

EDUCATION TO EMPLOYMENT PARTNERS

Youth Disconnection in Corpus Christi

Identifying and Reengaging Opportunity Youth

Updated Report May 2023

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY CORPUS CHRISTI | SOUTH TEXAS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CENTER

Executive Summary

This report identifies young adults who find themselves disconnected from work and education for different reasons in Corpus Christi. The objective is to help community stakeholders to find ways to reengage and empower these people so they can fulfill their otherwise forgone opportunities.

Disconnected, or opportunity, youth represent a group of young people ages 16-24 who are not employed or in school. Today, more than 6,000 persons fall into this category in Corpus Christi, making up slightly less than 15% of the youth population.

Historically, the local youth disconnection rate averaged slightly below 10% and has improved steadily for more than a decade before the COVID-19 pandemic. The recent sharp surge was widespread across the nation.

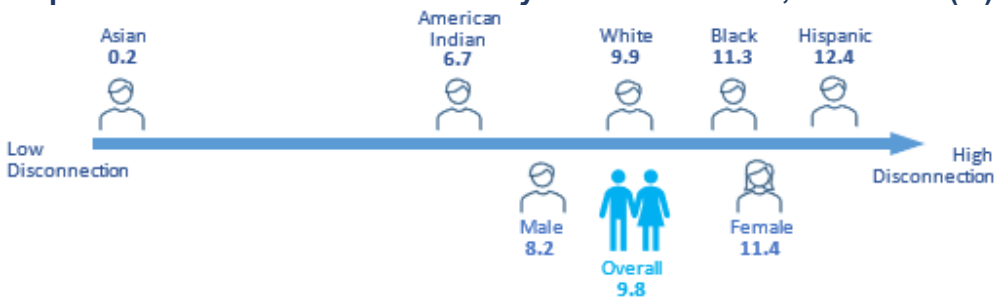
Disproportionately more youth are disconnected in Corpus Christi than the statewide and national averages. They are more concentrated in neighborhoods close to the downtown area than the rest of the city like communities in the Southside.

Wide gaps in local youth disconnection prevail among sociodemographic groups. Hispanics and Blacks are more likely to be disconnected from school or the workforce than whites and Asians. So are those who are female instead of male, have disabilities, and live in poverty. Youth who are less educated or less proficient in English are also more likely to be disconnected.

In Corpus Christi, disconnected youth are dominated by people of color, especially women who are married, less educated, and have children. The wide socioeconomic gaps notably for Hispanic women are exacerbated by their traditional gender roles to be the primary household members to care for children and older relatives.

In Corpus Christi, slightly more than 5,000 youth ages 16-24 earn less than a living wage with a full-time job. These young people are at risk of disconnection.

Corpus Christi Youth Disconnection by Race and Gender, 2001-2020 (%)

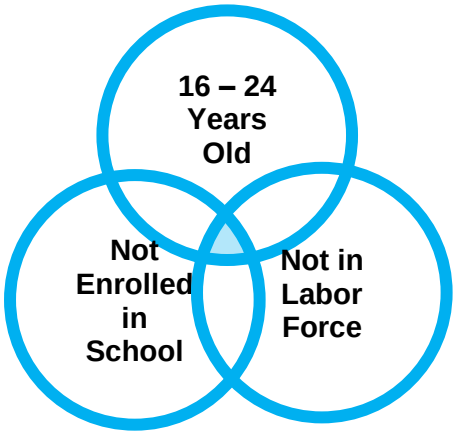


Introduction



Disconnected youth are young people who are neither in school nor working. Young people between the ages of 16 and 24 are at a critical stage for building human capital through education or skill training that generates higher wages and other benefits later in life. From this perspective, these young adults are also called "opportunity youth" for missing potential economic opportunities that follow.

Figure 1: Diagram of Disconnected Youth Population



The disconnected youth population group is schematically depicted by the intersection among three populations: (1) persons of the ages between 16 and 24, (2) persons who do not attend school, and (3) persons who are not employed and are not looking for work.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the share of disconnected youth in the United States had followed a decadelong steady decline. The pandemic, however, has upended such progress. As most communities began to recover from the pandemic, many young Texans dropped out of high school and college, while others were slow to return to the labor force (Crocket and Saving, 2021, 2022).

