

WALTON FAMILY FOUNDATION

Voices of Gen Z Study

Gen Z Wants to Do Good: How Helping Others Supports Meaning and Wellbeing



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Table of Contents

- 2 Gen Zers Want Careers That Help Others:
Let's Help Them Get There
- 4 Executive Summary
- 5 Key Findings
- 6 Detailed Findings
- 24 Conclusion
- 25 Methodology



Gen Zers Want Careers That Help Others: Let's Help Them Get There

Foreword by Making Caring Common

We were delighted to collaborate with Gallup and the Walton Family Foundation on the following report on Gen Z. This generation (those born between 1997 and 2012) has not fared well in the popular press over the past several years. They've been described as fragile; self-involved; consumed with their own feelings; prone to constant, mindless self-display; and obsessed with working less and earning more (Berger, 2022; Parks, 2024; Riegel, 2020; Riegel, 2025; *The Guardian*, 2018).

There may be kernels of truth in some of these stereotypes, but they miss much of what is promising and exciting about this generation, and sometimes they are wildly unfair. Our data suggest that these stereotypes obscure, in particular, that today's teens and young adults often care a great deal about others and improving the world.

According to the survey we conducted with Gallup and the Walton Family Foundation, 79% of respondents report wanting a job in the future that is "mainly focused on helping others or making a positive difference" in others' lives. In response to an open-ended question on our survey, most respondents report that what makes their jobs meaningful is their positive impact on others. This interest in positive impact is not simply rhetorical. Deloitte surveys indicate that 44% of Gen Zers have left a role they felt lacked purpose; around 40% have rejected a potential employer, assignment or project based on their personal ethics or beliefs (Faber, 2025); and about 75% report that social impact is a factor in choosing where they work (Faber, 2024).

That many young people are interested in helping others is good news for our country's moral and civic life, but it also may be vital for young people themselves. According to our survey, Gen Zers who feel like they are needed by others and make a positive difference in others' lives — through their work or otherwise — are about three to four times more likely to experience meaning or purpose in their lives, and this meaning or purpose is strongly correlated with lower reported rates of anxiety and depression.

The desire to care for others may be critical in another sense. The rapid spread of artificial intelligence may transform the workforce from a "knowledge economy" to a "care economy," making the motivation and skills to care for others and other interpersonal skills crucial to earning a living. This particular moment in history and the desires of this generation may align.

Yet, while the aspiration to do good in one's career is important to high percentages of Gen Zers, other factors appear to be more important. When selecting their top three future job priorities, 23% choose caring for others, trailing personally fulfilling work (52%), work-life balance (50%), earning enough without enduring excessive stress (50%), and making enough money to be considered financially successful (41%). Similarly, when asked about the obstacles they may face in choosing jobs that mainly focus on helping others, financial concerns (49%) and the stress created by these jobs (46%) — a work-life balance issue — top the list.

There are good reasons for Gen Z to prioritize financial security and work-life balance. This generation is under inordinate financial pressure and, in many cases, wanting downtime and work-life balance in our wired, overstimulating world may be very healthy. But if we want more Gen Zers to pursue helping jobs — and these jobs appear to be important to their mental health and may be crucial to their livelihood in a care economy — these jobs can't undermine their financial stability or swamp them with stress.

Increasing Gen Zers' financial stability and reducing their job stress are complex challenges beyond the scope of this foreword and report, but several strategies may move the needle. Our data indicate that parents strongly influence their children's job choices, and these strategies include suggestions for how parents can be a useful resource to their children who want helping jobs.

Yet, perhaps what's most important is not that we pursue any particular strategy but that we avoid what so many generations have done before us. There is a risk in negatively stereotyping a whole generation, our future citizens and leaders, including underestimating what they are capable of. And as AI transforms the economy and perhaps much else in our lives, we may need young people who not only have strong interpersonal and caring skills, but also who can respond — and at times resist — these changes with ethical clarity and their full humanity. Instead of criticizing Gen Z, we should think hard about who they are and what they value, how we can develop their interpersonal and ethical capacities, and how their aspirations might be harnessed in jobs that work for them and create a better world.

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The MCC team thanks Jennifer Breheny Wallace for her input on the survey.

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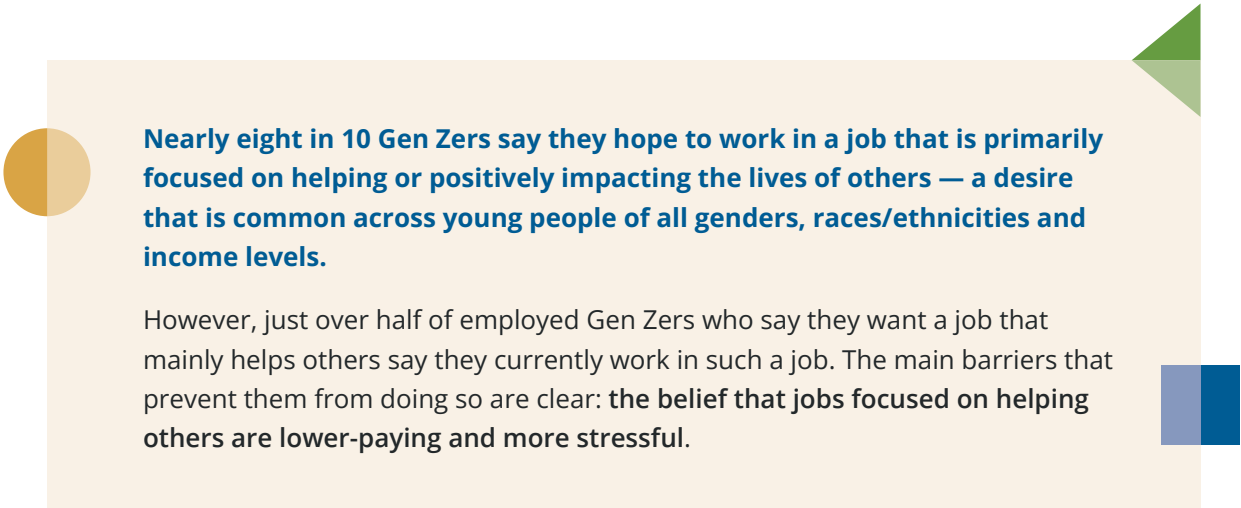
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Executive Summary

A new survey from the Voices of Gen Z study finds that the United States' youngest generation is broadly committed to doing good for others in their personal and professional capacities. The survey — conducted by Gallup Dec. 15-22, 2025, in partnership with the Walton Family Foundation and the Making Caring Common project at the Harvard Graduate School of Education — asked Gen Zers, among other topics, about their overall sense of meaning or purpose in life; the extent to which they make a positive impact on the lives of others; their priorities for their future career, including helping others; and their parents' opinions about what they should prioritize at work. The survey collected responses from a nationally representative sample of more than 2,400 Gen Zers (those born between 1997 and 2012).



Nearly eight in 10 Gen Zers say they hope to work in a job that is primarily focused on helping or positively impacting the lives of others — a desire that is common across young people of all genders, races/ethnicities and income levels.

