

Think Twice Before Allowing Your 10-Year-Old to Work

February 24 2009, By Glenda Fauntleroy

(PhysOrg.com) -- A new study finds that - despite being responsible enough to have a job at such a young age - fifth-graders who work are more likely to exhibit bad health behaviors than their unemployed 10-year-old peers.

Fifth-graders who work are more prone to use alcohol and marijuana and get into fights, according to the study in the April issue of the American Journal of Preventive Medicine.

Lead author Rajeev Ramchand, an associate behavioral scientist at the RAND Corporation, and his colleagues interviewed 5,147 fifth-graders who lived in three large cities — Birmingham, Los Angeles and Houston — as part of the Healthy Passages study conducted between 2004 and 2006.

The students reported whether they had held a job in the past 12 months, how many hours they worked and what kind of work they did.

Twenty-one percent of the fifth graders said they had a job, with babysitting (16.7 percent) and yard work (24.4 percent) the most common.

Ramchand said the proportion of fifth-graders who reported having a job initially surprised him and his colleagues, but added, “When we saw that over half of the kids who reported having a job worked only one to two hours per week, and mostly doing chores such as yard work and

cleaning, this number did seem sensible.”

The study also looked at how many of the fifth-graders acknowledged delinquent behavior in the last month, such as using alcohol (4 percent) or marijuana (1 percent), being in a fight (52 percent) or running away from home (3 percent).

Those who held a job were 2.2 times more likely to use tobacco, 1.7 more times to drink alcohol and 3.1 times more likely to smoke pot than those who did not have jobs were.

The authors suggested that one reason for the fifth-graders’ behavior is that those who work might “have more unsupervised time” to engage in delinquent behavior and drug use.

“A few studies among older youth have found that the degree to which parents monitor their children’s behavior tends to lessen when their kids start working,” Ramchand said.

Supervision is key, agreed Jeanie Alter, the program manager and lead evaluator of the Indiana Prevention Resource Center at Indiana University’s School of Health, Physical Education and Recreation.

“It is important for parents to monitor the workplace, activities and associates of their working children,” Alter said. “It is also critical to set parameters with the child’s employer, such as limiting access to alcohol and prescription drugs in the home where the child is babysitting. Assuring that children will spend their extra money on positive purchases is also important.”

Provided by Health Behavior News Service

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