

BCTF Research Report

Part of the BCTF Information Handbook

Section XII
99-EI-02

How does working part-time influence secondary students' achievement and impact on their overall well-being?

www.bctf.bc.ca/ResearchReports/99EI02

by Charlie Naylor
May, 1999

Summary

The prevalence of secondary school students working part-time is linked to economic cycles: when there is an economic upturn, more students work; when economies are depressed, fewer work. Most students who work do so in low-paying service, clerical, or sales jobs, with some evidence that proportionately more students from middle-class families work than students from either poor or wealthy families. There appears to be a general view that there is a connection between working more than 15 to 20 hours per week and reduced school success in terms of academic achievement, as well as an increased risk of dropping out of school. However, it is not clear whether increased work causes the problems, or whether academic failure leads more students who are failing to increase their work hours.

Literature Review

A range of literature has been reviewed and some details from this literature are shared below.

1. The prevalence of work

It is not clear what proportion of students work, but in a (U.S.) study of 21,000 senior high school students, 75% were working part-time for an average of 16.4 hours a week (Gordon, 1985). The study found that working was related to a need for immediate income and to a lack of interest in school. In Canada, 40% of teenagers aged 15 to 19 had jobs in 1993, but these data include full-time summer jobs (*Canadian Social Trends*, Winter, 1994). B.C. teenagers are more likely to be employed than teenagers in Ontario, Quebec, or the Atlantic provinces, with 44% employed in B.C. Slightly higher teenage-employment rates than B.C.'s were reported in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta. When only part-time work is considered, 72% of those employed worked part-time. 33% of full-time Canadian students aged 15 to 19 worked during the school year. The Statistics Canada (StatsCan) data reported in *Canadian Social Trends* appear low in comparison to other data, but one possible explanation may be the differentiation

RT99-0042
May 1999

B.C. Teachers' Federation, 100 - 550 West 6th Avenue, Vancouver, BC V5Z 4P2
(604) 871-2283 • 1-800-663-9163 • Fax (604) 871-2294 • www.bctf.bc.ca



between full- and part-time students, a difference not always clarified in some reports. Bernier (1995), using Canadian Labour Force data, found that 40% of Canadian full-time students participated in the labour force, compared to 77% of part-time students.

There may be considerable differences across socio-economic groups, though there is little firm data to support this: Lawton (1992) states that middle-class students are more likely to work than either lower- or upper-class students. Lawton also indicates that about two-thirds of students in senior grades hold part-time jobs, findings closer to Gordon's study than to the data supplied by StatsCan.

2. The effect of working part-time on students' academic achievement

a. Most research shows that there is a detrimental effect on achievement if secondary students work for over 15 hours a week (Stern, 1997). Such students have lower grades, do less homework, are more likely to drop out, and are less likely to enter post-secondary education. Those students who work fewer hours suffer fewer negative consequences. These findings are supported by a Toronto study (Cheng, 1995), and are similar to StatsCan data (*Canadian Social Trends*, 1994), which show that students who worked fewer than 20 hours a week had much lower dropout rates than those who worked for more than 20 hours a week. There were startling differences between males who worked fewer than 20 hours (16% dropout rate), and those who worked longer than 20 hours (33% dropout rate), although the highest female dropout rates (22%) occurred among females who did not work at all while at school. There is one important caveat to the link between part-time work and marks: there is mixed evidence as to whether marks decline because students work more, or whether students whose marks are declining choose to work more. However, Singh (1998) in a study which factored in socio-economic status and previous achievement, stated that the more hours worked, the greater the negative effects on student achievement.

b. The consequences for younger students working longer hours could be more severe than for older students (Barone, 1993).

c. Many students who work find some problems balancing school and work demands (Worley, 1995). Many who work part-time have limited participation in extra-curricular activities (Hope, 1990).

3. The effect of working part-time on students' overall well-being

d. Stern (1997) and Cheng (1995) both state that students derive benefits from working, as long as the hours are below 15 per week. Stern identifies a benefit to future earning potential and a more positive attitude to work formed while working or during work experience at school.