However, just over half of employed Gen Zers who say they want a job that mainly helps others say they currently work in such a job. The main barriers that prevent them from doing so are clear: **the belief that jobs focused on helping others are lower-paying and more stressful.**

Further, the data show that doing good for others, whether through the workplace or outside of it, has important benefits not only for recipients but also for those engaged in helping others in some way. Gen Zers who are confident that they make a positive difference in the lives of others are significantly more likely to feel like their own lives have meaning or purpose. These young people also report far lower rates of anxiety and depression than their peers who lack meaning or purpose. This is a critically important finding for a generation that is more likely than their older peers to be struggling with their mental health and offers a potential counter to Gen Zers' concerns that "helping jobs" are detrimental to wellbeing.

Consistent with prior findings from the Voices of Gen Z study, parents' influence on their children is important, including the degree to which their children aspire to jobs that help others. Young people who say their parents emphasize the importance of finding a career that helps or cares for others are not only more likely to prioritize these types of careers but also more likely to end up in a career that does so. However, the data suggest that many other young people are not hearing or internalizing their parents' encouragement to pursue these kinds of jobs. This disconnect, combined with the financial and mental health sacrifices Gen Zers anticipate, may be keeping some young people who would like to fill these critical roles from actually doing so.

Key Findings

- 1 Most Gen Zers want to help others through their work:** 79% say they hope to find a job in the future that is primarily focused on helping or making a positive difference in the lives of others.
- 2 About half of employed Gen Z adults (48%) say they currently work in a job that focuses on making a positive difference in others' lives,** including 56% of those who say they want such a job in the future. Gen Z women are particularly likely to be employed in these kinds of jobs compared with Gen Z men (63% vs. 48%, respectively).
- 3 Nearly half of all Gen Zers — including those who want a job that helps others — say they would consider avoiding such a job** because they believe these types of roles do not pay enough (49%) or tend to be hard or emotionally draining (46%).
- 4 About one in three Gen Zers (34%) feel like they are not needed by others and do not make a positive difference in others' lives (31%).** Adult men are especially likely to feel like they are not needed (42%) or that they do not make a difference in others' lives (35%).
- 5 Gen Zers who feel like they are needed by and make a positive difference in the lives of others** — through their work or otherwise — are about three to four times as likely to feel like their lives have a sense of meaning or purpose. This sense of meaning or purpose is also strongly correlated with better mental health ratings.
- 6 A majority of Gen Zers (53%) say their parents talk to them about the importance of a career that positively impacts others;** this percentage is especially high among Black Gen Zers and children of lower-income parents. Young people who say their parents encourage them to prioritize helping others through their work are significantly more likely than their peers to say they have or want a job focused on helping others.

Detailed Findings

Most Gen Zers want to help others through and outside of their work.

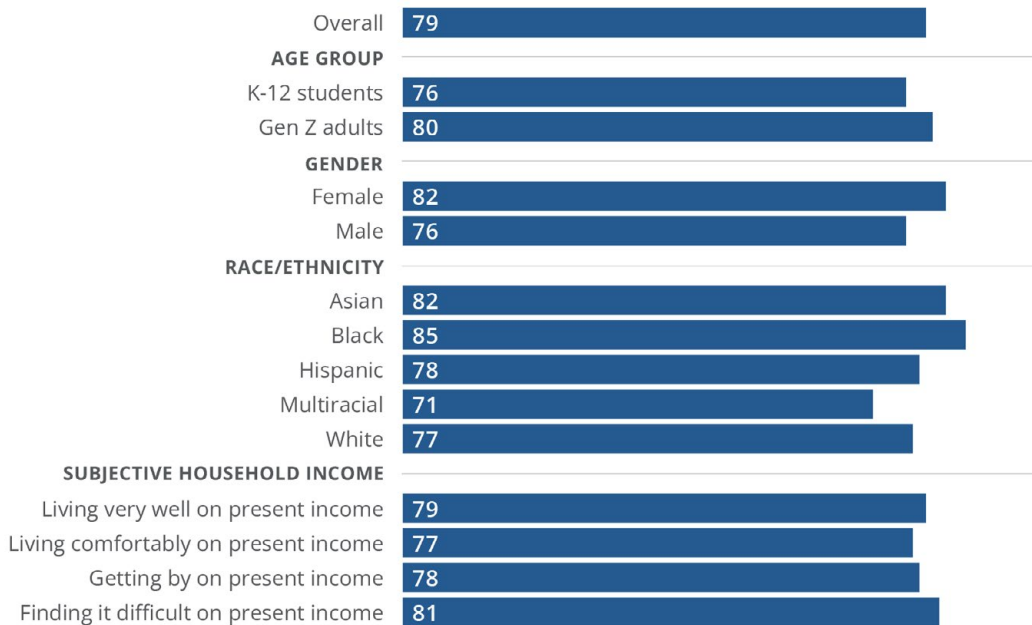
Most Gen Zers (79%) say they aspire to a career that is primarily focused on helping others or making a positive difference. This is a high priority for Gen Zers regardless of age, race/ethnicity or gender, though women and Black Gen Zers are slightly more likely than their peers to prioritize this.

FIGURE 1

Gen Z’s Interest in Jobs Focused on Helping Others

Do you want a job in the future that is mainly focused on helping others or making a positive difference in their lives?

% Yes



Gen Zers living in households that are struggling financially express just as much interest in helping jobs as those living in financially secure households.

Prior Gallup research suggests that Gen Z’s broad interest in jobs that make a positive difference is even higher than that of older generations. The [Business in Society](#) study, conducted in partnership with Bentley University, finds that 71% of employed 18- to 29-year-olds would leave their current job to join an organization that has a greater positive impact on the world. This sentiment is slightly higher than it is among 30- to 44-year-olds (64%) and substantially higher than it is among 45- to 59-year-olds (47%) and those aged 60 and older (29%).

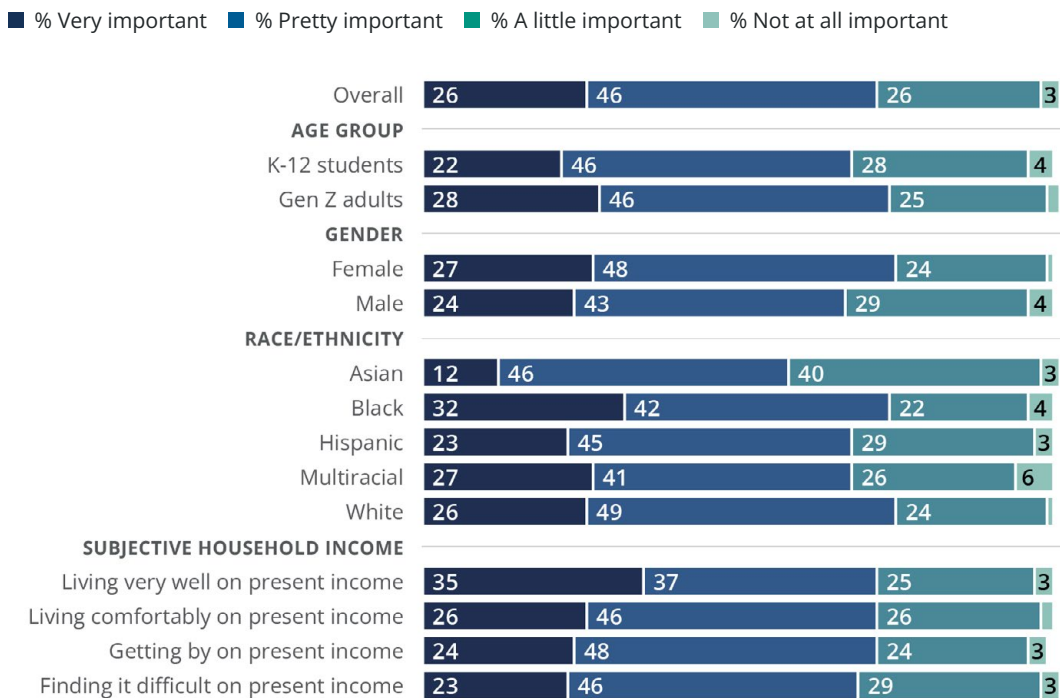
Gen Z's interest in helping others extends beyond their careers.

