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## Main activity of people not in the labour force

This article looks at the main activity of people who were not in the labour force in the September 2016 quarter, using information from the Household Labour Force Survey (HLFS). Information about their main activity was updated in the redeveloped HLFS questionnaire.

### Summary of key findings

- The most-common main activity of people not in the labour force was free-time activities.
- For 15–24-year-olds not in the labour force, 78.3 percent said studying or training was their main activity.
- Women were more likely than men to have been looking after a child or doing household work as their main activity.
- Men were more likely than women to have been doing free-time activities, study or training, or 'own care due to sickness/injury/disability' as their main activity.

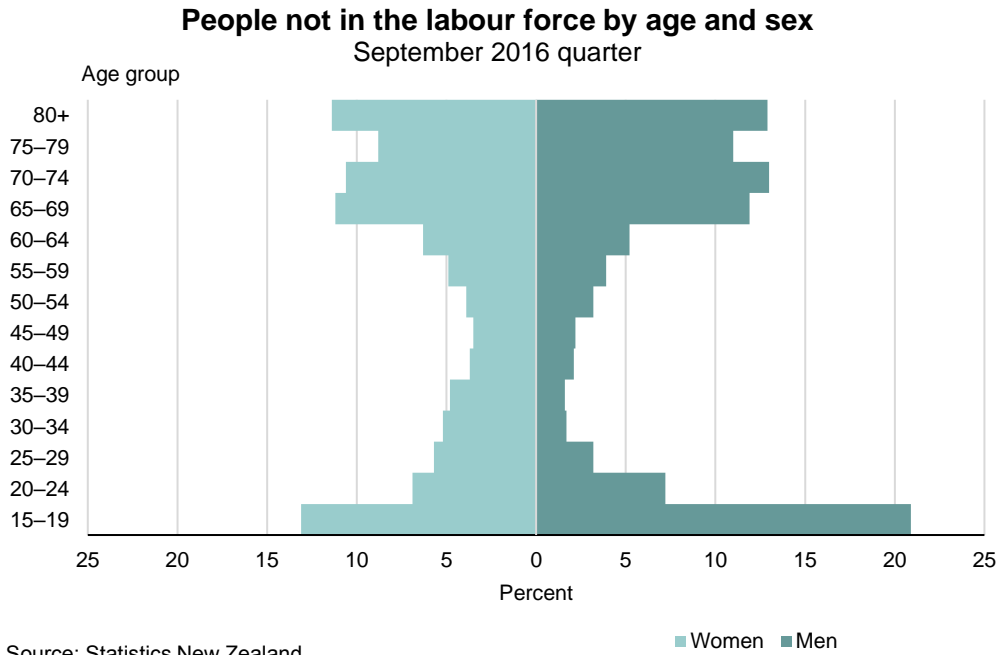
### People who are not in the labour force

The HLFS classifies people as being 'not in the labour force' if they do not meet the conditions of being either 'employed' or 'unemployed'. People classified in this category encompass a wide range of conditions, including those who are retired, students not engaged in the labour market, parents engaged in full-time care of their children, and individuals who are permanently unable to work due to illness or disability.

In the September 2016 quarter, the HLFS estimated there were 1,136,300 people who were not in the labour force, which accounted for 30.4 percent of New Zealand's working-age population. More women were not in the labour force (35.9 percent) than men (24.7 percent). Younger and older people were the age groups most likely to not be in the labour force – 39.6 percent of 15–24-year-olds and 76.3 percent of those aged 65 and over (65+).

Figure 1 shows the distribution of men and women who were not in the labour force, by five-year age groups.

