Family responsibilities fall mostly under three categories: taking care of an elderly family member, taking care of children, or taking care of a disabled family member (who could be also be a senior or a child).

Disability

Generally speaking, Hawaii youths aged 16-24 are less likely to have an individual with a disability in the household and are less likely to be disconnected when there is an individual with a disability in the household. There is a slightly higher percentage of disabled fathers in Hawaii, but the disconnection rate of youth with a disabled father is lower. Youth with a disabled spouse are more likely to be disconnected in Hawaii by over 7 percentage points, but the lower rate of disabled spouses in Hawaii means the percentage all youth aged 16-24 who are disconnected and have a disabled spouse is only 0.6 percentage points higher in Hawaii. Thus, it seems unlikely that disability is the reason for disconnection related to family responsibilities.

Own Children and Seniors

In Hawaii, the percentage of youth aged 16-24 with either a child or senior in the household is higher than the national average, particularly with respect to seniors (**7.6%** in the US compared to **17.4%** in Hawaii for seniors over 65, and **1.7%** versus **5.6%**, respectively, for seniors over 80; the difference between the US and Hawaii averages for having own child is less than 1 percentage point, **8.6%** in the US compared to **9.3%** in Hawaii). Of the youth with a senior in the household, Hawaii has a lower rate of disconnectedness, by around 5 percentage points, while youth with their own child in the household are slightly more likely to be disconnected, by a little over 4 percentage points. This means that generally speaking, being disconnected due to family responsibilities is related to having more family responsibilities (own child or senior in the household), as opposed to being more likely to be out of school and out of a job.

Youth Without Family Responsibilities

While policies could be implemented to help youth with family responsibilities in order to minimize detachment from educational and work opportunities, the difference in disconnected youth rates between the US and Hawaii is persistent even when excluding youth that might have family responsibilities. Approximately **10.6%** of US youth aged 16-24 who do not have an elderly individual, own children, or a disabled parent or spouse in the household is disconnected, compared to **12.1%** in Hawaii.

Characteristics of Disconnected Youth

The literature on disconnected youth points to certain populations that have a higher percentage of disconnected youth. Females and racial minorities (except for Asians) tend to have higher percentages of disconnected youth. Having low education or low income increases the likelihood of being a disconnected youth. Young people living outside of urban centers and suburban areas have higher rates of disconnection.

Language proficiency and citizenship also play a role in youth disconnection. Some literature notes that someone who is married to a connected spouse, i.e. a spouse that is in school or working, can reduce how disconnected that person is, as he or she can maintain some sort of social connection through the in school or working spouse. Furthermore, an employed spouse can earn income for the household.

Gender

Females are even more likely to be disconnected than males in Hawaii, compared to the nation. In fact, Hawaii has the 10th highest rate of disconnection for female youths. One reason why females are more likely to be disconnected than males are family responsibilities; culturally, females stay at home to take care of the elderly, children, and people with disabilities. Because Hawaii has such a high number of elderly and own children in the household, the larger male-female disconnection rate gap could be due to the larger percentage of dependents. Looking at disconnected youth who do not have seniors, own children, or people with disabilities in the household, female youth in Hawaii are still much more likely to be disconnected (**11.2%** for males versus **13.0%** for females). In comparison to the national average, dependent-less female youth are less likely to be disconnected than dependent-less males.

Race/Ethnicity

Looking at the percentage of disconnected youth within each racial/ethnic group shows that youth of a single race in Hawaii tend to be more likely to be disconnected. The rate of disconnectedness is particularly high, relative to the US, for youth who are white, black, or Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander. The gaps between the US's percentage of youth that is disconnected and Hawaii's percentage of youth that is disconnected for these populations are among the highest gaps among all demographics.

Educational Attainment

Among people aged 18 to 24, Hawaii has a higher high school graduation rate but a lower college attendance and graduation rate than the US. The higher high school graduation rate leads to a higher percentage of disconnected youth with a high school degree or equivalent. However, the lower college graduation rate does not translate to a lower percentage of disconnected youth with more than a high school degree; almost **30%** of disconnected youth in Hawaii have some college or more, compared to **25%** of disconnected youth in the US.