Nearly three-quarters of Gen Zers say it is “very important” (26%) or “pretty important” (46%) to make a positive difference or help others outside of their work or job. Just 3% of Gen Zers say it is “not at all important.” These results are generally consistent by age, gender, race/ethnicity and income.

FIGURE 2

Importance to Gen Z of Helping Others Outside of Their Workplace

How important is it for you to help others or make a positive difference in others' lives outside of your work or job?



Note: Values of less than 3% are not labeled.

Prior research from the Voices of Gen Z study finds that most young people have recently been involved in some kind of philanthropy or volunteerism.

Half of Gen Zers have volunteered in their community or another community within the past year (49%) or have donated to a charity, school or religious organization (46%) over the same period. A total of 59% of Gen Zers have done at least one of these activities within the past year, including 63% of Gen Z adults.

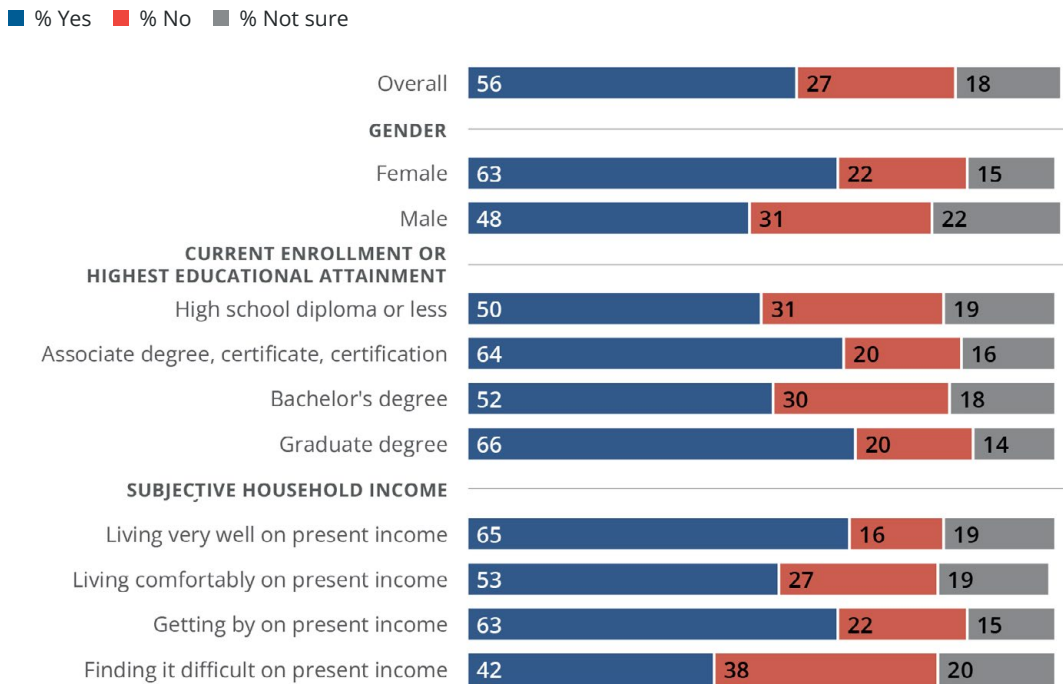
While most Gen Zers say they would ideally like to work in a job oriented toward helping others, fewer say their current job allows them to do so.

Among Gen Z adults who are currently employed, about half (48%) say they work in a job that is mainly focused on helping others or making a positive difference. Just over half of employed Gen Zers who say they *want* to work in a helping job say they are currently doing so (56%).

FIGURE 3

Gen Zers’ Employment in Helping Jobs

Does your current job mainly focus on helping others or making a positive difference in their lives?



Among currently employed Gen Z adults who indicate they prefer to have a job that mainly focuses on helping others or making a positive impact on their lives.

Women are especially likely to be working in jobs primarily focused on helping others compared with men (63% vs. 48%), while those who are struggling financially are markedly less likely to be working in these kinds of roles, despite expressing similar levels of interest as their more financially secure peers. However, it is worth noting that those who are in jobs mainly focused on helping others are not statistically more likely to be getting by or finding it difficult financially than their peers who are not in those types of jobs.

Moreover, when selecting the things they most want from their future job, 23% of Gen Zers say helping or caring for others is among their top three priorities; however, this trails other features such as doing work that is personally fulfilling (52%), maintaining work-life balance (50%), earning enough without enduring excessive stress (50%), or making enough money to be financially successful (41%).

This may suggest that while Gen Z broadly wants to help others through their work, for many, this goal is superseded by competing priorities such as financial stability and personal wellbeing.

FIGURE 4
Gen Z's Priorities for Their Future Career

What are the top three things you want from your future job or career? Select up to three.
What do you **most** want from your future job or career?

% Selected

■ Top three ■ Most important



“I work in medical manufacturing, and yes, of course, there are days when it feels too mundane to care. When I take a step back, though, I see the impact I have on patients’ lives, and it helps me feel a bit better.”

“My job is to prevent plague outbreaks from spreading uncontrolled. I know I have an important job. I just wish it didn’t pay poverty wages.”

Directly making a positive impact on others is just one way that young people can derive purpose from the work they do, though when asked to describe the reasons that their work is meaningful, Gen Zers frequently mention that it is because of the positive impact these jobs have on others.

More employed Gen Zers say they find their work meaningful (65%) than say their job focuses on helping others; however, those who work in jobs that help others are about **twice as likely to find meaning in their work** as those who do not work in those kinds of jobs (84% vs. 44%).

As a result, Gen Zers from groups most likely to have helping jobs, including women (69%) and those with a postgraduate degree (75%), are especially likely to say their work is meaningful. Those who are finding it difficult to get by on their present income are least likely to find meaning or purpose in their work (57%).

“ Being a 911 dispatcher [and] EMT, I am able to make a difference every day. I have the opportunity to help people every day during their worst times.”

“ I am a curriculum editor, and I know that the materials we create directly improve literacy rates for children. I believe literacy is incredibly important for a child’s future success.”

“ I help people with their taxes. I’m happy when they get the best refund because it helps them and their family.”