**Figure 1**

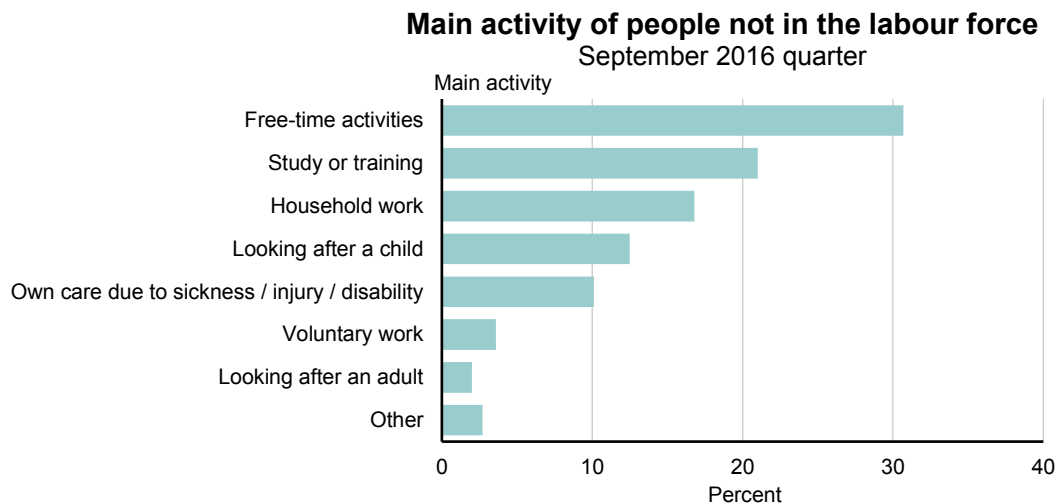


## Free-time activities are the most-common main activity

We ask people who are classified as not in the labour force what their main activity was in the previous week.

Figure 2 shows the most-common main activity they reported was free-time activities (30.7 percent). These include activities such as visiting friends, relaxing around the house, reading, and hobbies. Other common activities were: study or training (21.0 percent), household work (16.8 percent), and looking after a child (12.5 percent).

**Figure 2**

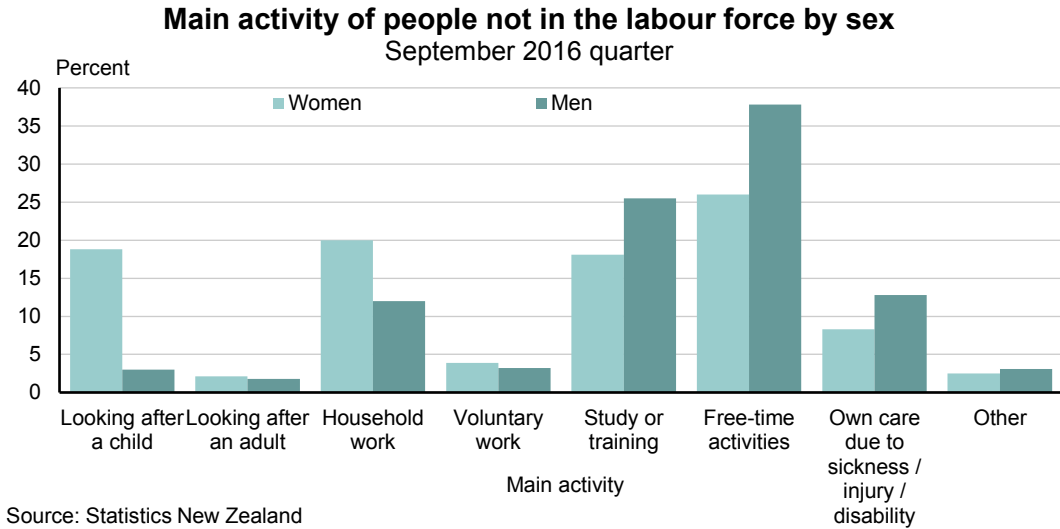


While free-time activities was the most-common main activity for both men and women, there were other differences by sex.

Women were more likely than men to have been looking after a child or doing household work as their main activity in the previous week. Men were more likely than women to

report study or training, free-time activities, or their own care due to sickness, injury, or disability as their main activity.

