

Life After High School: Focus on Opportunity Youth

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Cowen Institute
TULANE UNIVERSITY

Introduction

For the past decade, many research and programmatic efforts at the Cowen Institute have focused on supporting **opportunity youth**, a term for young people aged 16-24 who are neither working nor enrolled in an educational institution. Our research has shown that New Orleans has a higher proportion of opportunity youth than the U.S. as a whole — in 2018, 15.5% of youth were disconnected in Orleans Parish, compared to 11.2% nationally.¹ Louisiana also has one of the highest rates of opportunity youth of any state in the nation — 16.4% of youth in Louisiana are opportunity youth.² Research has found that many opportunity youth come from low-income households, and experience unpredictable housing, lack of health insurance, and unreliable transportation and that can impede their efforts to find stable employment.^{3,4}

Gender, Race, Age, and other Demographics

Individuals identifying as male are overrepresented among opportunity youth (64%), compared to the general population of 16-24 year olds (49%). In New Orleans, opportunity youth are also more likely to be Black: 86% of opportunity youth are Black, compared to 66% of all youth in the same age bracket. Approximately 9% of opportunity youth are White, compared to 23% of all youth. Opportunity youth are more likely to be on the older end of the 16-24 age spectrum than on the younger. Nearly two-thirds of the opportunity youth in the city are between the ages of 21-24, and a majority are 22 or older.

Disabilities

As previously reported, opportunity youth in the city are more likely to have a disability than youth as a whole: 2.2% of opportunity youth have been diagnosed with a disability, compared to 1.1% of all youth aged 16-24.⁵ The most frequent types of disabilities were cognitive impairments and disabilities that prevented youth from being able to live autonomously.

1 Measure of America, Youth Disconnection by County: <https://measureofamerica.org/DYinteractive/#County>.

2 As of 2018, Louisiana had the 4th highest rate of youth disconnection of any state in the United States, behind Alaska, West Virginia, and New Mexico. Measure of America, Youth Disconnection by state.

3 Clive Belfield, Henry Levin, Rachel Rosen, *The Economic Value of Opportunity Youth*, January 2012; Sims, Patrick, *Opportunity Youth Data Guide*, Cowen Institute, 2015.

4 This brief uses American Community Survey (ACS) census data from 2019. Subgroup percentages have a large margin of error, as high as +/- 10%.

5 *No Longer Invisible: Opportunity Youth in New Orleans*, The Cowen Institute, 2016.

Opportunity Youth

Educational Attainment

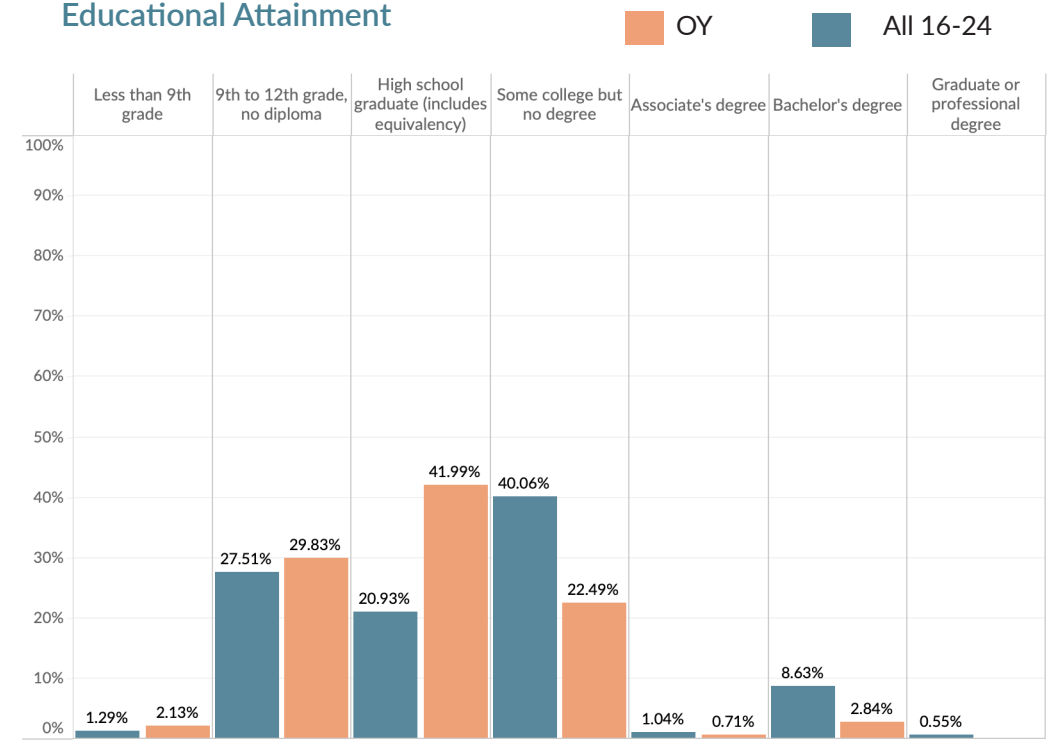
The majority of opportunity youth are high school graduates: 70% of opportunity youth have at least a high school diploma, while more than a quarter have earned some college credit or have a college degree. However, opportunity youth have lower levels of formal education attainment than all youth aged 16-24. Youth in New Orleans as a whole have nearly twice the rate of college experience as opportunity youth, and youth have far higher rates of post-secondary degree attainment than opportunity youth.