Concerns about financial and personal wellbeing deter Gen Zers from seeking helping jobs.

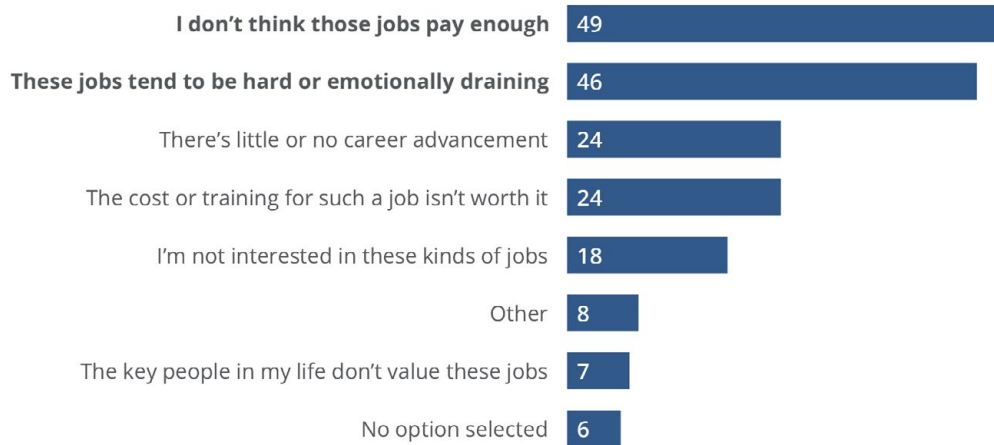
When asked directly about the potential barriers that would prevent them from pursuing a helping job, pay and stress are the most frequently cited issues. Nearly half of Gen Zers say concerns about insufficient pay (49%) or the emotional toll that they believe these jobs take (46%) prevents them from having a job that mainly focuses on helping others.

FIGURE 5

Perceived Barriers to Seeking Helping Jobs

Which of the following, if any, would keep you from having a future job that is mainly focused on helping others in some way? Select all that apply.

% Selected



Female Gen Zers (53%) are much more likely than men (39%) to cite the emotional drain of these types of jobs as a barrier. Men (52%) are slightly more likely than women (46%) to say these types of jobs do not pay enough.

This pursuit of financial stability and work-life balance may partially explain why Gen Zers agree in principle with the virtue of pursuing jobs that help others but, when given a binary choice between a purposeful job and a significant pay raise, are split on which they would prioritize.

Respondents were shown one of the following two descriptions of a hypothetical employment scenario:

Imagine you are working at a job that you enjoy. It doesn't pay as well as other jobs you could get, but it is very meaningful and gives you purpose.

Now imagine you are offered a new job. You do not think it will be nearly as meaningful as your current job or give you the same sense of purpose, but they are offering to [increase your current pay by 50% / double your current pay].

Would you keep your current job or take the new job?

About half of Gen Zers (46%) say they would take the new job and higher salary, and about one in four (28%) say they would keep their current, more purposeful job.

The remaining one in four would not immediately take the higher-paying job without knowing more about the trade-offs of the new job (26%). These percentages are nearly identical regardless of the amount of the salary increase.

Black Gen Zers (36%), K-12 students (31%) and women (31%) are all marginally more likely than their peers to say they would keep their current, more purposeful job.

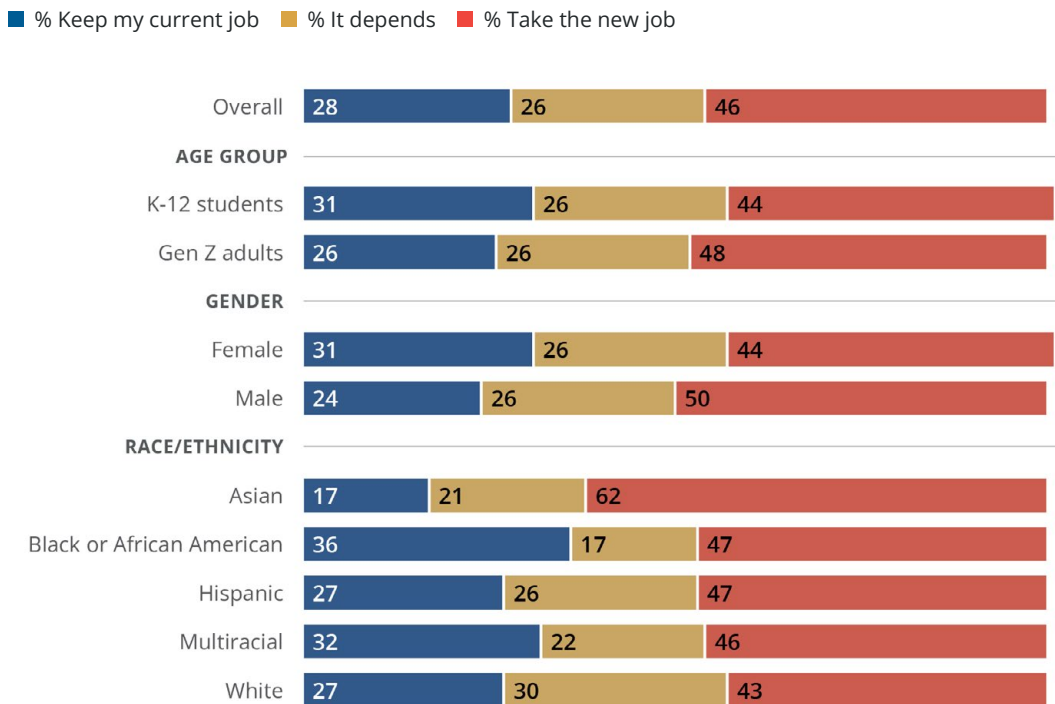
FIGURE 6

Preference for Higher-Paying vs. Higher-Purpose Jobs

Imagine you are working at a job that you enjoy. It doesn't pay as well as other jobs you could get, but it is very meaningful and gives you purpose.

Now imagine you are offered a new job. You do not think it will be nearly as meaningful as your current job or give you the same sense of purpose, but they are offering to [increase your current pay by 50% / double your current pay].

Would you keep your current job or take the new job?



Qualitatively, many of those saying their decision would depend on additional factors had questions about financial stability; if they felt their current salary were enough to be financially comfortable, they would keep their current, more purposeful job.

Gen Z adults' current financial circumstances also impact this decision. Those who say they are living "very well" on their present income are 15 percentage points more likely than their peers to say they would keep their current, more purposeful job (41% vs. 26%). However, there is no significant difference in the likelihood of Gen Zers living comfortably, getting by or finding it difficult on their current income to say they would keep their current job.

