

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The American phenomenon of high school part-time employment has been a concern of educators and researchers for the past three decades and researchers have addressed the issue in cross-sectional as well as longitudinal studies. One researcher (Steinberg, 1996) believes that American adolescents are underachieving at school because they spend too much time engaging in out of school activities, particularly part-time employment. Unlike Europe and other developed and developing countries, the education system in America “enhances the value of early employment” (Mortimer, 2003, p. 13).

In the United States, part-time employment is perceived by many as an integral part of adolescent identity, necessary to promote independence (Shanahan, Finch, Mortimer, & Ryu, 1991), as well as time-management skills (Phillips & Sandstrom, 1990), and crucial for developing responsible adolescents (Finch, Mortimer, & Ryu, 1994; Greenberger, 1984). There is also the belief that early work increases moral and social development (Post & Pong, 2000), social and human capital and the total development of students (Holland & Andre, 1987). Part-time employment during the school year is not mandatory but is an option that high school students have and often opt to choose (Bachman, Safron, Sy, & Schulenberg, 2003).

Adolescents commonly attempt to perform adult management skills in that they try to manage family, school, friends, and work and as students, some are fairly successful at multitasking (Mortimer, 2003). However, for many adolescents, as hours of work increase, management of other aspects of their lives decrease, particularly school related aspects. Hence, adolescents who work intensely (in excess of 20 hours per week) demonstrate decreased grades,

decreased attendances, and sometimes drop out of school (Lillydahl, 1990; McNeal, 1997; Schoenhals, Tienda, & Schneider, 1998). They also spend less time with family and peers (Steinberg, Fegley, & Dornbusch, 1993). Shanahan, Finch, Mortimer, and Ryu (1991) considered the role of the employee to be problematic to adolescents' academic achievement.

Adolescent development and values

Steinberg (1996) attributed three main reasons to the prevalence of student employment in the United States. First, there is great demand in industry for part-time, low wage, retail and service jobs with flexible working hours because it is cost effective for businesses to employ adolescents on a part-time basis. Then, compared to other countries, American students have enough free time to fill the demands of retail and service jobs. Finally, and of considerable importance, American society considers adolescent part-time employment as a sign of maturity and independence and a means to obtain autonomy and essential "hands-on" experiences that are vital for adult work and life. Steinberg also suggested that there is the perception in America that "hands-on" learning is superior to "book learning" and that "laboring in a 'common' job is the best way to build character" (p. 173).

Researchers have indicated that many high school students equate their value with the ability to purchase luxury consumable items because the American society is oriented towards consumerism (Frank, 1999). For many high school students, obtaining and spending money is gratifying (Bachman et al., 2003). In addition, some adults support the view that the "real world" can provide more education than the false environment of the classroom (Bachman, 1983; Steinberg 1996, p. 173). Indeed, employment does not only provide a successful transition

into the workplace it also creates greater autonomy as well as financial awareness and independence for the adolescent (Bailey, 1992).

Obtaining employment outside of the home is also considered a right of passage for American adolescents (Greenberger & Steinberg, 1986) and this promotes a sense of “premature affluence” (Bachman, 1983; Bachman & Schulenberg, 1993) which is augmented by parents who sometimes misjudge their children’s money management skills (Greenberger & Steinberg, 1986). Bachman (1983) used the term “affluence” because teenagers suddenly have a great deal of spending money and the term “premature” because many of them would not be able to sustain that level of spending if they had to provide for their own necessities. Premature affluence has been linked to “precocious development” (Newcomb & Bentler, 1988) where adolescents indulge in adult-like roles, and “pseudomaturity” (Jessor & Jessor, 1977) where the working adolescent behaves in an adult manner, as well as “pseudo-adulthood” where adolescents omit their psychosocial “moratorium” to engage in work and work-related activities.

Premature affluence has been criticized for promoting cynicism about the value of hard work, lack of interest in working more than is necessary in adult work situations, increased interest in drugs and alcohol, materialistic attitudes, and omission of the adolescent “moratorium” period (Bachman, 1983; Greenberger & Steinberg, 1986).