By the end of 2022, enrollments at Corpus Christi's university and community college remained below their pre-pandemic levels as fewer teenagers attended college after finishing high school. The regional labor force was also down when increasingly more people who lost their jobs during the early months of the pandemic have been staying out of the labor market altogether. Youth disconnection is expected to stay evaluated for at least some time.

Historically, youth disconnection was more prevalent in Corpus Christi and the rest of South Texas than in other parts of the state and the nation. Long spells of disconnection from education and work likely affect those youth's future economic prospects, lifetime earnings, and likelihood to commit crime. So, it is important to understand who and where they are in order to develop pathways to reengage and empower them effectively.

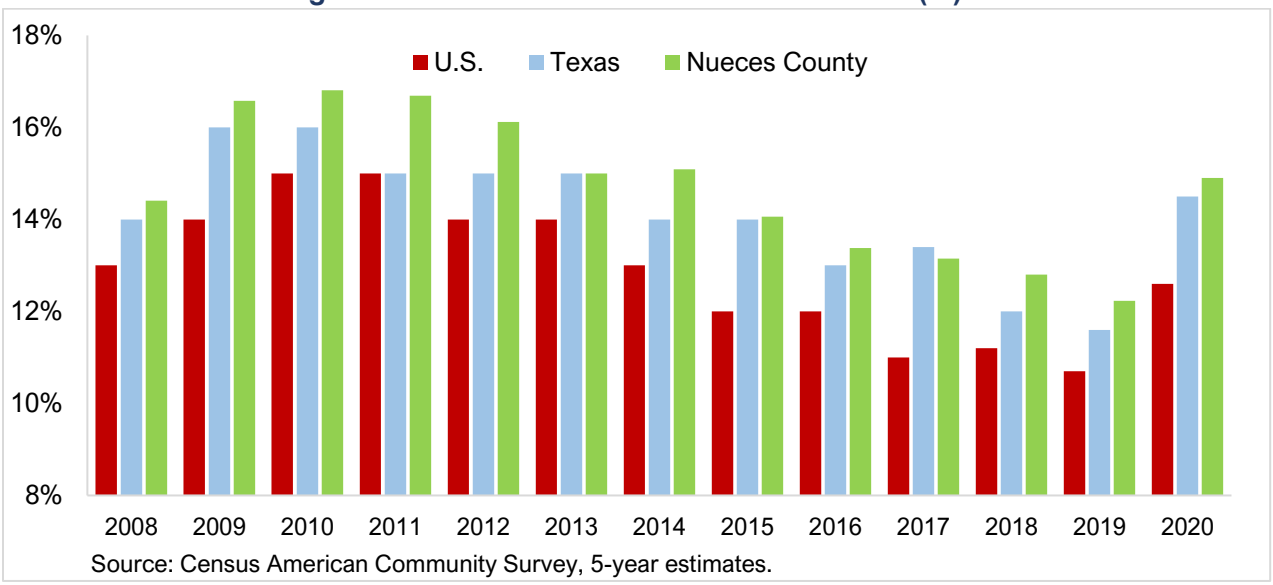
Historical Trends



For more than a decade following the 2008-2009 recession, the percentage of disconnected youth among all persons 16 to 24 years of age declined steadily across the United States. The state of Texas witnessed about one percentage point higher than the nation in youth disconnection. Still, the youth disconnection rate of Nueces County was persistently higher.

The nationwide longstanding progress, however, ended as the COVID-19 pandemic unfolded. The following bar chart displays the data of youth disconnection based on the American Community Survey (ACS) of the U.S. Census Bureau. The local, statewide and nationwide rates of youth disconnection all surged by more than two percentage points in 2020. The share of disconnected youth in Nueces County was 14.9% in 2020, compared with the national average of 12.6%. It is widely expected that youth disconnection has remained elevated since 2020 (Lewis, 2022).

