



Youth, the Changing Nature of Work, and Food Insecurity Considerations for the Development of the Canadian National Food Policy



Problem

Young people today are faced with a more challenging Canadian job market than that of their parents. A decrease in full-time employment and a rise in temporary and part-time positions has resulted in “job churn” – young people working a variety of precarious contract jobs throughout their careers. This lack of security prevents young people from progressing in their lives paying off student debt, and delays “traditional markers” of adulthood, including house and car purchases. This delayed progress can result in slowdown of Canadian economic growth. There is an evident link between precarious employment and being at-risk for food insecurity, and it is well-documented that Canadian youth and post-secondary students are facing this problem. The growing use of food banks and the rising number of campus food banks specifically are just several indicators of this developing situation. As a result, the long-term impact of the precarious labour market in which youth are entering, including its influence on food security, requires further investigation. It is vital to support young Canadians as they enter the labour market by advocating for more full-time, permanent positions that provide much-needed job security, to ensure that they are able to access adequate and nutritious foods throughout their lifecycle.

Vital Statistics

Rise in precarious work:

- The proportion of men and women less than 25 years of age who hold temporary job positions has risen from 7% and 8% in 1989 to 24% and 26% in the mid-2010s, respectively ([Statistics Canada, 2016](#)).
- The full-time employment rates for men and women 17-25 years of age averaged 76% and 58% in 1978, respectively. By 2016, these percentages have dropped to 59% and 49% ([Statistics Canada, 2016](#)).
- As of 2015, the average wage of men 17-25 years of age was 10% lower than average wages for the same age group in the 1980s ([Statistics Canada, 2016](#)).
- The gap in income between Canadians aged 50-54 and those aged 25-29 has grown from 47% in the mid-1980s to 64% in 2014 ([Conference Board of Canada, 2014](#)).
- Tuition costs have risen 948% between 1975 and 2013, much faster than the rate of inflation ([Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives](#))

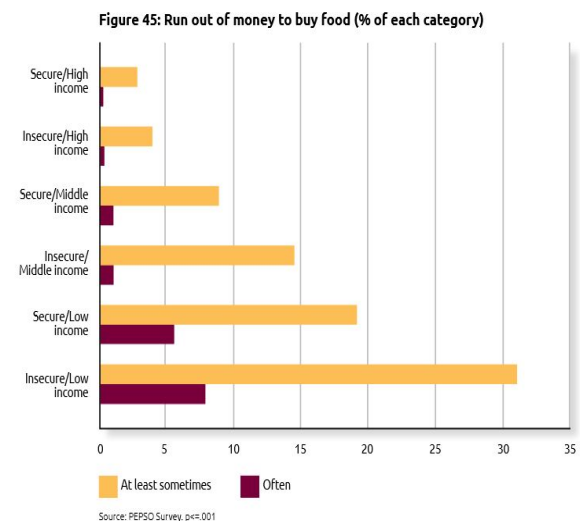
Links between Precarious Work and Food Insecurity

- According to a 2016 study conducted by Meal Exchange, an average of 38% of students across 5 Canadian campuses experienced moderate or severe food insecurity - a symptom of the mounting financial pressures faced by postsecondary students ([Meal Exchange, 2016](#))

Running out of money for food

Figure 45 explores difficulty meeting food needs. Among individuals in insecure employment and low-income households, almost one in ten report often running out of money to buy food. Nearly one in three report running out of money for food at least some of the time.

Employment insecurity moderately increases the frequency and severity of food deprivation in low-income households. It has less effect in middle-income households and is rare in high-income households.



