

A qualitative comparison

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Background

- Precautionary measures put in place during the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) pandemic such as physical distancing and closure of schools and businesses has had a significant global economic impact
- The pandemic has had an impact on youth's ability to work, volunteer and go to school
- Youth are particularly vulnerable to the economic impacts of COVID-19 since they are more likely than adults to hold temporary, non-unionized, casual positions
- Disruptions to youths' education, could have both short- and longer-term impacts for school-to work transition

Objective

The purpose of this study was to explore barriers to school and work transitions for youth with and without a disability during the pandemic.

Methods

Design: Qualitative study design involved semi-structured interviews done remotely (Zoom n= 30 Phone n=5), was guided by interpretive descriptive methodology and with a purposive sample

Inclusion Criteria

- Youth aged between 15-29, with a disability or without a disability
- Employed or have work experience

Sample

- **35** Youth and young adults aged 16-29 years (Mean age: 23)
 - **18** youth with disabilities (Mean age: 24.4)
 - **17** youth without disabilities (Mean age: 21.6)

Key Themes

Difficult transition to online school and working from home

Sub-themes: Expenses of setting up a home office, technical challenges and impact on mental health

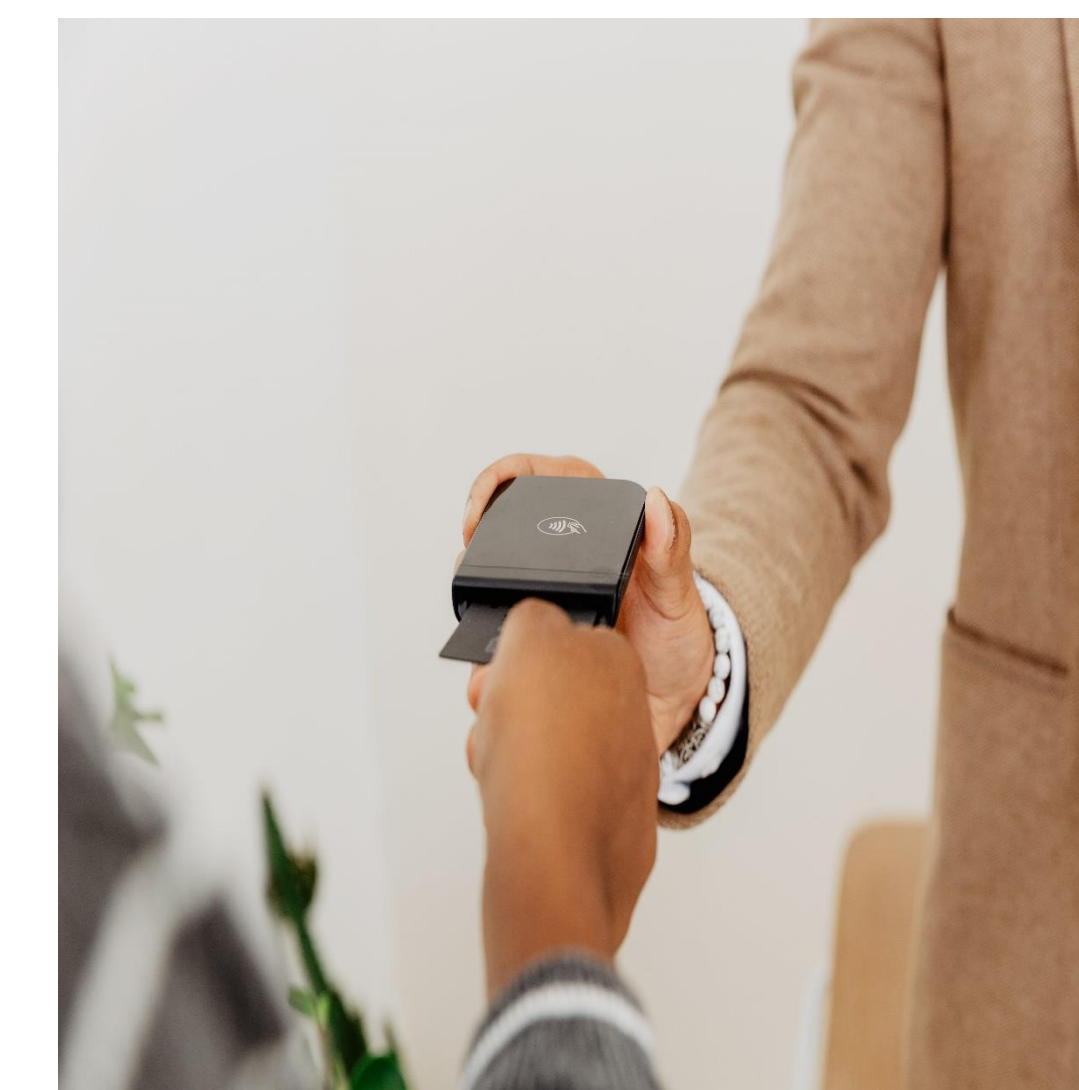
"I don't have enough space in my apartment to work from home...I didn't have Wi-Fi before the pandemic at my apartment...We have to pay \$90 a month for Wi-Fi...We also had to buy webcams, which were pretty expensive. We had to buy a monitor and we had to buy a desk and chair." (#16, disability)



Uncertainty about employment

Sub-themes: Under-employment, reduced hours & job security, difficult working conditions, difficulty finding work, cancelled jobs, lack of opportunities to work from home and disability-related challenges

"I didn't get a call back for anything, even though some of the jobs I applied for were the exact same position I've been doing for three summers...I've settled for a retail job that's close by that could earn me enough money to help pay for school." (#7, disability)



Missed career development opportunities

Sub-themes: Cancelled or reduced placements or internships, lack of volunteer opportunities, uncertainties about career pathway and concerns about the longer-term impact on their career pathway

"I needed the experience to for (professional) school...I wanted that experience, that recommendation. I did want to grow in the healthcare field so that I can apply to more relevant positions that matter for school." (#34, no disability)



Implications

- Clinicians should consider helping to foster youth's engagement in meaningful and accessible activities such as employment or volunteering
- Educators and employers should help to facilitate remote learning and employment to accommodate youth with disabilities
- Youth with pre-existing mental health conditions may need additional supports and resources (i.e., vocational rehabilitation) during the pandemic and beyond to help foster their well-being and develop career pathways

Acknowledgements

This project was funded by a CIHR-SSHRC partnership development grant. Kimmel Family Opportunities Fund through the Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital Foundation.