Figure 2: Historical Youth Disconnection Rate (%).

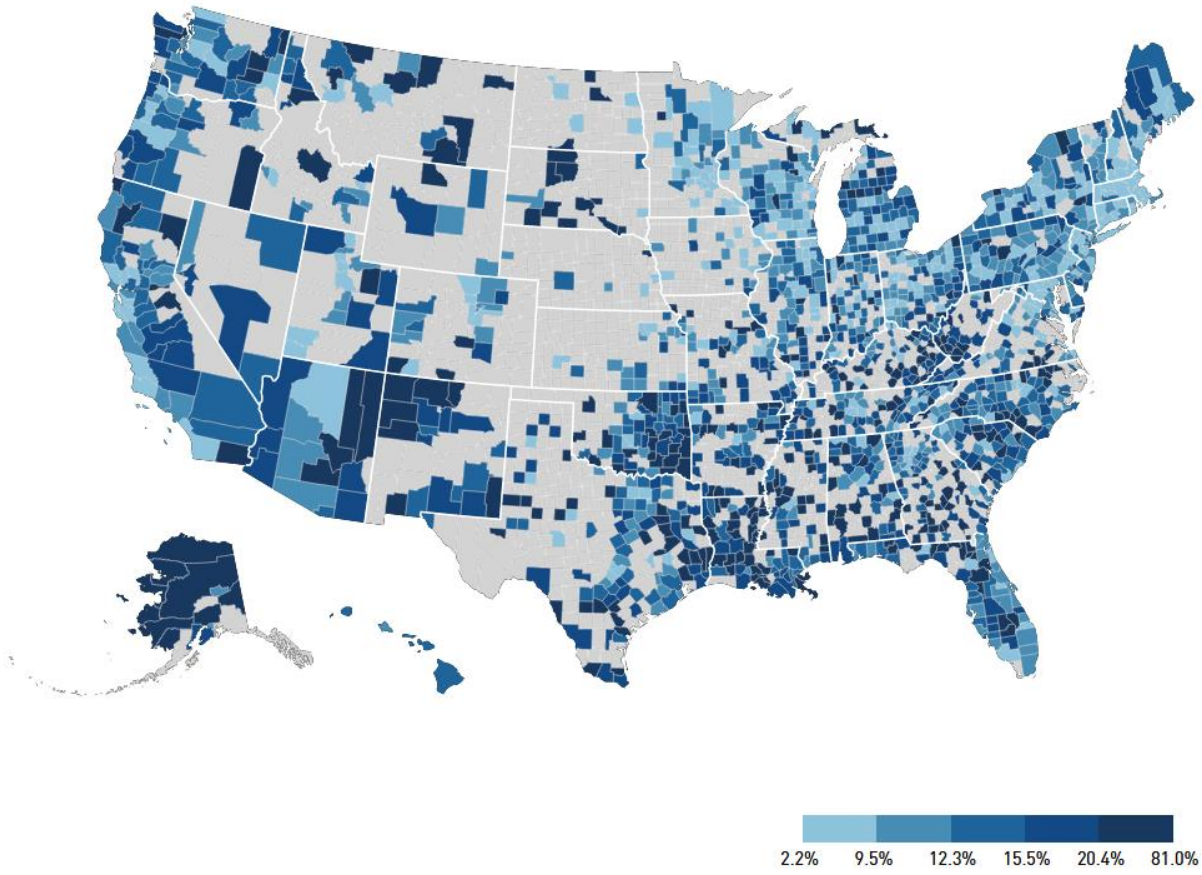


Source: Census American Community Survey, 5-year estimates.

Geography

There is no apparent geographic pattern across the nation in youth disconnection, but the highest rates tend to concentrate in the southern U.S. region, such as the states of Louisiana and Georgia. By geographic coverage, the largest regions spread across Alaska, eastern Arizona, and western New Mexico.

Figure 3: Youth Disconnection by County, United States



Note: Counties in gray have a population too small for reliable estimates by the ACS.
Source: Measure of America based on ACS 2015–2019 data, https://www.measureofamerica.org/DYinteractive/.