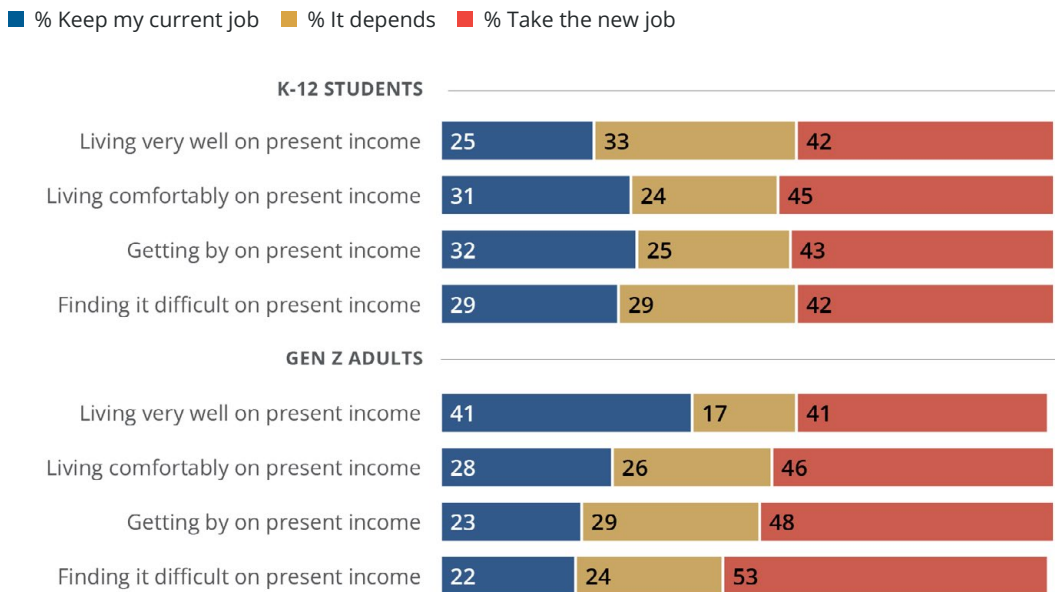
FIGURE 7

Influence of Household Income on Gen Z's Likelihood to Opt for a Higher-Paying Job

Imagine you are working at a job that you enjoy. It doesn't pay as well as other jobs you could get, but it is very meaningful and gives you purpose.

Now imagine you are offered a new job. You do not think it will be nearly as meaningful as your current job or give you the same sense of purpose, but they are offering to [increase your current pay by 50% / double your current pay].

Would you keep your current job or take the new job?



Gen Z K-12 students who still live with their parents do not demonstrate this pattern; children living in households that are less financially secure are at least as likely to say they would pass up the higher-paying job as their peers living in wealthier households.

Gen Zers who don't feel they matter to others report lower personal meaning or purpose.

The lack of social impact that many Gen Zers feel in the workplace extends beyond it. About one-third of Gen Zers say it is either “a little true” or “not at all true” that their life has felt meaningful over the past month (34%), and about four in 10 say they have lacked a sense of purpose in life (39%).

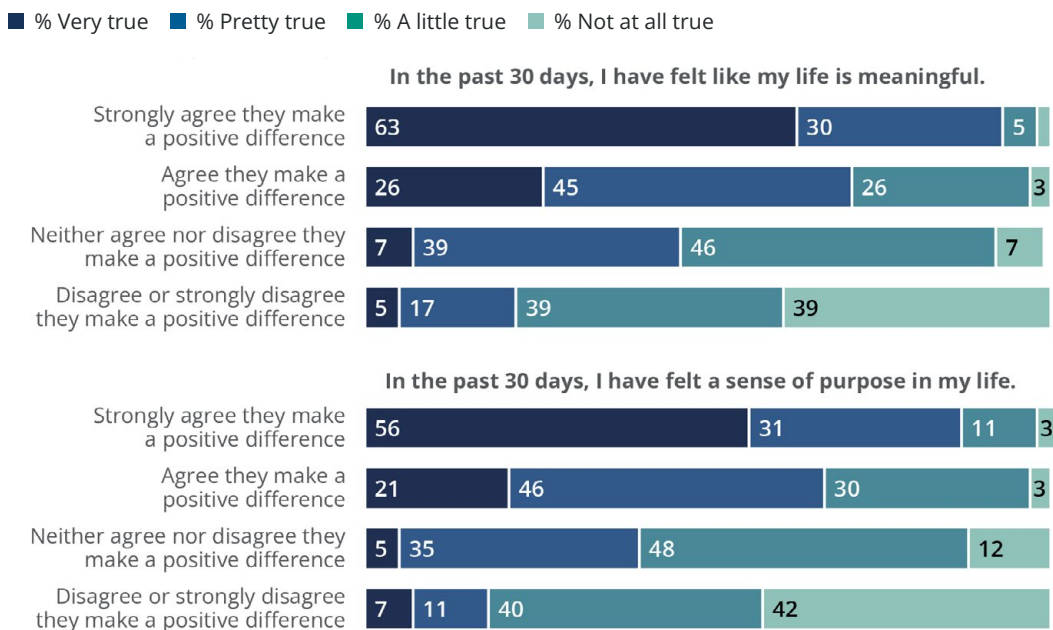
Importantly, one of the strongest predictors of the extent to which Gen Zers feel a sense of meaning or purpose in their lives is whether they feel like they make a positive difference in the lives of others.

Among those who disagree that they positively impact others' lives, just 22% say it is very or pretty true that their life has felt meaningful over the past month, while 18% say it is very or pretty true that they have felt a sense of purpose over that period. By comparison, those who agree or strongly agree that they make a positive impact on others are about **three to four times more likely to say they have felt a sense of meaning or purpose in their lives.**

FIGURE 8

Effect of Making a Difference in Others' Lives on Gen Z's Meaning or Purpose

Based on agreement with “I know I make a positive difference in other people's lives.”



Note: Values of less than 3% are not labeled.

Despite its importance to their overall sense of meaning or purpose, about one in three Gen Zers do not agree that they feel needed by others (34%) or make a positive difference in other people’s lives (31%). Gen Z adult men are particularly likely to say they do not feel like they are needed (42%) or make a positive impact on others (35%).

Young people report several factors that they feel get in the way of finding purpose in their lives.