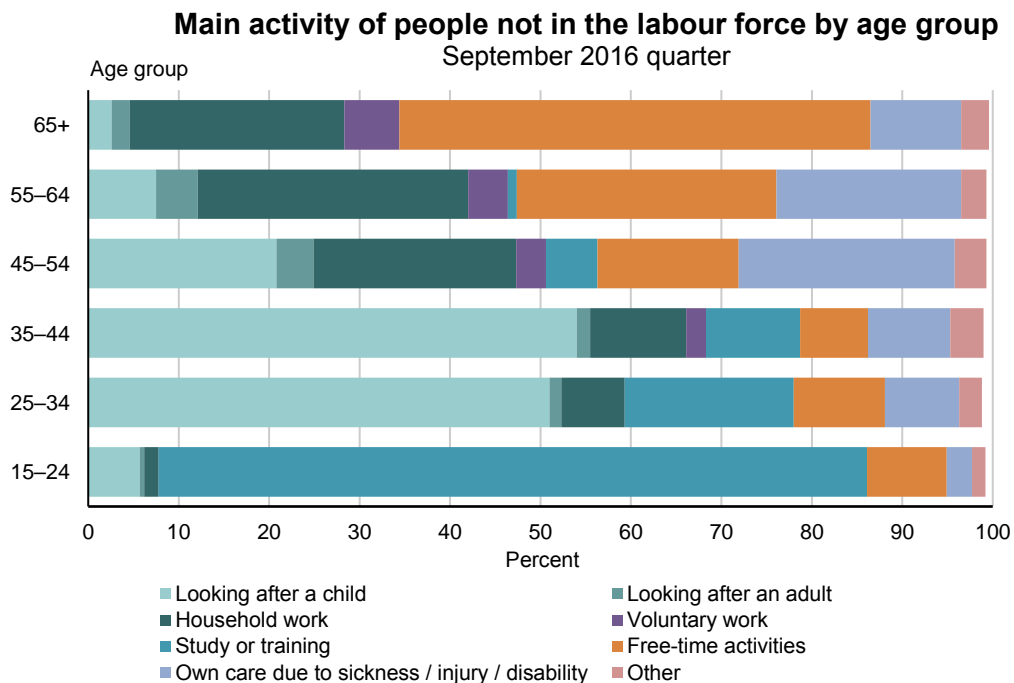
**Figure 3**



## Main activity changes with stage of life

Figure 4 illustrates how the activities of people not in the labour force change at different ages or stage of life.

**Figure 4**



Studying or training was the most-common main activity for people aged 15–24 (78.3 percent); this proportion decreases as a main activity as age increases. Looking after a

child becomes the most-common main activity for those aged 25–44 years, but this also drops off as age increases.

For people aged 45–54 years, caring for themselves due to sickness, injury, or disability, and household work were the most-common main activities reported for the September 2016 quarter.

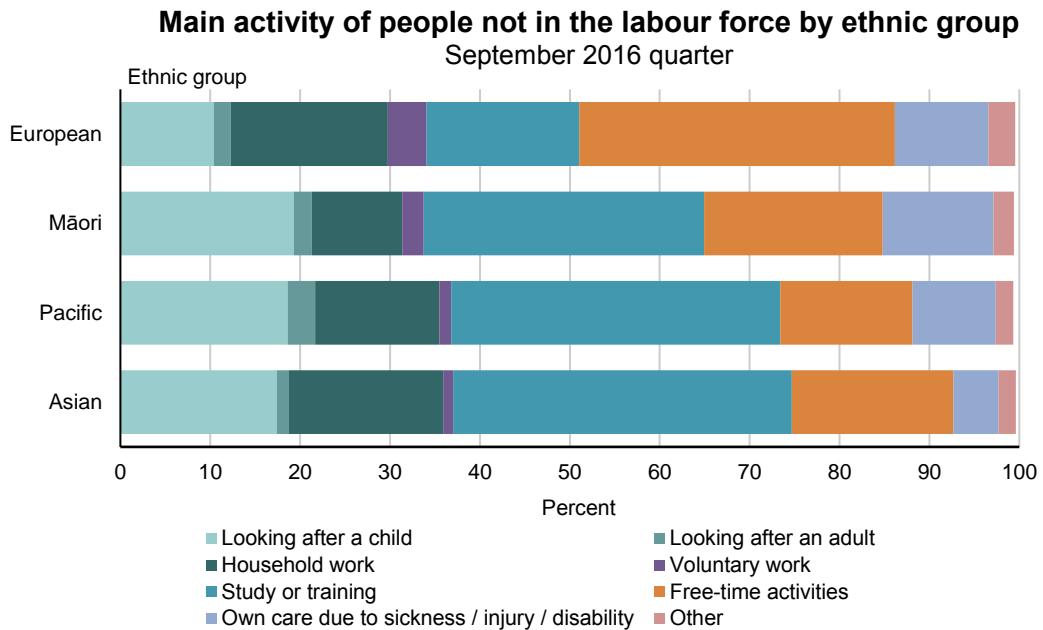
Household work and free-time activities started to dominate in the 55–64-years age group – together they accounted for 58.6 percent of the chosen main activities for this age group. This peaks for the 65+ age group, where 75.7 percent were engaged in either household work or free-time activities – over half reported free-time activities.