On average, the youth disconnection rate was about three percentage points higher in rural areas than in urban areas. Within an urban area, youth disconnection was highest in the city center than in other neighborhoods, such as suburbs (Lewis, 2022). This uneven landscape holds true in the Coastal Bend. Across the region, rural counties witness relatively higher disconnected youth

rates. Bee County has the highest rate of 28.8%, and Kleberg County has the lowest rate of 7.7%.

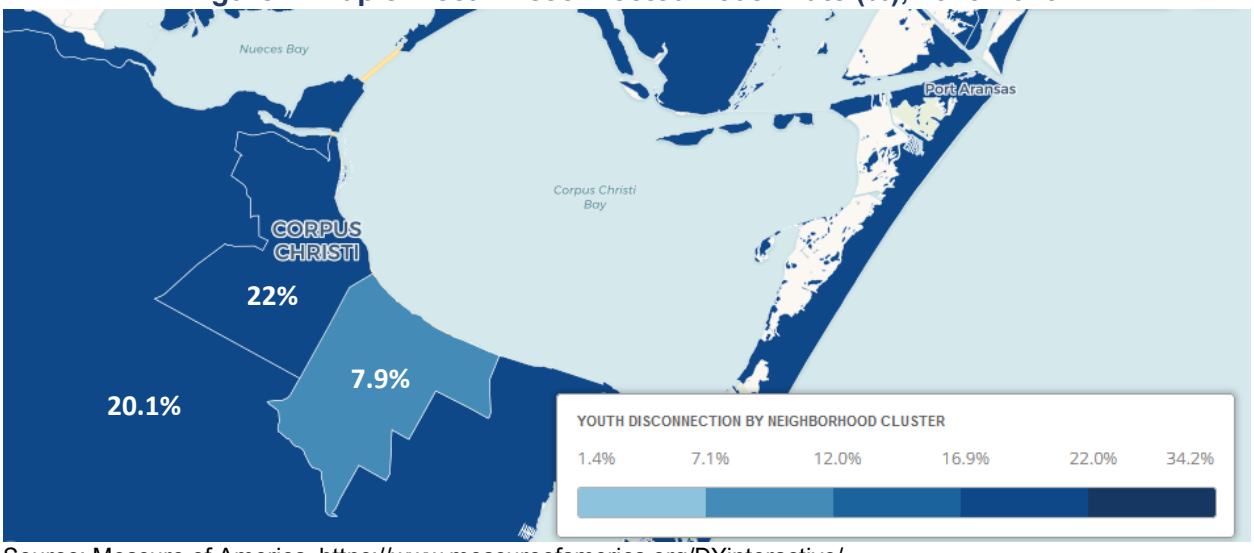
Table 1: Disconnected Youth Rate (%), Ages 16-24, Coastal Bend Counties

Aransas	12.5
Bee	28.8
Brooks	21.8
Duval	8.6
Jim Wells	18.5
Kenedy	–
Kleberg	7.7
Live Oak	12.2
Nueces	14.9

Source: Census 2015-19, ACS 5-Year Estimate.

According to the 2020 ACS data, the youth disconnection rate of the city of Corpus Christi is 14.9%. This amounts to roughly 6,100 local residents between the ages of 16 and 24 who are not employed or in school. The prevalence of disconnection is uneven across neighborhoods. The ACS's geographic definition of a "neighborhood" is called Public Use Microdata Area (PUMA). Corpus Christi consists of three PUMAs. The North-Central region west of Crosstown Expressway and near the city downtown has the highest youth disconnected rate of 22%, compared with 7.9% for the South-Central region spanning the rest of the city, including the Southside west of the Flour Bluff district on the eastern end of the city. The rest of the city, which also extends to the rest of Nueces County, has a youth disconnection rate of 20.1%.

Figure 4: Map of Local Disconnected Youth Rate (%), 2016-2020.



Source: Measure of America, https://www.measureofamerica.org/DYinteractive/.