Adolescent Psychosocial Moratorium

More than 100 years ago, Hall (1904) supported a moratorium for youth when he suggested that adolescents need leisure time to explore their environment, their social world, and to discover themselves. He expressed the view that adolescence should be a time of freedom from labor and this would inevitably reduce attempts at adult-like behaviors.

Erikson's (1959) landmark research concluded that adolescents try to attain success as fast as possible but they are not sure on what real success entails. Like Hall, he suggested that adolescents need a psychosocial moratorium where they take "time out" to explore different aspects of their lives and so find themselves. By the same token, Bachman and Schulenburg (1993) expressed concern that high school students who work, and work intensely, do not have the time to enjoy the necessary moratorium period and this can later influence their attitudes in the workplace.

Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1986, cited in Mortimer & Shanahan, 1994), argued that the development of an individual must be considered as a combination of simultaneous connections in several systems such as the family, school, and work, and these systems have consequences when they interrelate. He suggested that individuals can cope better if there is familiarity and shared knowledge among systems and participation by members of each system, particularly the family. For example, if adolescents part-time work is supported by family, school and community, students will cope better in all systems and their educational achievement should not normally be affected in negative ways.

Conceptual Framework

The Nature of Adolescents' Work

The nature of work done by high school students differs from work done by adults in many ways. In addition to being part-time, it is unstable, in a perpetual state of transition, and is highly dependent on the demands of employers, labor market conditions, as well as the individual needs of students. Ideally, high school students are available for work during the summer months (Manning, 1990) and to a lesser extent on weekends only. Yet a large number of students

continue to be employed during the school year (Greenberger & Steinberg, 1986; Weller et al., 2003).

The work adolescents do ranges from informal tasks such as yard maintenance, and babysitting, to formal work in fast-food outlets and retail services which may include supervisory roles. Most jobs held by these adolescents are in retail and service areas and employers rely heavily on the services provided by these adolescents. Thus, over the past two decades a symbiotic continuous relationship (Linder & Cox, 1999) has been developed between adolescents and employers.

This study draws on the concept of work and its relationship to societal view of identity, independence, autonomy, and decision making. High school students who engage in part-time employment are said to derive “status, knowledge of the world of work and attainment of work skills, increased responsibility, maturity, and self-confidence” (Mihalic & Elliott, 1997, p.464). By the same token, there are indications that service-oriented, minimum wage jobs of limited intellectual capacity and marginally related to future careers provide little developmental benefits to students (Fine, Mortimer, & Roberts, 1990; Steinberg et al., 1993). Hence, the literature on high-school student employment presents both negative and positive aspects of high school students’ employment at different intensity levels. It is therefore established that the effects of employment is not uniform and varies according to context, reasons and motivation. One reason for the inconsistency is that aspects of part-time employment need to be more clearly defined. For example, there is need to find out more about the students who work, the duration or number of weeks per year that they work, and the intensity or number of hours that they work compared

to non-workers. Further research is vital to conclude for whom work is good and in what intensity.

Adolescent Work Related Theories and Models

Theory of Social Embeddedness

Granovetter (1985) established a theory of social embeddedness that explains how being embedded in social roles affect individuals. He argued that social embeddedness connects individuals to institutions and influences choices and perceptions. Such embeddedness also provides a sense of allegiance to networks even when these networks affect individuals in negative ways. Hence, students who work intensely often are or become embedded in work more than school and acquire characteristics of the workplace that very often are in conflict with those of the school. Some researchers (Steinberg, 1996; Warren et al., 2000) believed that students who become embedded in part-time work were already disengaged from school prior to seeking employment, and that intense employment was a result of pre-existing differences (ability, family background, attitudes, and values). Granovetter's embeddedness theory is directly related to the concept of job involvement (Bielby, 1992) which suggested that work influences perceptions, attitudes, and choices that individuals make.

