



Occupations performed by adolescents and their relationship with school participation*

Ocupações exercidas por adolescentes e sua relação com a participação escolar

Ocupaciones ejercidas por adolescentes y su relación con la participación escolar

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: To identify the occupations performed by teens participating in a social service program for youth and to evaluate their integration in school, after entering the world of work. **Methods:** A descriptive, quantitative study, conducted together with a program of support and care for young people, by means of which 437 young workers were interviewed. **Results:** The majority were male (54%), with a mean age of 16 years, attending high school, working as office boys (36.4%), administrative assistants (25.4%), receptionists (16, 0%) and parking lot attendants (12.6%). An educational delay was found in 95.8% of these individuals, indicating a disconnect between their completed educational grade and their chronological age; however, performance in school seemed not to have been harmed by work. **Conclusion:** One should be cautious when introducing the adolescent into the labor market, because aspects such as fatigue, lack of time to study, among others, may have implications on the school activities.

Keywords: Child labor; Adolescent; Education; Workers; Work

RESUMO

Objetivos: Identificar as ocupações exercidas por adolescentes participantes de um programa social de atendimento para jovens e avaliar sua inserção na escola, após a entrada no mundo do trabalho. **Métodos:** Estudo descritivo, quantitativo, realizado junto a um programa de apoio e atendimento aos jovens, por meio do qual 437 jovens trabalhadores foram entrevistados. **Resultados:** A maioria era do gênero masculino (54%), com média de idade de 16 anos, cursando o ensino médio; trabalhavam como *office-boys* (36,4%), auxiliares administrativos (25,4%), recepcionistas (16,0%) e no estacionamento rotativo (12,6%). Atraso escolar foi constatado em 95,8% dos indivíduos, indicando descompasso entre a série cursada e a idade cronológica; entretanto, o desempenho na escola pareceu não ter sido prejudicado pelo trabalho. **Conclusão:** Deve-se ter cautela ao introduzir o adolescente no mercado de trabalho, pois aspectos como cansaço, falta de tempo para estudar, entre outros, podem ter implicações nas atividades escolares.

Descritores: Trabalho de menores; Adolescente; Educação; Trabalhadores; Trabalho

RESUMEN

Resumo: Objetivos: Identificar las ocupaciones ejercidas por adolescentes participantes de un programa social de atención para jóvenes y evaluar su inserción en la escuela, después de la entrada en el mundo del trabajo. **Métodos:** Estudio descriptivo, cuantitativo, realizado junto a un programa de apoyo y atención a los jóvenes, por medio del cual fueron entrevistados 437 jóvenes trabajadores. **Resultados:** La mayoría era del género masculino (54%), con un promedio de edad de 16 años, cursando la enseñanza media; trabajaban como *office-boys* (36,4%), auxiliares administrativos (25,4%), recepcionistas (16,0%) y en el estacionamiento rotativo (12,6%). El atraso escolar fue constatado en el 95,8% de los individuos, indicando un descompás entre la serie cursada y la edad cronológica; entre tanto, el desempeño en la escuela pareció no haber sido perjudicado por el trabajo. **Conclusión:** Se debe tener cautela al introducir al adolescente en el mercado de trabajo, pues aspectos como el cansancio, falta de tiempo para estudiar, entre otros, pueden ocasionar implicaciones en las actividades escolares. (porcentajes con apenas un decimal).

Descritores: Trabajo de menores; Adolescente; Educación; Trabajadores; Trabajo

* The data collection occurred in the city of Uberlândia, Minas Gerais. The orientation of the study happened in the EERP-USP.

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INTRODUCTION

Labor is a conscious activity of men; by executing it, men dominate and transform the environment, giving it the shape that existed initially only in their imagination⁽¹⁾. Working is a way to keep oneself connected with the social world, besides helping in the constitution of identity. But if performed under ruthless and unhealthy conditions or by an unqualified person, labor might favor sickness or accidents at work.⁽²⁾

The inclusion of children and adolescents in work activities dates back to the beginning of labor itself, when men depended on agriculture for subsistence⁽³⁾. In Brazil, during the 16th century, indigenous children helped adults to extract the Brazilwood (pau-brasil) and to build the first villages in exchange for trinkets distributed by the Portuguese people⁽⁴⁾; in the slavery time children helped their enslaved parents in the execution of work.