Sociodemographic Disparities



Who is more likely to be disconnected in Corpus Christi? The following describes data based on the Census ACS 5-year estimates covering the years between 2001 and 2020. The data were extracted online from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (Ruggles et al., 2019). The averages over a rather long 20-year period render more reliable findings especially for relatively small cities like Corpus Christi. The inclusion of other major Texas cities along with Corpus Christi provides a comparative perspective. Overall, disparities across sociodemographic groups in Corpus Christi mirror other cities and the nation.

Demographic Characteristics

The youth disconnection rate varies by gender and age. Across the nation, females are more likely than males to be disconnected. In Corpus Christi, the youth disconnection rate is 11.4% for females, compared to 8.2% for males.

Table 2: Youth Disconnection Rate by Gender and Age (%)

City	Gender		Age Group		
	Male	Female	Age 16-24	Age 16-19	Age 20-24
Austin	4.5	7.7	6.1	4.4	6.9
Corpus Christi	8.2	11.4	9.8	5.8	13.1
Houston	8.3	14.6	11.4	8.3	13.4
San Antonio	8.1	13.4	10.8	7.3	13.4
U.S.	7.7	8.9	8.3	5.2	10.7

Source: Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2001-2020.

Within the youth age category between 16 and 24 years, there is a distinction between the younger 16-19 age group and the older 20-24 age group. The likelihood of being disconnected is notably lower for the younger age group, which includes proportionally more people in high school or college. In Corpus Christi, the overall youth disconnection rate (ages 16-24) is 9.8%, and those ages 20-24 are more than twice as likely as those ages 16-19 to be disconnected (13.1% vs. 5.8%).

Race and Ethnicity

Disparities in youth disconnection across communities are correlated with sociodemographic characteristics. The local patterns of demographic disparities in youth disconnection are similar to those at the state and national levels.

One observation on the disparate youth disconnection rates by race/ethnicity stands out. Hispanics tend to be most likely to be disconnected, while Asians tend to be least likely to be disconnected. Non-Hispanic whites are notably less likely to be disconnected than Blacks (African Americans) and Hispanics. Nationwide, American Indians are twice as likely to be disconnected as whites, but their disconnection rates among Texas cities are much closer to those of other races.

Table 3: Youth Disconnection Rate by Race and Ethnicity, Ages 16-24 (%)

City	Non-Hispanic White	Hispanic	Black	American Indian	Asian
Austin	4.8	10.8	10.8	6.1	1.3
Corpus Christi	9.9	12.4	11.3	6.7	0.1
Houston	10.5	14.2	12.5	7.2	5.1
San Antonio	10.0	12.2	12.6	3.5	2.4
U.S.	7.3	11.2	9.2	15.9	3.4

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2001-2020.

Marital Status

The youth disconnection rate also differs drastically between single and married persons. In Corpus Christi, youths who are single or have never married are much less likely (7.9%) than married persons, especially if they live with their

spouses (30.7%). The presence of children explains much of the difference between single and married people. The likelihood of youth in Corpus Christi to be disconnected from both work and school increases nearly threefold if they have at least one child (22.9% vs. 7.9%).

Table 4: Youth Disconnection Rate by Marital Status (%)

City	Marital Status			Children	
	Never Married/ Single	Married (Spouse Present)	Divorced	No Children	Has Children
Austin	4.7	21.5	21.9	4.3	25.7
Corpus Christi	7.9	30.7	26.9	7.9	22.9
Houston	9.1	29.2	7.9	9.1	26.4
San Antonio	9.1	23.7	21.7	8.4	26.9
U.S.	7.4	19.4	14.3	7.1	22.4

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2001-2020.

Other Socioeconomic Characteristics

There is also a correlation between educational attainment and youth disconnection. As for other Texas cities, the percentage of disconnected youth in Corpus Christi who only finish high school is nearly three times as high as those who have a college degree (13.6% vs. 4.8%). As for the nation as a whole, the disconnection rate for local youth having some college credentials (3.2%) is in fact lower than that for college degree holders largely because most of the former continue to attend college.

