

# THE EDUCATIONAL AND PERSONAL CONSEQUENCES OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS EMPLOYMENT IN TURKEY

By: Dr. Nuray Tastam  
Kirikkale University, Turkey

## ABSTRACT

*Child employment and increase in the number of child labor in various sectors are felt as important social problems in Turkey. As a developing country, Turkey has serious issues. Child labor, which is related to basic issues, is a multidimensional problem. Factors such as poverty, poor education system failing to meet the expectations, employers preferring cheap labor are effective in children's and adolescents' employment. Children and adolescents who are guarantees of our future are working in hard conditions at a critical period for their physical, cognitive, social and personality development and at a time they are in need of education most. Data were gathered by a semi structured interview form in this study. The sample consisted of 40 (20 boys, 20 girls) employed high school students. Data were analyzed by content analysis. For this reason, firstly categories were formed in accordance with the questions on the research form. After controlling defined categories, researcher went on to analysis.*

## INTRODUCTION

Child employment and increase in the number of child labor in various sectors are felt as important social problems in Turkey. As a developing country, Turkey has serious issues. Child labor, which is related to basic issues, is a multidimensional problem. Factors such as poverty, poor education system failing to meet the expectations, employers preferring cheap labor are effective in children's and adolescents' employment.

Concepts like "child worker" or "juvenile worker" have different meanings for societies of different socioeconomic levels. Definitions of these concepts vary not only from one country to another but also from rural to urban areas in the same country. International Labor Organization accepts individuals within the age range of 15 to 24 as young/juvenile workers, while organization defines workers under 15 as child workers. It means that child workers or employees are those who are employed in order to earn their lives or contribute to the family income before 15 years of age. Employing children who are under 15 and who do not complete 8 years of compulsory schooling is forbidden by laws in Turkey.

According to the first article of the United Nations Child Rights Treaty which is ratified by Turkey, individuals under 18 are considered as children. Also since civil laws in Turkey determine the age of majority as 18, individuals under

18 are not accepted as adults regarding the law (UNICEF, 2005). Then whether they are called 'children' or 'adolescent', both groups form minors regarding the civil laws. However, there is no such concept in labor legislation. From this point of view there is no difference between child and adolescent.

As a developing country, Turkey passes through fast economic changes. Numerous economic crises have been effective on almost every socioeconomic level of society. Like the rest of the world, this situation has caused inequality of income distribution, growing gap between socioeconomic classes and consequently, the increase in poverty.

An important part of Turkey's population consists of individuals fewer than 17. The result of the Household Budget Survey which is carried out by Turkish Statistical Institute between 2002-2003 shows that 16 million of the population is between the ages of 6-17 and 12% (twelve per cent) of them are in the labor force. According to the survey, 948 000 (nine hundred forty eight thousand) children and adolescents between the ages of 12 to 17 are employed. Children and adolescents' distribution rates for sectors are like these: 58.9% in agriculture, 21.1% in services and 20.1% in industry sectors. The study's results also show that fifty five point six per cent of children working in urban areas are from families who were emigrated from rural areas (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2004).

Whatever the reasons are, to work at an early age keeps children and adolescents from living their childhoods and teenage years, effects their physical and psychological development negatively and results with the abuse of those children and adolescents. Most widespread form of child abuse is child labor. Children and adolescents who are guarantees of our future are working in hard conditions at a critical period for their physical, cognitive, social and personality development and at a time they are in need of education most (Messer and Millar, 1999).

The work history of most young people begins early in life with more than 50% of adolescents beginning their first jobs around the age of 12. Boys tend to begin their jobs at younger ages and work more hours than girls. As adolescents reach high school, nearly half are entering the labor market and working during the school year. By the time teens graduate from high school, 80% will have held a part-time job at some time during the high school year (Gordon, Nandy, Pemberton and Townsend, 2003).

Considering the increase in the number of high school students working at part time jobs, the necessity of determining positive and negative effects of continuing education while working at the same time become apparent. In this regard this study's aim is to determine educational and personal results of high school students' working at part time jobs.

## METHODS

### Participants

Participants of the study consisted of 40 employed high school students who are between 15 to 17 years of age from Ankara.

In order to determine a possible gender effect, numbers of male and female participants were equaled. Therefore there were 20 male and 20 female participants in the study. Male participants in the study were employed at sectors such as industry (turnery, welding, hood repairing, auto motor dyeing, motor repairing, sanitary and electricity installations etc.), furniture dealing, joinery while female participants were working at sectors such as textile (manufacturing, weaving, tailoring etc.) and services.