Nowadays the socioeconomic situation of many families either favors or is a key factor on the entry of young people to the labor market, in order to make their own livelihood or as a complement to the family income.^(5,6) This insertion is controversial. On the one hand, work can be a way of preventing urban social delinquency, playing an important role in the development of self-esteem and the symbolic construction of future perspectives for youngsters, and also acting in the development of their identity⁽⁶⁾. On the other hand, adolescence, which happens between childhood and adulthood, a period characterized by intense physiological, mental and social changes, is a time when young people have experiences and feelings previously unknown⁽⁷⁾; therefore it is a phase of vulnerability to several factors, including the economic ones, that leads young people to labor.

Performed precociously, labor can rival the education and interfere in the process of acquiring the basic competencies demanded by the contemporary world⁽⁸⁾, besides competing with leisure activities as well as family and social lives⁽⁹⁾. In Brazil, the adolescents can work under apprenticeship conditions, due to an employment contract of fixed time, according to the article 428 of the Consolidation of Labor Law, to which are linked the programs for pupils⁽¹⁰⁾. A worker aged between 14 and 18 years is considered a minor; and is forbidden of performing any labor activity if younger than 16 years old, unless as an apprentice, from 14 years old and above. This labor cannot take place in sites that can jeopardize the youth formation and physical development nor have schedules that prevent them from school attendance⁽¹¹⁾.

In spite of the legislation, children and adolescents work, in most of the times, informally, without any labor rights, exposing themselves to accidents and sickness. Moreover, the apprenticeship allows an approach to the labor market that respects the juvenile needs and devel-

opment particularities, besides helping with professional qualification and personal growth.

This paper addresses the issue of labor performed by adolescents, which has associated causes, such as poverty, the youngsters necessity to collaborate with their parents in economical activities executed in the domicile, the family desire that they (young people) are kept busy, the will of making a life of their own, together with the consideration that it is better to work than to be idle^(6,12,13), among other arguments.

In the intention to contribute with a wider discussion over work performed by children and adolescents and their school participation, the study aimed to identify occupations held by juvenile participants of a social service program directed to youngsters, and to evaluate their insertion at school after the entry in labor market.

METHODS

A descriptive quantitative study performed in the Organization for Support and Service to the Youth (Organização de Apoio e Atendimento aos Jovens – OAAJ) in the city of Uberaba, State of Minas Gerais, which forms, guides, educates and professionalizes adolescents at risk of any kind. Intermediated by the Organization (OAAJ), youngsters entry the labor market in partner companies; school attendance is a prerequisite to remain in the Organization; they cannot repeat the school year and it is mandatory to present a school attendance list⁽¹⁴⁾. Like other organizations of this kind, the OAAJ aims to promote professional qualification and to engage young people in formal employment with accredited institutions⁽⁵⁾.

At the time of the data collection there were 497 adolescents registered with the Organization. In order to choose the research participants, the following criteria was used: the youngsters, as well as their parents or tutors, should agree with the interview conducted and sign a Statement of Consent; also, the young people were supposed to attend the learning courses offered by OAAJ during the data collection period or, in case they did not, they should accept to be interviewed at home. There have been some exclusions from the research: all the people whose domiciles were visited over three times with nobody found, those who refused to participate of the investigation and also, the ones that were not authorized to do so by their parents or guardians/tutors. Following this criteria, of all youngsters registered, 3,8% (19) were no longer connected with OAAJ; 5,0% (25) were not found; 2,8% (14) refused to participate and 0,4% (2) were not authorized by their parents/guardians. The number of young people considered as subject was 437, or 87,9% of the universe studied.

