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SCHOOL LEAVERS SURVEY

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SCHOOL LEAVERS SURVEY

INTRODUCTION:

The School Leavers Survey explores the environmental, social, attitudinal, personal and economic factors that may contribute to the early departure of students from school. As well, it compares the labour market experiences and the quality of life of early school leavers with the experiences of those who graduated from school.

This release highlights some of the early results of the survey, focusing on why students leave, their satisfaction with leaving, their employment status, the likelihood of their returning to school and the overall distribution of leavers by gender and by province. These results represent a very small proportion of the very rich data base developed by the survey, and future analysis will yield data on issues such as youth integration into the labour market, the creation of typologies of school leavers, the mechanisms involved in the process of dropping out of school, and what effect leaving school has on earning potential.

Preparatory research for the Survey design indicated that, from the student's point of view, leaving school is not an event, but a process.¹ Not only do many students leave and return, but also some have difficulty even identifying or recognizing a specific point in time when they actually left school.

The survey was conducted by Statistics Canada between April and June 1991 under a contract from Employment and Immigration Canada. A sample of 9460 youths was contacted and asked to self-identify whether they were still in school, had graduated, or had left school before graduating. The survey design allowed for an over-sampling of the latter group, the potential school leavers, in order that their characteristics could be more fully described.²

¹ As background to the development of the survey on School Leavers, and to give qualitative information on the process of leaving school, Statistics Canada conducted 38 focus groups across Canada including school leavers, students, teachers, and educational experts. The Report on the focus groups is available from Doug Higgins, Chief, Projections and Analysis Section, Education, Culture and Tourism Division.

² For a fuller description of the methodology see "Methodological Notes" on the last page of this release.

SURVEY RESULTS

Why do students leave?

Almost three out of every ten students, males or females, who had ever left school cited "boredom" as a reason for leaving school. Other than this, however, the reasons given by males and females differed considerably. Although over all, almost the same number of students cited "preferred work to school", this reason was noted primarily by males (33.8% as compared to 16.2%). And while males tended to feel that they had to work or left for financial reasons (15.4%) or that they had teacher problems (11.1%), females more often cited problems at home (11.9%) or pregnancy or marriage (9.4%). [Table 1, Chart 1].

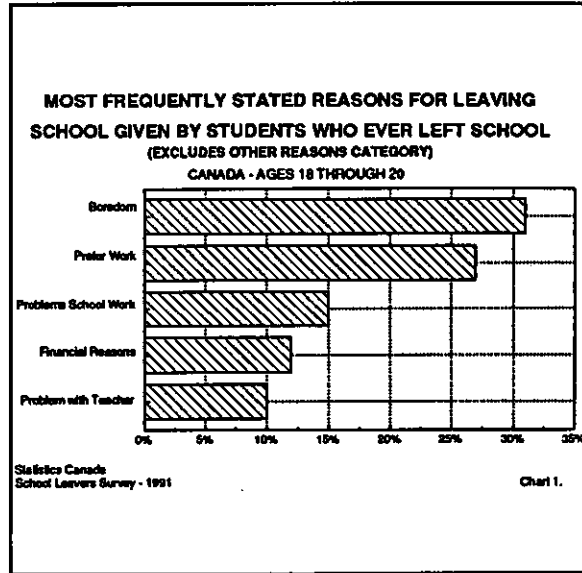


Table 1.

**SIX MOST FREQUENTLY STATED REASONS FOR LEAVING SCHOOL
GIVEN BY STUDENTS WHO EVER LEFT SCHOOL
AGES 18 THROUGH 20**

Reasons	Males (%)	CV (1)	Females (%)	CV	Both Sexes (%)	CV
Boredom	30.6	6.6	31.0	8.3	30.7	5.2
Other Reasons	26.8	7.3	36.4	7.1	30.6	5.1
Preferred Work to School	33.8	6.2	16.2	12.9	26.9	5.8
Problems with School Work	13.7	11.2	16.8	12.3	14.9	8.3
Had to Work/Financial Rsns	15.4	10.8	--	--	11.8	9.6
Teacher Problems	11.1	12.3	--	--	9.8	10.1
Problems at Home	--	--	11.9	15.7	--	--
Pregnancy/Marriage	--	--	9.4	14.3	--	--

(1) Coefficient of variation.