There were no differences between their parents' education levels or their occupations. Study group was of adolescents from low socioeconomic status families. Their mothers' were primary school graduates or drop-outs while their fathers were either primary or secondary school graduates.

Mothers of all participants were housewives, with the exception that five participants' mothers occasionally went to cleaning to other houses. All fathers were employed. Six of the fathers worked as doorman, twenty of them as janitors or security guards at government or private institutions and fourteen of them as workers at factories.

### Data Collection

Data were gathered by a semi structured interview form in this study. In order to obtain detailed information by observing participants' reactions, in-depth interview technique was applied individually by the researcher, herself.

When their answers were not related to the question content or more definitive answers were needed, extra questions were asked.

### Data Analysis

Data were analyzed by content analysis. For this reason, firstly categories were formed in accordance with the questions on the research form. After controlling defined categories, researcher went on to analysis. During the analyze data, were also grouped by gender. All the answers given to a particular question were included in the analysis.

## FINDINGS

Considering the increase in the number of high school students working at part time jobs, the necessity of determining positive and negative effects of continuing education while working at the same time become apparent. In this regard this study's aim is to determine educational and personal results of high school students' working at part time jobs.

For this reason, firstly high school students were asked how work affected their academic successes. Secondly, they were asked if they had problems regarding school attendance and class participation. Then they were examined about their behaviours in class and their academic efforts. Besides, their relationships with their teachers, friends and their families were investigated. Lastly, they were questioned about their attitudes toward their working lives and if they had any addiction to alcohol, cigarette or any other substance. When records of interviews were evaluated, there was no difference found between the answers of male and female students. Therefore their responses are presented together in the study.

Work's effect on academic success:

Working high school students' responses regarding effects of working on their academic successes show that it has negative influence on their academic achievements. Almost all students stated that their academic achievements decreased and their GPAs' distinctly declined after they had started working. A female student said "*...my class achievement has declined, I start getting low grades...*" A male student told "*...my GPA's so low that I may repeat the year...*"

Time Spared for Homeworks:

Majority of the participants indicated that they could not spare enough time for homeworks. Adolescents stated that it was difficult to fulfill both school and work related responsibilities, they had no time to do their homeworks and got very tired. Moreover, they said they feel ashamed in front of their teachers and schoolmates. A female student said "*... when I get back home and sit down to do my homework, I am so tired that I usually fall asleep...*"

School attendance and class participation:

When working students responses to the questions regarding the effects of work on school attendance and class participation were examined, it was found that they spare more time and energy for work than for school. Adolescents depicted that time they spent at work sometimes prolonged and that by giving extra work their bosses detained their off time therefore their attendance dropped significantly. Adolescents stated their thoughts as "*... bosses seek ways of making us work more, there are pressing works, so I can't go to school*"

*sometimes...*” These responses show that absenteeism is common among working students.

#### Classroom behavior and academic effort:

Participants’ answers to questions on their classroom behaviours, their participation, their efforts to increase their academic achievements have revealed that they avoid answering teachers’ questions and participating intra-class activities. Those students told that since they came to class unprepared and without doing their homeworks, they became alienated from course subjects and therefore they could not actively participate to classes. Besides they said as they were generally tired and wakeful they were unable to focus their attention and had difficulties in comprehending what was told by the teacher. Most participants emphasised that they put more effort to their jobs than to their classes. A male student said “*...my family is in need of money, if I put too much time to my studies, my job performance will decline and I may get fired, I can’t take the risk...*” Moreover some students told that they copied homeworks from their classmates and they attempted cheating in the exams since they could not study.

#### Relationships with teachers:

Participants’ responses to questions regarding to the effects of working on their relationships with their teachers has shown that majority of students hide the truth about their jobs from their teachers and other people at the school. Most of the participants said they did not want to tell they were working because they did not want anyone knew their financial difficulties. However, they also stated that because of low academic success, low class participation, and undone homeworks, they thought they were not much liked by their teachers. Other adolescents whose occupational statuses are known by teachers and other school staff told that some teachers could show sympathy and did not get mad when they were unable to do their homeworks or participate classes, however that other teachers had negative attitudes towards them because of their failures. A male student said “*...teachers discriminate students, they behave successful students better, since I am not good at school. I am not on good terms with teachers...*”

#### Friendship Relationships:

Working adolescents depicted that they met their schoolmates only at school during breaktimes, and that they did not have time to spare time for friends out of school. A female student said “*...I have no relationships with friends, I don’t have time to spare for my friends...*” Majority of students told that they got tired during work hours and they also put efforts to school related studies therefore they could not meet their friends. A male student told “*...my social life, friendship relations have ended, I have no time...*” Some adolescents depicted that they felt

lonely among schoolmates, that they behaved them as they were from out of this world.

