

Maria E. Canabal, Ph.D., C.H.E.

Debra Larson, M.S.

Introduction

In the mid-70's and early 80's several groups called for earlier and more deliberate integration of adolescents into the workplace. It was anticipated that adolescent workers would receive the added benefits of skill development, interaction with adults, increased academic motivation, exposure to work attitudes and habits, and the opportunity to learn financial responsibilities (Peters, 1987). However there is some evidence (Greenberger and Steinberg, 1986 and others) that the massive influx of young workers in the work force has had some negative and unforeseen consequences in terms of adolescent's socialization, education, family relationships, and attitudes about work.

In this exploratory study the authors were particularly interested in finding out 1) the effect of work on adolescents social life, family relationships, and school performance as perceived by the employed students, their non-employed peers and their parents, 2) the skills used and/or developed by employed students in their jobs 3) students motivations or reasons to work 4) the perceived relationship between present job and career goals.

Sample and Procedures

The random sample for this study consisted of 68 juniors and seniors at Mason City High School, Mason City, Illinois and 16 parents of employed students. Of those 68 students, 27 were employed and 41 were not employed at the moment of the survey. Data were collected by means of self-administered questionnaires. Several open-end questions provided additional information.

Findings

Seventy-seven percent of the working students indicated that at least occasionally they give up school activities or outings with friends to work. Non-employed students, however, perceived work as having much less impact on their social activities - only 37% indicate that as workers they would occasionally have to give up school activities or outings with friends to work.

While there is not a significant difference between the GPA of employed and non-employed students, a slightly higher percentage (44%) of the employed students carried a 3.0 or better GPA as compared to 41% of the non-

employed. Interestingly though for 30% of the workers their grades improved, for 49% they stayed the same, and for 21% the grades dropped slightly after they started working. A difference of opinion exists regarding the number of work-related arguments perceived by the employed students and their parents. Twenty-four percent of students compared to 63% of their parents indicated that they argue occasionally about the teenager's work. However over half of the students workers believe work has affected their relationship with their parents.

Over 65% of the employed students never used or have opportunity to develop such skills as typing, telephone usage, mathematics, and writing in their present job. On the other hand 63% reported contact with the public in their present positions.

The most important reason why employed students were working was to make money according to employed students and their parents. Sixty-three percent of the employed students felt their present job was preparing them at least somewhat for their future career. However they listed "preparation for a future career" among the least important reasons for working.

Conclusions

There could be some positive as well as negative consequences of employment on adolescents. Some of the negative consequences seem to be related to adolescent's socialization, family relationships motivation for work, and lack of skills development.

Due to the exploratory nature of this study and the small sample size recommendations and implications based on these data are not possible. A larger sample, more representative of the teenage population in the United States, is recommended for further research on this topic.

REFERENCES

- Greenberger, E. and Steinberg, L.D. (1986). When teenagers work. New York: Basic Books, Inc.
 Peters, J.F. (1987). "Youth, family, and employment," Adolescence, 22, 465-473.

1 - Assistant Professor

2 - Teacher, Mason City High School