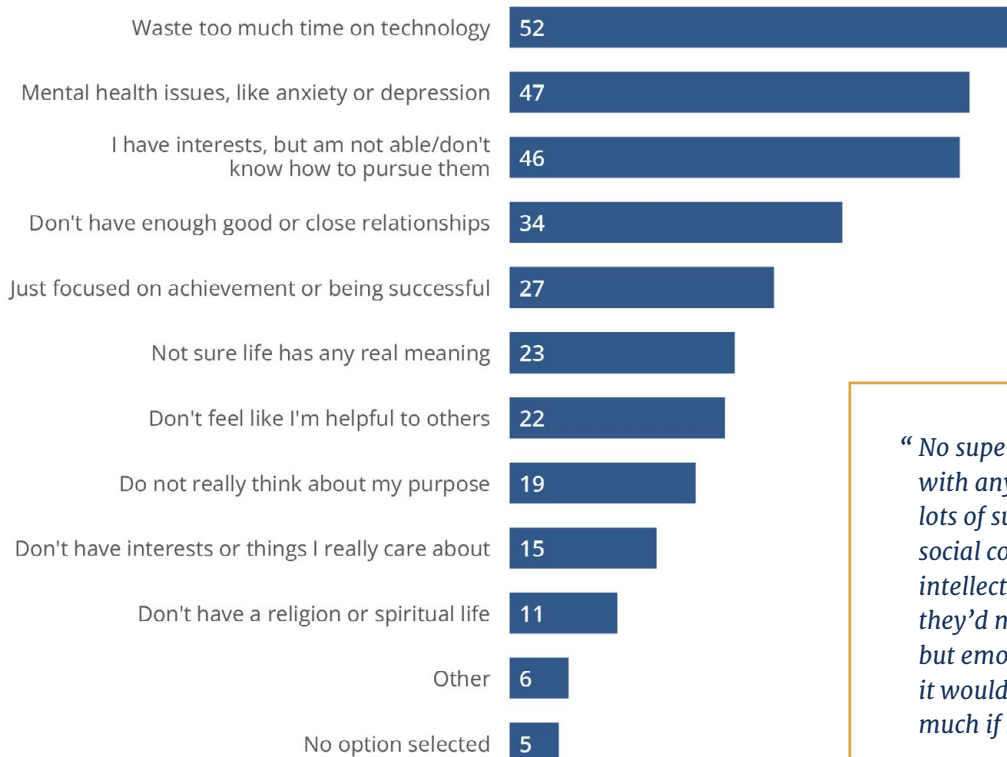
Notably, more than half cite excessive and unproductive **use of technology** (52%), while significant percentages also cite **mental health issues** (47%) and a **lack of close relationships** (34%) as barriers. About one in four Gen Zers question whether life has any intrinsic meaning (23%), while one in five say they rarely think about their purpose (19%).

FIGURE 9

Barriers to Meaning or Purpose

In the past 30 days, which of the following, if any, have made you feel like you lack meaning or purpose? Select all that apply.

% Selected



“No super strong connection with any one person; lots of surface-level social connections where intellectually I know they’d miss me a little, but emotionally I know it wouldn’t affect them much if I were gone.”

A higher sense of meaning or purpose is linked to stronger mental health.

For those concerned about improving the flagging mental health of Gen Z — which, compared with other generations, reports the worst mental health and highest number of visits to mental health professionals — meaning or purpose may offer an important intervention to a widespread challenge.

Over half of Gen Zers — including seven in 10 adults — report mild (30%), moderate (18%) or severe (10%) symptoms of anxiety and depression.

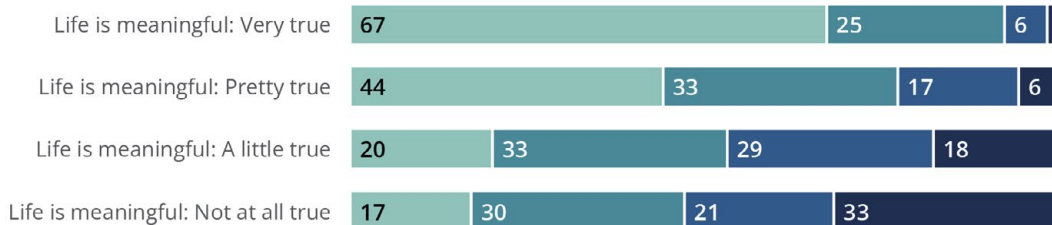
But those who say it is very or pretty true that they have felt a sense of meaning or purpose in their life in the past month are significantly less likely to report symptoms of anxiety and depression than those who do not feel their life has felt meaningful or purposeful.

FIGURE 10

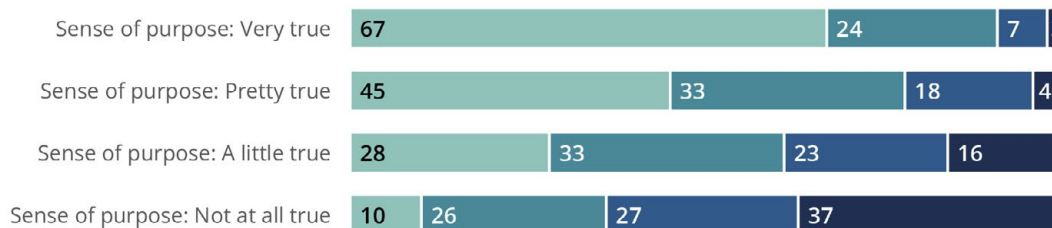
Effect of Meaning or Purpose on Gen Z's Mental Health

■ % No anxiety/depression ■ % Mild anxiety/depression ■ % Moderate anxiety/depression ■ % Severe anxiety/depression

Mental health, based on "In the past 30 days, I have felt like my life is meaningful."



Mental health, based on "In the past 30 days, I have felt a sense of purpose in my life."



Categories are based on the Patient Health Questionnaire for Depression and Anxiety (PHQ-4), which includes four items that ask patients to describe how often they have been bothered by the following problems over the past two weeks:

1) Feeling nervous, anxious or on edge, 2) Not being able to stop or control worrying, 3) Having little interest or pleasure in doing things, 4) Feeling down, depressed or hopeless. More details about PHQ-4 can be accessed here: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S016503270900278X>

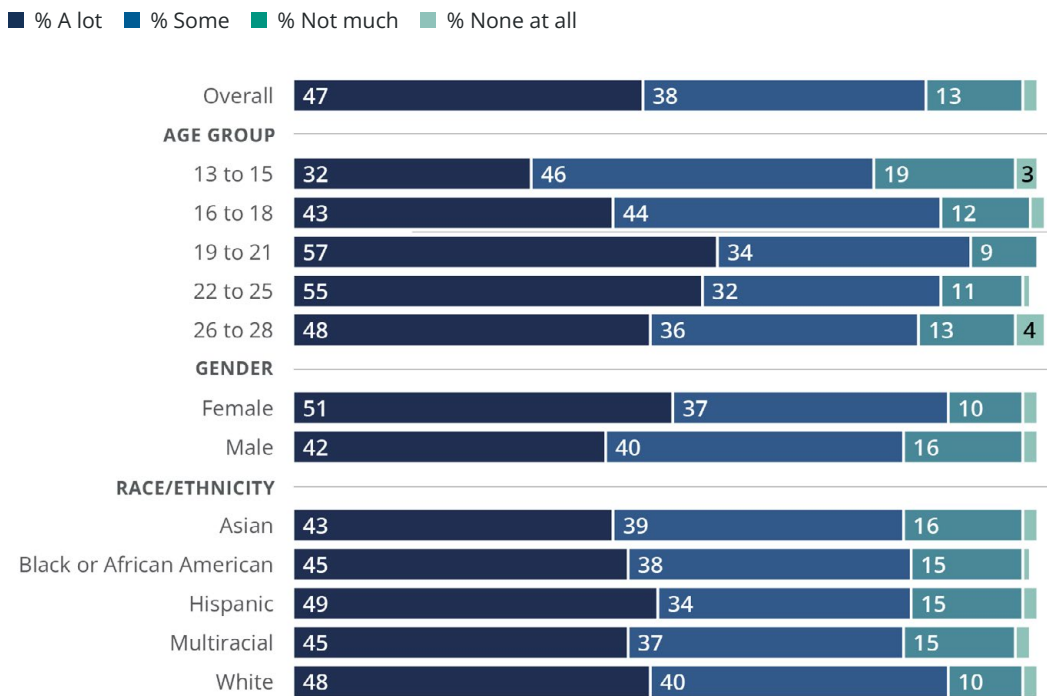
Note: Values of less than 3% are not labeled.

