

WORK QUALITY EXPERIENCES AND ENGAGEMENT AMONG YOUNG WORKERS



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The Future Skills Centre (FSC) is a forward-thinking centre for research and collaboration dedicated to preparing Canadians for employment success. We believe Canadians should feel confident about the skills they have to succeed in a changing workforce. As a pan-Canadian community, we are collaborating to rigorously identify, test, measure, and share innovative approaches to assessing and developing the skills Canadians need to thrive in the days and years ahead. The Future Skills Centre was founded by a consortium whose members are Toronto Metropolitan University, Blueprint ADE, and The Conference Board of Canada, and is funded by the Government of Canada's Future Skills Program.

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The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada.

We are The Better Work Project — a research team at Toronto Metropolitan University (formerly known as Ryerson). We support better work conditions for young workers.

We wanted to find out how young people (age 16-29) define good quality work - and whether their actual work experiences measure up. We also wanted to know how young people are trying to make their work better, and what supports they need to make it happen. To do this, we surveyed 1000+ young people across Ontario and then did more than 40 in-depth follow-up interview.

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Executive Summary

This research project explores the work quality of young people (age 16-29), in Ontario, through their own experiences and words. At a time when work is being dramatically transformed by a host of forces, this project has three overarching aims:

- To hear, analyze and amplify young people's voices and perceptions of work quality
- To explore young workers' efforts to improve their work quality
- To develop resources to advance young people's capacity for greater voice regarding their work quality

In short, this project combines both knowledge-generating and capacity-building elements to promote optimal work quality for young people.

We focus on young workers for several reasons. First, quantitative research identifies young people as disproportionately employed in poor-quality jobs. They are often under-employed, poorly paid, and/or precarious workers. Our research further reveals substantial deficiencies in their everyday treatment at work.

Second, people's early labour market experiences can set in place lifelong work norms and trajectories, both positive and negative. Improving young people's work quality can therefore yield long term employment and economic benefits.

Finally, young workers aged 16-29 **are** the future of work, currently comprising one-quarter of the Canadian labour force. Few previous generations have entered as volatile and adverse a labour market as young people today.

In conducting this research, we use an intentionally broad definition of 'work', including all forms of work for remuneration – including formal employment, gig work, side hustles, self employment and entrepreneurship. We surveyed over 1,000 young workers and conducted in-depth work history interviews with more than three dozen. While recognizing common dimensions of work aspirations and adversities rooted in young age, we also note this cohort's remarkable diversity of identities. Our project is therefore attentive to how differential identities and their intersections shape experiences of work.

The result is a rich tapestry of young people's hopes, priorities, frustrations and scars at work. Our central finding is that young workers in Ontario endure a serious, multi-layered deficit in their quality of work. This is manifest in a number of commonly experienced negative work qualities including: low pay, along with age discrimination, lack of respect, and unfair treatment typically coming from managers or supervisors.

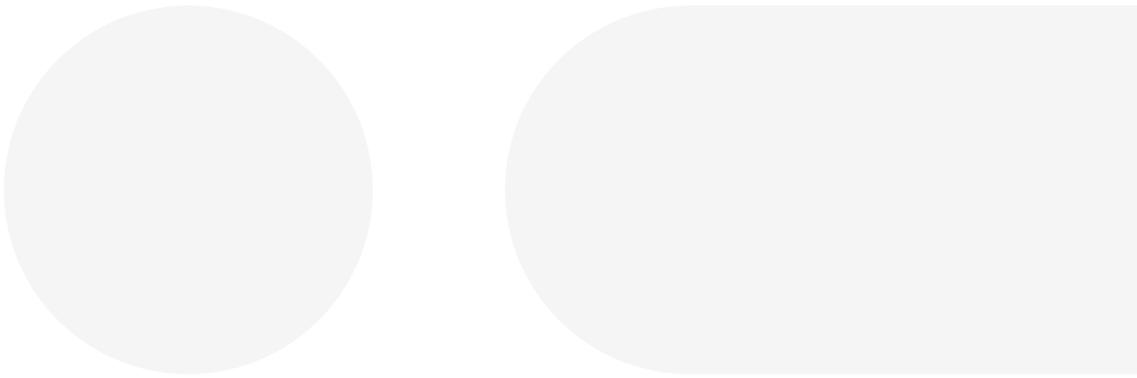
Young workers' responses to these adverse work quality conditions range along a continuum from resignation to resistance. Some young workers resigned themselves to work being unrewarding and un-affirming. Many others literally resigned from such work – almost half of all survey respondents (45%) reported having quit a job due to poor work conditions.

Another common response to poor quality work was resistance. This could entail expressing individual or group discontents to management, matching minimal pay with minimal work effort, or supporting unionization.

Many young people we surveyed and interviewed stressed the importance of learning about worker rights and advocating for change. Relatively few young people reported knowing much about what labour unions do, but those who did were generally positive in their assessments.

We understand young workers not only as passive 'recipients' of labour market conditions, but also as potential change agents. Indeed, we regard their engagement as critical to making meaningful work quality improvements. Accordingly, drawing on our research findings, the project produced 17 short videos, optimized for social media, which are designed to promote young people's awareness of information, rights, skills, and organizations that can support their efforts to improve work quality.

We conclude this report with recommendations for future research and some proactive steps that could be taken by different workplace stakeholders, before closing with the hopeful voice of a young worker we interviewed, who asserts: "My generation or younger generations, aren't really taking disrespect anymore. And I find that very admirable in young people." Better work quality is a worthy societal goal to pursue.



Introduction

Paid work is currently undergoing dramatic transformation. It is no exaggeration to say we are in the midst of a ‘work revolution’ that is redefining work quality, workers’ lives, and broad economic well-being. This transformation will potentially have the greatest impact on young workers, who are at the start of their working lives. Indeed, a joint OECD/ILO report declares that “all G20 economies face considerable challenges in ensuring that young people are well integrated into the world of work.”¹ Our project explores how young workers (age 16-29) in Ontario assess the quality of their work and considers how they can be equipped to exercise greater influence on their work circumstances.

We focus on young workers for several reasons. First, quantitative research identifies youth as disproportionately employed in poor-quality jobs.² Second, people’s early labour market experiences can set in place lifelong work norms and trajectories, both positive and negative.³ Improving young people’s work quality can therefore yield long term employment and economic benefits.

Young workers are the future of work, currently comprising one-quarter of the Canadian labour force. Few previous generations have entered as volatile and adverse a labour market as young people today. Work is being dramatically transformed by a host of factors including, but not limited to: technological innovation, rising precarious employment, new relations of work associated with the gig economy, austerity neoliberalism, and the decline of traditional channels of worker voice.⁴

Relatively little is known about how young people are experiencing paid work today, and how they are attempting to re-shape it to meet their own needs and priorities. Broadly, this project has three objectives:

- To hear, analyze and amplify young people’s voices and perceptions of work quality
- To explore young workers’ efforts to improve their work quality
- To develop resources to advance young people’s capacity to become change agents at work

While recognizing common dimensions of work aspirations and adversities rooted in young age, we also note this cohort's remarkable diversity of identities. Our project is therefore attentive to how differential identities and their intersections shape young people's experiences of work.

Literature Review and Research Approach

The notion of 'work quality' accounts for a range of subjective and objective markers that together define both individual work experiences and the broader economic landscape. Worker well-being, business success, and national economic performance all require an ongoing attentiveness to job quality. Yet, job quality research, policy and capacity-building have lagged; one recent study notes that "to date, Canadian literature on job quality has been rather scarce."⁵

As noted, however, statistics on unemployment rates, precarious employment, wages, benefits coverage, and health and safety risk exposures suggest that young workers experience more adverse labour market conditions than older workers. Often, young people's lower work quality is attributed to their inexperience and recent entry into the labour force. Measures commonly recommended for improving their work quality include: enhancing education and skill training, expanding on-the-job experience through work-integrated learning (i.e., student placements or internships), promoting young people's entrepreneurialism, and modifying their personal lifestyle or outlook.⁶ While such initiatives can be fruitful for some, our findings point in another direction. Our research strongly suggests that poor work quality is pervasive in young people's experience, and the following three corrective measures stand out as especially important:

- Fostering higher expectations among young people about work quality (i.e., "expect better")
- Fostering a greater awareness of workers' rights among young people
- Fostering the capacity of young people to make change at work, through collective voice and mobilization

This project is anchored in hearing, analyzing and amplifying young people's voices and experiences of work quality. In this undertaking, we align ourselves with Rainsford et al. (2019) who contend that research and interventions related to youth work quality "need to start reflecting the reality of how young people experience the modern labour market."⁷

Additionally, this project seeks to foster young people's agency as workers. We understand young workers not only as passive 'recipients' of labour market conditions, but also as potential change agents. Indeed, we regard their engagement as critical to making meaningful work quality improvements. Accordingly, our project has amplified our research findings through a social media video series aimed at engaging a young audience. This video series is designed to boost young people's capacity to make work better (see Annex E for a list of videos).

This project used both qualitative and quantitative data gathering methods to learn from young people *themselves* about how they assess their work experiences. As described more fully below, we surveyed over 1,000 young workers and conducted in-depth work history interviews with more than three dozen. The result is a rich tapestry of young people's hopes, priorities, frustrations and scars at work. Our central finding is that young workers in Ontario endure a serious, multi-layered deficit in their quality of work.

