Research for Policy: Responding to COVID-19 -- Education and Social Development
Date/time: 26 May 2020 (1:00-2:00 pm EST)

Moderator: Jacques Fauteux, Assistant Chief Statistician, Strategic Engagement Field, StatsCan

Panelists:
- Catherine Haeck, Associate Professor of Economics (UQAM)
- Marc Frenette, Assistant Director and Research Manager, Social Analysis and Modelling Division (Statistics Canada)
- Cindy Perry, Director, Policy Research and Analysis Branch (Ministry of Children and Community Services, Ontario)
- Alexandra Blair, Postdoctoral Researcher, Dalla Lana School of Public Health (University of Toronto)

Moderator notes
- The moderator welcomes the panelists and participants in coming together to convene and connect with colleagues during this extraordinary time in our country's history, noting that 223 colleagues from universities across the country, from various levels of government and from the nonprofit sector, registered for the webinar.
- Also noted: CRDCN is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year and would like to thank CFI, CIHR, SSHRC, Statistics Canada, university partners from across the country as well as provincial government and private sector partners for their ongoing support.

Note on this summary document
There was a wealth of ideas presented and exchanged during each of the webinars and we encourage you to watch the recordings in full: https://crdcn.org/covid-19-webinar-series. In this summary, we present a brief overview of the discussion, framed according to a delineation that emerged in each of the webinars: (1) data and research to inform policy decisions in the shorter term, and (2) research and policy questions for the medium and longer term. That said, there are, of course, strong links between these and the research and policy questions discussed during the webinars in some way involved the full spectrum of shorter to longer term implications.

Data and research to inform policy decisions in the shorter term
- COVID-19 has had far-reaching impacts in all aspects of society like we've never seen before and Statistics Canada has responded to this in a very timely way. On the analytics side, StatCan immediately initiated a new research paper series. On the data production side, StatCan is creating new, timely, malleable datasets to fill data gaps to address issues as they emerge, through efforts such as panels and crowdsourcing (see https://www.statcan.gc.ca/eng/covid19).
- A Vancouver School of Economics at UBC (to be discussed further during the webinar on May 28, 2020) and UQAM (see https://grch.esg.uqam.ca/en/covid/) collaboration has developed a "risk tool" to look at the risk of contamination given the employment of an individual (this is one of four projects that has gained remote access to RDC-level data during the lockdown).
- A UQAM project started a year ago identifies significant inequality in education across Canada, with links to socio-economic status of parents; gaps will likely increase as a result of the pandemic (see https://grch.esg.uqam.ca/en/working-papers-series/).

- The 2018 Canadian Internet Use Survey found that although the vast majority of school children had home Internet access, there are clear inequities in the ability of school children to actively participate in online education.
- One area of focus for Ontario's Ministry of Children and Community Services (MCCS) is to better understand the impact of COVID on vulnerable populations using real-time data (operational data, administrative data, data from external partners, data from other ministries). They are also looking at how social assistance caseloads are changing and are engaged in scenario-based planning using economic forecasts. They are looking to the research community in particular to fill some evidence gaps related to recovery, such as risk prevention and mitigation strategies.
- It would be useful to be able to add questions to some of the StatCan crowdsourcing surveys to better understand the social and educational impacts of COVID-19.

Research and policy questions for the medium and longer term
- Some social concerns that have arisen as a result of COVID are not new concerns, they existed pre-COVID, but have taken on a new life because of COVID, for example: social isolation among seniors; food insecurity; mental health issues.
- The discontinuation of the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth in 2008 has left a significant data gap; the pandemic has made how very little we know even more striking. Some questions: How is the quality of teaching? Are parents able to cope with the demands of schooling?
- It isn't clear what enrollment numbers will be in the fall for international post-secondary students or the impacts of this on the reliance of Canadian post-secondary institutions on international students.
- StatCan simulated the earnings losses due to the COVID-related economic downturn brought upon by COVID; this year's class of high school and post-secondary graduates could lose approximately $25,000 over the next five years as a result of the downturn.
- MCCS work on intermediate and long term impacts includes: impacts on vulnerable populations over time; impacts on children (those most likely to fall behind); implications for long term trajectories (graduation rates and labour market prospects); the intersection of multiple vulnerabilities over the long term; intergenerational patterns. They are also evaluating what emergency response efforts have worked well to protect the most vulnerable and identifying ways to make existing programs more equitable.
- Public health researchers and epidemiologists at the University of Toronto and policy partner, the Division for Social Determinants of Health at the Public Health Agency of Canada, are engaged in research a project on the "Social determinants and social impacts of COVID-19 in Canada" to monitor emerging evidence of social inequalities and COVID-19 outcomes (this is one of four projects that has gained remote access to RDC-level data during the lockdown). They are interested in whether there is social patterning across educational attainment, income and various other factors.

Keeping the conversation going …
CRDCN is creating a framework based on the key research and policy questions discussed in the webinars to guide concrete next steps. We will be launching CRDCN community channels on Slack in June 2020 in order to provide a platform -- for researchers, data experts, policy-makers and program deliverers-- to connect about key questions, map out next steps and collaborate to advance research

and policy efforts. Stay tuned and join us as we continue to support the important work of the CRDCN community.