

THE STUDENT WORKER: A new Adolescent Lifestyle, full-time secondary student and part-time employee.

Karen Yap Institute of Catholic Education

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The focus of this research based study is the full-time secondary student who is also participating in part-time paid employment. This increasing phenomenon attracts both male and female adolescents equally. The assumption that this working experience is intrinsically 'good' for the students is questioned, as is the awareness of the schools to this new lifestyle.

This paper includes a pilot study which involved a group of Melbourne students who responded to a questionnaire about the types of jobs they were involved in, their workplace experiences, their perceptions of the benefits of working and finally how they prioritised their commitments and 'managed' their lives.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

My initial awareness of this new lifestyle of adolescents occurred whilst I was employed as a Year 12 co-ordinator and teacher in a Melbourne Secondary Girls' College. Often I experienced a confrontation with a student over our differing values regarding education and commitment. When homework was not done, option work not handed in on time and often the student was too tired to attend fully in class or to take part in school life generally, the 'problem', usually turned out to be the student's commitment to part-time paid employment.

Thursday nights were a major problem area as well as the week-ends. Altercations would occur when work was due Friday morning or Monday mornings Thursday night was late night shopping, hence the responsibility to Safeway, and Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays were popular again for Retail Outlets, Fast Food and Hot Bread Kitchens. Indeed a number of my Year 12's would work a full Sunday at the Hot Bread Kitchen, taking their homework with them this did not seem a concern to them, at the time. This commitment to work I interpreted as a 'lack of commitment to academia (and to the school generally) but its 'nature' intrigued me. I pondered over the students' need to work and its obvious importance to them. I questioned the gains of this work experience and the role the parents played. How did the students obtain employment, what types of jobs were they doing? To me as a teacher, any personal attributes they may have been developing, as a result of this part-time employment, seemed much less important than their schooling.

If the Year 12's, at the most important time of their secondary school life were involved in the workforce, so too must the younger students of years 8, 9, 10 and 11.

WHAT DOES THE LITERATURE SAY?

Historically for young women, much more than young men, working and going to school have been mutually exclusive. But nowadays evidence shows that it is quite common for secondary school students to be organising their lives around employment and school commitments.

Incidence of Part-Time Work: In Australia in the late 1960's approximately one in twenty full-time secondary students had a part-time job (Ashenden 1990). By 1971, 3.6% of students between the ages 15-19 years had part-time work and this had risen to 23% by 1980 (O'Neil & Bosio 1984) 59.5% of all teenage part-time workers in 1986 were school students and 74% of these were 15 or 16 years of age (Sweet 1987).

This year, Australia wide, Ashenden (1990) claims that about one quarter of all Australian secondary students have part-time jobs. A recent study of two Melbourne High Schools (one in the inner city area, the other in the outer South-Eastern metropolitan area) found that more than half of the total student populations of the high schools in the sample were involved in part-time employment (Nolan & Hagen 1989). These included 42% of all Year 7's rising to 75% of Year 12's. The hypothesis that pressures of senior school life lead to a reduction in working time is not supported in this study. Nolan and Hagen also ascertained that boys are involved in employment more in the first two years of high school and girls more from year ten onwards.

Teenage work involvement is not a purely Australian phenomenon of course. American data indicates that 63% of high school seniors are working at any given time throughout the year. On estimate this means that well over one million school students between the ages of 14 - 18 are employed in some way. By the time American teenagers have completed their schooling, 80% will have held a job at some point during their high school career (Greenberger and Steinberg 1986). These authors considered this a 'uniquely American phenomenon' however more recently this can be challenged. 1988 figures suggest that the percent of teenage school students participating in the workforce, in Australia is 36.7%, Canada 40.5%, United States 43.8%, United Kingdom 45.1% and Denmark 51.7%. (OECD Source 1988 Cited in Ashenden 1990:2).

Two immediate problems arise when discussing the incidence of part-time work and full time study, the first of these is the timing of paid employment in the student's year. There is a vast difference in the experiences of those students (a) who work only at vacation time and those (b) who work continuously throughout the year. The second is the definition of both 'student' and 'adolescent.' If the focus is on the 15-19 year olds, then the experiences of those less than 15 years are being ignored. I suggest that these younger adolescents are involved significantly in the areas of both paid and unpaid work and their commitments and experiences need to be considered.