Table 5: Youth Disconnection Rate by Educational Attainment and Other Characteristics (%)

City	Educational Attainment			Language Proficiency		Other	
	High School	Some College	College Degree	No English	Limited English	Disability	Poverty
Austin	10.3	1.4	1.6	19.0	12.2	27.6	7.6
Corpus Christi	13.6	3.2	4.8	25.6	24.5	40.3	17.2
Houston	16.0	4.8	3.2	26.1	18.4	36.4	15.9
San Antonio	13.9	4.3	4.1	23.7	17.5	34.5	17.8
U.S.	13.1	3.3	3.7	27.7	17.3	38.7	12.5

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2001-2020.

Other than educational attainment, disproportionately more disconnected youth lack proficiency in English. In Corpus Christi, about one in four young adults who speak little or no English is disconnected. Even in Austin, which has a notably low youth disconnection rate of 6.1%, nearly one out of five youth (19%) who do not speak English is disconnected.

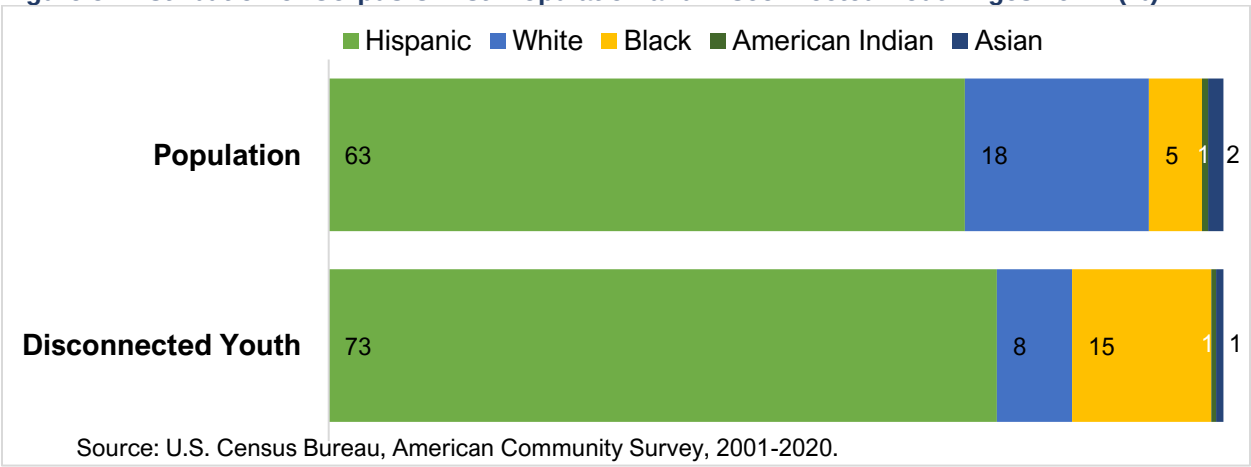
People with disabilities are also overrepresented among disconnected youth at the national and local levels. In Corpus Christi, a whopping 40% of youth with a disability status are disconnected. Likewise, proportionally more youths from poor families are disconnected. In Corpus Christi, youth living in poverty are almost twice as likely to be disconnected as others (17.2% vs. 9.8% average).

Demographic Distributions



The demographic distribution of disconnected youth in Corpus Christi by race/ethnicity does not closely reflect their populations. Overall, youth disconnection is more prevalent among people of color, except Asians. Hispanics are the majority population in Corpus Christi, making up 63% of the city population. According to the 2001-2020 ACS data, 73% of disconnected youth are Hispanic. Non-Hispanic whites make up 18% of the population but 8% of the disconnected youth population. Like Hispanics, disconnected youth are overrepresented by Blacks, with their share of this group about three times that of their overall population in the city.