This connection between purpose, mental health and positively impacting others is particularly relevant in the context of helping jobs. While nearly half of Gen Zers worry about the mental toll that these kinds of jobs can take, it is important to note that the purpose that young workers may find through helping others may have a positive impact on their mental health.

While having a sense of purpose is beneficial to Gen Z's overall wellbeing, the actual process of finding that purpose may itself be creating stress and anxiety for young people. Nearly half of Gen Zers (47%) feel like there is “a lot” of pressure on young people to find a single purpose or passion in life, while an additional 38% say there is at least “some” pressure to do so. More than half of young women and those between the ages of 19 and 25 feel there is a lot of pressure on young people to find a singular purpose.

FIGURE 11
Perceived Pressure to Find a Single Purpose in Life

How much pressure, if any, do you think there is on young people to find a single purpose or passion in life?



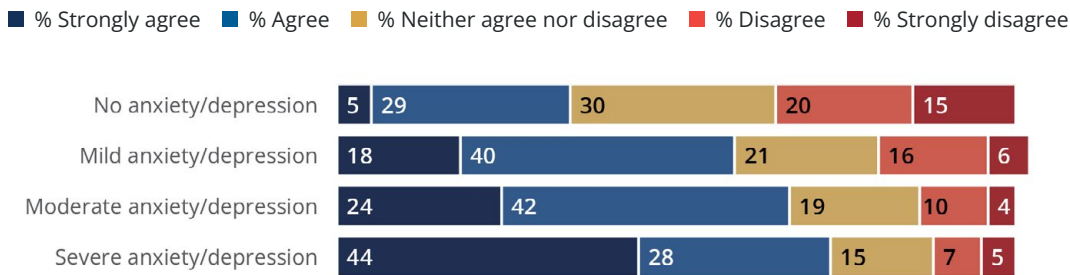
Note: Values of less than 3% are not labeled.

For Gen Z adults, higher rates of anxiety and depression are also closely linked to the extent to which they report feeling achievement pressure. Just over half of Gen Z adults (55%) agree that they are stressed by the pressure they feel to achieve, with agreement especially high among 19- to 21-year-olds (63%). This stress may be rising to the level of negatively impacting young people’s overall mental health. Among Gen Z adults with no symptoms of anxiety or depression, about one in three (34%) agree that they feel stressed by achievement pressure; this percentage increases to well over half of adults with mild (58%), moderate (66%), or severe anxiety and depression (72%).

FIGURE 12

Stress of Achievement Pressure, Based on Mental Health

I get stressed by the pressure that I’m under to achieve.



As with their mental health more broadly, Gen Zers with a greater sense of meaning or purpose in their lives are also somewhat less likely to say they feel stressed by achievement pressure. Half of Gen Z adults who feel like it is very or pretty true that their life has meaning or purpose say they feel stressed by the pressure they are under to achieve, compared with about six in 10 who do not feel like their life has meaning or purpose. Moreover, while heightened achievement pressure is correlated with a higher incidence of anxiety and depression, young people who feel this pressure but also have a sense of purpose in their lives report better mental health than their peers who feel achievement pressure without having a sense of purpose. In short, helping young people find their purpose may help mitigate the negative effects of the achievement pressure they feel.

Parents are an important influence on their children’s desire to help others.

Prior Voices of Gen Z research has found that parents are the most trusted and influential source of guidance in Gen Zers’ decisions about postsecondary options. As a result, the priorities that parents advocate to their children are likely to strongly influence the decisions that young people make early in their careers.

In this respect, the aspects of a job that Gen Zers say their parents emphasize closely resemble their own. As with Gen Zers themselves, focusing on personally fulfilling work (51%), maintaining work-life balance (49%), and finding a job that pays the bills without being too stressful (49%) are the three priorities Gen Zers say their parents focus on most when giving career advice. Gen Zers and their parents diverge when assessing caring for others as a top job priority, with 23% of Gen Zers choosing it and 14% saying their parents value it highly.

FIGURE 13

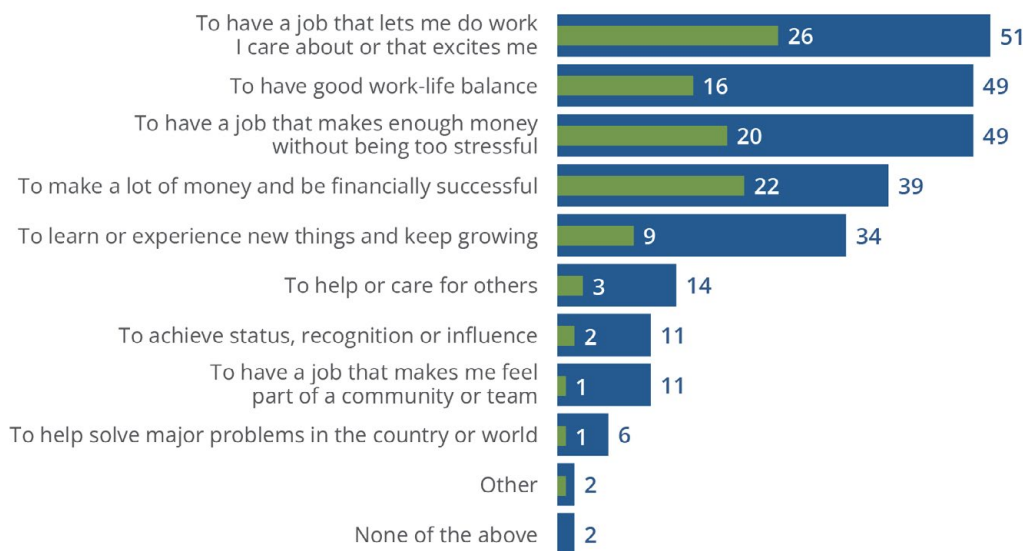
Gen Zers’ Perceptions of Parents’ Hopes for Their Future Career

What are the top three things that your parents say are most important for your future job or career? Select up to three.

*What do you think your parents **most** want for your future job or career?*

% Selected

■ Top three ■ Most important



Importantly, there may be a disconnect between what parents *think* they are encouraging their children to prioritize and what their children are actually hearing. When asked to indicate the three most important attributes they want their children's future career to have, 15% of parents choose helping or caring for others as one of their top three priorities. However, when the children of parents who prioritize helping jobs are asked what they *think* their parents' most important priorities are for them, more than one-third indicate that they believe helping others is one of their parents' priorities for their future job.

Older Gen Zers are more likely than younger Gen Zers to believe their parents focus too much on how much their future career will pay them and focus too little on the meaning or positive impact associated with that career. Gen Z adults (29%) are about twice as likely as Gen Z K-12 students (16%) to say their parents focus too much on the amount of money they will make. Gen Z adults are also twice as likely as Gen Z children to say their parents focus too little on the amount of meaning they will derive from their future job (23% vs. 10%) or the positive impact it will have (31% vs. 14%).