Types of Jobs: Basically the jobs done by our student workers offer few prospects for advancement and are often monotonous and dull. Their experience of work is gained through casual unskilled jobs found mainly in the retail areas, supermarkets, and fast foods outlets (O'Neil & Bosio 1982; Coventry et al 1984; Murphy 1986; Nolan & Hagen 1989). Other findings included the service and entertainment area, factory work, self employment and voluntary work (O'Neil & Bosio, 1982) and newspaper and paper deliveries and baby sitting (Nolan & Hagen, 1989). These results are similar to those found in the American data where in 1980, 56% of student-workers were involved in the retail and service area (Greenberger & Steinberg, 1986).

The Number of Hours Worked: As expected there is a wide range in the number of hours worked and this is dependent on

(i) Whether involvement in work is during term time or vacation time, (ii) the age of the student, and (iii) the level at which the student is currently studying. Recent Australian findings for the number of hours worked per week illustrate this.

THE NUMBER OF HOURS WORKED PER WEEK

AUTHOR

COVENTRY et al
 1982 NOLAN & HAGEN
 1986

1984 O'NEIL & BOSIO
 1989 MURPHY

FINDINGS

5 TO
 9
 HOURS
 < 8
 TO 16
 HOURS
 < 5
 TO 18
 HOURS
 9 TO

>20 HOURS The United States data reflects a much higher investment and these hours may indeed be uniquely American, as claimed. Senior boys for example work 21.1 hours weekly and senior girls, 17.8 hours. One in four students has

the equivalent of a half-time job whilst 10% of seniors worked the equivalent of a full-time job, that is more than 35 hours weekly. (Greenberger and Steinberg, 1986)

Incentives to Work: The simple answer to what motivates teenagers to work is money and the autonomy it can buy. Australian and American data agree on this although the latter suggests that previously it was the children of blue-collar workers who worked, to help the family out. Seldom is this given as a reason today, although in Ashenden's work (1990) reference is made to Bentley and O'Neil's research where one in ten said that they worked to help the family income. One year 10 student in the recent Melbourne study said she looked for work because she no longer lived at home and she needed the money (Nolan and Hagen, 1989). This is a more recent area of serious concern and raises the question of the great variety of experiences that our teenagers have and the grave inequality that exists. Not only do some teenagers have paid employment and schooling to cope with but often this, plus, unpaid, unacknowledged, domestic workloads. I suggest that this is a significant issue for teenage girls.

Independence, an investment in the future and pragmatic reasons were those given by the South Australian students (O'Neil and Bosio, 1982). Money, personal satisfaction, a sense of contributions to personal development, independence and responsibility were those stated by Victorian students (Coventry et al, 1984) while financial gain, independence and experience were the most popular reasons given by the Melbourne students. (Nolan and Hagen, 1989). These same students spend their wages on consumer items, consumables and entertainment.

The Consequences of Involvement in Part-Time Work:

POSITIVE EFFECTS: Having money and autonomy are the two most obvious positive consequences of student employment. For the majority of teenagers, these would also be the most important consequences, for these are the reasons given for taking on part-time employment whilst studying. As well as these, students do seem to enjoy the experience of working, although they are realistic enough not to want to do the same job full-time. Studies reveal that staying longer at school and working part-time was considered to be more profitable and attracted less stigma than leaving school and either being employed or working part-time. These same students considered that they had benefitted personally by working, becoming more independent, responsible and confident. They felt that their attitudes and manners had changed and they had developed their own abilities and had greater knowledge of the world of work. (O'Neil & Bosio, 1982)

Whether working part-time improves one's academic life is disputable but there is some evidence that suggests this could be so. Coventry et al (1984) found that those students who were employed part-time whilst studying for Year 12 fared slightly better on the results overall than did the non-workers.

Working students have also been described as being more enthusiastic and motivated about going on to further studies than their non-working peers. These same students are also socially more involved and active. (Nolan & Hagen, 1989)

NEGATIVE EFFECTS:

The costs of part-time work for these teenagers need to be considered. It is obvious that the more time spent on working, the less time there is for other investments - be they family, study, friends, recreation, sport, health and so on. Logically it would seem that the greater the investment in paid work, the greater the costs.

Despite interest in social interaction, the jobs done by teenagers tend to be dull, monotonous and boring, hardly the type of work experience that one would recommend. It is suggested that due to the nature of teenage employment, a negative attitude towards the world of work is developing. Students in the retail area reported feeling frustrated. They claimed they had learnt no new skills, that they did not enjoy their work and that they felt exploited (O'Neil and Bosio 1982). Students learn about the inevitability of a work consumption cycle, about submission and how to resist submission by 'mucking-around', 'working fiddles' and negotiating their own work styles. (Reeders 1985) Working mainly with other adolescents, the experience can also be seen as an

extension of the adolescent sub culture rather than a transition to the adult world. As well, being more affluent need not lead to a greater appreciation of economic reality but may lead simply to self gratification, conspicuous consumption, and selfishness. As to school related 'costs', students do not generally see their part-time work as interfering with their studies, although they mention sometimes the difficulty of getting homework done. Non working students however see this as the main reason for choosing to stay out of the workforce. (O'Neil and Bosio, 1982)

