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**COVID-19 pandemic: Impacts on the work placements of postsecondary students in Canada**

by Katherine Wall

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# COVID-19 pandemic: Impacts on the work placements of postsecondary students in Canada

by Katherine Wall

## Cancellation of work placements raises academic and financial concerns among postsecondary students

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a number of impacts on the labour market situation of postsecondary students, with one being the cancellation of work placements such as co-op work terms, internships, practicums and residencies.

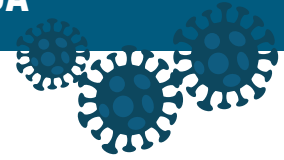
A recent crowdsourcing data collection completed by over 100,000 postsecondary students from April 19 to May 1, 2020 provides insight on how their work placements were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Readers should note that crowdsourcing data are not based on sampling principles. As a result, the findings reported below cannot be applied to the overall postsecondary student population in Canada. However, given the large number of participants, the results offer valuable insights on the experiences of participating students (see methodology section).

Over one-third (35%) of participants had a work placement cancelled or delayed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. This proportion was relatively similar among those enrolled in a college or CEGEP diploma (32%), a bachelor's degree (36%) and a doctoral program (32%). In contrast, it was higher for participants enrolled in a master's or professional degree (45%).

There were also differences by field of study across all levels of education. Crowdsourcing participants studying in the services (e.g. hairdressing, cooking) or health care fields were the most likely to have reported cancellations or postponements in their work placements (Chart 1). This is likely because work placements are particularly common, and sometimes mandatory, in these fields. Conversely, those in the arts, humanities and social sciences (26%) or science (30%) were the least likely to have reported a work placement was postponed or cancelled. Work placements are less common in these fields, so fewer students may have had one in the first place.<sup>1</sup>

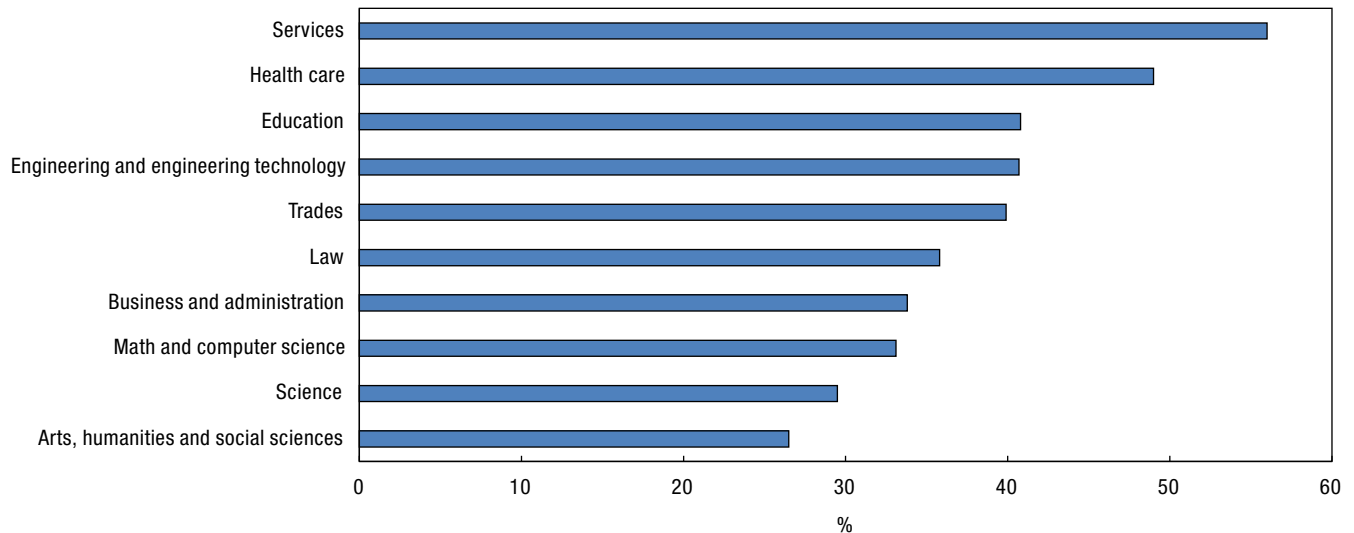


1. Data on the typical prevalence of work placements in different fields of study are from the National Graduates Survey, 2018.