When asked to focus on the most important reason for leaving school, slightly over 1 in 5 students reported that they "preferred working to attending classes", and almost the same number reported being "bored". "Problems with school work" and "financial reasons" seemed to be of considerably less importance, each being cited by 8% of the youths, and "problems with the teacher", at 6.4%, ranked below "No Main Reason". [Table 2, Chart 2].

Differences by gender were more marked for the most important reason for leaving. Females more often cited "problems with school work" (12.5%) and "pregnancy/marriage" (9%). "Preferring work to school" dominated the reasons for leaving for males, with slightly over one in four reporting that as the most important reason for leaving while only one in ten females cited this as the most important reason.

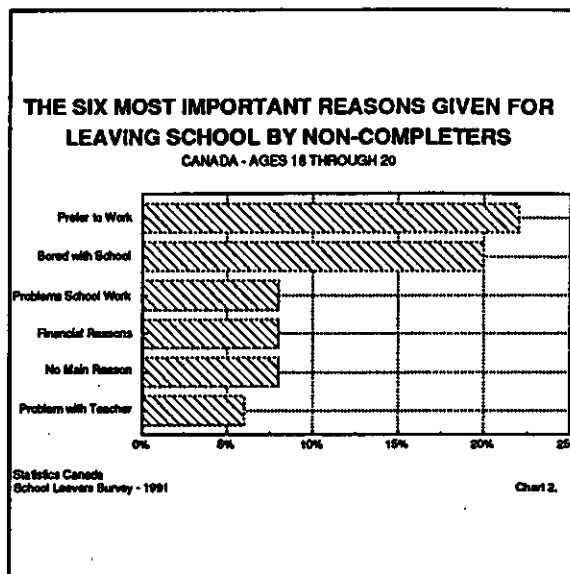


Table 2.

**DISTRIBUTION OF MOST IMPORTANT REASON FOR LEAVING SCHOOL
GIVEN BY NON-COMPLETERS
TOP FIVE REASONS BY SEX
CANADA-AGES 18 THROUGH 20**

Reasons	Estimated Male Dstrbtn (%)	CV	Estimated Female Dstrbtn (%)	CV	Estimated Total Dstrbn (%)	CV
Preferred Work to School	28.3	8.0	10.4*	18.2	21.5	7.5
Boredom	19.2	10.0	21.9	11.9	20.2	7.7
Problems with School Work	--	--	12.5*	16.6	8.0	12.9
Had to Work/Financial Rsns	9.2	16.3	--	--	8.0	13.4
No Main Reason	7.0*	18.4	9.1*	20.8	7.8	13.8
Teacher Problems	7.9*	17.1	--	--	6.4	14.6
Pregnancy/Marriage	--	--	9.0	15.9	--	--

Does academic performance influence school leaving?