American data does show a positive correlation with intensive work experience, low grades and dropping-out of school. (D'Amico, 1984, Greenberger and Steinberg, 1986.) But at the same time Greenberger and Steinberg have speculated why the toll is not greater and have raised the question in the United States context of an unchallenging curricula and the low expectations of teachers. It is suggested that parents, school administrators, teachers and students have collaborated tacitly in allowing students to work long hours without ill effects on their school performance

..."Students' part-time jobs were a key factor in lowering teachers' expectations that students would take lessons seriously, would exert effort in preparing assignments, would merit teachers' efforts instructing meaningful activities."

(McNeil 1984 cited in Greenberger and
Steinberg 1986: 192)

Thus, this American study claims that a vicious circle was established where the more students worked and for longer hours, the less some teachers required of them at school. The more school became boring and less demanding, the more students increased their work hours. Other extreme costs of intensive involvement in work experience reflected in the American data are increased rates of drug and alcohol abuse, higher rates of delinquency and increased absences from school.

The quality of life experienced by the working student needs to be extended to include not only the hours worked but the conditions at the workplace and the potential for exploitation and harassment. The Melbourne study of Nolan and Hagen begins to do this. They also raise the issue of unpaid work in the home or for the family. Such costs involved in unpaid responsibilities especially girls', have not been measured. However, if one is investigating the student's commitment to study, then it is unsatisfactory to ignore this and to consider paid work only. Girls, I believe, are learning very early that their future life is to be a constant juggle of responsibilities with perhaps little time 'left-over' for self. I speculate that this is not the case for boys.

To consider competently the full costs of this lifestyle, the non-worker should also be studied. Are they 'better' students, are they healthier, more active, more ambitious or are they just as involved but in other less visible but not less significant activities? Nolan and Hagen, (1989), by researching the total student populations of two Melbourne High Schools attempt to do this. The fact that schools choose to ignore this new phenomenon and that the students' out of school work experience is not acknowledged in any positive way, is yet another major cost both to the student and to the school.

METHOD:

In a small study, with the aim of exploring student perceptions of some of these phenomena discussed above, forty-five students from a Melbourne secondary college who were involved in part-time work were given questionnaires. Twelve students were from Year 12, twelve from Year 11, sixteen from Year 10 and four from Year 9. Ages ranged from 13 years to 18 years.

Despite the location of the school, in a wealthy Eastern suburb of Melbourne, some 5 kilometres from the city, the clientele come from varied socio-economic backgrounds and travel to the school from widespread areas. Fathers' occupations reflect that some 60% are tradespeople with a small minority of professional people and unskilled workers. Many parents are involved in their own businesses, especially those from migrant families.

The majority (67%) of this sample claimed to be "Australian." A slightly smaller majority (60%) said that both parents were employed, whilst a very small minority (4%) claimed that the parents were self-employed.

I met with these students as a group and explained what was required of them. They had a questionnaire of twenty-five open-ended questions to respond to. At that initial stage I was trying to ascertain the following:

(i) the nature and incidence of part-time work (ii) utilisation of income (iii) the extent of domestic responsibilities (iv) how students' priorities their activities (v) the parents' role (vi) the perceived consequences of working

RESULTS:

The findings from the pilot study are compatible with the current Australian data. These teenage girls were overall averaging nearly nine hours of part-time work weekly. The year nines more than the others (but the figure is inflated due to the 'exceptional' work experience of one respondent), followed by the year elevens, the year tens and the senior students; the year twelves were working the fewest hours. As a group their average earnings were \$50.00. One third of this sample also received 'pocket money', the amount ranging from \$2.50 per week to \$50.00 per month. Most of the sample were both spending and saving their earnings. Expenditure was focused on 'going out', consumer items, consumables and to support hobbies e.g. caring for a horse.

Savings were for overseas holidays, buying a musical instrument, holidays in Queensland and purchasing cars. No student mentioned spending on 'necessities' and it appeared that their earning were for their 'extras' or luxuries and that in this sample at least, there were no contributions towards the family household.

As would be expected the girls worked mainly Saturday, Friday night and then in a much reduced manner on other evenings. Only one student worked every week day and the remainder mainly appeared to have 'reasonable' hours, although a number (31%) obviously did not have a set, regular pattern of hours. This can be a problem.