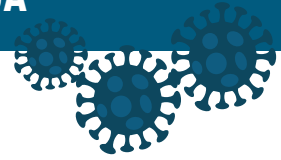
**Chart 1**

**Proportion of participants with a work placement cancelled or delayed due to COVID-19, by field of study**



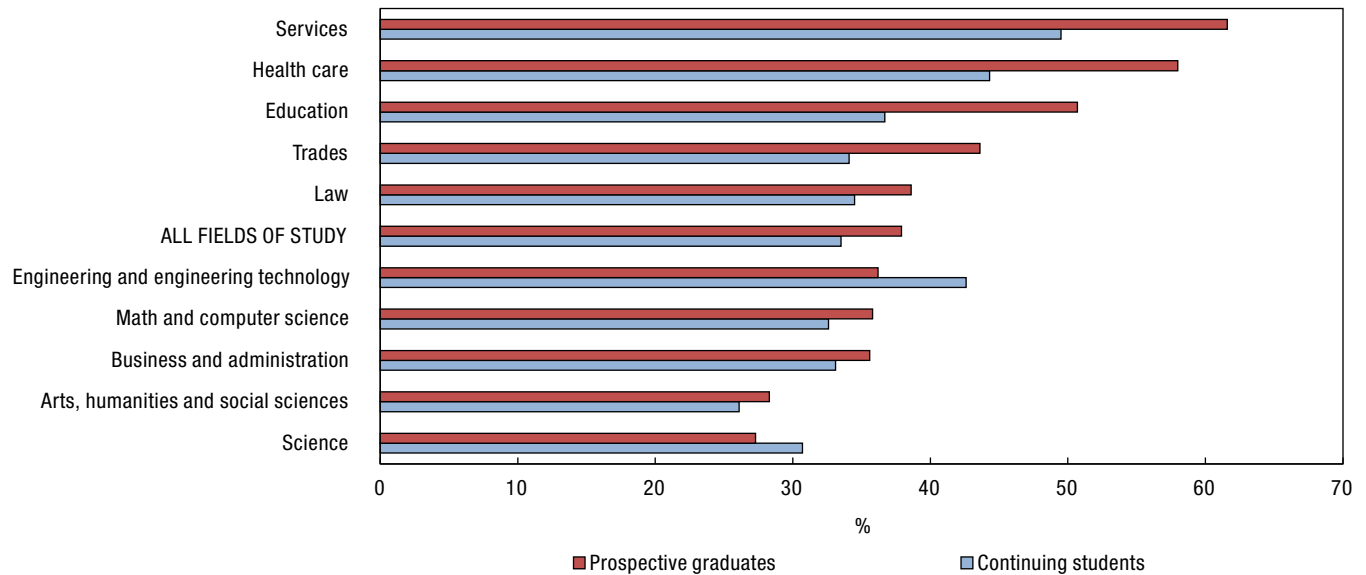
**Source:** Statistics Canada, Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on postsecondary students.

Work placements take place at different times throughout an academic program and may vary according to field of study. In fields such as services, health care, education and trades, where work placements commonly take place at the end of a program, cancellations or postponements were more likely among prospective graduates (those who planned to graduate in 2020), as they were at the end of their program at the time of the crowdsourcing. In fields where work placements were more likely to occur midway through the program, in forms such as co-ops (e.g. engineering and engineering technology, science), cancellations and delays were more frequent among continuing students (those who planned to graduate in a later year).