The data were collected between April and October, 2007 inside the headquarters of OAAJ in most of the times. A questionnaire was used, with questions related to the sociodemographic features of the subjects, to the activities performed in the companies as well as related to the youngsters participation at school after the onset

of labor. The school performance was assessed with the question: How has your participation at school been since you started working (grades, attendance and learning)? The questionnaire was previously evaluated by five experts in occupational health who expressed opinions regarding the contents and clarity, semantics, logic and objectivity, and their suggestions were accepted by the authors. Afterwards, a pretest with five teenagers was held (school laborers, although not registered with the Organization), and it was considered understandable and clear to be answered.

The research project was appreciated and approved by the Organization (letter n° 0328/05) and was approved by the Ethics Committee in Research of the Federal university of the Triângulo Mineiro, under the protocol number 702.

For the statistical information treatment, a database was created using the program *Excel*, subsequently exported to the software *EPI-INFO 6.0*, enabling the univariate analysis of the two variables in study (*occupation exercised by adolescents* and *participation in school after insertion at work*). The labor activities were encoded by the Brazilian Classification of Occupations⁽¹⁵⁾; considering activity the specific action or work performed⁽⁴⁾, and considering occupation the aggregation of jobs or similar work situations when it comes to the activities performed⁽¹⁵⁾.

RESULTS

The 437 adolescent workers were predominantly male (54%), aged between 14 and 18 years; attended Elementary (86,1%) and High School (13,7%). Among all the 48 in the 8th grade, 95,8% were aged 15 years or more; only two had the appropriate age (14 years) at the final time of Elementary School. As for the *occupation exerted by the adolescents*, the results are demonstrated in the data of Table 1 as follows.

Table 1 – Distribution of the adolescents regarding the occupation exerted, in accordance with the Brazilian Classification of Occupations. Uberaba, MG, 2008. (n= 437)

Occupations	F	(%)
Office boy (CBO 4122)	159	36,38
Administrative assistant (CBO 4110)	111	25,40
Receptionist (CBO 4221)	70	16,02
Worker of the parking lot sector	55	12,59
Trade operator in shops and markets (CBO 5211)	23	5,26
General helper	5	1,14
Mechanical maintenance of automotive vehicles (CBO 9144)	3	0,69
Does not perform activity	2	0,46
Editor (CBO 2616)	1	0,23
No answer	5	1,14
Others*	3	0,69
Total	437	100

*Others: vague answers such as “walking, jogging and thinking”

The data about the *participation in school after the insertion at work* are presented below.

Table 2 – Distribution of the adolescents according to the participation in school after insertion at work. Uberaba, MG, 2008. (n= 437)

Occupation	F	(%)
Improved	209	47,83
Not altered	185	42,33
Worsened	36	08,24
Unable to define	03	0,068
No answer	04	00,92
Total	437	100

Legend: Improved (improved; very good; more responsibilities; high and good grades; increased or equal attendance; excellent learning or equal or better; progress in learning; never absent); not altered (remains the same); worsened (worsened; school performance decreased; decreased or average grades or below average; attendance and slow learning or ongoing learning; tiring; in the beginning was frequently absent); unable to define (has striven; a little of each has improved/worsened).

DISCUSSION

The predominance of males among working adolescents was also found on other investigations^(2,12-13,16-18), proving that men are the ones who more prematurely entry the formal labor market. The age range between 14 and 18 is in consonance with other studies^(5,12-13) and with the norms on the development of activities such as the apprentice⁽¹⁰⁻¹¹⁾.

There was a concrete school discrepancy in 95,8% of the 8th grade students, which represents a delay of over one year and indicates a mismatch between the grade they attended and their chronological age, for reasons possibly prior to work or even associated with it, in a period before their registration with the OAAJ. These results match the investigation about young students labor at a public school in the State of São Paulo, which also showed a school gap among respondents⁽¹⁸⁾ and also match the study conducted with apprentices in a countryside town in the State of São Paulo in which the majority attended high school (74,4%), 25,6% attended primary school and among the 117 respondents, 27 were “behind” the grade they should be attending⁽⁵⁾.