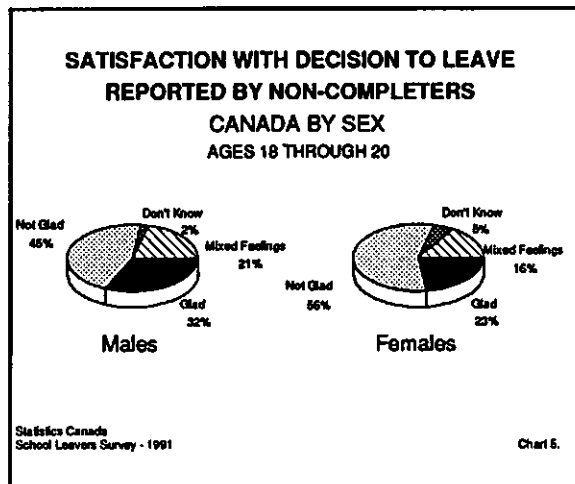
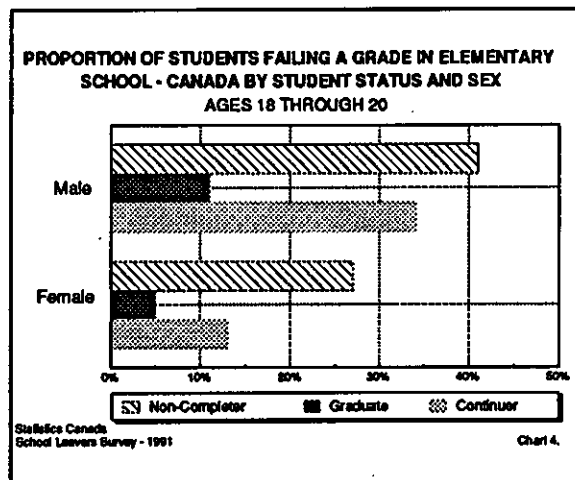
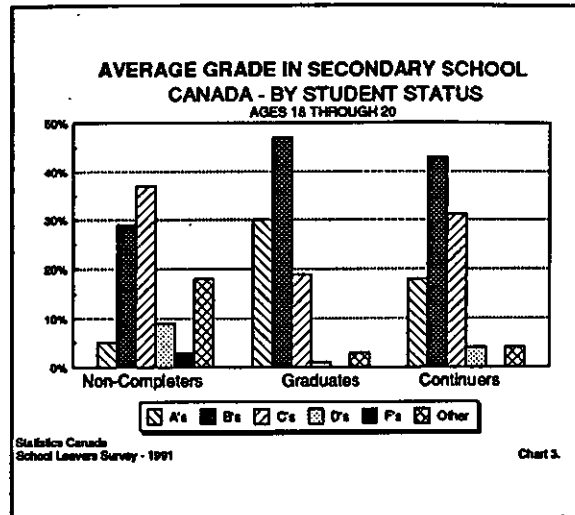
All youths in the survey -- the graduates, those that were still students, and those who had left school without completing -- were asked to estimate and report their average grade in secondary school. The pattern reported by these three categories of youths, and illustrated in [Chart 3], does show a stronger academic performance by graduates and continuers. However, it also shows that many of the students who left school without a certificate or diploma did not report failing grades. Over 30% of these non-completers reported averages of A or B, while just over 10% reported D's or F's. This is fairly consistent with the fact that only 8% reported "problems with school work" as the most important reason for leaving.

Is early school failure a factor?

Even though few students reported a relationship between current difficulties with school work and school leaving, respondents to the survey were asked to report if they had ever failed a grade in elementary school. The pattern of response illustrated in [Chart 4] suggests that there may be a relationship between early failure and the non-completion of schooling that warrants further research. For both males and females there is a higher incidence of early grade failing with eventual non-graduation from secondary school.

Are leavers glad they left?

Respondents who reported having left the school system were asked if they were satisfied with that decision. Approximately 1 out of every 3 males and 1 out of every 4 females reported they were glad they had left [Chart 5]. On the other hand, for both sexes, approximately 1 out of every 2 youths reported they were not happy that they had left before completion.



Do leavers get jobs?

How do school leavers fare in the labour market? Survey results indicate that in the 18 to 20 age group, about the same percentage of graduates and non-completers found jobs: 60% of the graduates and 57.3% of the school leavers. [Table 3] However, there are indications that the situation may change considerably in the future. Of the graduates, almost 22% are still students, and just 7% are unemployed. Of the non-completers, over 20% are unemployed, either looking for work (10.7%) or not (10.6%). This latter category often indicates a "discouraged worker", one who has had a repeated lack of success in finding and holding employment. The picture for females leaving school is particularly severe, with only 47% working and 35% unemployed.

Table 3.

DISTRIBUTION OF GRADUATES AND NON-COMPLETERS
BY THEIR LABOUR FORCE STATUS
CANADA BY SEX
AGES 18 THROUGH 20

Status / Sex	Estimated Male Distrib.(%)	CV	Estimated Female Distrib.(%)	CV	Estimated Total Distrib.(%)	CV
Graduates						
Working	60.6	2.1	59.4	1.9	60.0	1.4
Student	21.2	5.4	22.4	4.7	21.8	3.6
On Recall	12.2	7.7	10.2	8.1	11.1	5.6
Looking for job	4.8	13.0	5.1	11.6	5.0	8.7
Not Looking	1.3**	26.5	2.9	15.5	2.1	13.5
Non-Completers						
Working	63.7	3.7	47.0	6.5	57.3	3.3
Student	2.6**	27.2	5.1**	25.7	3.5*	18.7
On Recall	20.7	9.7	12.9	15.7	17.7	8.3
Looking for Job	9.7	14.9	12.5	16.1	10.7	11.0
Not Looking	3.3**	27.0	22.5	11.2	10.6	10.9

Do leavers ever return?

