

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between part-time employment and school engagement; academic achievement; family and peer relationships. This chapter was written to provide a discussion on the major findings and their implications for the educational, social and psychological outcomes of adolescents. The contribution of the study to research on the effects of part-time employment for high school students is also discussed. Finally, directions for future research are suggested.

#### Summary of Research Findings

This chapter presents the major findings of the study required to answer the three research questions and to support or reject the two hypotheses.

#### *The Current Nature of High School Students' Employment*

Demographics of the sample for this study were similar to the state and national averages (Appendix A) There were almost equal numbers of males and females in the sample and most students were age 16 and above. Students were employed in a wide variety of jobs which outside of three or four main types varied marginally across race, gender and grade. Approximately two-thirds of students reported that they had been employed at some time during the semester with the preferred jobs being fast food jobs, lawn and odd jobs, and babysitting. Employment in fast food establishments (28%) was the most popular job among workers, followed by lawn jobs (9.8%) and baby sitting (9.6%). Parents had the most influence on students' decision to work and this demonstrates the need for students to have some level of support and supervision in selecting

and keeping their jobs (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). The study did not investigate students who worked in family owned businesses where it was concluded that students who worked in family owned business reported greater parental support and males reported less drug and alcohol use (Hansen & Jarvis, 2000).

As anticipated, most students reported that spending money was important to their getting a job. Nevertheless, a moderate number of students attached importance to saving for education, and a small number of students reported that obtaining work experience, and helping with family expenses as important to them. With regard to spending their earnings, almost two-thirds of students spent most, some, or all of their earnings on consumer items. Also, 23% of students spent some, 33% spent most, and 12.6% spent all of their earnings on personal purchases. Approximately 33% of students spent some, while 15% spent most, and 2% spent all of their earnings on recreation. Approximately 16% of workers saved most or all of their earnings while 24% saved some.

The spending habits of high school workers are skewed towards personal consumption and recreation, this follows the trend of similar research conducted for the past three decades. Adolescents still appear to associate their value and identity with spending on consumer items (Bachman, Safron, Rogala, & Schulenberg, 2003).

Early work has been determined as one of the strongest predictors of whether a person is likely to work for pay (Bachman & Schulenberg, 1993). But is there a typical high school worker? In this study, most students were White (66.1%), followed by Black/African American (26.5%). Almost 60% of the students were in almost equal proportions in grades 11 and 12 followed by 10th grade and 9th grade. Most students in the sample were in the college

preparation or general education track and hence approximately 70% of the sample reported getting As and Bs in the last semester and just over 85% reported that they expected As and Bs in the current semester. Hence the typical worker in the study was a white junior or senior student in the college prep or general education program. Part-time employment of high school students has been reported as a middle-class phenomenon (Carr, Wright, & Brody, 1996; Mortimer et al., 1990) associated with white middle class junior and senior students with two parent families who are relatively well educated.

Use of time is a major issue among adolescents in general and those who work in particular. Using multiple selections, students reported that if they were not working they would: sleep (64.7%), shop (62.4%), chat on the telephone or computer (51.7%), and do home work (37.3%). This pattern supports the Primary Orientation Model (Warren 2002) which suggested that if students were not employed they may find other interests which may not necessarily be school related. However, it was gratifying that over one-third of the students who worked reported that they would do more homework if they were not employed.

Many students reported positive attributes of their job. Approximately 80% stated that they loved their job and that the job taught them valuable social and job skills. Most students (92.7%) agreed that the job was able to provide them with money to purchase things that they would not otherwise been able to purchase. Almost half of the students sought job related advice from their parents which again suggests that parents can be effective and influential in determining the types of work that adolescents do. Approximately 80% of working students sought advice from their peers, which is typical of adolescent behavior.

However, a number of students reported negative descriptions of their jobs such as tiring, and stressful, and some students reported that their job reduced study time, interfered with school work, and caused them to have poor school attendance patterns. Students also claimed that their supervisor was not supportive and that they were not given adequate instructions on the job. This illustrates that the work environments of high school students can be associated with negative work effects and psychological problems (Mortimer, 2003).

#### The Relationship of School Related Factors with Part-time Employment

##### *Differences among Workers and Non-Workers on Study Variables*

Students who were not employed experienced lower levels of school attendance problems, and were more prepared for class. These students had higher levels of positive learning behaviors for class and had more interaction with their parents and other family members than students who did work. Non-workers also showed more joy in their learning endeavors and attached greater value to academic learning.

