



“Our own youth innovation is an untapped resource that can only result in stronger, more sustainable, and more inclusive outcomes” (p. 5).

Hopeful Resilience:

The Impacts of COVID-19 on Young Ontarians

1. What is the research about?

The COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately impacted young people, and Ontario’s current systems, which fail to consider youth’s unique needs and views, are ill-equipped to provide comprehensive and sustainable solutions for recovery.

This report illustrates the effects the pandemic has had on different groups of Ontario youth, specifically with regard to education, employment, and health. Working from a youth-led, solutions-building approach, the authors put forth individual, organizational, and government-level recommendations on how to collaboratively respond to the diverse challenges that young Ontarians are currently facing.

2. Where did the research take place?

The research in this report took place across 68 cities, towns, and regions in Ontario, Canada.

3. Who is this research about?

This report is about youth in Ontario, aged 16-30, and their lived experiences with regard to the COVID-19 pandemic. A particular focus is on youth of colour, young women, youth in care, youth living with disabilities, LGBT2SQ youth, young newcomers, youth experiencing homelessness or facing risk of homelessness, and rural and remote youth.

4. How was the research done?

The research conducted was entirely youth-led and done using three methods: **community consultations**, a **province-wide online survey**, and **innovative design jams**. The researchers first consulted with 20+ community organizations to determine a framework for analyzing youth experiences. Next, they ran a digital, province-wide survey that invited youth to share their experiences about how COVID-19 has impacted their employment, education, wellbeing, and community. Researchers then hosted three online **design jam sessions** – creative and collaborative brainstorming sessions in which participants co-create innovative solutions to a specific problem at hand. In these moderated spaces, youth had the opportunity to speak about both the impacts of COVID-19 and ways to move forward. A total of 485 youth participated in the youth-led survey and another 45 youth participated in the youth-led design jams.

5. What are the key findings?

Working from an intersectional lens, the authors detail the impacts COVID-19 has had on **education**, **employment**, and **health** for youth across the province, as well as for specific populations and groups of youth.

a) Education

Transitioning from in-person to online learning during the pandemic resulted in many exceptional challenges for youth. Post-secondary students report having their learning disrupted, and high school students are dealing with unstructured learning environments and excessive workloads. The majority of youth who responded to the province-wide survey felt that their overall quality of education has decreased during COVID-19. Because of the strong impact education has on personal development, it needs to be a primary focus for a post-pandemic recovery. Improvements to curriculum (including its diversification and decolonization), the online experience (including more realistic and manageable workloads), and supports being offered (including better access to the internet, quiet spaces, and mental health counselling appointments) are all needed to improve Ontario's current education system.

b) Employment

COVID-19 has greatly impacted job opportunities for young people in Ontario, and these impacts are likely to be felt in the years ahead. While some jobs have pivoted and can be offered remotely and/or online, a large number of positions, including service sector, retail, and seasonal camp jobs held by youth prior to the pandemic, are no longer available or have shrunk. The majority of youth survey respondents revealed that their unemployment statuses during Summer 2020 were directly related to COVID-19. While youth employment has been affected as a whole, impacts vary depending on young people's respective identities and situations. It is therefore critical to take an intersectional approach when determining the impacts COVID-19 has had on youth employment in Ontario.

c) Health

The pandemic has resulted in increased rates of substance use and lower rates of 'good mental health' being reported by youth. Feelings of anxiety, frustration, and loneliness have risen; so too has screen time, while time spent outdoors and physical activity have decreased. Reduced and limited access to health and social services have been identified as two major health issues for young people. Gaps contributing to health system challenges faced by youth include inconsistent communication on behalf of the government, problematic telehealth systems, a lack of youth-friendly navigation sites for mental health support, and affordability concerns for personal protective equipment.

Recommendations

The authors put forth both **general** and **youth group-specific** recommendations for how to help young people recover from the effects of the pandemic. They emphasize that only youth-led, reimagined, and redesigned systems and supports will create a comprehensive, post-pandemic recovery.

6. Why does it matter for youth work?

This report stresses that because of the disproportionate impact COVID-19 has had on young Ontarians, solutions to mitigate such impacts, especially those on education, employment, and health, need to be youth-led. **Youth must be at the centre of a post-pandemic recovery:** "Young people are an essential part of this change. It's time that young Ontarians have a seat at the table, too" (p. 89).

The report also has practical implications for youth workers, suggesting ways that **youth workers can collaborate with youth as well as advocate for youth** to advance the wellbeing of young people in Ontario.



Wang, K., D'Souza, T., Sarker, S., Jain, A., Ling, M., Sahota, R., Zhang, A., Sandhu, S., & Dhailwal, K. (2021). *Hopeful resilience: The impacts of COVID-19 on young Ontarians*. Young Ontarians United.

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