Almost half of those who reported leaving school at some point also reported returning [Table 4]. This can be viewed either as support for the pattern of leaving as a process rather than a single event or as a return for later school completion. Slightly over 5% of those who reported graduating or continuing in school reported having left and subsequently returned at some point in their schooling [Table 5].

Table 4.

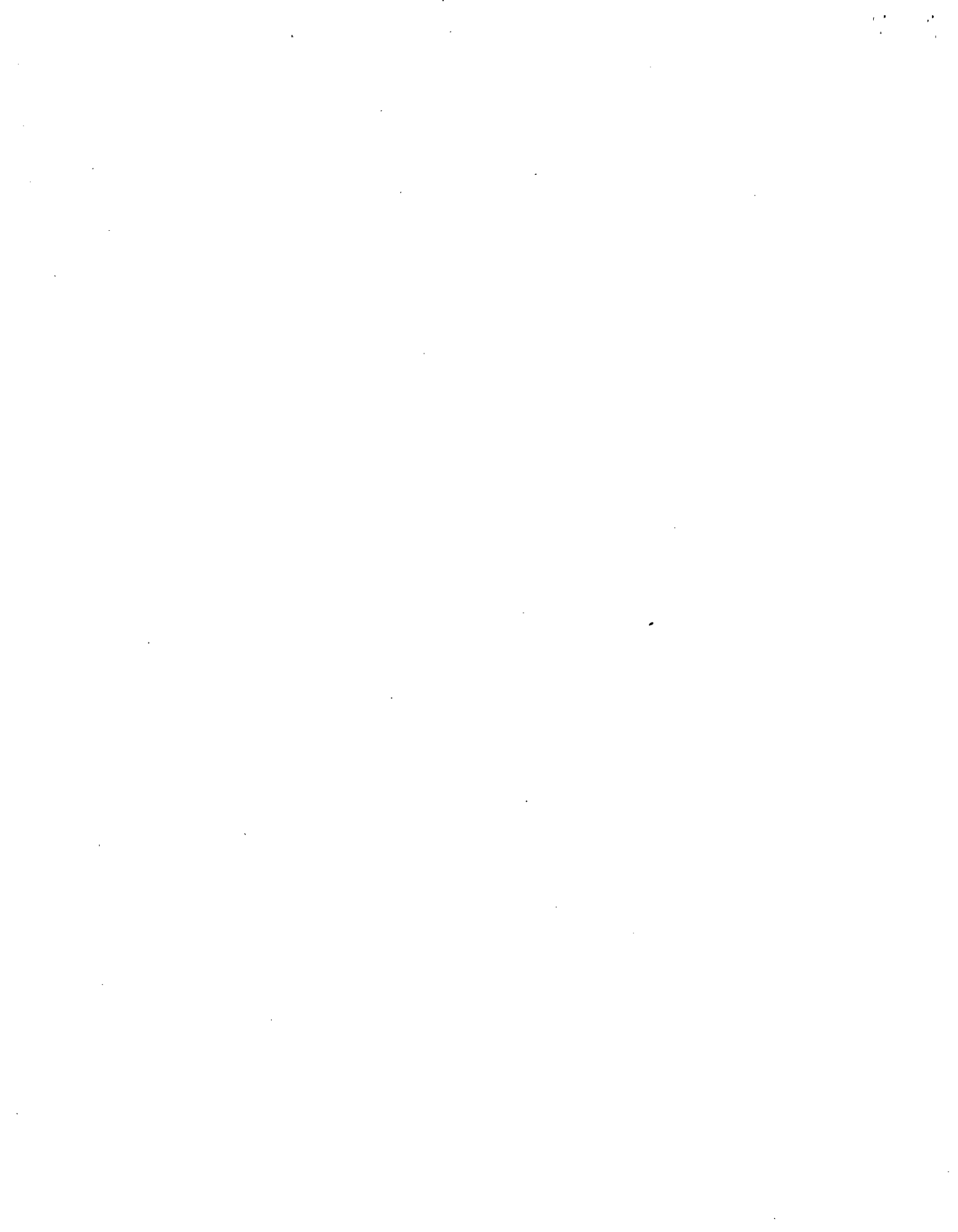
RETURNER RATE FOR EVER LEFT SCHOOL
CANADA BY AGE AND SEX