Ecological Theory

Bronfenbrenner (1986) also argued within his ecological theory that human development involves a combination of nature, nurture, and context and there is need for connections between these systems. He suggested that there are more benefits to students when there are transitions between or among different settings such as home and school. His foreword to Greenberger and Steinberg (1986) stated four active forces that promote adolescent employment. These forces are

occupational and economic societal changes; a psychological concept of adolescent work that is rooted in American culture; parental permissiveness and youth self-gratification; and the increased societal emphasis on teenage consumerism that is promoted by the mass media.

Developmental/Socialization Model

Some researchers have concluded that involvement in the workplace is vital for an easier transition from adolescence to adulthood (Schoenhals et al., 1998) since work increases moral and social development (Post & Pong, 2000) and provides the opportunity to obtain social and human capital. Social capital is invaluable for building networks and relationships for social support (Coleman, 1990). Work is also associated with the total development of students (Holland & Andre, 1987).

Zero-sum Model

The zero-sum model (Marsh, 1991) suggested that there is a strong negative association between hours spent working and hours spent on educational activities such as studying, doing homework, participating in extracurricular activities, or sleeping. The zero-sum model concept argued that because time is limited (24 hours in a day), the time and energy spent on part-time work would be available to be spent on school-related activities in the absence of work. Marsh and Kleitman (2005) concluded that zero-sum models were associated with academic self-concept and aspirations, commitment to school (Marsh, 1991), investment in school (Greenberger & Steinberg, 1986), and identification with school (Warren & Lee, 2003).

Therefore, similar to the theory of embeddedness, students who spend long hours doing part-time work have less time for school activities. This model assumes that five hours spent flipping burgers is five hours spent not doing home work and other school activities.

However, studies conducted with employed and non-employed students (Warren, 2002), refuted the zero-sum model and concluded that the difference in time spent on homework between moderately employed students (1 to 14 hours) was only 4 hours a week. Therefore, there was little difference between moderately employed students and intensely employed students (20 hours or more) in terms of time spent on homework, school activities and extracurricular activities. While part-time employment was found to detract from educational pursuits, the time spent at work detracted mainly from time spent watching TV or socializing with friends (Schoenhals, Tienda, & Schneider, 1998). Hence, Warren, (2002) rejected the zero-sum model as a model for the association between employment intensity and school performance.

The Primary Orientation Model

The primary orientation model (Warren, 2002; Warren & Lee, 2003), an alternative to the zero-sum model, suggested that the negative performance of employed students was more related to students' social psychological orientation towards and identification with work or school than with their allocation of time. This model implies that students who are oriented toward work are more likely to work anyway and even to work intensely, and as a result do not perform well at school. By contrast, students who are oriented towards school tend to work less and less intensely, and perform better at school. Researchers have questioned whether the negative educational outcomes of students who work are the results of intense employment or pre-existing differences in ability, socio-economic status, attitudes and other characteristics (Steinberg, Fegley, & Dornbusch, 1993; Warren et al., 2000).

The Problem

After three decades of research on the topic, negative issues associated with part-time employment still plague educators. While poor families may depend on adolescents' earnings to facilitate their economic well-being. Many high school students who work are White and middle or upper class. There is need to investigate the present nature of adolescents' work (urban and rural), the quality of the jobs they do in terms of relevance to school work and preparation for future careers, the number of hours they spend working, the ways in which their earnings are used, the degree of stressfulness, the nature of social relationships in and outside of the workplace, and how students' identity and relationships are affected by part-time employment. There is compelling evidence in previous research that the quality of adolescent employment has been found to have effects on adolescent psychological functioning (Mortimer & Finch, 1986). If adolescents are given too much responsibility in the workplace with which they cannot cope, they fall victim to job-related stressors (Greenberger, 1986).