Research Project Overview

This research project explores the work quality of young people (age 16-29), in Ontario, through their own experiences and words. We use an intentionally broad definition of 'work', including all forms of work for remuneration – including formal employment, gig work, side hustles, self employment and entrepreneurship. Also embedded in the project is a capacity-building goal, aiming to produce resources that support young people in their effort to make work better.

This project addresses several key questions:

- How do young workers evaluate the quality of their past and current paid work?
- What – in their view – distinguishes 'good work' from 'bad work'?
- What avenues do young workers identify and exercise to influence their work quality?
- Is there anything distinctive about the work expectations/experiences of young workers compared to older workers?
- What skills and resources would assist young workers to improve their work quality?

Research Methods and Design

We used several complementary research methods to gather data about the work experiences of young people.

- A **literature review on work quality**, focusing specifically on industries where young people are overrepresented, such as retail, food, hospitality, and care-giving services, as well as work outside of traditional employment relationships.

- **Analyses of publicly available Statistics Canada data** related to young people (aged 15-29) living in Ontario and in Canada. The purpose of this data analysis is to develop a profile of young people's work and how it compares to the entire workforce.
- A **survey of young workers**, aged 16-29, living in Ontario who are currently working for pay. The purpose of this online survey is to understand young workers' perceptions and experiences of work quality (see the simplified survey questionnaire in Annex A). We secured a total of 1,121 survey responses via two routes: 1) through a survey panel provider, and 2) through public availability of the survey on social media disseminated by our research team and project partners.
- **Individual interviews with young workers**, aged 16-29, living in Ontario who are currently working for pay. We conducted 43 semi-structured interviews, which typically lasted over an hour, and generated over 600 pages of transcribed text (see the interview script in Annex B). These in-depth interviews provided rich insight into young people's lived work quality experiences and their approaches to 'making work better'.
- **Individual interviews with organizers and activists**, to gain deeper contextual insight into issues impacting young workers, we also conducted six semi-structured, in-depth interviews with labour leaders and activists (see the interview script in Annex C).

As previously noted, particular efforts were made to secure and identify survey respondents and interviewees reflecting the diverse cross-section of identities comprising Ontario's young population. Accordingly, our survey asked respondents to self-identify and convey whether they had experienced any negative work experiences related to their gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, religion, dis/ability, immigration status, language/ accent or other personal characteristics, and these topics were also routinely discussed in the individual interviews with young workers.

The mixed research methods outlined above enabled us to acquire data and insight directly from young workers themselves, and to situate these findings in the broader contexts of scholarly literature, labour market statistics, and the wider lens of select worker advocates.

Data Analyses

The survey data were analyzed using statistical software (SPSS).⁸The focus was on univariate and bivariate statistics, with particular attention to the relationships between socio-demographic characteristics (i.e., gender, racialization, dis/ability) and assessments of work quality, as well as the relationships between labour force location (employment/self-employment, industry) and assessments of work quality.

The interview data were analyzed using inductive coding: first, a sample of transcripts was reviewed and coded for key themes; the themes were then applied to a second sample of transcripts and refined in order to ensure that all key ideas were captured. Reliability checks were employed to ensure consistency between coders, resulting in a final identification of 41 distinct themes that emerged from the interviews (see the list of themes in Annex D).

The survey and interview results were compared and contrasted, in order to provide a comprehensive picture of how young people understand work quality and the potential to enhance their work-related agency.

Research Partners

In this project we benefitted from the support of three research partners:

- United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Canada, a private-sector labour union with 40% of its total membership under the age of 30
- The Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL), Ontario's largest labour organization, with one million affiliated members
- The Young Workers Rights Hub at Toronto Metropolitan University, a campus organization promoting student awareness and exercise of rights at work

These partners supported the project in a variety of ways, including: providing advice on research instruments, assisting in the recruitment of labour leaders/activists to interview, and giving feedback on the social media video campaign.

Findings

Our findings reflect the work experiences of more than a thousand young people aged 16-29 in Ontario and present a rich portrait of work in the lives of young people in Ontario.

The following five key themes stand out:

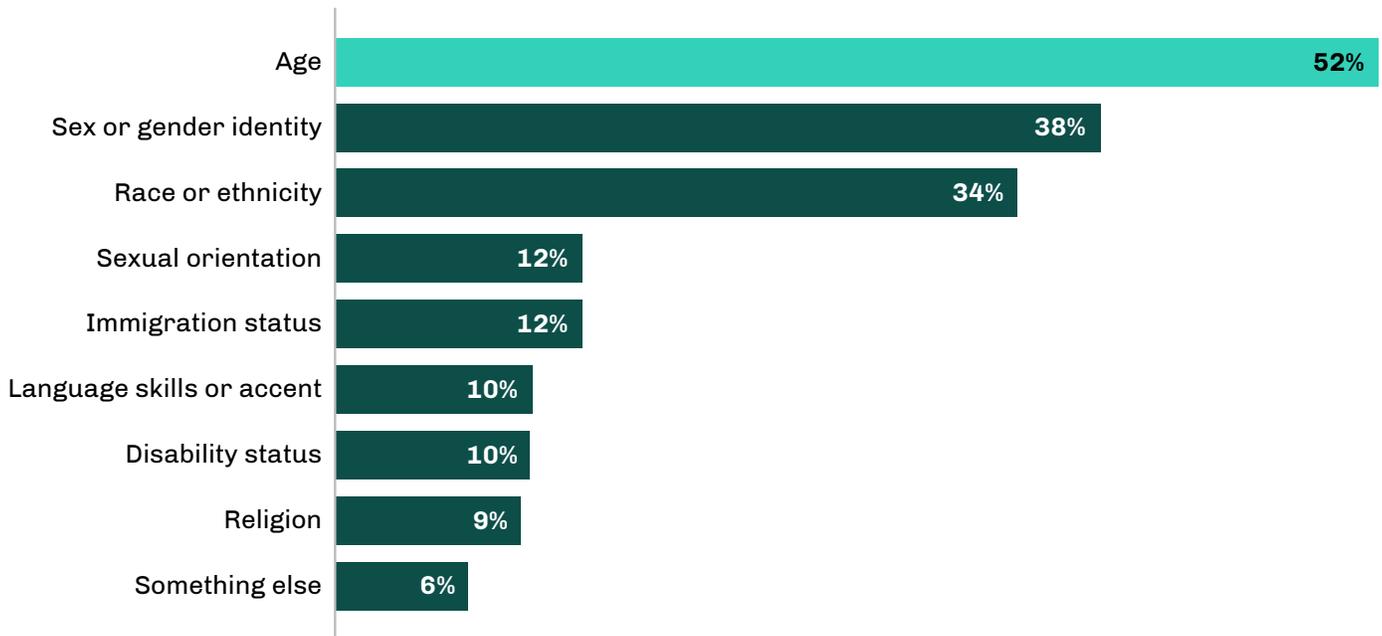
- **Age matters.** Young people aged 16-29 have distinct, adverse work quality experiences.
- **Elements of good work quality.** Young people especially value being treated fairly, good wages, supportive management, and healthy work-life balance.
- **Elements of poor work quality.** Topping the list were bad managers, poor pay, discrimination, and toxic/grind culture.
- **Young worker responses to poor work quality.** Young workers' responses to poor work quality range from resignation to resistance.
- **Expecting better.** Young workers identify a range of skills and supports that would improve their work quality. These include greater knowledge of worker rights and organizations, plus the confidence and skills to expect better at work and bring about change.

The work quality stakes are highest for young workers. They have the most working years still ahead of them. Our findings suggest that for many, their early experiences in the workforce do not pass 'quality inspection'.

Age Matters

One-third of survey respondents reported having been discriminated against at their current or previous work – typically by an employer or supervisor. Over half of those who reported mistreatment (52%) said the unfair treatment was **because of their age** (see Figure 1). Indeed, this was the most frequently cited grounds of discrimination.

FIGURE 1:
Basis of discrimination (among those who experienced it)



In interviews, many young workers gave voice to adversities they encountered due to their age. Amplifying these voices is a major aim of this project. Here is a sample of what we heard (all bolded segments of interview citations throughout this report are emphases selected by the researchers):⁹

“Ageism is huge. People look down on you because they’re like, ‘you’re so young’” - Carrie, Personal Support Worker, age 29

“I see it a lot with people my age, where their **managers don’t take them seriously** just because they’re older. And so that’s frustrating for sure.” - Ellen, Federal Government, age 23

“I’d have to train someone who would become my supervisor because they were, like, 5 years older than me. And then **they would talk down to me.** That was a pretty steady situation. It held me back.” - Amanda, Sales Associate, age 25

“People took advantage of me. Since they were older they were kind of just bossing me around like, ‘Oh, go and clean up; go chop this up.’” - Jeff, talking about past restaurant work, now age 28

“I was **never allowed in the 4 years I worked there, to move up in the kitchen.** Because of my age. Because I was young. And because I was a **woman.**” - Monique, talking about past restaurant work, now age 27

“I think **students are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and, like, lower pay.**” - Betty, Research Assistant, age 21

Young workers told us that good work cannot include age discrimination. Age discrimination hurts young workers in many ways, including feeling disrespected at work, having limited promotion opportunities, and feeling that their skills and education are not valued.