#### Family Relationships:

When participants responses on their family relationships and the time they spent with their families are examined, working students don't seem to spend much time with their parents and siblings. Students told that they exhaustedly returned home and that they spent their time at home by studying or resting in their rooms. Moreover they stated that they conflicted with their parents about how to spend money they earned. They said their parents wanted to spend the money for domestic needs while they wanted it for themselves, therefore they lived problems with their families. A female student said *"...I can't decide how to spend the money I earned, my parents use it for family expanses..."*

#### Attitude toward working life:

Working adolescents' responses regarding to their attitudes toward working life have revealed that they have both positive and negative attitudes. While only a small number of students said they had heavy and exhaustive work loads and therefore they hated work life, most of them depicted that working life prepared them to life. Almost all participants stated that they would work full-time and that learning working life at an early age would be an advantage for them in their future professional lives. They said they had experience in what they use, it made them happy to earn their own money already, they overcame difficulties by both working and studying. A male student told *"...working life has thought how to use time, now I can manage the time I spare for school and for study efficiently..."*

#### Alcohol and cigarette consumption:

There is found a gender difference regarding to alcohol and cigarette consumption. Almost all male students stated that they smoked and five of them said they used alcohol, while nine girls told they did not smoke and none said they used alcohol. There were no adolescents who said he or she had any addiction to other substances. Adolescents stated that people at their jobs smoked, so they became smoker themselves in time, besides that they smoked because of the stresses and hardships of working life. Male students, who stated that they used alcohol, said they drank with their fellow workers in order to relax after work. A student replied *"...I am very distressed so I drink to relieve stress..."*

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Although results of the study indicate that there are both positive and negative consequences of working for students, it has revealed that there are more negative consequences than positive ones. Moreover, according to the

study, there are no gender differences for the effects of working on high school students' educational and personal consequences except on alcohol and cigarette consumption.

According to the findings, working life has such positive effects on high school students: good working habits, effective use of time and money, economic independence, occupational specialization and work experience.

However, findings have also shown that working has also negative effects on both educational and personal lives of high school students. Adolescence is a period which individual goes through emotional conflicts, rapid physical, emotional and sexual changes, and makes plans for future and decisions on his or her career. Peer relationships and being admired and approved by peers are also important for the adolescent. Besides adolescents often conflict with their family in this period due to their egocentrism. In addition to accomplishing their developmental tasks, youngsters bear heavy responsibilities such as fulfilling their responsibilities at work and at school, earning money and contributing to living expenses of their family. Consequently negative effects of high school students' working may be summarized like this:

Students' academic achievements drop, they become unable to spare time for school and class related activities, they cannot do their homeworks, and therefore they behave undesirably such as copying their homeworks from their schoolmates or cheating in the exams. Moreover, working students spend little time with their parents and siblings, come into conflict with their families on how to spend money they earn and react negatively to their families who wants to use the money for family expenses. These findings overlap with other studies' results (Newman, 2000; Panter-Brick, 2002; Stevard and Kagan, 2005).

Low academic achievements of working high school students also affect their relationships with their teachers negatively. In addition to this, adolescents who are in great need of friendship relations do not have enough time to come together with their friends and feel lonely. Besides, working in negative conditions cause them to display negative attitudes and especially lead an increase in male adolescents' alcohol and cigarette consumption. Findings of the study support literature (Ansalone, 2001; Attre, 2006, Brooks-Gunn and Duncan, 1997; Buckner and Bassuk; 2001; Rikowski and Neary, 2001; Thomas, 2002).

Low SES families have financial difficulties, therefore their children both make contribution to family expenses by working and continue their education. Especially considering the increase in the number of part-time worker high school students, families and schools should be supportive in order to prevent those youngsters to be influenced negatively. It is necessary to assist them to fulfil their responsibilities at work and school, and guide them through their emotional problems. Parents, teachers and school counseling services should monitor

working students' academic successes, friendship relations, social lives and emotional developments and help them.

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