- Of the 850,000 people in Canada who turn to food banks each month, over 52% are under 30 years of age, despite making up only 36% of the total population ([Food Banks Canada, 2016](#))
- People who are employed in precarious work and live in low-income households are twice as likely to experience food insecurity compared with workers in the same income category with secure employment ([United Way](#))
- Compounding the rise in low-wage or precariously-employed youth is the rise in healthy food prices, with the average price of fruit in Ontario rising 19.7% and the average price of vegetables by 26.3%, while the comparative cost of unhealthy foods such as sodas has dropped by 0.9% since 2015 - paving the way for increased healthcare costs related to diabetes and other diet-related disease ([Ontario Association of Food Banks](#))

Short- and Long-Term National Food Policy Priorities:

Subsidize Healthy Foods for Youth

The National Food Policy should include the subsidization of healthy foods for youth, to complement the goal of reducing precarious youth employment and to reduce future healthcare costs associated with eating ultra-processed foods. To build the evidence base for this policy, research should be conducted to determine the cost of such a policy in relation to the health care costs incurred by the government for treating diet-related disease.

Support the Creation of Full-Time, Entry-Level Positions for Youth

Beyond providing increased social supports for youth experiencing precarious employment, the Government of Canada should invest further in the creation of full-time, entry-level positions across industries. Enhanced labour and hiring regulations could prevent youth from becoming stuck in job churn by incentivizing the creation of full-time positions for young people, rather than hiring for short-term contracts. This will involve a close collaboration between government and industry to determine how to narrow the gap between graduation and full-time employment, and investment in programs such as the recent Ontario Career Kick-Start, which ensures that post-secondary programs align with the demands of the job market. The National Food Policy should be developed with the understanding of the importance of secure employment as a determinant of food security, and should closely involve representatives from the Department of Employment and Social Development to ensure policy cohesiveness.

Ensure Policy Coherence

Given that the issues of youth income security and food security cross multiple policy spheres including labour, social security, health, and agriculture, political action is needed to address these issues on multiple fronts. For instance, as the Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy and the National Food Policy are developed in parallel, policy-makers must recognize the potential for synergy and for unanticipated consequences that may hinder young people from finding secure work and accessing safe and healthy foods.

Monitor the Impact of New Policies on Youth Employment and Food Security

Policies and programs that indirectly aim to reduce food insecurity often exclude youth in precarious employment situations; for example, youth without dependents are not eligible for the Canada Child Benefit, and employment status makes them ineligible for social assistance despite the inadequacy of minimum wage to ensure food security. In May 2017, a Basic Income Pilot was announced by the Ontario government to be trialed in three communities of differing sizes and demographic characteristics. Recent evidence has shown that the Basic Income Guarantee is the single most effective policy for targeting food-insecure households ([Northern Policy Institute, 2017](#)).

To maximize the impact that this program could have on youth food insecurity, the following are required:

- Specific monitoring and evaluation of Basic Income participants under the age of 30, to determine their representation in the program and the impact that basic income has on their ability to purchase adequate, nutritious foods.
- If proven to have positive impacts, the program should be integrated as a complementary component of the National Food Policy.

Policy action is needed to support secure, full-time, and fairly-compensated employment for youth in Canada. Such action is critical for promoting economic growth, preventing immense burdens on the healthcare system, and ensuring food security. As the National Food Policy is developed, these issues must be considered directly alongside issues of food and agriculture to ensure the creation of a comprehensive and effective policy for all Canadians.

Key Resources:

[Food Banks Canada](#) (2016). "Hunger Count 2016: A Comprehensive Report on Hunger and Food Bank Use in Canada, and recommendations for Change," Food Banks Canada.

[Lewchuk, Wayne et al.](#) (2013). "It's more than Poverty: Employment Precarity and Household Well-Being," Ontario: United Way Toronto, Poverty and Employment Precarity in Southern Ontario, and McMaster University.

[Meal Exchange](#) (2016). "Hungry for Knowledge: Assessing the Prevalence of Student Food Insecurity on five Canadian Campuses," Toronto: Meal Exchange.

[Ontario Association of Food Banks](#) (4 August 2016), "Poverty Creates a Vicious Cycle of Food Insecurity and Poor Health," Huffington Post Blog.

[Statistics Canada](#) (2016). "Perspectives on the Youth Labour Market in Canada, 1976 to 2015," Statistics Canada.

[Tarasuk, Valerie](#) (2017). "Implications of a Basic Income Guarantee for Household Food Insecurity," Thunder Bay: Northern Policy Institute.