The most frequently reported reasons for school delays which normally present relation with work are: the competition established between labor and school activities; the decrease of time used to perform school tasks, which prevents the worker-student’s strong dedication to studies during periods in and out of the school term; the lack of sleep that interferes with the

attention and concentration during classes, reducing performance; the physical consequences of labor, such as fatigue, difficulty in concentration or obstacles to comply with the school routine represented by delays, absences, among others⁽²⁾. Such findings coincided with the investigation that, in aim to identify the effects of labor on children and adolescents school performance, showed the association between this performance level with work outside the home; the odds of those who worked outside the home to repeat the school year were 260% higher than of those who did not perform such work ($p=0,000$). The more children and adolescents entry the work world, the higher their possibilities of presenting poor school performance or quitting school altogether⁽¹³⁾.

Regarding the occupation of respondents, administration roles were predominant (61,8%). As an *office boy* (36,4%), there is the need to transport correspondences, documents, objects and valuable goods, in and out of the institutions, also, the performance of bank and mail services; assistance to the secretariat as well as kitchen duties, among others⁽¹⁵⁾. Apart from these activities, the adolescents operated fax machines and typed documents. The documental analysis of 56 medical records investigated accidents at work (AAW) among children and adolescents showing that 18% of the victims were *office boys*, restaurant attendants, toolmaker apprentices, janitors, among others⁽¹⁷⁾.

Administrative assistant (25,4%) is an occupation that includes clerks, agents, and administrative assistants; this worker performs services of support to the areas of human resources, administration, finances and logistics; also assists suppliers and clients; handles documents of various types; prepares reports, among other tasks⁽¹⁵⁾. In this study the activities were performed in an office.

In the occupation of receptionist (16,0%) were included those working at banks, in hotels and medical offices, among others. The workers hosted customers and performed services of support to patients, hotel guests, visitors and passengers; provided telephone assistance service and transmitted information in the offices, the medical offices, banks and other establishments; also observed internal security rules, checked the documents and the integrity/suitability of customers notifying securities of any suspicious behavior; organized information and planned everyday tasks⁽¹⁵⁾. Receptionists were also the young victims in one investigation that analyzed causes of accidents at work on medical records of health institutions⁽¹⁷⁾.

The self-parking system of the city is paid and operates on working days and Saturday mornings, with free parking on Sundays and Bank holidays⁽¹⁴⁾. In this activity 55 adolescents (12,6%) worked standing, subject

to weather conditions and other hazardous situations at work performed on the streets; they had to be alert for drivers' guidance and to charge for parking; they were sometimes verbally abused and embarrassed by customers (drivers) who refused to pay for the card (the self-parking system demands that all drivers buy a card and place them inside the vehicles). These problems were identified when observing this type of work.

A few (5,3%) worked on trade, in shops and markets; in this group there was the occupation of replenisher, who is responsible for tidying up shelves and replenishing goods. Such activities are exhausting because, depending on the number of shelves, there is the need to squat, stand up, stretch and shrink body and arms many times during the work shift, predisposing the worker to repetitive strain injuries; this type of laborer was also found among young students at a school in São Paulo⁽¹⁸⁾.

The general assistant (1,1%), that "does everything" is similar to the general helper or, in other words, performs a job without any specialty nor specificity. It has also been found in other studies focused on the work of youngsters^(17,18); an investigation that analyzed medical records of patients, and this data was related to people that had been victims of accidents at work, showing that 7,1% were young people who performed the occupation of general assistant/helper⁽¹⁷⁾. Adolescents were still found in other occupations, such as mechanic automobile assistant and editor assistant.

The activities performed by youngsters in their many occupations are those allowed by their qualifications and lack of experience⁽¹⁶⁾. On that kind of entry in the work market there is no occupational ascent, which will hardly provide prestige or social rise. The young person will be part of the work market, but will not extract any knowledge from it that might allow him to build a better future; possibly performing activities in which the final point will be the same as the current moment at work⁽¹²⁾. One investigation conducted with students of a public school in São Paulo showed that adolescents performed occupations of painters, bakery assistants, babysitters, general helpers and packers, among others, all informal, without any social security; like their parents, they also occupied low paid positions⁽¹⁸⁾.