##### *Differences among Working Students Based on Intensity of Work*

In the study, significant differences were found among the different work hours and school attendance problems, unpreparedness for class, value of academic learning, learning behaviors in class, and parent family relationships. This means that when students work over 30 hours both school engagement and family interaction are negatively affected as was reported in other studies (Ruhm, 1997; Weller et al., 2003)

Tukey HSD tests that were computed to determine the nature of differences among the work hours, found that very high and some high intensity workers were significantly different from other intensity levels across the different variables. Tukey HSD post-hoc tests also revealed

that students who worked 1-10 hours per week had similar school attendance problems, problems with unpreparedness for class, peer relationships, peer activity, peer interaction and peer engagement with those who worked between 11 and 30 hours, but were different from those who worked over 30 hours per week. Therefore, students who work at high intensity levels have more school related problems and also less interaction with family and peers.

#### *Relationship of Work to School Engagement*

Earlier research has shown that there is usually a weak or reciprocal association between high work intensity and academic engagement (Bachman & Schulenberg, 1993; Mihalic & Elliot, 1997; Steinberg & Cauffman, 1995). The results of this study indicated that work increased school attendance problems and preparedness for class. Hence, students who worked intensely had problems associated with punctuality, regularity and general preparedness for successful learning behavior.

#### *Relationship of Work to Other Work Related Variables*

Students who worked intensely during the week reported increased work related stress. This is often the result of trying to manage work, home and school activities. A qualitative study on sources of stress and coping responses of 10th grade high school students (after parents and family stress, work and money related stress had been controlled) reported work as the major source of stress among high school students (Mates & Allison, 1992). In the study, employed students complained about work, school, and family, and although employed, they complained about money problems as much as those who were unemployed.

This study also concludes that students with high instrumental values of work also had high positive views of work and experienced less work related stress. High instrumental value is

based on the ability to obtain and spend money. Those students who perceived their work as having negative aspects also reported higher work related stress.

#### The Relationship of Part-time Employment with Family and Social Life

##### *Relationship of Work to Parent and Family Relationships, and Peer Relationships*

Results of the study revealed that working at intense levels decreased the time spent with parents and other family members. However, work did not affect parent-child interaction and did not seem to create additional family conflict, increase levels of family disagreement, or decrease the possibility of potential conflict in families. Family conflict seemed to be based on other issues outside of work. Parental adolescent conflict is usually an inherent part of adolescent development (Pickering & Vazsonyi, 2000) and persists or does not persist in spite of work. However, research by Steinberg et al., 1993 concluded that students who choose to work, particularly to work intensely, had greater autonomy from parents and came from households that were significantly different from those who did not work or worked at low intensity. Increased work also affected peer relationship and peer interaction. Students who work intensely or very intensely find less time to interact with peers.

##### *Effect of Work Intensity on Co-curricular Activities*

Students in the study indicated limited participation in co and extracurricular activities. Frequencies indicated that 81.9% of students reported that they had never participated in most of the co-curricular activities. Correlations between the items denoting co-curricular activities and work were not significant except for participation in choir or music clubs and participation in intercollegiate sports. Items associated with co-curricular activities were: participation in art or photography clubs, participation in religious clubs, participation in drama or dance clubs,

participation in forensics or debate clubs, participation in choir or music clubs, participation in cheerleaders team, participation in political clubs, participation in reading club, participation in magazine club, and participation in intercollegiate clubs. When work was regressed on intercollegiate sports while controlling for student expectation, a significant negative effect was found which means that the more students work the less they participate in intercollegiate sports. Approximately 2% of the variance in intercollegiate sports participation can be explained by work.

### Discussion and Implications

The study found evidence suggesting that overall school year employment of students in this southwest Virginia sample had small negative effects on their school engagement and family and peer relationships. However, high intensity work by students was associated with increased stress, increased school behavior problems, and diminished activity and time with parents, family and peers. Non-workers, and low intensity workers reported less academic, social, and psychological effects than workers who work at high intensity level.

Leaders of educational systems are generally not in favor of adolescents working during the school year, yet parents and society continue to encourage adolescent work and adolescents believe it is important to have a job while in high school. Educators and parents need to look at both sides of the coin – there are both advantages and disadvantages to being employed during high school, but if part-time work becomes problematic in that it affects students' educational achievement and well-being, then it is not the best option for an adolescent. The autonomy that adolescents are expected to display also comes with students wanting to spend their own money and this is one reason why many adolescents feel compelled to get a job.

*School engagement and high school students*

The present study examined high school students' engagement in school and its relationship to part-time employment. High school students' engagement in school needs to be further examined in terms of its relationship to part-time employment. Part-time employment is clearly an "out-of-classroom" factor (Alexander, 1997) which affects school outcomes. For many students, part-time work further erodes interest and engagement in school. This study adds to the further evidence that work intensity contributes in part or total to high school students' disengagement, alienation and attrition (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000). However, in spite of the pre-existing differences that exist among students who work and the knowledge that many high school students are already disengaged before they begin intense part-time work, schools have been reported as boring and uninteresting by students who work long hours (Steinberg, Brown, & Dornbusch, 1996).