Another notable age-related finding produced by our research is the fragmented working life of young people. They begin paid work at a young age, often working informally (e.g., babysitting, yard work) before entering high school, when they move to formal employment, typically in food and retail services. They often hold multiple jobs and forms of paid labour at a time, and they churn through many jobs and types of work before reaching age 30.

The fragmentation of young people's work

Among survey respondents:

- 54% are employees with a single employer
- 17% are employees with multiple employers; among them:
 - 65% work more than one job to earn more money or get more hours
 - 36% work more than one job to get experience with different types of work
 - 28% work more than one job to pursue their interests/passions
- 18% are self-employed; among them:
 - 49% are freelancers or independent contractors
 - 25% are app/platform workers (most work on more than one app/platform)
- 10% are both employees and self-employed; among them:
 - 84% do more than one type of work to earn more money
 - 47% do more than one type of work to pursue their interests/passions

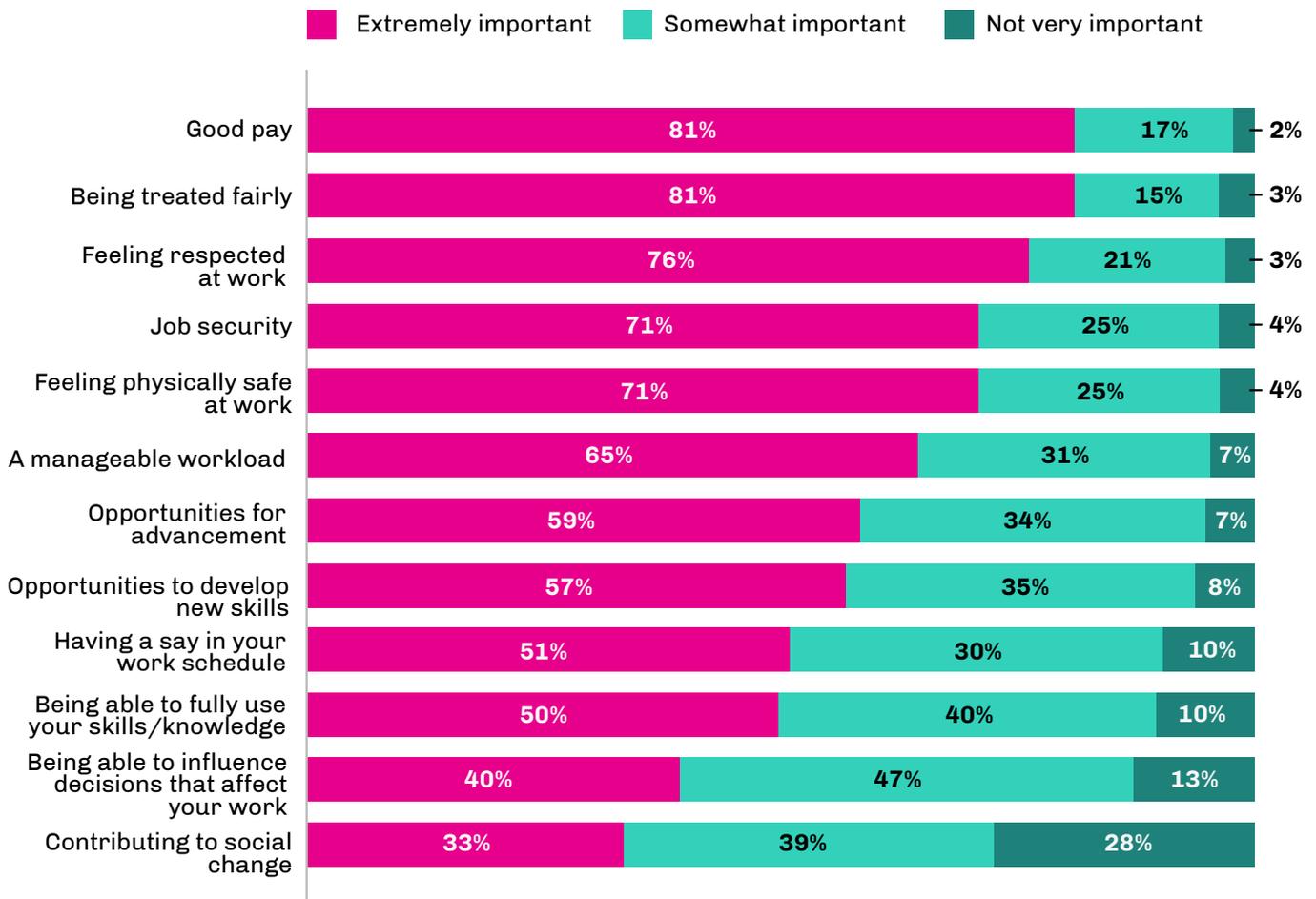
When survey respondents were asked why they were doing multiple jobs or multiple types of work, the most common response was that they needed to earn more money to compensate for low wages earned at a single job. This challenges the common trope that young people take on multiple types of work to pursue their 'passions', or to gain additional work experience – a view sometimes used by employers and the public to justify low pay. Rather, our findings reveal that it is the prevalence of low pay that prompts young people to take on multiple jobs or types of work. Not surprisingly, pay ranked highly in how young people defined good and bad job quality.

Young Workers Discuss Good Work Quality

Our research probed young people’s definition of good work, and how their actual work experience measured up. The survey and interview responses revealed two distinctly different work quality landscapes, reflecting our different approach in each method. The survey asked respondents to assess their *current* work, whereas the interviews probed young people’s entire work histories, allowing them to discuss all work and jobs they had ever performed. While the survey revealed young people’s largely favourable assessments of their *current* work experience, in interviews virtually every young person ‘had a story’ (or many!) about poor work quality in both the past and present.

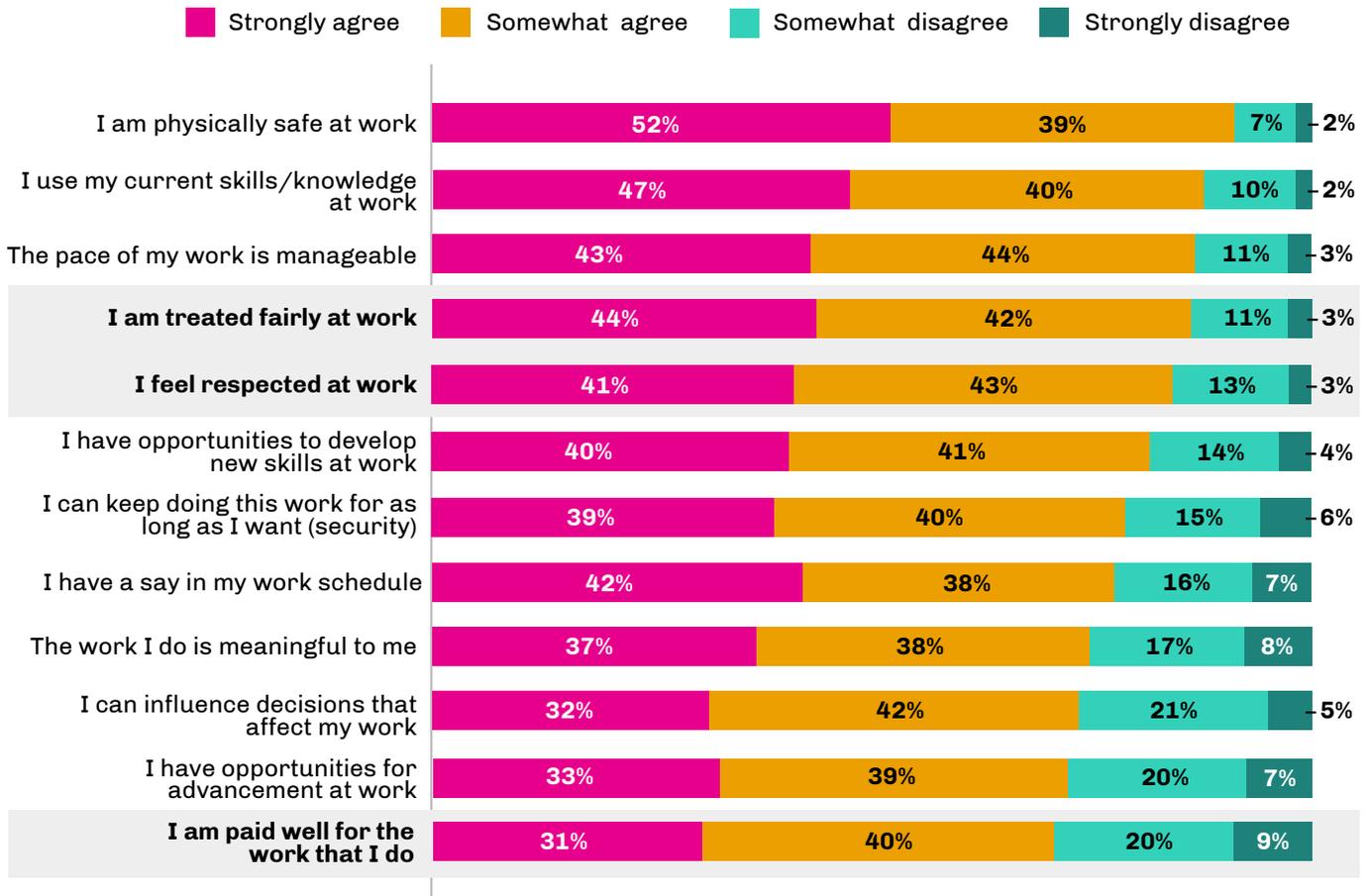
The survey asked respondents to rate the importance of 12 factors typically identified as work quality indicators. As shown in Figure 2, all of the factors were highly – if not overwhelmingly – rated as important by young people. Two tangible economic factors rated especially high: i) good pay and ii) job security. **Clearly, young people need work to provide an acceptable, stable livelihood.** Interestingly, two other subjective/interpersonal factors also ranked very high: i) being treated fairly and ii) feeling respected at work. **Young people also want work to be an affirming personal and interpersonal experience.** Work and the workplace as a platform for social change resonated less with survey respondents.