Voluntary work was most common as a main activity for those aged 65+. In the September 2016 quarter, 6.1 percent of this age group reported this as their main activity in the previous week. Of all people who gave this as their main activity, 75.6 percent were in this age group.

## Study is main activity for most ethnic groups

The most-common main activity for the Māori, Pacific, and Asian ethnic groups was study or training. For those who identified as European it was free-time activities.

Figure 5



Source: Statistics New Zealand

This difference for the European ethnic group can be attributed to its different age structure when compared with the other ethnic groups. The median age of the European people not in the labour force was 66 years in the September 2016 quarter. In contrast, the median age was 30 years for Pacific peoples, 32 years for Māori, and 33 years for the Asian ethnic group. If we restrict the population to only look at those aged under 65 years, then study or training is the most-common main activity, and looking after a child is the second most-common main activity for all four of the ethnic groups looked at.

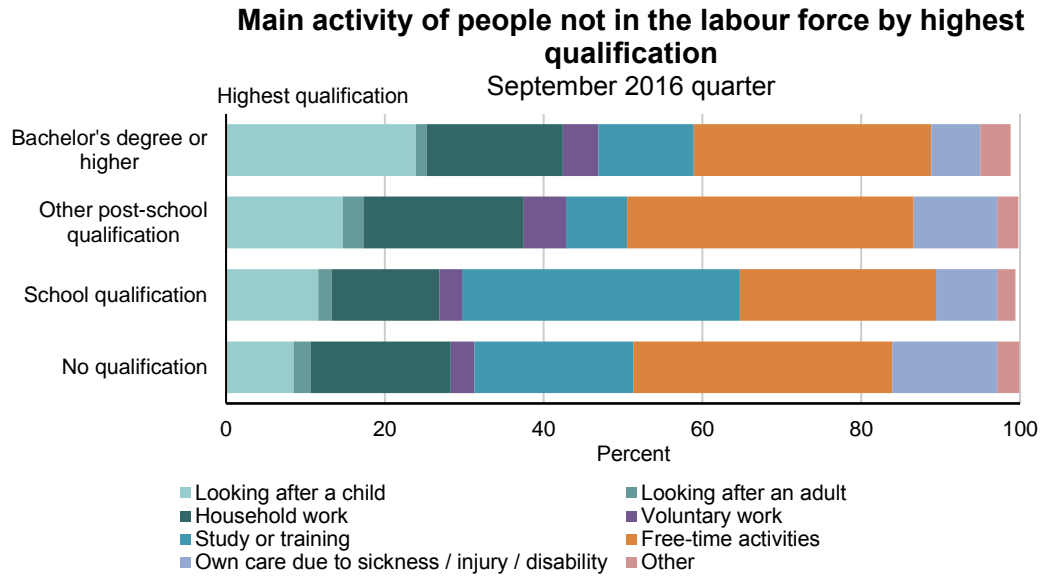
## Main activity varies with qualification

People not in the labour force who had a secondary school qualification as their highest completed qualification were most likely to identify study or training as their main activity (35.0 percent), followed by free-time activities (24.7 percent).

For those with no qualifications, free-time activities was the most-commonly reported activity in the previous week (32.6 percent), followed by study or training (20.0 percent), and household work (17.6 percent). This group had the highest proportion reporting that caring for themselves due to illness, injury, or disability (13.2 percent) was their main activity – they accounted for just under half of all people who gave this as their main activity.

Just under one-quarter (23.9 percent) of the people not in the labour force who had a bachelor's degree or higher stated their main activity in the last week was looking after a child.