Figure 5: Distribution of Corpus Christi Population and Disconnected Youth Ages 16-24 (%)

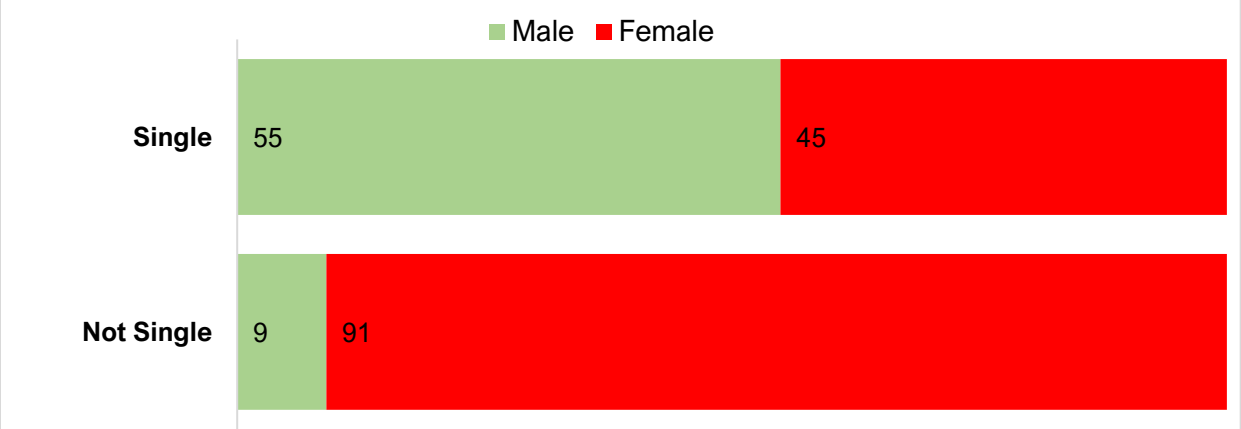


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2001-2020.

The comparative data also show that the prevalence of youth disconnection is affected by marital status. This factor more disproportionately affects youth in

Corpus Christi than elsewhere. Among youths who are single or never married, more males than females are disconnected. However, among those who are married or divorced, then more than nine out of ten disconnected youth (91%) are women. In other words, disconnection falls disproportionately on women.

Figure 5: Distribution of Corpus Christi Disconnected Youth by Gender and Marital Status (%)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2001-2020.

One reason for the disparity in the disconnection rate between married men and women is the social norm around marriage and parenthood. Among disconnected youth without children, women make up 42% of the group. However, the gender distribution changes dramatically for disconnected youth who have children. An overwhelming majority of them (96%) are female.

Figure 6: Distribution of Corpus Christi Disconnected Youth by Gender and Children (%)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2001-2020.

