

Working more than 20 hours a week in high school found harmful

February 4 2011

Many teens work part-time during the school year, and in the current economic climate, more youths may take jobs to help out with family finances. But caution is advised: Among high school students, working more than 20 hours a week during the school year can lead to academic and behavior problems.

That's the finding of a new study by researchers at the University of Washington, University of Virginia, and Temple University. It appears in the January/February issue of the journal, *Child Development*.

In a reanalysis of longitudinal data collected in the late 1980s, researchers examined the impact of getting a job or leaving work among middle-class teens in 10th and 11th grades. Drawing from the full sample of about 1,800 individuals, the researchers compared [adolescents](#) who got jobs to similar teens who didn't work, and adolescents who left jobs to similar teens who kept working.

Using advances in statistical methods, the researchers matched the teens on a long list of background and [personality characteristics](#) that are known to influence whether or not a young person chooses to work; using this technique allowed more certainty in estimating the effects of working on adolescents' development than in the original analysis of the data.

The researchers found that working for more than 20 hours a week was associated with declines in school engagement and how far adolescents

were expected to go in school, and increases in problem behavior such as stealing, carrying a weapon, and using alcohol and [illegal drugs](#). They also found that things didn't get better when teens who were working more than 20 hours a week cut back their hours or stopped working altogether. In contrast, working 20 hours or less a week had negligible academic, psychological, or behavioral effects.

"Working part-time during the school year has been a fixture of American adolescence for more than 30 years," notes Kathryn C. Monahan, a postdoctoral research scientist at the University of Washington, who led the study. "Today, a substantial proportion of American [high school students](#) hold part-time jobs during the school year, and a large number of them work more than 20 hours each week.

"Although working during high school is unlikely to turn law-abiding teenagers into felons or cause students to flunk out of school, the extent of the adverse effects we found is not trivial, and even a small decline in school engagement or increase in [problem behavior](#) may be of concern to many parents," she adds.

The bottom line, suggests Monahan: "Parents, educators, and policymakers should monitor and constrain the number of hours adolescents work while they are enrolled in high school."

Provided by Society for Research in Child Development

Citation: Working more than 20 hours a week in high school found harmful (2011, February 4) retrieved 25 April 2024 from

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