Age and Sex	Estimated Male Returner Rates(%)	CV	Estimated Female Returner Rates(%)	CV	Estimated Total Returner Rates(%)	CV
Age 18	45.5	9.1	53.3	9.3	48.6	6.5
Age 19	41.8	8.6	44.2	9.6	42.8	6.4
Age 20	50.5	7.2	45.6	10.5	48.6	6.0
Ages 18-20	46.3	4.8	47.3	5.7	46.7	3.7

Table 5.

RETURNER RATE FOR GRADUATES AND CONTINUERS
CANADA BY SEX
AGES 18 THROUGH 20

Sex	Estimated Graduate Returner Rates(%)	CV	Estimated Continuer Returner Rates(%)	CV	Estimated Total Returner Rates(%)	CV
Male	3.0*	18.5	14.3	12.0	6.2	10.2
Female	3.4*	16.9	9.6	15.7	4.8	11.6
Total	3.2	12.5	12.1	9.6	5.5	7.7



What proportion of youths have ever left school?

Estimates based on the self-reporting of youths who were 20 years old in April 1991 indicate that nearly 24% of students had ever dropped out of school at some time during their school career. [Table 6].

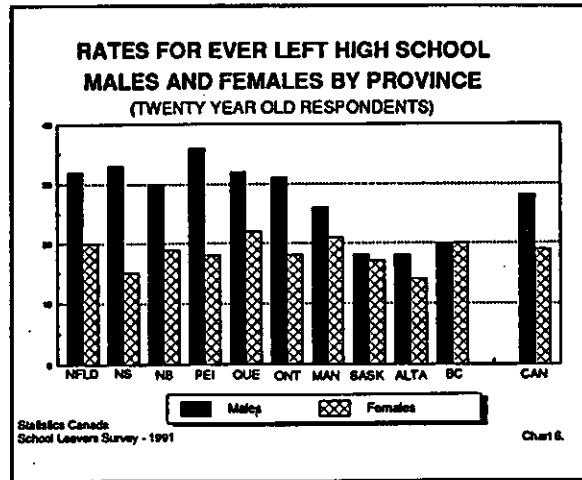
Table 6.

RATES FOR EVER LEFT HIGH SCHOOL
TWENTY YEAR OLD RESPONDENTS
CANADA AND PROVINCES BY SEX

Province	Estimated Male Rates(%)	CV	Estimated Female Rates(%)	CV	Estimated Total Rates(%)	CV
Nfld	31.6	8.3	19.7	12.7	25.9	7.1
PEI	36.0	7.0	18.0	11.7	26.8	6.2
NS	33.0	8.4	15.3*	16.7	25.0	7.7
NB	29.9	9.7	19.1	15.0	24.7	8.3
Que	32.1	10.3	22.4	14.2	27.3	8.4
Ont	30.9	9.7	17.8*	16.7	24.7	8.6
Man	26.1	11.0	20.5	14.3	23.5	8.8
Sask	17.8	16.0	16.6*	17.2	17.2	11.7
Alta	17.7*	16.9	14.4*	19.7	16.2	12.8
BC	20.3	15.1	19.5*	16.6	20.0	11.1
Canada	28.0	5.2	18.9	7.6	23.7	4.3

The provincial distributions are based on where students reported they were last in school. By this measurement, Quebec has the highest overall rate of reported school leaving (27.3%), and Alberta and Saskatchewan the lowest (16.2% and 17.2% respectively).