FIGURE 2
How important are these for making work “good work”?



We also asked survey respondents to assess their current work situation based on a parallel series of indicators. As Figure 3 illustrates, the ratings are strikingly positive – especially when combining all ratings in the ‘agree’ range. Interestingly, however, the three most highly-valued work indicators above did not fare as well, with pay remuneration ranking the lowest in young people’s assessments of their current work. On all of the indicators below, respondents who were self-employed reported more agreement in their responses than those who were employees.

FIGURE 3
Assessment of current (main) job or work



In interviews, young people conveyed similar priorities for what constituted good work such as a reasonable income, benefits and a supportive, respectful and diverse work environment.

*"We were all **paid a really fair wage, time off when we needed it, sick days and benefits** to people even if people were working maybe 10 hours a week, great bonuses during Christmas." - Janice, Recreation Therapist, age 25*

*"I want to see **diversity and inclusiveness**. I need to see women in the company. I can't see an all-boys club. I've been in that too many times" - Alyssa, Receptionist, age 29*

*"The management! The way that they appreciate staff and it can make or break the work environment. So like, if you have an unhealthy work environment, it doesn't matter what's going on, it's not a good job. Am I **being paid for what I'm doing?** And am I **being respected for what I'm doing?** And do I have **a team where we respect each other** and are able to work together?" - Monique, Nutrition Manager, age 27*

*"I loved my job because my **co-workers were very accommodating**, and were very helpful in my limitations." - Maclean, Early Childhood Educator, age 24*

Regrettably, in our interviews, young workers reported far more negative than positive work experiences.

Young Workers Discuss Poor Work Quality

In discussing their past and current work experiences, young interviewees voiced a litany of grievances and discontents. These included: grind culture, work scheduling, discrimination, harassment, health and safety, and more. By far, however, the two most recurring complaints related to **poor pay** and, even more frequently, **bad (often abusive) managers or supervisors**. In addition to the previously reported findings related to low pay, sample complaints voiced by interviewees included:

*"**The biggest challenge is pay**. It is so hard to be able to find a job where you can stay there for years, know you have financial security, and that you can live off of." - Monique, Nutrition Manager, age 27*

*"I've noticed some of the jobs like they'll be asking for 5 years experience working with kids. But then they're paying like just above minimum wage. So I feel like the **qualifications are increasing and the pay isn't necessarily reflective of that**." - Emily, Occupational Therapist, age 27*

*"Nowadays with this generation, **minimum wage isn't even liveable**. So I think the whole point is this generation cares more about increasing their pay because of inflation. And it's rapidly increasing and getting worse." - Steven, Sales Associate, age 19*

However, experiences with bad managers were the most recurring and harrowing examples of poor work quality described by young people in interviews. We cite a small sample to convey the tyranny some young people face at work:

*“The owner and **the management was horrible. She set up security cameras and would watch us work from home.** It was not a good job at all. I learned what management shouldn’t be like.” - Janice, talking about past retail work, now age 25*

*“**We were getting treated like garbage.** I remember going to the back of the store on my break, and just yelling and being like ‘I’m done’. **I’m sick of being treated like this.**” - Amanda, Sales Associate, age 25*

*“I’ll put it this way: **Bad management, bad work culture, and just no happiness.**” - Andrew, talking about past private investigator work, age 29*

*“He [the manager] definitely had anger issues—on a good day, he would just **talk to you like you’re stupid.** But if you like made one little mistake or anything, he would scream at you **and he would throw things.**” - Charlotte, talking about past fast food restaurant work, now age 21*

Making work better for young people will not be a quick or easy task. Our findings reveal many affronts, difficulties, and deficiencies that need to be addressed, across various domains.

Young Workers’ Responses to Poor Work Quality

In both the survey and interviews, we asked young workers how they responded to poor work quality and conditions. **Their answers were located on a continuum from resignation to resistance.** Each can be enacted in two ways. Resignation encompasses i) resigning themselves to bad work, or ii) literally quitting bad work. Resistance encompasses i) individual action such as voicing personal discontents to management, or ii) acting together with other workers to press for change. Some expressions of resignation to poor quality work include:

*“My mom was like ‘you need to quit’. I was like: ‘I need \$10 an hour, Mom’. I can’t believe I did that for \$10 - that was crazy! Yeah. But I just thought - ‘this is the work world at my age.’ Like **you have no right to complain, this is just something you have to go through.**” - Charlotte, talking about past fast food restaurant work, now age 21*

*“I think about just the structure of high school and stuff. And it’s, you know, ‘**respect authority and don’t ask questions**’, and I feel like that moves right into the workforce, you know, ‘respect authority and don’t ask questions’. So if management is telling me I have to do this, this, and this, **I have to do it.** No questions asked, even if it’s making me feel a certain type of way.” - Kathleen, Nanny, age 27*

*“**It’s like disheartening...** I’ve seen the sweetest people get torn to shreds because they don’t know how to say anything or do anything or someone’s yelling at them, and they just freeze. And it’s an unfortunate part of being in retail and fast food. And I’ve personally been in like those situations where you’re just like in shock.” - Amanda, Sales Associate, age 25*

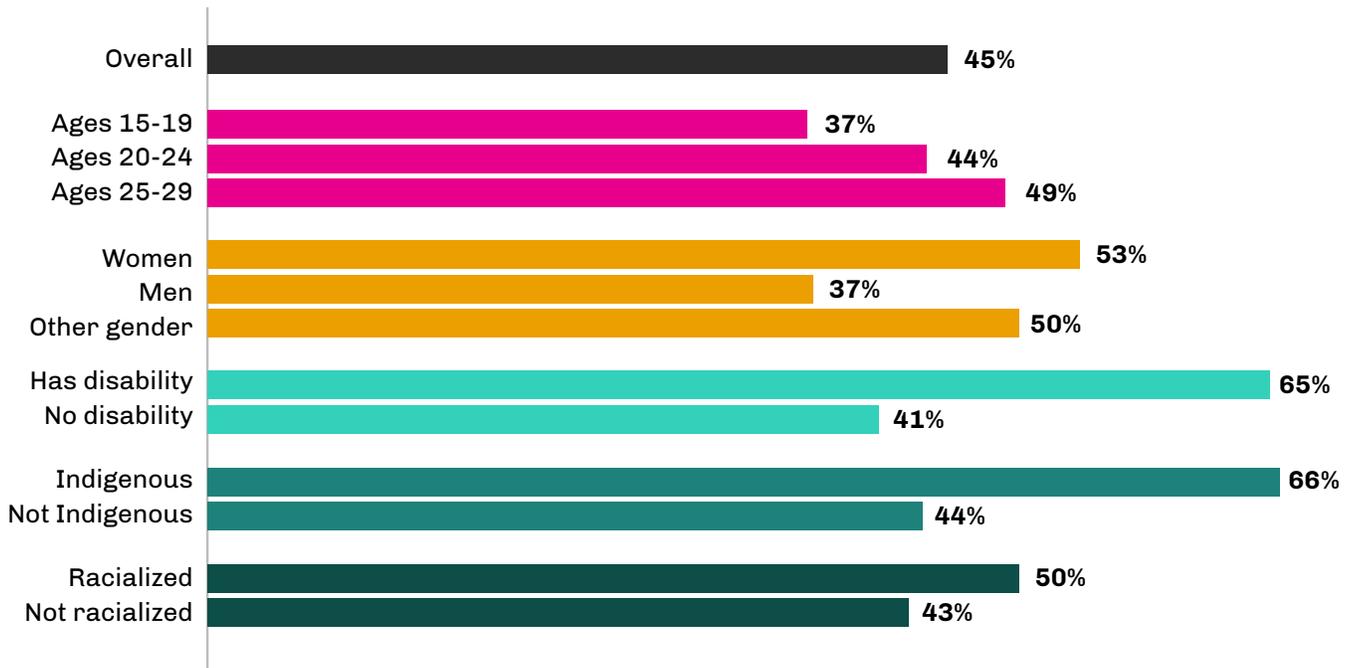
Other young people talked about resigning in a more literal way: **quitting their jobs**.