The types of employment were the typical, teenage jobs, in the main repetitive, dull, boring and unskilled. Overwhelmingly, these girls worked in the retail area (68%). One fifteen year old was holding down two jobs; working in a motel - cleaning breakfast trays, the kitchen, rooms, making beds etc., on Saturday and Sunday mornings - (6' hours per week) and at McDonald's weekdays and weekend afternoons/evenings - (9 - 13 hours per week.) She would be working in total, approximately a minimum of 15' hours or a maximum of 19' hours. Her only reason given was 'for the money'. She used her earnings for 'going out', 'buying clothes' and savings. She expanded on this response by referring to the fact that her friends worked and had money so she needed to work to be able to do the things that they did. Her parents were not happy about her working the two jobs, mainly because she was not home enough but also because of concern regarding school work. She does not like working - the job or the commitment, has difficulty managing her time and cannot play the amount of sport that she would like to, but realises that if she wants to be like her friends there is no alternative.

The youngest student in the sample (13 years) also worked long hours in a restaurant. Friday night 5pm to 2am; Saturday night 5pm to 2am and Sunday 11am to 3.30pm. it is a situation where her mother is the manager of the restaurant and, I presume, arranged the job for her. She claims to only earn between \$40 and \$60 (including \$20 for tips...) this is after 22' hours of work! She also has a babysitting job for one night a week at \$20. These findings tend to inflate the figures for the group.

The teenagers were involved in unskilled work. When asked about the types of skills required for the work, responses ranged from 'nil' to the personal ones of patience, pleasant personality, confidence and the like. Basic maths and organisational skills were also mentioned. Personal skills developed from working and mentioned by the girls included communication skills, speed, friendliness, confidence etc., as well as the jobs specific skills like 'how to

make a bed properly' (motel work), 'how to make a cappuccino, a pizza, drinks ...' For these girls the best thing about working was the money, as well as being the prime reason in the actual decision to work part-time. The worst things were the repetitive nature of the job, tiredness, cleaning-up at work, finishing late, travelling and a variety of other 'complaints' like 'boring', 'dull', 'my boss' and the 'commitment.'

The majority, (75%) felt that working had changed their lives to some extent. Apart from being richer the students mentioned that they were now more confident, more mature and more responsible. They planned their days more carefully, did not waste as much time as before and felt in control of their lives. Their social circle had been extended, they no longer borrowed money and they felt that generally they used their money wisely.

On the other hand the teenagers complained of being 'so busy', tired and depressed. Leisure time was restricted and study had been reduced. However, none of them had plans to discontinue working part-time.

The difficulty of fitting in all that they wanted to do was put to the students and they were equally divided in their responses. Those who said that they found it difficult to fit everything in, spoke of the lack of time spent with boyfriends and friends, the lack of a social life and that there was no time for sport and other leisure activities e.g. caring fully for a horse. Senior students mentioned neglect of homework and schoolwork generally. Younger students mentioned that they 'gave-up' sport and going out because of their part-time job

" ... Yes, I like to do a lot of sport and now that I'm working my job has taken the place of my weekend activities ..."

Those who felt that they could manage to do what they wanted to, claimed that they were well organised or that they had nothing else to do anyway.

"... Not really. It just requires dedication and organisational skills ..."

When asked to rank the importance of employment, going out with friends, school work and family, the year nines and tens tended to put employment and friends, before school and family. The more senior students 'reluctantly' indicated school work ahead of friends, employment and family. Despite this, if there was a clash of all four, a majority of students indicated that a decision would be made in favour of employment over school, family or friends.

As well as working part-time and going to school full time, these teenagers also have added responsibilities of unpaid domestic work. There was a very unequal spread of chores with some girls looking after their own room only whilst others were responsible for food preparation, washing, ironing, dusting, babysitting, caring for pets, mowing the lawn and putting out the rubbish. A closer examination is needed of the daily routine of students, especially in relation to gender differences in expectations and responsibilities in order to fully appreciate the question of part-time work and full time study for girls.

CONCLUSIONS

These findings do support local and overseas data and predominantly tell us that there is a great deal that we do not know about this new lifestyle. We do know that this phenomenon is here to stay. With structural changes occurring within the economy, coupled with increased retention rates for schools, the adolescents' period of dependency has been lengthened. As developing adults, with sophisticated tastes, there is a 'push' for them towards autonomy and independence. With some parents, either unwilling or unable to cope with the financial pressures of these older dependents, who under different circumstances, may already have been established in the workforce, part-time, casual work is the solution.

