

Young people speak out about the unprecedented collapse in their living conditions since the pandemic began

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A majority of the United States' young adult population has been forced to place its life on hold as the pandemic has erased the opportunity to move out of their parents' homes or otherwise gain independence. This is the reality that has been exposed by a recent Pew Research Center report showing 52 percent of people between the ages of 18-29 are living at home with their parents.

According to the study, this is the highest share of young people living at home since the end of the Great Depression in 1940. As shocking as it is, this number belies the actual social crisis that is hidden beneath it.

The psychological impact of the chasm that has opened up between expectations for the future and the objective conditions facing millions of people is reflected by a national survey conducted by researchers from four universities and published this month by the COVID-19 Consortium for Understanding. The survey on mental health conditions for people in Generation Z, or young adults between 18 and 24, is a damning depiction of the mental and psychological destruction being wreaked on this generation.

According to the research, about 47.3 percent of young people experienced some sort of depressive symptoms during the last few months. The most common causes for depression seen in this age group are closure of schools (51 percent), working from home (41 percent), and suffering a pay cut. This compares to only 3.4 percent of people in this age group in 2013-2014 reporting suicidal thoughts, anxiety or sleep disruption.

"I've never been in a situation in my life when I was financially comfortable," said Dasilva, who has been forced to live with relatives along with her husband

since spring. In a conversation with the *World Socialist Web Site*, she explained that her family in Michigan, where she lives, has caught COVID-19. This includes her aunt, uncle and cousin.

Prior to the pandemic, Dasilva and her husband were part of the performance industry. However, as live music venues, theatre and other creative arts have been upended, she admits that she has "no idea where I see myself in five years."

In addition to her financial situation, Michigan has once again become hard-hit by the coronavirus. The state ranks eighth in the country with almost 390,000 COVID-19 cases and over 9,500 deaths since March.

Democratic Governor Gretchen Whitmer re-imposed a 3-4 week shutdown of restaurants and bars across the state last month without any new financial aid for those affected. While being largely ineffective to stem new outbreaks—since the auto factories and other large workplaces remain open without any significant restrictions—the shutdowns will continue to devastate the retail and service industry, which largely employs young people.

David, a 21-year old student and grocery worker in Virginia, told the WSWs that the "state of the economy scares me." During the first weeks of the pandemic, millions were laid off on a weekly basis, leading to tens of millions of people unemployed or underemployed. Even as millions are cut off from the last remnants of unemployment benefits which expire at the end of this month, hundreds of thousands continue to apply for assistance from their states on a weekly basis.

"Being stuck with parents, it used to be something that people would get made fun of for," David said

sarcastically. “Now we can see that this is a real concern for society.” Speaking about his own personal circumstances, David explained “I live with my parents but my mother was furloughed for three months” during spring. “She didn’t get paid anything during this time, she is labeled an ‘independent contractor,’” a term businesses often affix to workers in order to avoid paying them unemployment or healthcare benefits.

“I had to pay the bills. While the bill collectors lowered the cost of the mortgage and things like that, I was the only one working” in the entire house, he said. On top of this, David’s grandmother, a food stamp recipient, passed away during summer. Not only did this further traumatize family members, “but she was the only other person in the house getting any sort of financial support,” he said.

“I’m an essential worker,” he said in conclusion. “I was going to quit my job to pursue a career [in visual arts], but that field isn’t hiring right now. I don’t know when things will be normal again. I don’t know when I’ll be able to see my friends. This is a struggle.”

As misery among the working population grows millions are turning toward politics of a decidedly left-wing and anti-capitalist variety. According to a survey conducted by YouGov this year, the support for socialism among young people has increased significantly. Among the Gen Z group, support grew from 40 percent in 2019 to 49 percent this year. The report also indicated that 60 percent of Millennials are looking for an alternative to capitalism.

Mark, another young worker that was laid off in September, said that his plans to move out of his parents’ house “pretty much vanished” when COVID-19 emerged. “There aren’t any jobs beyond entry level, with horrible \$10-12 per-hour pay.”

Speaking about the living situation for his friends, he said “those that can afford it are living together as roommates.” Even this poses difficulties, due to the fact that “landlords are increasing rent.” Mark explained that he had heard stories about states setting up courthouses simply to deal with the growth in evictions as moratoriums on owed rent expire.

“The unemployment benefits [made available by the CARES Act] were super helpful,” he said. “But when the expanded \$600 weekly pay ended in July, jobs didn’t come back.” Mark said he had a job lined up with the local county government but the pandemic

forced the office to furlough workers.

“The coronavirus proves that under the current system, capitalism can’t deal with the issue of joblessness,” he concluded. “It makes you wonder what things will be like when there are no expanded benefits for people.”

To combat the social catastrophe resulting from the criminal response of the ruling class to the pandemic, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) and the Socialist Equality Party urge young people to join our movement and take up the fight for socialism.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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