FIGURE 14

Gen Zers' Assessment of Parents' Career Priorities

When your parents talk to you about your future job or career, do they focus too much, too little or about the right amount on:

■ % Far too much ■ % Too much ■ % About the right amount ■ % Too little ■ % Far too little

The amount of money you would make



The amount of meaning the job or career would give you



The amount of positive impact the job will have on other people



Note: Values of less than 3% are not labeled.

Still, while it may not be the highest priority that parents emphasize to their children, a majority of Gen Zers (53%) agree that their parents do talk to them about the importance of helping or positively impacting others through their work. This is especially true among Gen Zers who are still enrolled in K-12 school (66%) compared with their adult peers (45%), as well as Black Gen Zers of all ages (67%).

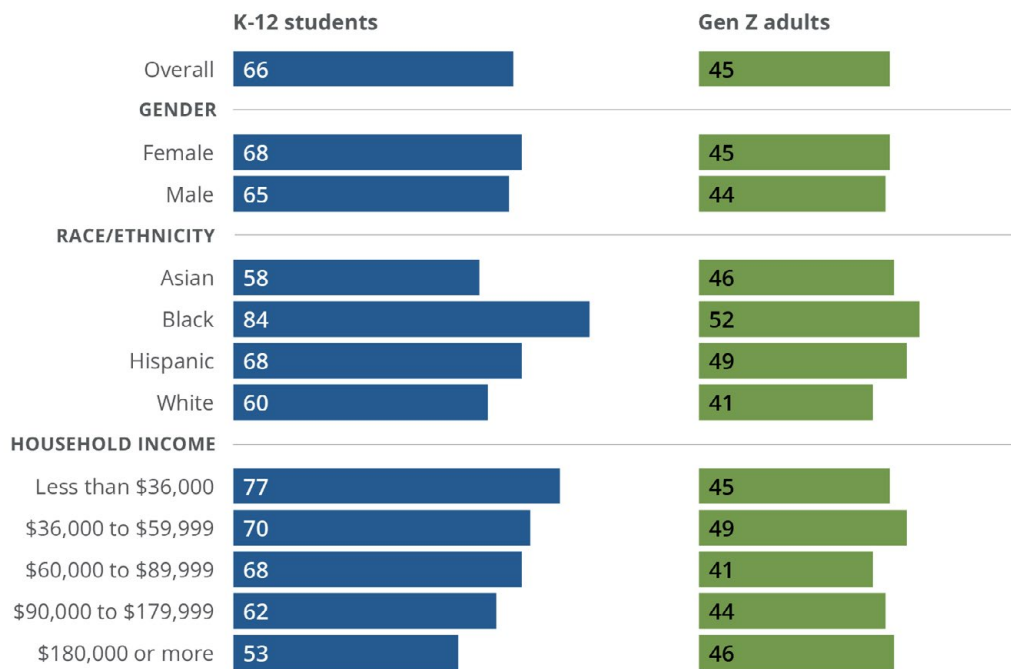
While Gen Z adults across income levels are similarly likely to say their parents discuss the importance of helping others through their work, the income of parents of younger Gen Zers is predictive of the incidence of these conversations. Gen Z K-12 students living in households with lower incomes are notably more likely than those in wealthier households to agree that their parents discuss the importance of having a career that positively impacts others.

FIGURE 15

Parent-Child Discussions About the Importance of Helping Others Through Work

My parents talk to me about the importance of having a job or career that helps or impacts others in positive ways.

% Strongly agree + Agree



Note: Multiracial data are suppressed due to sample size.

These conversations are particularly important because the extent to which parents encourage their children to find jobs that have a positive impact on others — or more accurately, the extent to which children *believe* their parents prioritize this — appears to be positively related to their children’s intent to pursue and likelihood of securing helping jobs.

Eighty-six percent of Gen Z children who agree that their parents talk to them about the importance of having a job that positively impacts others say they would like to have that type of job in the future, compared with 62% who neither agree nor disagree and 51% who disagree.

Perhaps more importantly, 64% of employed Gen Z adults whose parents encourage them to help others in their career say they are currently in such a job; among those whose parents do not prioritize helping others, 44% are currently in helping jobs.

This further reinforces the importance of parents’ influence in encouraging young people to pursue jobs that will not only provide them with benefits but also allow them to improve the lives of the people around them.



Conclusion

A recurring finding from several years of data from the Voices of Gen Z study is the gap between the world or lives that Gen Zers see for themselves and their perceived ability to realize them. They are generally optimistic about their lives but are worried about how prepared they are for them. They recognize the need to adopt new technology like artificial intelligence but are concerned about its implications for their work and learning. And in this most recent survey, they express their desire to do good for others but worry about the personal toll it may take on their financial security and mental health.

The data suggest that bridging this gap may have a net-positive impact on this generation's sense of purpose and wellbeing. Gen Zers who have found ways to help others through or outside of their work are notably more likely to feel like they have meaning or purpose in their lives — all of which are correlated with positive mental health outcomes. Unfortunately, significant segments of Gen Z continue to struggle with these aspects of their lives: At least one in three have not recently felt like their life is meaningful or purposeful, while more than half report at least mild struggles with anxiety and depression.

Moreover, this relationship stands in direct contrast to one of the barriers that Gen Z perceives to working in a job that is primarily focused on helping others. While nearly half of Gen Zers say they believe that these types of jobs are hard or emotionally draining, the knowledge that young people who find ways to help others through their work often report *stronger* mental health than those who do not may encourage more Gen Zers to pursue these kinds of jobs.

Parents will likely play a critical role in delivering this messaging. Prior Voices of Gen Z research finds that young people are most likely to trust their parents to guide them in their postsecondary career and education decisions, by a wide margin. These most recent data reinforce the strength of parents' influence, as Gen Zers who say their parents encourage them to think about or pursue jobs that make a difference in the lives of others are notably more likely to want such a job and to end up working in one.

If parents and other influencers can communicate to Gen Zers that, despite their potential challenges, working in helping jobs can be a virtuous cycle — that in doing so, they can improve not only the lives of others but also their own — young people are likely to listen.

Methodology

Results are based on a Gallup Panel™ web survey conducted Dec. 15-22, 2025, with a sample of 2,436 13- to 28-year-olds living in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The Gallup Panel is a probability-based panel of U.S. adults who are randomly selected using address-based sampling methodology. Gallup also recruits using random-digit-dial phone interviews that cover landlines and cellphones.

Within the overall sample, 1,087 13- to 18-year-old children were reached through adult members of the Gallup Panel who indicated they had at least one child aged 18 or younger living in their household. The remaining 1,349 18- to 28-year-old respondents are members of the Gallup Panel.

For the sample of 1,087 parents of Gen Z children, the margin of sampling error is ± 3.8 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. For the total sample of 2,436 Gen Z respondents, the margin of sampling error is ± 2.7 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. For the sample of 1,029 Gen Z respondents still enrolled in K-12 school, the margin of sampling error is ± 3.9 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. For the sample of 1,407 Gen Zers who are no longer enrolled in K-12 school, the margin of sampling error is ± 3.6 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. Margins of error for subgroups are higher.

All reported margins of sampling error include computed design effects for weighting. In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of public opinion polls.



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