In this study 32.4% of the students reported that they would rather work than attend school while 32.9% reported that school was just a place to meet friends. Maybe successful students succeed in spite of schools and not because of them. If work provides excitement and engagement then inevitably students get embedded in work and alienate themselves from school to the point where they drop out. Are schools interesting enough to compete with the work place? Shaw, G.B. (1909), 1909 Nobel Prize winner reported "... there is, on the whole, nothing on earth intended for innocent people so horrible as a school. To begin with, it is a prison." (p. 35).

Employers need to be aware of the educational and psychological needs of adolescents who work. Students have stated that while they prepared to work less than twenty hours a week, employers always ask them to work additional hours and they are happy to get the extra earnings. In addition, students are forced to contribute many more hours before and after their agreed hours of work. Additional work does affect the quality and quantity of academic work. Work for young people should be monitored and supervised

#### Contributions of the Study

This study contributes to existing research on part-time employment by addressing the educational, social and psychological aspects of part-time employment in southwest Virginia as well as the work perspectives of the students in this region and real data on this sample of students. The study also presents a recent look at many aspects of part-time employment among high school students particularly at behavioral, cognitive and emotional aspects of engagement in school as they relate to part-time employment.

The study provides a synthesis of approximately three decades of research on positive, and negative aspects of part-time work for high school students. The study discussed the theories associated with work and adolescents and those associated with adolescent development in general (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Coleman, 1990; Erikson, 1959; Granovetter, 1985; Hall, 1904). The study outlines the myriad connections between work intensity and school, work variables and peer and family relationships.

In terms of methodology, the instrument was developed to obtain self-reported data from students on how they felt about work, school, family, and peers. The variety of analyses

procedures (Descriptives, T-tests, Anovas, and Hierarchical Regression) contributed to a better understanding of the nuanced nature of part-time employment.

### Directions for Future Research

Future studies need to use mixed methodology to determine why students whose families are financially stable still feel compelled to pursue low level employment during the school year. We need to use qualitative inquiry to find out if engaged students work because work provides better interests and challenges than school. How do these students see co-curricular and extra-curricular activities? Do students feel compelled to have consumer items because their friends do and if they were discouraged from working would they obtain money through other means? We also need to investigate how parents from different socioeconomic backgrounds view part-time employment and its implications for student achievement, social and psychological well being. Some studies have concluded that intense high school employment is related to the stress, the use of drugs and promiscuous behavior (Greenberger & Steinberg, 1986; Mates & Allison, 1992).

The role of employers must also be investigated. Employers view student employees as a cost-effective source of employment. It is difficult for high school students who are fraught with materialistic ambitions to resist offers to work extensive hours to obtain additional wages.

The study revealed that most parents have high educational aspirations for their children but they seem to jeopardize this by allowing them to work intensely on jobs that have little relevance to school and career. Previous studies conducted with parents of high school students who work (Mortimer et al., 1996; Phillips & Sandstrom, 1990) indicated that most parents

believe that grades were not affected by working and that myriad skills and experiences were irreplaceable benefits of work. School counselors, educators and parents need to be better informed about the effects of work on high school students.

The study should also be replicated with heterogeneous samples since the sample use was relatively homogeneous. Comparative studies can also be conducted in developed and developing countries to gain greater insights into international issues related to part-time employment and its effects on high school students in other countries. The American phenomenon of working and work at high intensity levels confirms the view that American students generally devote less time to school related activities than do students in many countries.

### Conclusion

Many of the effects of part-time employment have not changed considerably over the three decades. The engagement of high school students continues to be a challenge for parents and educators. Decades before researchers have reported that some 40 to 60% of high school students are disengaged from school (Steinberg, 1996). The behavioral, emotional, and cognitive aspects of engagement are important to students' academic achievement. Behavioral engagement is of utmost importance because it constitutes time spent on school work, staying on tasks, effort and initiating activities that promote learning.

This study has concluded that school, family and peer relationships are all affected by different intensities of part-time work among high school students. The need for young people to have close connections with family and peers should be considered in these different paradigms as suggested by Bronfenbrenner, 1979. There is also need to investigate how social connections

affect part-time employment in terms of job selection and acquisition. Students who participate in career related jobs are more likely to improve peer relations than in jobs that are of low cognitive complexity with age-segregated employees (Mortimer & Shanahan, 1991).

Based on the findings in this study, it is recommended that parents and educators collaboratively monitor the number of hours that high school students' work during the school year and encourage them to pursue jobs that would provide some measure of cognitive complexity so that the job activities can compliment school activities. There must also be some understanding and dialogue between employers and all persons who are responsible for students' academic and psycho-social development achievement. New research should concentrate on job selection for adolescents rather than only on work intensity. Finally, more longitudinal studies on part-time employment need to be conducted so that stronger causal inferences could be made. There are some positive effects to being employed during adolescence but working at high intensity levels obstructs educational goals of students.