*“I talked about it with my colleagues, and they agreed - they were like ‘yeah, this is a bit of a **toxic workplace**’, and we all decided to look for new jobs at the same time.” - Karen, Medical Receptionist, age 27*

*“I know younger workers tend to be a little bit more insecure about applying to better jobs, because job descriptions look very intimidating. But it got to a point where I said, **I’m ready to move on. I don’t care what the salary is.** I just want to move on to another company, and I kind of built up confidence in myself.” - Priya, Communications Advisor, age 29*

As shown in Figure 4, almost half (45%) of survey respondents reported having quit a job or work due to poor work conditions. **This alone suggests the reality and scope of the work quality crisis young people face.** These high rates of quitting also have substantial implications for employers who foster poor work conditions, who must continually hire and train new employees.

FIGURE 4
Who quit a job or work because of bad work conditions?



As Figure 4 also shows, quitting work is related to young workers’ identities. Disadvantaged and marginalized identity workers (Indigenous people, people with disabilities, women, non-binary and racialized young people) have especially high work quit rates. This likely reflects their greater exposure to poor work quality resulting from discrimination and harassment.

It is also noteworthy that aging is related to the prevalence of quitting among young workers. As they age through different young worker sub-cohorts, there is a steady rise in quit rates. This may reflect a growing sense of self-worth and unwillingness to accept poor work, or that aging entails holding more jobs, and the prospect of experiencing more bad ones. This is, as we indicate below, an issue worthy of further research.

Young workers also told us about the importance of resistance strategies at work, be they individual or collective. Narratives of individual resistance relied strongly on workers' knowledge of the law, awareness of their rights, and their confidence to speak out:

*"I would definitely say, just like **standing up for yourself**. Which I know is really hard, but I guess just allowing yourself to feel empowered and **really knowing your rights**. Like having the skills to – first of all, read your rights and understand them, but also feel empowered to speak up if someone is violating your rights." - Samantha, Human Resources, age 23*

*"You should know your rights and stick by them, and **don't be afraid to stand your ground** for sure." - Janice, Recreation Therapist, age 25*

Others spoke of the direct individual action some young workers take against poor work conditions they face:

*"There's a lot of people I know that are like 'Well, I get paid minimum wage, so I'm not going to put in the effort. **They're not paying me to do more than the minimum**'." - Amanda, Sales Associate, age 25*

In contrast, collective strategies for resistance relied on coming together with co-workers in order make changes:

*"If you're having issues, problems, please speak them out, **because there's a really high chance your co-worker has the same issue**, and if we work on it we're all going to be happier. We're going to work better. So I think that's really important. - Kathleen, Nanny, age 27*

*"When a customer was racist towards our [Black, female] co-worker, **we complained to our general manager**. She said she would take care of it. The guy [customer] never came back." - Jimmy, Fast Food Restaurant Supervisor, age 22*

In the next section, we discuss what young people told us about strengthening their capacity to resist and to make work better.

Expecting Better: Making Work Better

Young workers are not only passive recipients of labour market conditions, but also potential change agents of their work quality. Indeed, young people's engagement is critical to making meaningful improvement to work quality. Notably, many young workers whom we interviewed had low expectations of work quality and assumed that bad treatment at work was simply the norm. Several noted authorities on the 'changing world of work' have attributed recent declines in work quality to a deepening 'voice gap' – the decline of worker influence on work conditions.¹⁰

Survey results showed that relatively few young people reported knowing 'a lot' about worker rights, and fewer still reported knowing 'a lot' about what labour unions do (see Figures 5 & 6). Since respondents may have been disinclined to report being unknowledgeable, young workers' 'information gap' may be even greater than these results suggest.

Figure 5
In general, how much do you know about your rights as a worker?

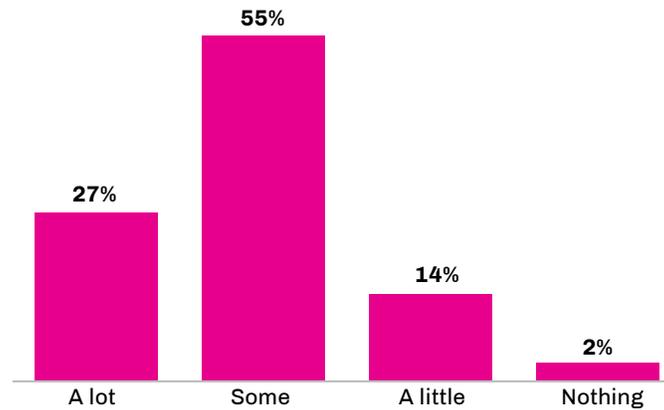
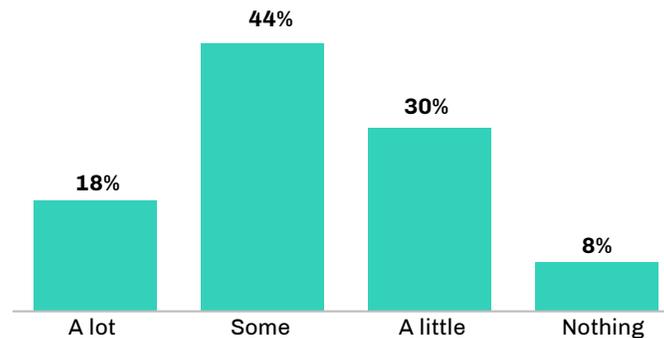


FIGURE 6
In general, how much do you know about what unions do?



In interviews, we asked young workers what skills, supports, and resources would be helpful for them to improve their work quality. They emphasized knowing their rights at work and having the confidence to express their discontents, both individually and collectively, as well as joining a labour union. A sampling of their responses includes:

“The more people are educated about what is acceptable, the less they will accept what isn’t acceptable.” - Luke, Freelance Audio Engineer, age 26

“When I just started my [work] position, I was so shy and scared, and you know I didn’t want to do anything wrong. Now, I feel like it’s important to speak up. Otherwise nothing is going to get changed.”
- Hailey, Customer Service Representative, age 25

“I think when people think union, they think of working class men in their sixties who have been in their jobs for 40 years... So when people think ‘join a union,’ they’re like ‘Oh, that’s for a long term job when I have a career’. But I think it’s still important, even for temporary work, to have a union to advocate for you if needed.” - Duncan, freelance delivery worker, age 21

“I support unions to be honest. I think as a young person, I look at countries where you know they have unions for [fast food restaurants] even, and everybody gets adequate pay because of it. Because everybody is fighting for the common good, not just for their individual good.” - Andrew, Sales Associate, age 29

In Canada and the United States today, there is considerable momentum among young workers in support of unionization. They are increasingly turning to collective action to amplify their call for better quality work. This has included successful waves of worker organizing, strikes, and lobbying in sectors with a substantial reliance on young workers – including retail, food services, gig work, and minimum wage work.

Implications and Future Directions

This project has both knowledge-generating and capacity-building goals. Using an online survey and in-depth interviews, this research has explored, analyzed and amplified the work experiences of young people (aged 16-29) in Ontario. The findings provide some affirming evidence of young people's work quality experience. What stands out, however, are their intense frustrations with job quality deficits. Chief among these are poor pay and age discrimination – the latter all too-often manifesting in lack of respect, limited promotion avenues, fragmented work histories and, most typically, in abusive treatment from managers or supervisors. We identify young workers' responses to poor job quality occurring along a continuum ranging from resignation to resistance. Drawing on our research findings, the project has produced 17 social media videos designed to highlight young people's common work experiences and promote their awareness of information, rights, and organizations that can support their efforts to improve work quality (see Annex E for the list of videos).

Several factors limit our ability to draw generalizations from this research. Our survey relies on a non-probability sample, although results are weighted to reflect the population distribution. Additionally, despite best efforts, two cohorts of young people were under-represented among survey respondents and interviewees: men/males, and those 16-17 years of age. Much of what we learned about these earlier work years came from the work history of older young people.

Future research on young workers would benefit most by further exploring responses to adverse work quality, and efforts to make work better. In responding to adverse work quality, what factors shape young workers' choices in taking the path of resignation or resistance? What strategies along either path are ultimately most effective?

The findings from this project have important, wide-ranging implications, impacting Canada's economy, employers, governments, labour organizations, and – most directly – its young workforce. The condition of young workers will increasingly define the well-being of Canadians. Will work provide this and future generations with the material, personal and social foundations of sustainable, rewarding life? Some learning, policy and practice takeaways from this study for various stake-holders include:

Employers: Poor pay and poor treatment from supervisors are the two chief complaints of young workers. Employers wishing to attract and retain workers amidst a prevailing labour shortage will need to do better. Assuring much more focus on fairness from supervisors is a good place to start. It is also evident that current wages are not sustainable for many young workers.

Governments: Federal and provincial governments regulate virtually all aspects of work. In recent decades, labour law has failed to keep pace with massive transformations of work, the gig economy, employment standards enforcement, and maintaining a level playing field for workers/unions and employers. A broad repertoire of reforms are needed to provide young workers with protection of the law. A comprehensive list of potential reforms is included in the *Young Workers & Ontario's Workforce Recovery* report produced by our project partners at the Young Workers Rights Hub of Toronto Metropolitan University.

Labour organizations: Unions need to commit more effort and resources to organizing and representing young workers. This requires reaching out to young workers in new ways and with new messaging, addressing both their material and identity priorities. Unions can model within their own organizations the importance of 'giving voice' to young workers. Additionally, independent worker action centres need better funding to deepen their support of unorganized, vulnerable workers – many of whom are racialized young people.