**Figure 6**



Source: Statistics New Zealand

## Main activity changes as time since last worked increases

Figure 7 shows the period since people who were not in the labour force in the September 2016 quarter had last worked. Over one-quarter had not worked in more than 10 years and a further one-fifth had never worked.

[See People who have never worked](#) for more about this group.

**Figure 7**



Source: Statistics New Zealand

Just under 70 percent of those who had never worked gave study or training as their main activity in the previous week. This reflects that people who had never worked had a median age of 17 years. The median age of those not in the labour force increased as the 'time since worked' increased.

For people who last worked more than 10 years ago, free-time activities was the most-common activity in the previous week (46.4 percent). This was followed by household

work (23.5 percent), and own care due to sickness, injury or disability (13.0 percent). The median age for this group was 76 years.

**Table 1**  
**Main activity of people not in the labour force**

By time since last worked  
September 2016 quarter

Main activity	Time since last worked						
	Never worked	< 3 months	3mths–1 year	>1–2 years	>2–5 years	>5–10 years	>10 years
	Percent						
Looking after child	5.6	17.2	17.4	24.3	21.0	17.8	5.4
Looking after adult	1.0	S	1.3	2.4	2.2	2.6	2.6
Household work	5.4	13.1	10.9	13.6	21.2	21.6	23.5
Voluntary work	0.5	S	2.2	4.0	4.1	4.9	5.5
Study or training	69.8	26.3	34.1	16.2	7.2	2.6	0.4
Free-time activities	10.3	25.9	22.0	28.3	31.0	35.2	46.4
Own care due to sickness/injury/disability	5.7	6.0	8.9	8.4	10.0	11.9	13.0
Other	1.2	7.7	2.8	2.3	2.6	3.1	3.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Symbol: S suppressed (estimate used to calculate percentage is less than 1,000)

Source: Statistics NZ

Looking after a child was most common for people who had last worked between one and two years ago, with just under one-quarter of this group (24.3 percent) reporting that activity.

The proportions reporting free-time activities, household work, voluntary work, and own care due to sickness, injury, or disability as their main activity generally increased as the time since they last worked increased.

## Main activity by attachment to the labour force

We can further classify people who are not in the labour force as being in the potential labour force or not. We consider people in the potential labour force as having a close attachment to the labour force. They are made up of two groups.

- Unavailable jobseekers – those actively seeking work, not available to start work in the reference week, but available in the next four weeks.
- Available potential jobseekers – those not actively seeking work who were available for work in the reference week and would like a job.

For people who are not in the potential labour force we can further classify people by whether they want a job or not.

**Table 2**  
**Main activity of people not in the labour force**  
 By attachment to the labour force  
 September 2016 quarter

Main activity	Labour force attachment				
	Potential labour force		Not potential labour force		
	Unavailable jobseekers	Available potential jobseekers	Wants a job	Doesn't want job – retired	Doesn't want job – other
Looking after child	26.6	16.1	23.2	2.8	20.2
Looking after adult	S	1.5	2.3	1.8	2.3
Household work	S	14.1	9.4	25.1	9.9
Voluntary work	S	3.4	1.5	5.8	1.5
Study or training	26.1	35.3	34.4	0.2	39.9
Free-time activities	20.7	19.9	12.8	52.3	11.7
Own care due to sickness/injury/disability	S	4.1	13.4	8.6	12.4
Other	11.8	3.2	2.8	3.1	1.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Symbol: S suppressed (estimate used to calculate percentage is less than 1,000)

Source: Statistics NZ

Within the potential labour force, available potential jobseekers were most likely to have stated study or training as their main activity. In comparison, the unavailable jobseekers stated looking after a child, or study or training, in almost equal amounts. About one-fifth of each group reported free-time activities as their main activity.

For people not in the potential labour force, study or training was the most-common main activity for those who wanted a job, and also for those who didn't want a job for reasons other than retirement. For both these groups, looking after a child was the second most-common main activity in the previous week. These two groups also had the highest proportions who stated their own care, due to sickness, injury, or disability, was their main activity. They also had the smallest proportions reporting free-time activities.

For people not wanting a job and stating they were retired, the most-common main activity was free-time activities, followed by household work. This group also had the largest percentage (5.8 percent) stating that voluntary work was their main activity.





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