Marsh (1991) concluded that adolescents who spend their earnings to save for college experienced positive effects of part-time employment. Almost one and a half decades after Marsh we need to find out the percentage of students who work, and who are able for example, to save part of their earnings for college. Parents and educators need to be aware of the positive and negative effects of having high school students work during the school year. In addition, we need to examine pre-existing differences among adolescent workers prior to their entry into the job market.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the nature of part-time employment among high school students and its educational, social, psychological and family effects on these students. The researcher examined the reasons why students work, the type of work these students do, how they spend their earnings, and the socio- psychological effects of employment. The study has added to the previous literature on the effects of part-time employment.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the current nature of high school students' employment? This includes the investigation of the following:
 - (a) The intensity of students' work,
 - (b) A profile of students who work,
 - (c) The kind of work students do,
 - (d) Whether there are gender and race based differences among students who work,
 - (e) The factors that motivate students' decision to work,
 - (f) How students spend their earnings,
 - (g) The activities that are likely to replace students' work, and
 - (h) How students cope in the workplace.
2. What is the relationship of school related factors with part-time employment? This question includes the investigation of the following:
 - (a) Academic engagement (attendance, preparedness for class, learning behaviors, enjoyment of learning).

- (b) School activities (extra curricular and co-curricular activities), and
 - (c) Grades.
3. What is the relationship of part-time employment with family and social life? This question includes the investigation of the following:
- (a) Parent-adolescent relationships, parent adolescent interaction, parent adolescent conflict, and time spent with family and participating in family activities, and
 - (d) Friendships, peer group relationships and time spent with friends.

Hypotheses

In this study, it is hypothesized that intense work involvement will be related to less engagement in school and school activities. It is further hypothesized that intensity of work will be negatively related to family and peer relationships.

School, Family and Community Connections

The main focus of the study is to explore the relationship of work involvement, school engagement, family, and peer relationships. School, family, and community connections are reported as dynamic and have profound effects on student outcomes (Bloome, Katz, Solsken, Wilett, & Wilson-Keenan, 2000; Chavkin, Gonzalez, & Rader, 2000; Epstein, Simon, & Salinas, 1997). Communities that collaborate with schools and families have impacted school attendance, educational achievement, students' decisions to pursue challenging and advanced courses and educational aspirations (Miedel & Reynolds, 1999; Yonezawa, 2000).

By the same token, high schools can serve as resources for the community by providing evening courses, social activities and sporting activities. School-community relationships can be established to facilitate both school and community. For example, parents and community

members can participate in activities that can provide physical and financial resources to the school and community.

Community Information

Background information on the school and community is essential for understanding the context of the study. Participants for the study reside in Franklin County, Martinsville City, and Salem City in southwest Virginia. Information on the communities was obtained from the summary files of the Virginia Economic Development Partnership, 2004, and US Census Bureau, Quick Facts, 2003. Data on community profiles are displayed in Table 1 and Figures 1 to 5 (Appendix A).

Franklin County

Franklin County lies 173 miles southwest of the Virginia state capital, Richmond. It is the largest of the three study communities and has a population of approximately 49,000 (2003). Like Salem City, the population is predominantly White (89%) with 11% nonwhite comprising 9.3% Black or African American, and less than 1% of other races. There are almost equal numbers of males (49.3%) and females (50.7%). The median age is 39.7 years which is slightly higher than Salem (39.2 years) but lower than Martinsville (40.8 years). The percentage of high school graduates 25 years and older is just over 72%, while the percentage 25 years and older with a Bachelor's Degree or higher is approximately 15%.

The civilian labor force (2004) is 24,747. Approximately 63% of the population 16 years and over are employed, 3.1% are unemployed, and 9.9% underemployed (2004). The median household income is \$38,056 with per capita income \$19,605. Some 7.3 % of families and 9.7% of individuals live below the poverty level. The main employment sectors are services (30.8%),

manufacturing (23.0%), and trade (17.8%) while the main occupations are sales and office (25.1%), managerial and professional (24.4%), and production, transportation & material moving (22.5%). The education sector (2003) has 11 elementary schools, 3 middle schools, and 1 high school.