Young workers: Finally, and most important, young workers need to be supported in having greater voice and influence over their work quality. This can be done in many ways: drawing broad attention to the extent and toll of age discrimination at work; deepening young people's awareness of their rights at work; cultivating an 'expect better at work' outlook among young people; fostering greater understanding of unions and collective actions; and building young people's skills and strategies to make work better.

Through our research, young workers like Maclean have signaled they are up for this challenge:

*"My generation or **younger generations, aren't really taking disrespect anymore.** And I find that very admirable in young people." - Maclean, Early Childhood Educator, age 24*

Annexes

A. Survey of Young Workers: Simplified Questionnaire

BLOCK: INTRODUCTION & CONSENT

The Better Work Project: Young Workers Making Change Survey of Young Workers

In this research project, we want to learn more about how young people evaluate the quality of their paid work. We are interested in hearing from young people (ages 16-29) living in Ontario about all types of paid work - jobs, gig work, freelance work, small businesses and more. This research is being led by Drs. Andie Noack and Myer Siemiatycki at [Toronto Metropolitan University](#) (formerly Ryerson University), and is funded by the [Future Skills Centre](#). The [United Food and Commercial Workers \(UFCW\)](#) Canada, the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL), and the Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU) [Young Workers Rights Hub](#) are partners in this project.

WHAT YOU ARE BEING ASKED TO DO

We are asking you to complete an online survey. The survey questions ask about your paid work experience. The survey should take about 20 minutes to complete. In order for your answers to be collected, you must go to the end of the survey and click the 'Submit Survey' button.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO YOU

There is no direct individual benefit to you for taking part in this study. However, this research will promote better understanding of young people's employment experiences, and how to make their work better. We will use the research findings to develop training that gives young people more of a say about their work. We will also share the results with our partners and labour organizations, as well as in reports and academic publications. You will be able to see the research results and training material at [betterworkproject.ca](#) after the study is complete.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL RISKS TO YOU

The risks of participating in this research are minimal. Some of the survey questions ask about bad work experiences you have had. They may make you upset, or you may not want to answer some questions. You can skip any questions that you do not want to answer. You can stop participating at any time by closing your web browser. If you close your browser before you get to the end of the survey and you do not click on the 'Submit Survey' button, your answers will not be used. In order to protect your privacy, we encourage you to complete this survey in a location where no one else can see your answers.

YOUR IDENTITY CAN BE ANONYMOUS OR CONFIDENTIAL

You can complete this survey without sharing any information that will uniquely identify you, such as your name or date of birth. We will not share your individual answers (i.e., raw data) with anyone outside the research team. In publications, we will only report information about groups of people (i.e., aggregate data), not individuals.

Although your Internet Protocol (IP) address can be tracked, we will not store this information. We may use your IP address to ensure that a person is not completing the survey more than once.

The last survey question asks whether you would like to participate in a follow-up interview. If you agree, we ask for your first name (or a nickname) and a way to contact you (a cell phone number and/or email address). If you provide this information, we will keep your identity confidential. We will only share this information with the survey panel company (Logit group), who will use it to schedule an interview with you. They have a strict [privacy policy](#).

If you do not want to participate in a follow-up interview and do not provide contact information, after the last question a link to the survey panel company will let them know that you completed the survey. The survey panel

company will know your identity and whether or not you completed the survey, but will not provide the researchers with any information about who you are.

HOW YOUR INFORMATION WILL BE PROTECTED AND STORED

The research team will use Toronto Metropolitan University's Google Drive to store and share data between themselves. Any identifying information collected by the research team will be password protected or encrypted. Only members of the research team will have access to the collected data. We will keep the data for 5 years after the research is completed, then we will destroy it.

This survey uses Qualtrics™, which is an American (US) company. In rare situations, US law enforcement officials may be able to access the survey data, using the "USA Freedom Act" (the Patriot Act). Qualtrics™ also securely stores data in the "cloud" until it is downloaded and deleted by the research team.

INCENTIVE FOR PARTICIPATION

You will receive an incentive from your survey panel provider for completing this survey, as specified in your invitation email. In order to receive the incentive, you must go to the end of the survey and click on the 'submit survey' button.

YOUR RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

Participation in research is completely voluntary (up to you). You can choose to stop participating at any point before you click the 'submit survey' button at the end of the survey. If you decide to stop participating, it will not affect your relationship with the researchers, Toronto Metropolitan University, or any project partners (OFL, UFCW Canada, and the TMU Young Workers Rights Hub).

By clicking the 'submit survey' button at the end of the survey, you are providing your consent (agreement) to participate in the research. By agreeing to participate in this research, you are not waiving any of your legal rights. Once you click the 'submit survey' button, we will not be able to tell which answers are yours, and so we cannot remove your answers.

IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS

If you have any questions about this research, please contact us at youngworkers@ryerson.ca or 416-979-5000 x552249. If you contact us about this research, your survey answers may no longer be anonymous.

This research has been approved by the Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU) Research Ethics Board (REB 2022-304). If you have any questions about your rights or treatment as a research participant in this study, please contact the TMU Research Ethics Board at rebchair@ryerson.ca or (416) 979-5042.

You may want to print a copy of this information for your future reference.

BLOCK: ELIGIBILITY

How old are you? _____

What are the first three digits of your postal code? (e.g. A1A) _____

Are you currently working for pay?

This includes jobs, freelance work, independent contracting, working through an app or platform, informal work for people in your neighbourhood or network, running your own business, or any other types of work that you are paid for. Do not count work/chores done for your household even if you receive payment or an allowance for them.

Yes

No

BLOCK: WORK/JOB COUNT & SELECTION

In general, what is the **main reason** that you work for pay?

- To earn money to pay for day-to-day living expenses for myself
- To earn money to pay for day-to-day living expenses for myself and my family
- To earn extra spending money
- To gain experience or build your resume
- To socialize or interact with other people
- Another reason, what? _____

Right now, which of the following types of work do you do?

Select all that apply. Do not count work/chores done for your household even if you receive payment or an allowance for them.

- A job or jobs where you are an employee of a company or an organization
- Freelance or independent contract work
- App or platform-based work where you get paid per job / task
- Informal work for people in your neighbourhood or network (e.g. babysitting, pet care or yard work)
- Running your own business (including an online business)
- Some other type of work, what: _____

Why do you do more than one type of work?

Select all that apply.

- To earn more money
- To get experience doing different types of work
- To pursue my interests or passions
- Because the availability of work is inconsistent
- To access benefits or perks
- Another reason, what? _____

How many jobs do you have where you are an **employee**? That is, how many different companies or organizations are you employed by? _____

In your work as an employee, why do you work for more than one company or organization?
Select all that apply.

- To earn more money or get more hours
- To get experience doing different types of work
- To pursue my interests or passions
- Because the availability of work is inconsistent
- To access benefits or perks
- Another reason, what? _____

In your app/platform work, how many **different apps or platforms** do you work on? _____

And why do you work on more than one app or platform?
Select all that apply.

- To earn more money or get more work
- To get experience doing different types of work
- To pursue my interests or passions
- To access the features offered by different apps / platforms
- Because the availability of work is inconsistent
- Another reason, what? _____

And which of these is your **main work**?

Your main work is the work that you spend the most time doing.

- A job or jobs where you are an employee of a company or an organization
- Freelance or independent contract work
- App or platform-based work where you get paid per job / task
- Informal work for people in your neighbourhood or network (e.g. babysitting, pet care or yard work)
- Running your own business (including an online business)
- Some other type of work, what: _____

In your main work are you an **employee** of a company or organization?
Your main work is the work that you spend the most time doing.

- Yes
- No

BLOCK: WORK QUALITY

For the rest of the survey questions, please think about your **main work** when you answer.

Your main work is the work that you **spend the most time** doing.

Overall, how would you rate the **quality** of the work that you have?

- Excellent
- Very good
- Good
- Fair
- Poor

Indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each of these 12 statements:
 Please give an answer for all 12 statements before moving to the next page.

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
I am paid well for the work that I do	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can keep doing this work for as long as I want (security)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am treated fairly at work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The work I do is meaningful to me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have opportunities for advancement at work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have opportunities to develop new skills at work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have a say in my work schedule	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can influence decisions that affect my work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel respected at work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am physically safe at work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The pace of my work is manageable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I use my current skills / knowledge at work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How likely are you to still be doing this work a year from now?

- Very likely
- Somewhat likely
- Not very likely
- Not at all likely

BLOCK: THE WORK YOU WANT

Now we'd like to know more about **what 'good work' means to you.**

In general, how important are each of these for making work "good work"?
Drag each item into a box; or tap on each item and then tap on a box to move it.

	Extremely important	Somewhat important	Not very important
Good pay	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Job security	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Being treated fairly	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Contributing to social change	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Opportunities for advancement	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Opportunities to develop new skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Having a say in your work schedule	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Being able to influence decisions that affect your work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Feeling respected at work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Feeling physically safe at work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A manageable workload	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Being able to fully use your skills/ knowledge	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What else is important for making work "good work"? _____

In general, how much do you know about your rights as a worker?

- A lot
- Some
- A little
- Nothing

In general, how much do you know about what unions do?

