

Youth Employment and Social Capital: The Impact of Working with Family on High School Performance

Extended Abstract

INTRODUCTION

Most adolescents are employed at some point during the high school period (an estimated 80-90%, see the Committee on the Health and Safety Implications of Child Labor, 1998). The likelihood of employment, as well as the hours (or intensity) of paid work, increase in subsequent years of high school. Data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health finds that approximately 46% of employed 12th graders averaged 20 or more hours of paid work per week during the school year, compared to just 9% of employed 9th graders. The prevalence of young people working in the United States has concerned some scholars that these early experiences may interfere with school achievement and positive behavioral adjustment (Greenberger and Steinberg, 1986). While research has generally found few differences in school performance between working and nonworking adolescents (Mortimer & Finch, 1986; Steinberg, Greenberger, Garduque, Ruggiero, & Vaux, 1982), intensive work (often measured as more than 20 hours per week) compromises academic performance in high school (Carr, Wright, & Brody, 1996; D'Amico, 1991; Greenberger & Steinberg, 1986; Mortimer & Finch, 1986; Steinberg et al., 1982). Working many hours has been found to increase school absences (Schoenhals, Tienda, & Schneider, 1998) and increase the probability of school dropout (D'Amico, 1984, Warren and Lee, 2003).

Despite the increasing attention researchers have devoted to adolescent employment and specifically, work intensity, there is a dearth of research that addresses

how context of employment affects youth development. Research on the effects of job quality on deviance and mental health (see Staff and Uggen, 2003; Mortimer, Harley and Staff, 2000) has illuminated the importance of moving beyond the focus on work intensity (or number of hours per week) in understanding how adolescent employment affects youth development. One aspect of employment context is with whom and adolescent works. A common criticism of teen employment is that students often work for employers who do not, and possibly *cannot*, make educational achievement a top priority. Often, the amount of business drives when and for how long a student will work. Parents and other family members, on the other hand, are presumably more likely to prioritize school over work for their children. If their child has a test coming up or their homework is suffering, they would be more likely to moderate their child's work hours, and have more control over the number of hours they work. Hansen and Jarvis (2000) find that working in a family-owned business is associated with greater perceived parental support and less drug and alcohol use. The purpose of this paper is to assess how working for or with other family members impacts academic achievement, specifically grades, for high school students.

PRIOR RESEARCH ON THE EFFECTS OF ADOLESCENT EMPLOYMENT

Research on adolescent work has consistently shown a negative relationship between paid work hours and many indicators of school performance. The number of hours worked per week is negatively associated with school engagement, grade point average, being in a college-orientation track, time spent on homework, educational aspirations, and high school completion (Carr, Wright, and Brody 1996; D'Amico 1984;

Greenberger and Steinberg 1986; Marsh 1991; Mortimer and Finch 1986; Schoenhals, Tienda and Schneider, 2000; Warren and Lee, 2003). More “adult-like” work roles in adolescence also limits educational attainment in young adulthood, as intensive work patterns (more than twenty hours per week throughout most of the high school period) reduce the probability of a four-year college degree by age twenty-five (Mortimer, 2003) and ten years after graduation (Carr, et al., 1991).

There are two main perspectives used to explain this negative association between high work hours and school performance. One perspective suggests that students who work are, or become, less engaged in school through increased investment work. Time spent at work takes away time that could be spent doing homework or participating in school activities. Additionally, students might perceive employment as an alternative means for tangible rewards that may or may not otherwise be gained at school. This implies that early work experiences are not only be harmful to academic success, but may also foster negative attitudes toward school and increase school detachment. A second perspective suggests that adolescents that work long hours have more autonomy from their parents and less attachment to their family. They not only become more financially independent, but they also might have more decision-making ability and authority at the workplace. This autonomy at work can be translated into less parental control at home, and can lead to increased problem behaviors and lower academic achievement. . Research by Staff and Uggen (2003) finds that youth who had more autonomy at work drank alcohol more frequently, had more problems at school, and were more likely to be arrested than those who had less autonomy.

Both of these perspectives rest upon the assumption that working increases an adolescent's autonomy from their parents, and jobs *compete* with school or the family, or both. However, for youth who work with or for their parents or other family members, parental control and involvement might be strengthened rather than weakened. Coleman and his colleagues' research on Catholic schools and social capital stress the importance of "intergenerational closure", which suggests that a community in which parents know their child's friends and their parents helps reinforce positive educational values and expectations. This reasoning can, and should be, extended to other arenas of adolescent development, such as employment. For students who work with family members, their parents would be more likely to know their child's co-workers and employers. Adolescents working in family businesses might actually have *higher* school performance because working for parents or other family members would not increase autonomy from parents, and in fact might even increase attachment to family and parental control, so parents can reinforce educational values. Also, parents might also put school as the priority for their children and allow more flexible schedules or limit work hours.

DATA

I use data from the University of Washington Beyond High School project, which surveys all seniors in the classes of 2000 and 2002 in a school district outside the Seattle, Washington area. Students were asked about their high school performance, educational aspirations and expectations, and their post-high school plans for the following year. They were also asked about their employment experiences during high school. Respondents and their parents' employment were determined by matching the student's

employer to their parent's employer. If the student responded that his or her employer was a parent or other family member, or if he or she had the same employer as a family member, respondents were coded to have been working with family. In addition, class of worker was also determined, and if they responded that they worked without pay in a family business, they were considered to be working with family.

To measure race, the survey followed the new approach from the 2000 census by allowing respondents to check one or more race categories. The responses to the race question were combined with a separate survey question on Hispanic identity to create a set of eight mutually exclusive and exhaustive race and ethnic categories that reflect the considerable diversity in the population of youth in West Coast cities. In this sample of high school seniors, only about one-half are (only) white. The remainder are incredibly diverse with about 9% Hispanic, 17% black, 6% East Asian (Chinese, Korean, and Japanese), 4% Cambodian, 5% Vietnamese, 4% Filipino and Other Asian, and 5% American Indian, Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander.

ANALYSIS PLANS

Preliminary analyses of this data show that there are positive effects of working with or for family members on high school grades. These positive effects can outweigh the negative impact of working more than twenty hours per week. In this paper, I plan to expand on these analyses and investigate racial and ethnic differences in patterns of employment and employment context and to see how the effects of employment context vary by race and ethnicity. In addition, because the decision to work, and who to work for, is a non-random process, I will investigate what factors predict work status, work

intensity, and whether or not an adolescent works with a family member. In my final models of high school grades, I will include a selection hazard equation in order to see if the selectivity of students who choose to work affects the impact that employment context has on school performance.

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