These teenagers are learning about work; they are richer and they may be more confident and more organised. But, they are also pressurised, tired, too busy, "fitting-in" study where they can, withdrawing from family activities and hobbies and perhaps are developing attitudes of acquisitiveness and selfishness.

As one quarter of all secondary students work, do the schools generally and teachers specifically acknowledge this? In Victoria, the new V.C.E. recognises some of these issues and provides opportunities for teachers to utilise the experiences of working students, but dealing with the student-worker in the classroom is still very much an individual matter. At least teachers should ensure that they do more than..."not set homework on Thursday nights" as Ashenden reported in 1990.

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Figure 1: Hours Worked/Income Earned - Weekly

YEAR LEVEL	AVERAGE HOURS WORKED	INCOME
	AVERAGE WEEKLY	
9		
14*		
\$50		

10
7
\$48
11
8
\$54
12
6.5

\$48*Inflated

due
to
exceptional
experiences
of
one
student.

Figure 2:

Days of the week on which students worked

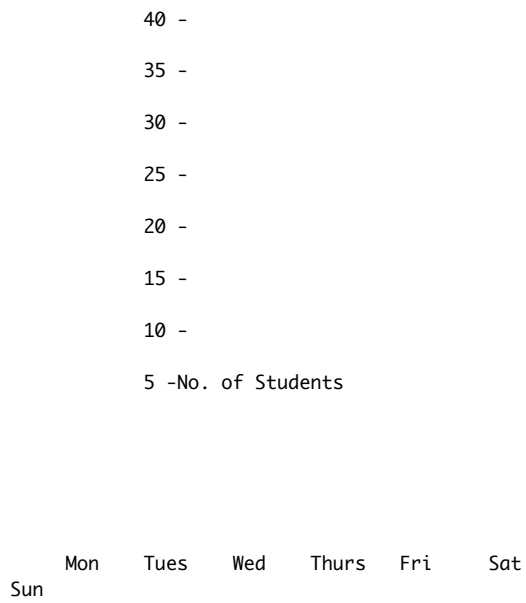


Figure 3: Places of Employment

Year Level
 Retail
 Specialised
 Fast Food
 Retail
 Food & Bev.
 Other
 9
 Milk Bar
 Canteen Waitressing
 Child care centre Baby Sitting
 10
 Market - Fr
 Deli Art Supplies Ice Cream P Hot Bread Jewellery Deli
 SSW check out SSW check
 out SSW check out Safeway check out
 McDonald McDonald
 Waitressing
 Waitressing
 Hotel-cleaning Hairdressing
 11
 Chemist Deli Deli Newsagent Aussie
 Disposal Target
 Coles check out Safeway Safeway
 Pizza Hut
 Waitressing Kiosk
 12
 Deli
 Newsagent Myers Target Target Venture K Mart
 Safeway Safeway Coles

Figure 4:

REASONS FOR WORKING

1. To earn my own money (80%)
 2. To be independent (32%)
 3. I enjoy it (20%)
 4. To meet people (13%)
 5. For experience in the workplace (11%)
 6. To be able to save (6%)
 7. Something to do outside home and school (4%)
- Extra pocket money (2%)
 To develop responsibility (2%)
 To escape the house (2%)
 To broaden my experience (2%)
 For a change (2%)
 To help Mum and Dad (2%)

Figure 5:

USE OF MONEY

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Spend (80%) <p> Going out
 year Clothes
 Presents
 Queensland Food
 Petrol Feed my horse etc. </p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Save (68%) <p> Overseas at the end of the
 To buy a flute
 For a holiday in
 To buy a car </p> |
|---|---|

Figure 6(a): 'Skills' Required for the Job

PERSONAL	SPECIFIC
Communication	Basic Mathematics
Confidence	Organisational Skills
Friendliness	Honesty Maturity Manners
Patience Pleasant personality	

Figure 6(b): 'Skills' Gained from the Job

Figure 7: The 'Best' and 'Worst' of Working

Figure 8: Has working changed your life.

Yes - 76% No - 22% Unsure - 2%

Some responses: POSITIVE

- I plan my daily routine much more carefully. (9) - I am richer, I have more self confidence, I know more people. (9) - I am more mature and responsible. (10) - I don't have to borrow money. (10) - I experience new things I have found my way around the city. - I spend more wisely and bank money. (10) - I do not waste time, I plan more carefully. (11) - I have control of my life. (12) - I have an extended social circle. (12)

NEGATIVE

- I'm too busy. (10) - I'm tired, I have a lot to fit in. (10) - My leisure time is restricted. (10) - I don't study as much as I need to. (12) - Work is a distraction. (12) - I'm depressed. (12)



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