- A lot
- Some
- A little
- Nothing

If you had a problem with your work, who would you reach out to for advice or support?

Select all that apply.

- Family or friends
- Co-workers
- Your immediate supervisor
- Your employer, an HR department or equivalent
- A government agency
- Social media or chat boards
- A union
- Someone or something else, who? _____
- None of these

What do you think would help you to improve your work conditions?

Select all that apply.

- More information about labour laws and workers' rights
- More confidence in speaking out for better work conditions
- Learning about how other workers handle similar issues
- More education/ skills to be competitive in the labour force
- Leadership training to build connections with other workers
- More information about what unions do
- Something else, what? _____
- None of these

BLOCK: WORK INFORMATION

For the next questions, we'd like you to go back to thinking about your **main work** when you answer.

Your main work is the work that you usually **spend the most time** doing.

For how long have you been doing this work?

- less than 3 months
- 3-11 months
- 12-23 months
- 24 months or longer
- I don't remember

Thinking about the number of hours you spend doing this work each week, does it usually:

- Change a lot from week to week
- Stay about the same from week to week

How many hours per week do you usually spend doing this work? _____

[ALTERNATE] What is the **average** number of hours that you spend doing this work each week? _____

And how are you paid?

- By the hour
- On salary
- By the task / gig / order
- By the day / week / month
- Some other way

What is your hourly rate of pay? _____

[ALTERNATE] What is your best estimate of your usual hourly rate of pay? _____
Estimate your hourly rate based on how much you earn and the amount of time that you work.

Does your work have any of the following benefits:

Select all that apply. Include benefits that you may need to opt-in to or pay for in part.

- Discounts on goods or services
- Free food, merchandise or services
- Paid sick days
- Drug, dental and/or vision care benefits
- Life or disability insurance
- Pension plan
- Other benefits, what? _____
- None of these

BLOCK: WORK INFORMATION: EMPLOYEES

Is your job:

Select all that apply.

- Ongoing (permanent)
- Seasonal
- Temporary or contract (limited-term)
- Casual or on-call
- Through a temporary help or staffing agency
- Not permanent in some other way
- I don't know

In your job, are you unionized?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

How knowledgeable are you about your union and what it does?

- Very knowledgeable
- Somewhat knowledgeable
- Not very knowledgeable
- Not at all knowledgeable

What is the **main business or industry** of the company or organization that you work for?

- Retail trade (e.g. selling goods or services to the public)
- Food services (e.g. restaurants, cafés, or catering)
- Accommodation services (e.g. hotels/motels or campgrounds)
- Health services (e.g. medical offices, residential care homes, or home health care)
- Recreation or sports activities (e.g. gyms, golf courses, or amusement parks)
- None of these

What is the **main business or industry** of the company or organization that you work for?

Please be as specific as possible, e.g. children's camp, financial services, residential home construction, social services.

What is your job? How would you describe it to someone you just met?

Please be as specific as possible: e.g. camp counsellor, bank teller, electrician assistant, fundraiser

What are the most important activities or duties of your job?

Please be as specific as possible: e.g. providing programming for campers, performing financial transactions for clients, installing wiring in condominium suites, soliciting donations by telephone

BLOCK: WORK INFORMATION: NON-EMPLOYEES

Which of the following best describes your work or business?

Select all that apply.

- Driving or delivery work (including shopping services)
- Creative, artistic or craft-based work
- Food or catering work
- Social media work
- Data work (including content moderation/creation)
- Research, technical or professional services
- Childcare or pet care
- Cleaning, painting, repair or yard work
- Education, teaching or tutoring
- Something else, what? _____

How do you mainly get work or make sales?

Select all that apply.

- By signing onto an app or platform operated by a company
- By posting content to an app or platform operated by a company (e.g. Tiktok, Youtube)
- Through an online store that you operate (e.g. Instagram, Etsy)
- In-person sales (e.g. pop-ups, trade shows)
- Selling to other businesses (e.g. wholesale or consignment)
- Commissions or contracts
- Through personal contacts / word-of-mouth
- Some other way, how? _____

In your work, how is your pay usually determined?

- I independently decide how much to charge for each job / task
- I negotiate the price of each job / task with the client
- The price of the job / task is set by the client
- The price of the job / task is set by a company, app or platform
- Some other way, how? _____

How much control do you have over **which days and hours** you work each week?
How much control do you have over your weekly work schedule?

- Complete control
- A lot of control
- Some control
- A little control
- Almost no control

And how much control do you have over the **number of hours** that you work each week?
How much control do you have over the amount of time you spend working each week?

- Complete control
- A lot of control
- Some control
- A little control
- Almost no control

Do you have any employees or sub-contractors, whom you pay to complete work for you?

- Yes
- No

BLOCK: WORK HISTORY

Now we'd like to learn a bit about your **work history**.

Have you ever held a job where you were an employee of a company or organization?

- Yes
- No

How old were you when you got your **first job** where you were an employee of a company or organization?
If you cannot remember, make your best guess.

Have you ever been treated unfairly at work?

- Yes
- No

Who were you treated unfairly by?

Select all that apply.

- Your manager, supervisor, boss or employer
- Your co-workers
- Customers or clients
- Suppliers or distributors
- Someone else, who? _____

Briefly describe the unfair treatment that you experienced at work:

Do you think that you experienced this unfair treatment at work primarily because of your personal characteristics, such as your age, race/ethnicity, immigration status, language skills/accents, religion, disability, sex/gender identity, or sexual orientation?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

Which of your personal characteristics do you think motivated this unfair treatment at work?
Select all that apply.

- Age
- Sex or gender identity
- Race or ethnicity
- Disability status
- Immigration status
- Language skills or accent
- Sexual orientation
- Religion
- Another characteristic, what: _____

Have you ever tried to make your work or your work environment better by reaching out to:

	Yes	No	Not Applicable
Your co-workers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A manager / boss	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A union	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The government	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Social media	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A community organization	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Have you ever quit a job or quit doing work because of bad work conditions?

- Yes
- No

Briefly describe why you quit this job or work:

BLOCK: DEMOGRAPHICS

Finally, we'd like to learn a bit more **about you**.

Are you currently enrolled in school?

- Yes, as a full-time student
- Yes, as a part-time student
- No

What is the highest level of education that you have **finished**?

- Less than Grade 8
- Finished Grade 8
- Finished high school or equivalent
- Finished community college or technical/trade school
- Finished a Bachelor's Degree (Arts, Science, Eng, etc.)
- Finished a Master's Degree (MA, MSc, MSW, MBA, etc.)
- Finished a PhD or "doctorate"
- Finished a Professional Degree (Law, Education, Medicine, Dentistry)

Are you planning to return to school in the next two years?

- Yes, I am planning to return as a full-time student
- Yes, I am planning to return as a part-time student
- No
- I don't know

Right now, who do you live with?

Select all that apply.

- Live alone
- Your parents or extended family members (grandparents, aunts/uncles etc.)
- Roommates or housemates
- Your spouse, partner or boyfriend/girlfriend
- Your children
- Someone else, who? _____

What gender do you identify as?

- Woman
- Man
- Non-binary/non-gendered
- Another gender identity: _____

Are you a person with a disability?

A person with a disability is someone who is limited in the types or amount of activity they can do because of a physical or mental health condition that lasts 6 months or longer.

- Yes
- No

Are you a visible minority?

The Employment Equity Act defines visible minorities as "persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour".

- Yes
- No

Are you First Nations, Métis or Inuk (Inuit)?

- Yes
- No

Were you:

- Born in Canada
- Born outside Canada

Are you currently:

- A Canadian citizen
- A Permanent Resident (PR)
- Something else (you have some other immigration status)

About how much money do you think you will make from **all of your paid work** during the 2022 calendar year?
Include income from all of your jobs, freelance work, independent contracting, working through an app or platform, informal work for people in your neighbourhood or network, running your own business, or any other types of work that you are paid for.

- Less than \$5,000
- \$5,000 to \$9,999
- \$9,999 to \$19,999
- \$20,000 to \$29,999
- \$30,000 to \$49,999
- \$50,000 to \$69,999
- \$70,000 to \$89,999
- \$90,000 or more
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

We are going to be **interviewing** young people about their work experiences.

Would you be willing to participate in a follow-up, one-on-one virtual (Zoom) interview about your work?

- Yes, I would be willing to participate in a one-on-one virtual (Zoom) interview
- No, I do not want to participate in an interview

Please tell us how to contact you to schedule an interview:

Your contact information will be kept confidential. We will only use this information for the purpose of scheduling an interview. Not everyone who volunteers will be contacted for an interview.

- Your first name or a name we can call you: _____
- Email address: _____
- Cell phone number: _____

By clicking the '**Submit Survey**' button, I am agreeing to have my survey answers used in this study.

B. Interview questions for young workers

The Better Work Project: Young Workers Making Change Young Worker Individual Interview Questions

1. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. Before we begin, do you have any questions for me about the consent form, about the interview process, or about the project more generally?
 - Reminder: You can skip any questions that you don't feel comfortable answering, and you can stop the interview at any point.

[If not previously selected] Is there a pseudonym or fake first name that you would like use to refer to you as, if we use quotes from this interview in publications? If so, what is it?

