

Puerto Rican Youth Out of School and Work, 2005-2009

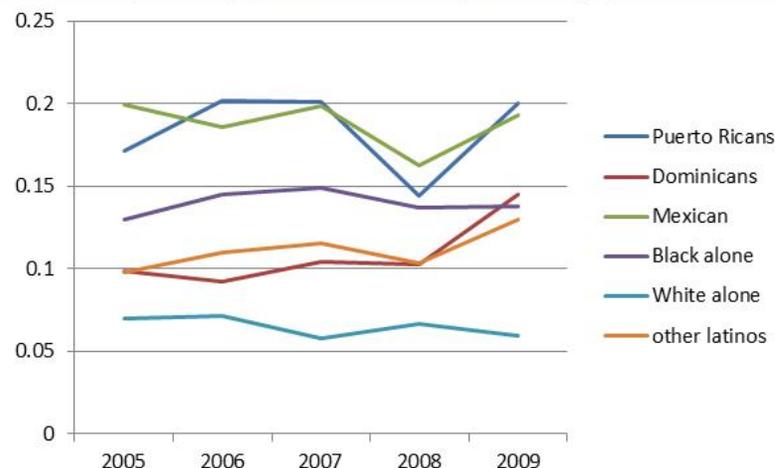
Edwin Meléndez and M. Anne Visser

By several recent counts, the United States is home to 2 to 3 million individuals ages 16 to 24 who are not in school or at work. This particular group of young adults has garnered considerable attention in the city over the last three months. In New York City, there are over three hundred thousand young individuals out of school and work.

Like many of you here today, we at the Center for Puerto Rican Studies, are concerned about the growing numbers of out of school and work youth –especially those of Puerto Rican and Latino descent. The reality is that the current economic climate will likely only contribute to the growth of this very vulnerable population. Such growth is cause for concern as studies continue to show that out of work and school youth are more likely to experience difficult transitions to and negative outcomes in adulthood including: persistent poverty, long term unemployment, poor mental and physical health, substance abuse and dependency, homelessness and violence.

Today, we would like to share with you a statistical profile of information on youth not at school or work in New York City, with particular attention given to populations who to the present have been somewhat overlooked in discussions of disconnected youth. Nationally, research on disconnected youth tends to paint a profile of a population that is largely African-American, male, and low-income. However as the report issued by the Community Service Society last year began to show, and as our analysis confirm, for New York City the population of disconnected youth includes not only a high level of African-American men, but also Latinos, and particularly Puerto Ricans, as well.

Graph I
Trends in Not at School or Work Youth in NYC, 2005-09
(% total population, 16 to 25 years of age)



According to the most recent data from the Census Bureau, from 2005 to 2009, the trends in the rates of non-participation in school or work have been fairly stable for Blacks and Whites, but have worsened for Latinos. Though Mexicans and Puerto Ricans show the highest rates exceeding those of Blacks, in 2009 rates for Dominicans and other Latinos jumped to the level of Blacks. According to the data, the average rates of non-participation in school or work from 2005 to 2009 of 17% for Puerto Rican and Mexican youth were the highest of all the major ethnic groups in the city. Dominicans and other Latinos have rates of about 11%. Though Blacks have a higher absolute number of youth not at school or work, the rates for Dominicans and Other Latinos are comparable to those of blacks in the city of 12%.

Table 1					
Individuals 16 to 25 Years of Age by Ethnicity, Labor Force Status and School Attendance, NYC 2005-2009					
	In School and in Labor Force	In the Labor Force, Not in School	In School, Not in Labor Force	Not in School Not in Labor Force	Total
Latinos	19.21%	36.63%	30.58%	13.57%	526,020
Puerto Rican	18.67%	30.29%	34.19%	16.86%	162,484
Dominican	22.30%	31.93%	35.19%	10.58%	117,071
Mexican	10.82%	53.76%	18.15%	17.27%	79,208
Other Latinos	21.55%	37.98%	29.75%	10.72%	167,257

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2005-2009 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

If one thing becomes clear from these rates of disconnection, is what we at the Center for Puerto Rican studies continue to argue, that understanding the variations which exist between Latino ethnic subgroups is not only important but imperative to designing effective, efficient, and equitable policy responses. The ethnic specific case in considering Latinos in the United States is important, we know that Puerto Ricans specifically experience higher rates of unemployment and poverty than other Latino Groups (Congressional Budget Office 2006; American Community Survey 2007), and the unique migration patterns and residency status of Puerto Ricans in the mainland United States, makes this ethnic-specific consideration important given that it can illuminate the unique challenges and experiences which Puerto Ricans may face that other population groups- even within the Latino community- do not (Pereira, Frase, and Mollenkopf 2008). Such differences underscore the realities that policy interventions aimed at disconnected youth in New York City, and especially Latino disconnected youth in New York City, must take the ethnic specific variations among Latino disconnected youth in account.