**Chart 2**

**Proportion of participants with a work placement cancelled or delayed due to COVID-19, by field of study and graduate status**



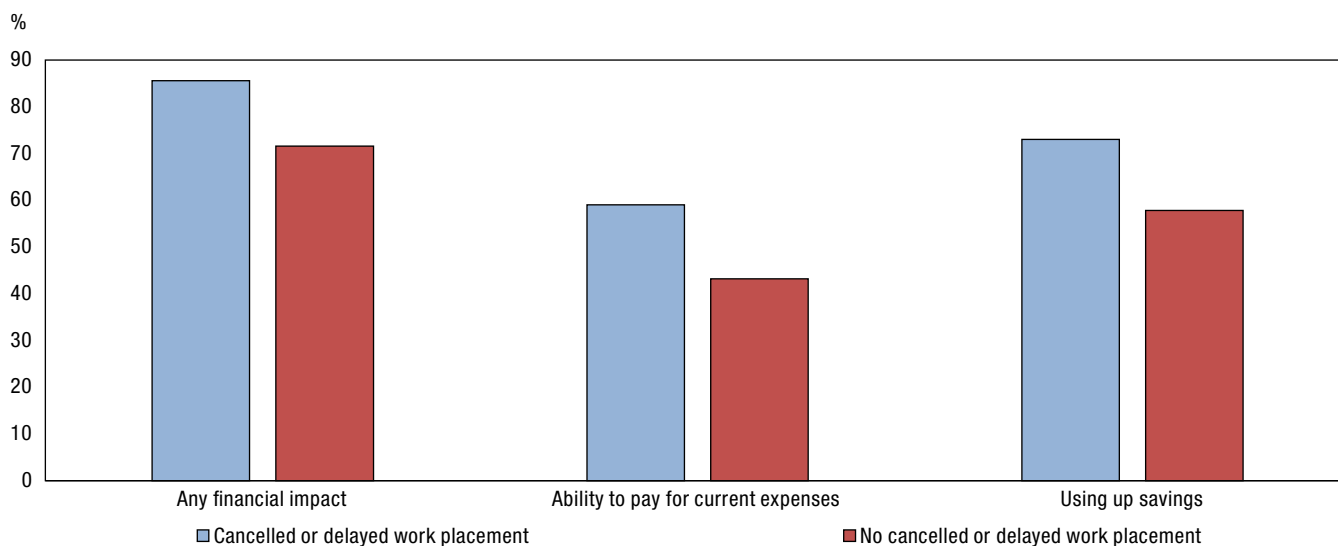
Source: Statistics Canada, Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on postsecondary students.

The cancellation or delay of a work placement could impact a graduate’s integration into the workforce and their future career prospects. Among prospective graduates, 52% who had a work placement delayed or cancelled were very or extremely concerned that their credential would be considered less valuable than the credentials of graduates unaffected by COVID-19. In comparison, 37% who did not have a work placement delayed or cancelled expressed significant concerns in this area.

Students in work placements are sometimes paid, and therefore a cancelled or delayed work placement could also impact their financial situation. About 86% of those with a cancelled or delayed work placement reported being very or extremely concerned about the impact of the pandemic on their personal finances, compared with 72% of those who did not have a cancelled or delayed work placement (Chart 3). Similar results were found for both continuing students and prospective graduates. Participants with a cancelled or delayed work placement were also more likely to be concerned about their ability to pay for current expenses or the need to use up their savings.



**Chart 3**  
**Proportion of participants very or extremely concerned about selected financial impacts of COVID-19 pandemic, by whether they had a work placement cancelled or delayed**



Source: Statistics Canada, Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on postsecondary students.

Crowdsourcing results also show that the COVID-19 pandemic had other academic impacts on students such as having academic work delayed, postponed or cancelled (see [Infographic](#)). Other papers in this series examine the [academic impacts](#) of the pandemic on students and explore their [financial concerns](#).

## Methodology

This article is based on a [crowdsourcing questionnaire](#) completed by over 100,000 postsecondary students from April 19 to May 1, 2020. Crowdsourcing data are not collected under a sample design using a probability-based sample. Data was benchmarked to the number of students by province or territory of study, level of study, and gender based on data from the Postsecondary Student Information System. Results are subject to potential bias due to the fact that responses from participants may not represent the non-participants. Therefore, caution should be exercised when interpreting the findings, and no inference about the total postsecondary student population should be made based on these results.