By definition, no opportunity youth are currently enrolled in school while 38% of all 16-24 year olds in New Orleans are currently enrolled in college, 24% are enrolled in high school or below, 3% are enrolled in graduate school, and 35% are not enrolled in any form of education.

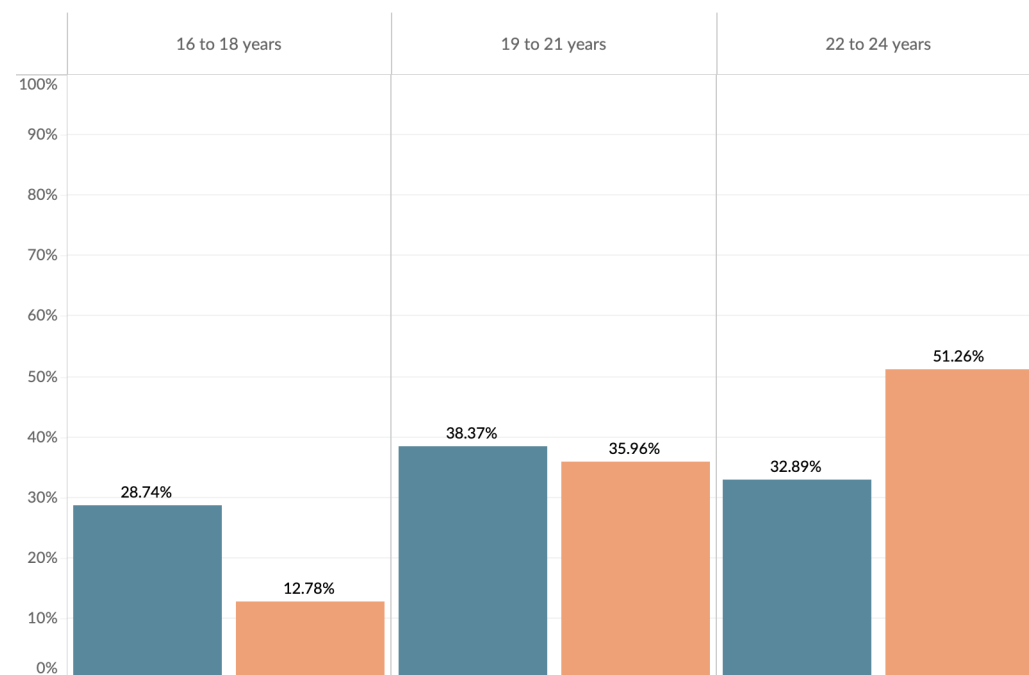
SNAP Benefits & Health Insurance

The Census tracks the usage of SNAP food assistance benefits by households, which helps to illuminate the rate of food insecurity in homes and families across the U.S. Opportunity youth in the city were more likely than their peers to use SNAP benefits in the past year – more than one-quarter of opportunity youth had received SNAP benefits compared to 17% of youth aged 16-24 as a whole. Opportunity youth are less likely to have health insurance than all 16-24 year olds. 30% of opportunity youth lack health insurance compared to 11% of all young adults in their age group.

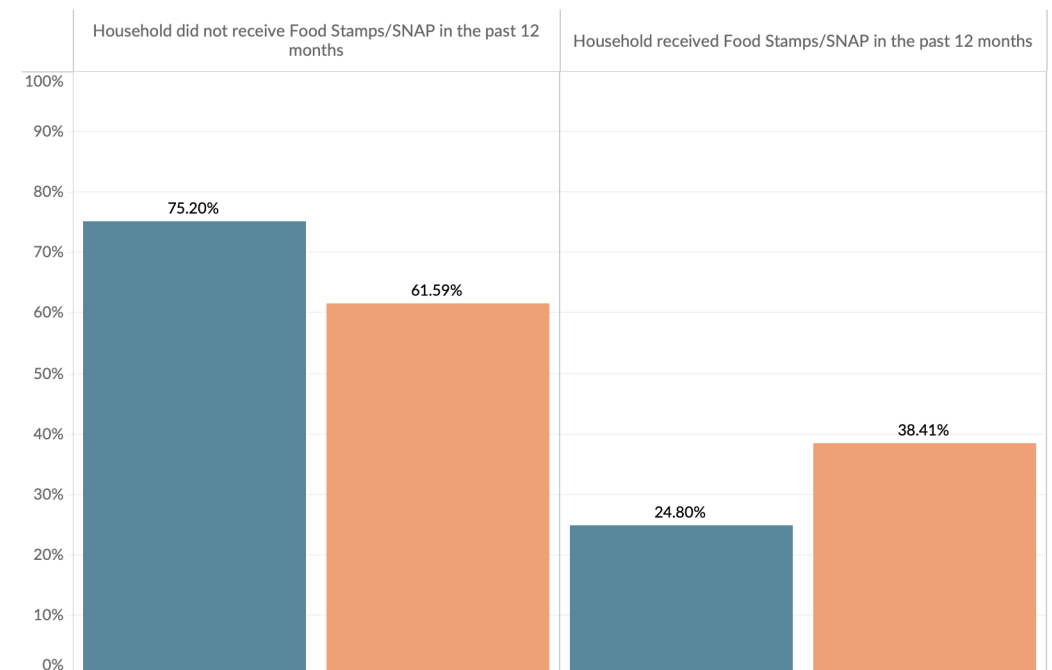
Educational Attainment



Age



SNAP Benefits



Opportunity Youth

