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Young Offenders Who Work, Don't Attend School May Be More Antisocial

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Age Differences in the Impact of Employment on Antisocial Behavior

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Many high school students work in addition to going to school, and some argue that employment is good for at-risk youths. But a new study has found that placing juvenile offenders in jobs without ensuring that they attend school may make them more antisocial.

The study, by researchers at the University of Pittsburgh, Temple University, and the University of California, Irvine, appears in the journal *Child Development*.

While evidence suggests that working long hours during the school year has negative effects on adolescent antisocial behavior among middle- and upper-income youths, much less is known about how employment during the school year affects high-risk adolescents, particularly with respect to delinquent behavior.

To learn about the association between employment and antisocial behavior among highrisk youths, researchers studied about 1,350 serious juvenile offenders who were 14 to 17 years old at the beginning of the study. They used monthly information about employment, school attendance, and antisocial behavior over the course of five years; examples of antisocial behavior included beating up somebody, purposely destroying or damaging properly, and knowingly buying or selling stolen goods. The youths, most of whom were from low-income families, had been convicted of a felony or similarly serious non-felony offense (such as a misdemeanor sexual assault or weapons offense). School was defined as high school, vocational school, GED programs, and college.

Going to school regularly without working was associated with the least antisocial behavior, and high-intensity employment (defined as more than 20 hours a week) was associated with diminished antisocial behavior only among youths who also attended school regularly. Youths who worked long hours and didn't attend school regularly were at the greatest risk for antisocial behavior, followed by youths who worked long hours and didn't go to school at all. These effects occurred during adolescence; by early adulthood, working more than 20 hours a week was associated with lower antisocial behavior.

“Our results suggest caution in recommending employment in and of itself as a remedy for adolescents’ antisocial behavior,” according to Kathryn. Monahan, assistant professor of psychology at the University of Pittsburgh, the study’s lead researcher.

“As an intervention strategy during young adulthood, placing juvenile offenders in jobs may be a wise idea. But for adolescents of high school age, placing juvenile offenders in jobs without ensuring that they also attend school may exacerbate, rather than diminish, their antisocial behavior.”

The study was supported by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention of the National Institute of Justice, the John and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the William T. Grant Foundation, the William Penn Foundation, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the National Institute on Drug Abuse, the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, and the Arizona Governor's Justice Commission.

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