The naive point of view that associates professional experience with better insertion in the work market and future must be demystified in order to avoid a precocious school abandonment motivated by this belief and also in order to prevent health problems generated by the overload of school-labor⁽²⁾.

Knowing that school attendance is condition *sine qua non* for adolescents to remain registered with OAAJ⁽¹⁴⁾, the subjects were questioned about their *participation at school after the beginning of work* and hence, after their

attachment with the program. The results pointed that this participation improved (47,8%) and did not change (42,3%), raising the possibility of a positive relationship between work and school. The work as an apprentice, it seems, did not collaborate with the presence of school difficulties, as only 8,2% mentioned negative implications at school, although investigations point that working youngsters worsen their performance at school^(13,20,21).

This fact was not verified in this study, which can raise the hypothesis that depending on the work conditions (decreased workload, respect for class schedules, enough sleep hours, among others) and in accordance with the current legislation, it might not constitute an important obstacle for education and school performance, on the contrary, it can have a positive effect over it. Explanations for the improvement of school participation included learning to be more interested in classes and the encouragement and demands of OAAJ, among others. The reasons for school performance deterioration were: lack of time to study, worsening in some disciplines, lack of interest, loss or disease in the family and fatigue. It is noteworthy that the explanations for this deterioration are not sufficient to establish a direct relationship between performance/participation at school and work done, once it implies other variables not related to the effects of labor.

However, studies show that labor associates with fatigue at the end of the day, low concentration in studies, sleepiness during classes, few sleep hours, body aches, among others^(2,5-6,8-10,12,13,17,18,20,21). In other words, the binomial fading/strengthening of youth seems to have more negative than positive meanings.⁽¹⁸⁾ In urban contexts of more poverty, children and adolescents as laborers young and more vulnerable organic and psychologically, subject themselves to a higher risk of not completing the basic school cycle as the double shift work-study demands greater resilience to stress^(2,21). Nevertheless with the globalization and the new demands of the work world, nowadays young people dispute spaces in the competitive market and work for petty wages.

CONCLUSIONS

The majority of the 437 youngsters studied were male, aged between 14 and 18 years old, 16 years on average, attending high school. The majority attending

the last year of primary school showed a mismatch between the chronological age and the school grade. They worked primarily as *office boys*, administrative assistants, receptionists and in the self-parking system of the city. The activities performed did not offer high risk but, especially the last one exposed the youngsters to the adversities on the streets, including acts of embarrassment and aggression. As for school participation, the majority reported improvements, with increase or maintenance of frequency and grades, as well as in learning. School performance apparently was not jeopardized by the apprenticeship program, indicating that it was important for the increase and maintenance of the family income.

However, the insertion of adolescents at work should be done with care, even as apprentices, because negative aspects as fatigue, lack of time to study, among others, can facilitate school evasion. In this aspect employers, in partnership with schools, need to look for ways to systematically monitor the apprentices that present poor school performance, as for still being in the formation process, they require support in order to avoid labor to inflict in any harm to their physical and intellectual development, and it may constitute an educational activity that allows their social introduction.

The investigation therefore suggests that greater attention should be given to the concrete conditions in which the youngsters labor develops, in a way that it can be composed of activities that bring actual and tangible benefits, without competing with the school period and other needs, more than simply receiving insufficient wages for them and their families to survive.

The results found might be extensive if compared with other studies that present youngsters that work and study, connected to official institutions that support them. However, the generalization of the results is impaired when compared with a very distinct reality, of those who not find themselves in the formal work market, neither study nor have the support of organizations willing to qualify them.

The knowledge resultant can be added to the one that already exists and is complex, with multiple facets and implies (among other aspects) on objective evaluations of the relationship work-study-development of young workers, considering the conditions in which labor is performed, as well as the expectations of the workers, in a way it can contribute to the reorganization of public policy at Federal level.

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