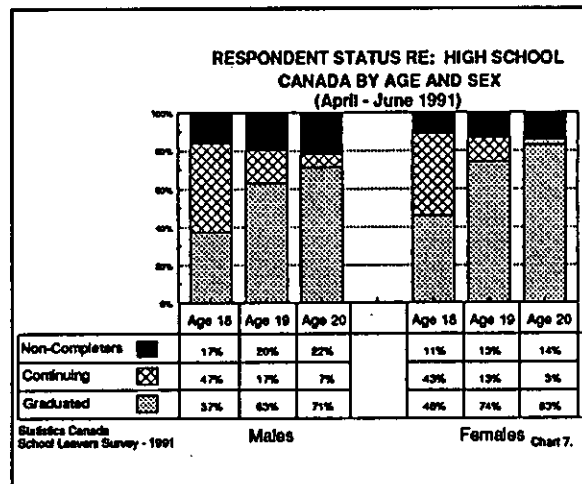
The difference between the reported school leavings for males and females is significant at the Canada level, 28% for males and less than 19% for females. This pattern differs across the country, however. The difference is most pronounced in the Atlantic provinces where the rates for males leaving school were found to be 10 to 18 percentage points higher than those for females, and least pronounced in the western provinces where the maximum difference was less than 6 percentage points [Chart 6].



The differences by gender present a clear pattern when the rates of leaving, graduating and continuing are compared at all ages (18 through 20) at the Canada level. In general, females graduate sooner and at a higher rate than the male population. In fact, the proportion of non-completers in the male population appears to continue to grow by about one percentage points per annum more than the females [Chart 7].

METHODOLOGICAL NOTES:

Data were collected between April and June 1991, using a Computer Assisted Telephone Interview (CATI) system, from a cohort of youths 18 to 20 years of age who were subsequently classified into one of three groups; Graduates (graduated from high school), Continuers (currently attending high school) and Non-completers (not attending and did not complete high school).



The sample frame for the survey was the Family Allowance File. The sample was drawn from this list, matched to telephone files and then used to contact potential respondents through their parents. Other tracing methods were used to locate the parents when the match proved ineffective and when parents were unable to provide information that would lead to finding the selected youth. A stratified sample design was used for the survey, utilizing the variables age and Province of residence available from the file for the stratification. In addition, variables which indicated a cancellation of payments prior to age eighteen, such as Parents no longer support child; Married; and, Child has income, were used to further stratify the population, in order to increase the probability of identifying a non-completer.

The 23.7% "Ever Left School" rate calculated in the "School Leavers Survey" represents the proportion of 20 year-olds in April 1991 who had ever left school for a period of time during their school career. The rate is lower than the 30% to 33% figure used by Employment and Immigration as an estimate of drop-outs. These latter estimates are derived from administrative data which relate the number of graduates from the final year of secondary school to the number of grade 9 students at the start of the academic year 3 years earlier. These data are adjusted for deaths and migration, but not for other factors.

For example, a student who did not graduate from secondary school but continued on to another type of school, such as a trade school would, under this method, be identified as a drop-out, while the School Leavers Survey would classify these people as continuing students. There are other reasons why the two estimates differ. The 23.7% "Ever Left School" rate derived from the "School Leavers Survey" refers to one specific cohort of students, 20 year-olds. The 30% to 33% administrative data estimate does not. Changes in the classification of special education or ungraded students either including or excluding them in graded enrolment, particularly grade 9 enrolment, can influence the magnitude of the administrative rate. Respondents to the School Leavers Survey self-identified themselves as having continued in school, graduated from school or left school before graduation. The administrative estimate considers anyone who did not graduate from Grade 12 to be a drop-out while respondents to the School Leavers Survey may have considered themselves a graduate if they received a certificate after completing Grade 10.

NOTE: * High sampling variability associated with the estimate, it should be used with caution.

NOTE: ** Very high sampling variability associated with the estimate, use with extreme caution.

NOTE: (1) CV - Coefficient of variation

In general, the value of the sampling error is unknown, but it is possible to estimate its probable size using sample data. The sampling variance gives us an indication of the size of the sampling error. The size of the sampling error is often reported using the standard deviation (the square root of the sampling variance) or the coefficient of variation (CV).

The coefficient of variation is the ratio of the standard deviation to the mean. Generally speaking, it means that two times out of three, the error in the estimates will be less than or equal to the value of the CV. For example if the CV is .10, (or 10%), then the standard deviation is 10% of the mean value of the estimate. Thus, if the estimate falls within one standard deviation of the true mean value (which it does two times out of three), then the error will be 10% or less, i.e. there is a 67% chance that the error will be 10% or less.