2. I'd like to start by learning a bit more about you. Can you tell me a bit about yourself: your age, how you identify in terms of your gender and race, what city you live in, your educational qualifications, and what type of paid work you are currently doing.
3. Can you give me a brief overview of your work history? What jobs or paid work have you had, beginning with your first ever? It might be easiest to link them to the different stages of your life:
 - Jobs or work during high school,
 - Jobs or work during college or university, if you attended post-secondary education
 - Jobs or work since being a student
4. Of the jobs that you have done, what was the best and worst work/job that you had, and what made them good/bad? [Could you tell me now, what was the best and the worst job or work that you have ever had?]
 - What made your best job/work good? How did that good job/work make you feel?
 - What made your worst job/work bad? How did that bad job/work make you feel?
 - Did you take any steps to improve the conditions of that bad job/work? Why/why not?
 - Looking back now, is there something else you could have done, or wish you had done to improve the conditions of that bad job/work?
 - Have you ever quit a job/work because of bad work conditions?
 - Have you ever felt mis-treated or disrespected at work because of your young age? Can you give an example?
 - Have you ever felt mis-treated or disrespected at work due to other aspects of your identity – eg. gender, disability, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion? Can you give an example?
 - Have you ever been angry about poor work conditions on a job? Can you give an example?
 - Have you ever regretted a good work experience that came to an end? Can you give an example?
 - Did the COVID pandemic have a good or bad impact on your work experience? How so?

5. With your experience, what factors would you say are most important to you in making a job or work good rather than bad?
 - Prompts: wages, benefits, scheduling, health and safety, respect, manager/co-workers, independence etc. OTHER factors?

- 5a. What do you think is different about young workers' different priorities or expectations around work, compared to older workers do?
 - What would you say is the biggest challenge young workers now face related to work?
 - Is this also your co-workers experiences, or do you think this just reflects your own experience

6. Next I'm going to ask some questions about how to make work better for young people:
 - In general, what do you think are the best things young workers can do to make their work better?
 - Do you feel like you can influence your work conditions or job quality? Why/why Not?
 - Have you ever taken any action to improve your working conditions? How/why Not? Was it effective?
 - What aspects of your current job/work would you change or make better, if you could?
 - What prevents these changes or improvements from happening?

7. Recently, some young workers have been joining unions. What are your general impressions or views about unions?
 - Do you belong to a union at work? Would you like to? Why/why not?
 - Do you think belonging to a union is or would be good for young workers?
 - Can you think of other ways an individual or group of workers can make their work conditions better?

8. What skills or supports do you think that young workers need in order to improve their job and/or work quality?
 - If a leadership program was developed to promote young workers' influence over their working conditions, what are the key skills or the most important knowledge that should be emphasized?

C. Worker organizer/advocate interview questions

The Better Work Project: Young Workers Making Change Worker Organizer/Advocate Interview Questions

1. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. Before we begin, do you have any questions for me about the consent form, about the interview process, or about the project more generally?
 - Reminder: You can skip any questions that you don't feel comfortable answering, and you can stop the interview at any point.
2. I'd like to start by learning a bit more about you. Can you tell me what your current position is? And what organization(s) you work for?
3. Can you tell me what led you to become a worker organizer/advocate? What led you to get involved in workers' rights?
4. In general, how would you characterize the labour market experience of young workers today?
 - Prompts: wages, benefits, scheduling, health and safety, respect, manager/co-workers, independence etc. OTHER factors?
 - Do you think that in general, young workers have different priorities or expectations around work and jobs than older workers do? If so, how are these priorities different?
 - What would you say is the biggest challenge young workers now face related to work?
5. Are there any groups of young workers who face specific challenges or adversities in accessing good quality work?
 - Prompts: race, gender, immigration status, industry, low-education, etc.
6. What successes do you think that young workers have had in improving their work conditions over the past decade?
7. What are the challenges in mobilizing young workers?
 - Do you think that the labour movement has done enough to mobilize young workers?
 - What skills or supports would you say that young workers need in order to improve their job and/or work quality?
8. We are planning to develop and pilot a young worker leadership program to promote young workers' influence over their working conditions. What are the key skills or the most important knowledge that should be emphasized in such a program?

D. List of thematic codes from young worker interview analysis

1. Purpose of work
 - a. Earning money
 - b. Self esteem, identity
 - c. Other reasons

2. Good Jobs
 - a. Material-gain (wages, benefits)
 - b. Affect
 - c. Autonomy
 - d. Meaningful
 - e. Good Manager
 - f. Unionized position
 - g. Other reasons for good jobs

3. Impact of COVID-19

4. Bad Jobs
 - a. Bad Manager
 - b. Reasons for continuing bad jobs
 - c. Other descriptors or reasons related to bad jobs
 - d. Emotional labour
 - e. Material-loss (low wages, low or no benefits)
 - f. Limited Autonomy (hierarchy, unfreedom, power, surveillance, peer control.)
 - g. Affect
 - h. Work scheduling, overtime
 - i. Organizational environment
 - j. Discrimination and harassment
 - k. Not adding value
 - l. Response to bad job

5. Youth Specific Struggles/Experiences
 - a. Devalued
 - b. Intersections
 - c. Biggest Challenges
 - d. Work expectations
 - e. Any other specific youth struggles
 - f. Employers take advantage of youth precarity/newness etc.

6. Making Work Better
 - a. Personal Influence at Work
 - b. Attempts at Change-Making
 - c. What Needs to Change
 - d. Barriers to Change-Making
 - e. Unions
 - f. Lifestyle Self-Change
 - g. Other ways of making work better

7. Skills for capacity building
 - a. Building Organizing/Advocacy Skills
 - b. Rights
 - c. Expect Better
 - d. Unions
 - e. Other (key skills/resources)

8. Key quotes, phrases or excerpts

E. Social media video series

[Expect Better: You Deserve #BetterWork](#)

[Young Workers Talk: #GoodWork](#)

[Young Workers Talk: Age Discrimination](#)

[Young Workers Talk: Customer Service | Emotional Labour and Abuse](#)

[Young Workers Talk: #RacismAtWork](#)

[Young Workers Talk: Sexual Harassment](#)

[Ever Had a Bad Manager? | Young Workers Tell All](#)

[Bad Managers = Bad Jobs: Young Workers Speak Out](#)

[Why I Quit: Young People and Bad Work](#)

[#ToxicWork in Canada](#)

[Grind Culture 101](#)

[Freelance #GigWork](#)

[What I Wish I Knew... \(When I Started Working\)](#)

[#KnowYourRights: Wages in Ontario](#)

[#KnowYourRights: Work Hours and Breaks in Ontario](#)

[#StrongerTogether: Making Change at Work](#)

[Union Myth-Busting](#)

Endnotes

- 1 OECD & ILO. Promoting Better Labour Market Outcomes for Youth. August 2014. p.2.
- 2 See for example: Morissette, R. Youth Employment in Canada, Statistics Canada, 26 July 2021; Statistics Canada. A Portrait of Canadian Youth, March 2019; Morissette, R. Wages for Young Workers up to the Age of 40; Statistics Canada, May 2018; Chen, W. & T. Mehdi. Assessing Job Quality in Canada: A Multidimensional Approach. Statistics Canada, December 2018; Statistics Canada. Canadian Youth and Full-Time Work: A Slower Transition. *Canadian Megatrends*, May 2017.
- 3 See for example: Emily Rainsford W. Maloney & S. Popa, 'The Effect of Unemployment and Low-Quality Work Conditions on Work Values: Exploring the Experiences of Young Europeans', *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 682(1), March 2019.
- 4 See for example: Autor, D., D. Mindell & E. Reynolds, 'The Work of the Future: Building Better Jobs in an Age of Intelligent Machines', MIT Press, 2021; Stanford, J. & D. Poon. Speaking Up, Being Heard, Making Change: The Theory and Practice of Worker Voice in Canada Today. Centre for Future Work, 2021; Autor, D. 'Work of the Past, Work of the Future', *American Economic Association: Papers and Proceedings* 109(5), 2019.
- 5 Chen, W. & T. Mehdi, op. cit., p. 7.
- 6 See for example: Rikleen, L.S. "What Your Youngest Employees Need Most Right Now", *Harvard Business Review*, 3 June 2020; Ross, M., et al., Pathways to High-Quality Jobs for Young Adults, Brookings Institute, October 2018; Expert Panel on Youth Employment. Final Report: 'Strategies For a New World of Work: 13 Ways to Modernize Youth Employment in Canada. Employment and Social Development Canada, 2017; Standing Committee on Finance. Youth Employment in Canada: Challenges and Potential Solutions. House of Commons Canada, June 2014.
- 7 Rainsford et al, op. cit., citing Rainsford, E. et al., Low quality work influences what young people want out of a job. March 2019; citing 'The Effect of Unemployment and Low-Quality Work Conditions on Work Values: Exploring the Experiences of Young Europeans', *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 682(1), March 2019.
- 8 Prior to analysis, the survey data were cleaned and assessed for data quality, then weighted to reflect the age and gender distribution of young people working in Ontario.
- 9 To protect young workers' confidentiality, only first names, occupations and ages are attributed to quotes. Some names are pseudonyms, an option that was offered to all interviewees.
- 10 See for example: Autor, D., D. Mindell & E. Reynolds, op. cit.; Stanford, J. & D. Poon, op.cit.



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