The reason why the percentage of disconnected youth with more than a high school degree is higher in Hawaii is because youth in Hawaii who have at least attended some college are much more likely to become disconnected. Youth who have attended some college or obtained an associate's or bachelor's degree are **35%** more likely to be disconnected in Hawaii than in the US (**10.7%** versus **7.9%**). In contrast, youth who have not earned a high school degree are less likely to be disconnected in Hawaii, compared to the national average.

The fact that Hawaii's youth who have at least some college education are as likely to be disconnected as US youth who have no high school degree is concerning. These are better educated youth who should be more productive and earning a good income. Having a relatively high disconnected rate for these higher educated youth could limit the productivity, and thus growth, of Hawaii's economy.

Conversely, Hawaii's limited opportunities for productivity and growth could be the reason for the relatively large share of disconnected youth among those with more education. Many jobs in Hawaii do not require any education beyond a high school degree. Even though college-educated youth might be more productive than those with just a high school degree, the difference in wages could justify hiring less educated youth.

Income

As income increases, the likelihood of being a disconnected youth decreases. This pattern holds true in Hawaii. However, at all income intervals, Hawaii's rate of being disconnected is higher than the nation's; among households with lower levels of income, the difference between Hawaii and national rates is over 3 percentage points. Special attention might need to be paid to youth with low household income. Low income individuals can be harder to reach when it comes to government services, making it disproportionately difficult for disconnected youth in Hawaii to receive assistance.

Connected Spouse

The gap between US and Hawaii rates of disconnected youth shrinks substantially if the status of the spouse is taken into consideration. The percentage of youth aged 16-24 who are not enrolled in school, unemployed, and not married to a connected spouse is **11.7%** in Hawaii, compared to **11%** in the US, a gap of 0.7 percentage points, compared to a gap of 1.4 percentage points when the spouse of the youth is not taken into consideration. Youth who are married to a connected spouse are significantly more likely to be disconnected in Hawaii, while youth who are unmarried or who are married to a disconnected spouse are only slightly more likely to be disconnected in Hawaii compared to the national average. Youth in Hawaii are not necessarily more likely to be married to a connected spouse (**9.6%** of people aged 16-24 in the US are married to someone who is in school or working, compared to **9.7%** in Hawaii).

While the decrease in the disconnected rate for Hawaii youth (relative to the US) is reassuring, the improvements should be taken with a grain of salt. There could be less concern for a disconnected youth who is married to a connected spouse, as the connected spouse can help the disconnected youth stay socially connected and provide some income. However, the high cost of living in Hawaii means that having only one employed person in the marriage can be problematic, with a single income source being insufficient to maintain a reasonable standard of living. In Hawaii in 2018, a couple with family income of \$56,500 is considered low-income; in comparison, per capita personal income in 2017 was \$51,939.²

Disconnected Youth and Wanting a Job

Not-in-labor-force disconnected youth in Hawaii consistently report less of a desire for obtaining a job, compared to not-in-labor-force disconnected youth across the nation. In fact, the gap between national disconnected youth and Hawaii disconnected youth desire for a job increases as barriers to employment decreases and "need" for employment increases. The gap between all national and Hawaii disconnected youth is approximately 5 percentage points, while the gap between national and Hawaii disconnected youth who do not have dependents (older individuals in the household, own children in the household, or a disabled parent or spouse in the household), and thus have fewer limitations to participating in the labor force, increases to 7 percentage points. For disconnected youth who have no dependents and who are below the poverty line, who might "need" to work due to having a low income, the gap for wanting a job increases to over 16 percentage points. This gap could be even larger, as the official federal poverty line doesn't take into account local costs that could affect the "need" to work; disconnected youth in Hawaii below the poverty line probably "need" to work more than those in the nation in general, due to the high cost of living in Hawaii.

² Low-income limit comes from the Department of Housing and Urban Development's Income Limits Documentation System and per capita income data comes from the Regional Economic Accounts from the US Department of Commerce's Bureau of Economic Analysis.