These findings are also supported by Canadian data. However, Lawton (1992) argues that those who support this argument also tend to support a vocational rather than a liberal view of education.

e. Greenberger and Steinberg (1986), in an analysis of psycho-social aspects of working high-school students, concluded that "it may make them academically rich but psychologically poor." They also argued that instead of instilling good work habits, many students who worked part-time learned how to cheat, steal, and deal with boring work.

f. Mortimer (1993) found no evidence to support the claim that working long hours fostered smoking or increased school behaviour problems, but there was evidence of increased alcohol consumption. Other studies, however, have found increased drug and alcohol use, and higher rates of delinquency associated with higher number of hours worked by students.

g. A 1991 Oregon Task Force found the numbers of 16- and 17-year-olds who were working to have increased in recent years. Jobs were often low-paying, unfulfilling, and offered little in the way of educational value or preparation for adult work. Canadian data suggest that trends in teenage employment are linked to economic cycles, with numbers rising and falling with buoyant or depressed economies. Most Canadian students (69%) work in service, clerical, or sales industries, with more females (84%) than males (57%) in these industries. Four times the number of males (16%) compared to females (4%) were employed in construction.

h. Research also indicates that too many hours of work for teenagers increases fatigue and may cause lower academic performance. Carskadon (1999) describes changing sleep patterns during adolescence and discusses the influence of employment on sleep patterns. She found that students working 20 or more hours reported later bedtimes, shorter sleep times, more frequent episodes of falling asleep in school, and more late arrivals in school.

i. An article in the American Federation of Teachers' publication, *American Teacher* (February 1999), cited a report produced by the (U.S.) National Research Council (NRC) and the Institute of Medicine (IOM) which provided evidence of what it claims is an underestimate of 70 documented deaths of children and adolescents as a result of injuries at work, and 100,000 young people seeking treatment in hospital emergency wards as a result of work-related injuries. Based on these data, a committee established by the NRC/IOM is calling for Congress to authorize limits to the number of hours worked per day by teenagers, and to regulate teenagers' work start- and finish-times on school nights.

Charlie Naylor,
BCTF Research

References

- Barone, F.J. (1993). "The Effects of Part-time Employment on Academic Performance." *NASSP Bulletin*, 76, 549.
- Bernier, S. (1995). "Youth Combining School and Work." *Education Quarterly Review*, 2, 4.
- Canadian Social Trends*, Winter (1994). "Working Teens."
- Carskadon, M.A. (1999). "When Worlds Collide: Adolescent Need for Sleep Versus Societal Demands." *Phi Delta Kappan*, 80, 5. January.
- Cheng, M. (1995). "Issues Related to Student Part-time Work: What Did Research Find in the Toronto Situation and Other Contexts?" Toronto Board of Education Research Department.
- Gordon, R. (1985). "Part-time Work Experience of High School Seniors." *Education and Employment Research for the Practitioner*, Research Brief No. 4. ED 262254.
- Greenberger, E., Steinberg (1986). *When Teenagers Work*. New York: Basic Books.
- Hope, W. (1990). "Secondary School Students and Part-time Jobs." Paper prepared for the Park Street Collegiate Institute and the Simcoe County Board of Education.
- Lawton, S.B. (1992). "Part-Time Work and the High-School Student: Costs, Benefits, and Future. A Review of the Literature and Research Needs." Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.
- Mortimer, J.T. et al (1993). "The Effects of Work Intensity on Adolescent Mental Health, Achievement, and Behavioural Adjustment: New Evidence from a Prospective Study," AERA paper, New Orleans.
- Oregon State Bureau of Labor and Industry, Portland (1991). "A Report of the Child Labor Task Force."
- Singh, K. (1998). "Part-Time Employment in High School and its Effect on Academic Achievement." *Journal of Educational Research*, 91, 3.
- Stern, D. (1997). "Learning and Earning: The Value of Working for Urban Students." ERIC Digest #128
- Worley, L.P. (1995). "Working Adolescents: Implications for Counselors." *School Counselor*, 42, 3.