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ACCESS AND BARRIERS TO POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION: EVIDENCE FROM THE YOUTH IN TRANSITION SURVEY

ABSTRACT

We exploit the Youth in Transition Survey, Cohort A, to investigate access and barriers to postsecondary education (PSE). We first look at how access to PSE by age 21 is related to family characteristics, including family income and parental education. We find that the effects of the latter significantly dominate those of the former. Among the 25% of all youths who do not access PSE, 23% of this group state that they had no PSE aspirations and 43% report no barriers. Only 22% of the 25% who do not access PSE (or 5.5% of all youths in our sample) claim that "finances" constitute a barrier. Further analysis suggests that affordability per se is an issue in only a minority of those cases where finances are cited, suggesting that the real problem for the majority of those reporting financial barriers may be that they do not perceive PSE to be of sufficient value to be worth pursuing: "it costs too much" may mean "it is not worth it" rather than "I cannot afford to go." Our general conclusion is that cultural factors are the principal determinants of PSE participation. Policy implications are discussed.

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