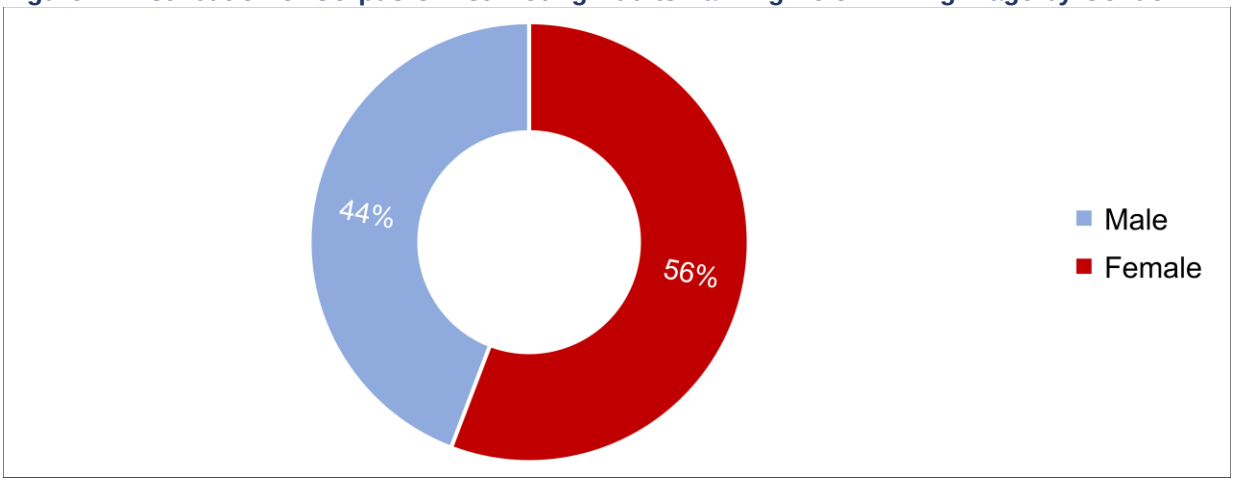
At Risk of Disconnection



Young adults without specific job skills or post-secondary education tend to earn less than a living wage to support themselves and their families. They are also at the most risk to fall below the poverty line or to become disconnected from the community altogether. This section provides a profile of those earning less than a living wage.

Based on localized expense data, the living wage rate is $16.58 an hour, or an annual wage earning of $34,476 for residents without children in the Corpus Christi metro area, according to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).[1] An analysis of wage earnings by occupations using the Lightcast database, roughly 53,500, or 40%, of residents in the city of Corpus Christi earn less than the living wage. Among those residents, an estimated 9,215, or 60%, are between 16 and 24 years old. Proportionally more of those workers (56%) are female.

Figure 7: Distribution of Corpus Christi Young Adults Earning Below Living Wage by Gender

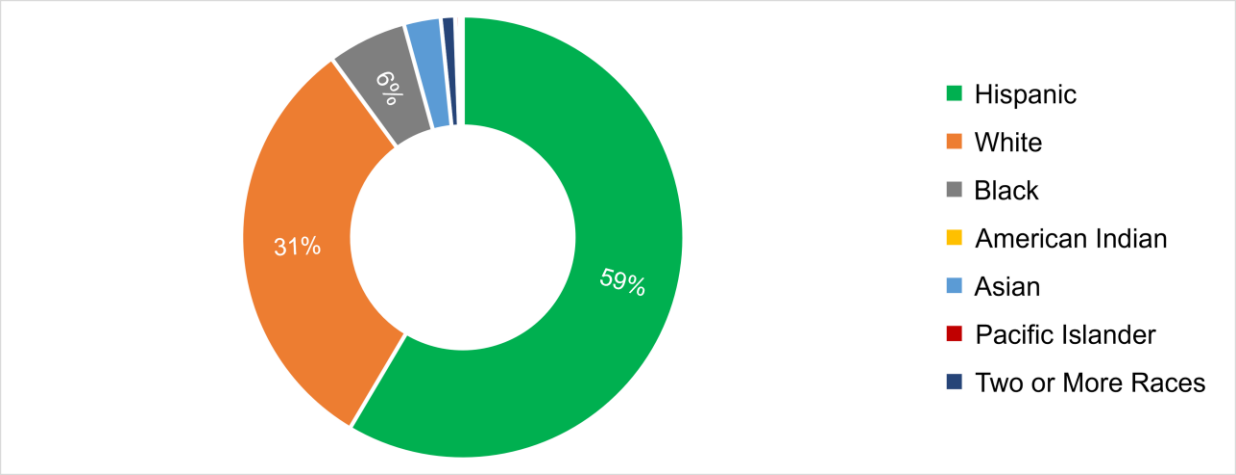


Source: Lightcast, 2022Q4.

[1] https://livingwage.mit.edu/metros/18580.

Corresponding to the city's overall demographic distribution, Hispanics account for 59% of local youth ages 16-24 earning less than the living wage, 31 non-Hispanic whites, 6% blacks, and 3% Asians.

Figure 8: Distribution of Corpus Christi Young Adults Earning Below Living Wage by Race/Ethnicity



Source: Lightcast, 2022Q4.

Nearly half of those local youth (47%) work in food preparation and other serving-related jobs in eating and drinking places. Another 18% of them are employed in sales occupations in the retail industry, followed by 7% in transportation jobs (moving and delivery services).

However, a significant portion of this workforce works only on a part-time basis because of a variety of non-economic reasons, including health problems, college attendance, or childcare. After removing part-time employees who account for 43% of all local workers, an estimated total of 5,238 youth ages 16-24 earn less than a living wage with a full-time job in Corpus Christi.

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