

Some minority students may fare better than whites when working part time, new research finds

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African-American and Hispanic students may be less likely than non-Hispanic white students to hold a job during the school year, but when they do, they tend to work somewhat longer hours and seem less likely to see their grades suffer than non-Hispanic white students with jobs, according to new research published by the American Psychological Association.

A study involving nearly 600,000 students from around the country also found that among [high school students](#) who work long hours at a part-time job, black and [Hispanic students](#) from lower income households may be less inclined to smoke and drink than affluent non-Hispanic white or Asian-American students who work long hours. The study was published online in the APA journal [Developmental Psychology](#).

"We know from previous research that for most students, working more than 15 hours a week is associated with various problems, including lower grades and substance use," said the study's lead author, Jerald Bachman, PhD, of the University of Michigan. "However, what we're finding with this new research is that this pattern does not seem to appear among some [minority students](#), particularly those who come from a less advantaged background."

Overall, white students were more likely than minority students to report working during the [school year](#), according to the study. Among 10th

graders, 43 percent of non-Hispanic white students worked compared with 29 percent of African-Americans, 31 percent of [Hispanics](#) and 26 percent of Asian-Americans. Among 12th graders, 72 percent of white students worked compared with 57 percent of African-Americans, 59 percent of Hispanics and 53 percent Asian-Americans. However, although [white students](#) were more likely than other students to work, African-American and Hispanic students who held [jobs](#) were more likely to report working more than 25 hours per week. Specifically, among those 12th graders who were employed, 18 percent of Asian-Americans, 22 percent of whites, 31 percent of African-Americans and 32 percent of Hispanics reported working more than 25 hours a week.

Grade point averages among white and Asian-American students dropped dramatically the more hours they worked, while the GPAs of Hispanics and African-Americans showed less connection with hours worked, the researchers found.

"Arguably, affluent kids have the least need to work during their student days," said Bachman. "When they do work, they seem to suffer more in terms of grades and substance use. At least this is true for white and Asian-American students, whereas spending long hours on the job appears to be less harmful for African-American and Hispanic students."

The reasons for this divergent impact remain unclear, but one reason may be that African-American and Hispanic teens, especially those who live in poor urban neighborhoods, have a harder time finding work, Bachman suggested. "When they are able to land jobs, those jobs may require them to work longer hours," he said.

These findings, like previous studies of this nature, do not prove there is a direct relation between working and poor grades or behavior, Bachman noted. "Many kids who choose to work long hours already show evidence of some problems beforehand and may have a more 'rebellious'

nature. But in our view, the evidence certainly does not rule out the possibility that the long hours of work add to the problems," he said.

For example, previous research has shown that teens who live in poor urban neighborhoods have fewer opportunities to find jobs than do youth in more affluent areas. Young African-Americans and Hispanics who do get jobs may be naturally harder workers and may be saving for college or to support their families and may be striving to do well in school, according to the article.

Bachman suggested that students should avoid spending a lot of time at work whenever possible. "The large bulk of research in this area suggests that students should avoid long hours of work in part-time jobs during the school year and, ideally, they should work 15 hours a week or less," he said. "Second, those who do work should try to build a 'credential' as a bright, courteous and motivated worker. As soon as they begin new jobs, students should tell employers and supervisors that they hope to earn a good letter of recommendation. If they say that right at the outset, it will help everyone view the job as an important opportunity for growth and education."

The study's nationally representative sample consisted of 314,959 10th graders and 276,026 12th graders as part of the Monitoring the Future project. These analyses were based on private and public school students who responded to surveys annually from 1991 through 2010. [Students](#) reported their average hours of [work](#) during the school year, their GPA and their levels of [substance use](#), including cigarette smoking, pot smoking and alcohol consumption. Demographic information included gender, race/ethnicity, parental education and income, mother's employment status and how often the student had been absent from school in the last month.

More information: "Adolescent Work Intensity, School Performance,

and Substance Use: Links Vary by Race/Ethnicity and Socioeconomic Status," Jerald G. Bachman, PhD, University of Michigan; Jeremy Staff, PhD, Pennsylvania State University; Patrick M. O'Malley, PhD, and Peter Freedman-Doan, PhD, University of Michigan; *Developmental Psychology*, online Jan. 14, 2013.

Provided by American Psychological Association

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