Martinsville City

Martinsville is the most rural and the smallest study community with a population of just over 15,000. It is also the most diverse community with 55.4% White and 42.5% Black or African American. The median age (40.8 years) is slightly higher than Franklin County (39.7 years), Salem City (39.2 years), Virginia (35.7), and USA (35.3 years). The percentage of females (54.8%) is slightly higher than males (46.2%) is similar to Franklin County, Salem City, Virginia (51.0%) and the USA (50.9). Of the three communities, this city has the highest percentage of persons 65 years and over (20.6%) compared to Franklin (14.3%), Salem (16.8%), Virginia (11.2%) and the USA (12.4%). Martinsville also has the lowest number of graduates 25 years and older (68.5%) but more graduates 25 years and older with Bachelor's and higher degrees (16.6%) than Franklin County (15%).

In Martinsville the main areas of employment by sector are manufacturing, services, trade, and government. The main areas of employment by occupation are production, transportation and material moving, sales and office, managerial and professional, service, and construction, extraction and maintenance. The median income per household is \$27,441, and per family is \$35,231. Families living below the poverty line equal 19.2% while individuals at that economic level equal 19.2%. Of the total population, 25% of those under the age of 18 and 16.9% of persons 65 years and over are living below the poverty line. Homeownership rate is 60.2% is

lower than Franklin (81.1%) and Salem (87.6%) as well as the median household income \$27,441, and per capita money income \$17,251.

Salem City

The population of Salem City (24,747) is about half the population of Franklin County (49,000). Like the other two communities, national and state, the number of females (52.8%) was slightly higher than males (47.2%). Like Franklin County, the population is predominantly White (91.9%) with 8.1% nonwhite. The median age is similar to the other communities (39.2 years). The number of high school graduates age 25 or higher (82%), and the percentage of persons with Bachelor's and higher degrees 25 years and older 19.8%, are higher than the other two communities. The percentage of persons 65 years and over is 16.8%.

The percentage of persons employed (16 years and over) is 64% (2003). The unemployment rate is 2.2% (2004) and the underemployment rate 6.1%. The major areas of employment by sector are services, trade, manufacturing and government. The major areas of employment by occupation are sales and office, managerial and professional, sales and office and; production, transportation and material. Homeownership rate is 67.6%. Per capita income is \$21,587 and median household income \$41,994. Some 4.3% of families and 6.7% of individuals live below the poverty line.

Delimitations

The participants in the study are limited to students in grades 9 to 12. The selection of the sample was based on convenience sampling. This method ensured the availability of a sample that would provide answers to research questions and hypotheses when random assignment was not possible.

Limitations

The following caveats should be considered when interpreting the results of this study:

1. The study is limited to high-school students in southwest Virginia where there is an over-sampling of White students and hence other ethnic groups are under-represented. Generalizability of the results may be limited to similar populations of high school students.
2. The study will rely on adolescents honest responses on a self-reported survey and may be subjected to accuracy of recall.
3. Respondents who participate in a survey in a classroom setting may practice test-taking behaviors and anxiety which may influence their responses (Dillman, 2000, p. 254).
4. Weekly work intensity hours were limited to four categories.

Definition of Terms

The following terms and definitions are provided to clarify constructs used in the study:

Adolescent moratorium: A period where the adolescents are free to explore their social world and develop their emerging identities without stringent commitment (Erikson, 1959; Mead, 1961).

Deferred gratification: The process of giving up temporary satisfaction in order to enjoy improved and more permanent satisfaction later on. Many adolescents strive for instant gratification (MacArthur, 1990).

Premature affluence: A situation where young persons work and spend their earnings by

indulging themselves and do not contribute to any expenses and responsibilities (Bachman, 1993).

Summary

Based on the conceptual framework and theories described, this researcher addressed the educational, familial, psychological, and social effects of part-time employment on high school students. The next chapter, Chapter Two is an overview of what has been researched on part time employment within the last two decades and culminates with a discussion on what is still needed by way of research. Chapter Three presents the methodology of the study and includes sample selection, data collection procedure, and data analysis procedure. Results of the analyses are presented in Chapter Four. Summary and discussion of the results as well as directions for future research are presented in Chapter Five.