

What Challenges Are Boys Facing, and What Opportunities Exist To Address Those Challenges?

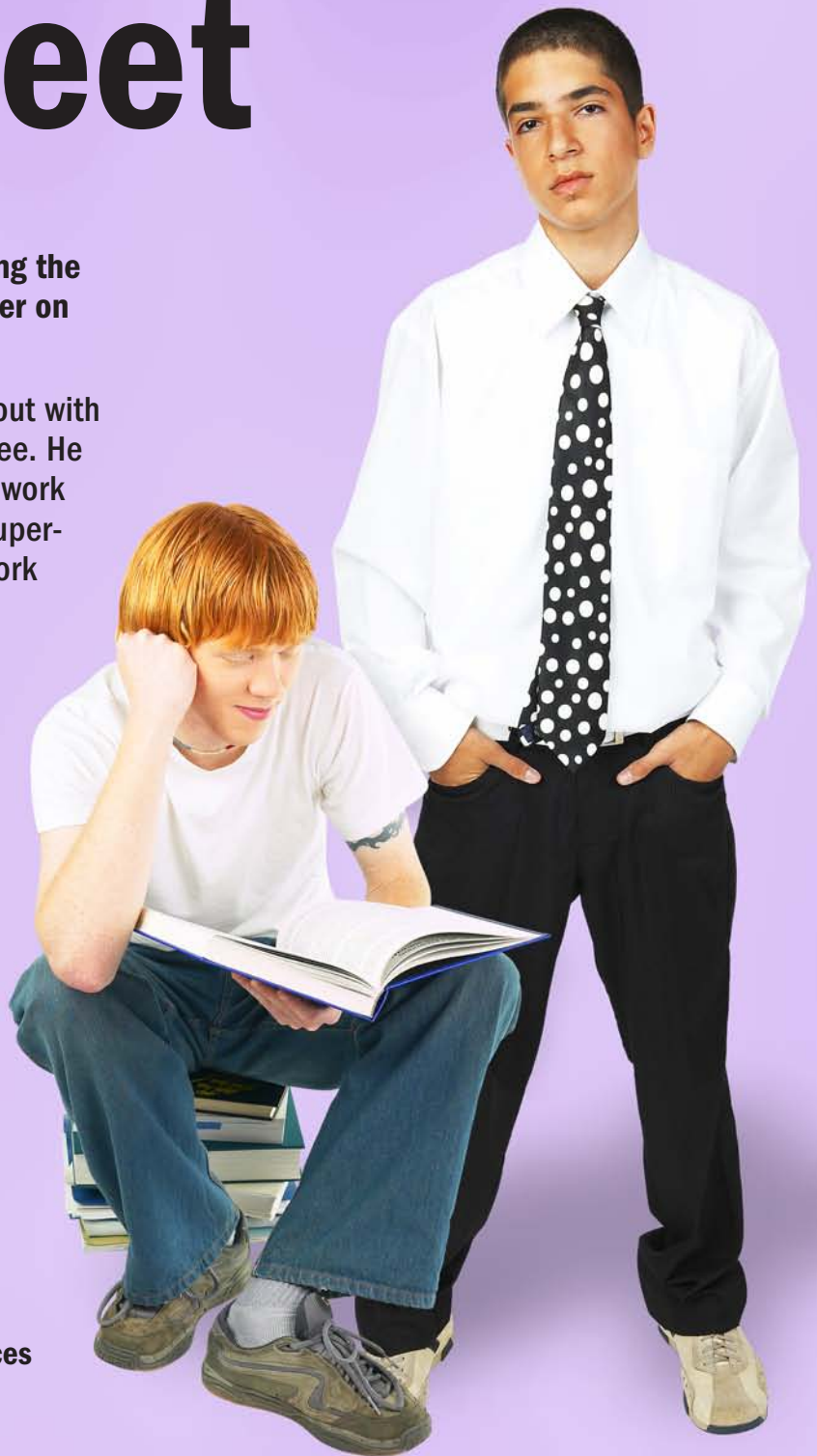
Fact Sheet

Employment

Gabriel, a high school junior, enjoys working the concession stand at the local movie theater on Friday and Saturday nights.

He earns a little money for college, hangs out with his friends, and gets to watch movies for free. He even got a pay raise because of his strong work ethic and positive attitude. But when his supervisor asked him if he would be willing to work after school some days, Gabriel hesitated. The extra money would be great, but how would he finish all of his homework?

Research shows that having a job as a teenager can be a valuable experience, teaching responsibility and time management skills, as well as providing a paycheck. However, managing a job and school can be a tough balancing act.



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Office of the Assistant Secretary for
Planning and Evaluation

This fact sheet is based on a comprehensive review of scientific literature, including computer searches of the major bibliographic databases (e.g., PsychINFO, MEDLINE/PubMed, EBSCOhost) looking, in particular for epidemiological studies that determine what factors make boys more or less prone to certain outcomes. The literature search was limited to scholarly journal articles and government documents published in 2000 and later unless an article was a seminal piece in the field or contributed to tracking trends over time. The statistics provided are from the most recent year for which data were available. Where possible, data related specifically to boys are included, but when these data were not available, data on youth, ages 10 to 18, are provided.

Some Facts About Boys and Employment

Trends in Employment Patterns Among Youth

- The employment rate for high school boys between the ages of 16 and 18 dropped from 33% in the 1995–1996 school year to 25% in the 2003–2004 school year.¹
- From 1968 to 2006, employment rates among African American and White youth have been similar.²
- During the 2006–2007 school year, 21% of boys and 26% of girls between the ages of 16 and 19 were enrolled in school and worked.³
- Of boys and girls between the ages of 16 and 19, 8% were neither enrolled in school nor working during the 2006–2007 school year; this percentage has been relatively stable since the early 1990s.⁴
- The 2007 summer employment rate for boys and girls was the lowest it has been in 60 years.⁵

Where Youth Work

- According to a 2000 report, the majority of employed boys and girls between the ages of 15 and 17 worked in the retail industry. More boys than girls were employed in goods-producing industries such as mining, construction, and manufacturing as well as in agriculture.⁶

Youth Employment Outcomes

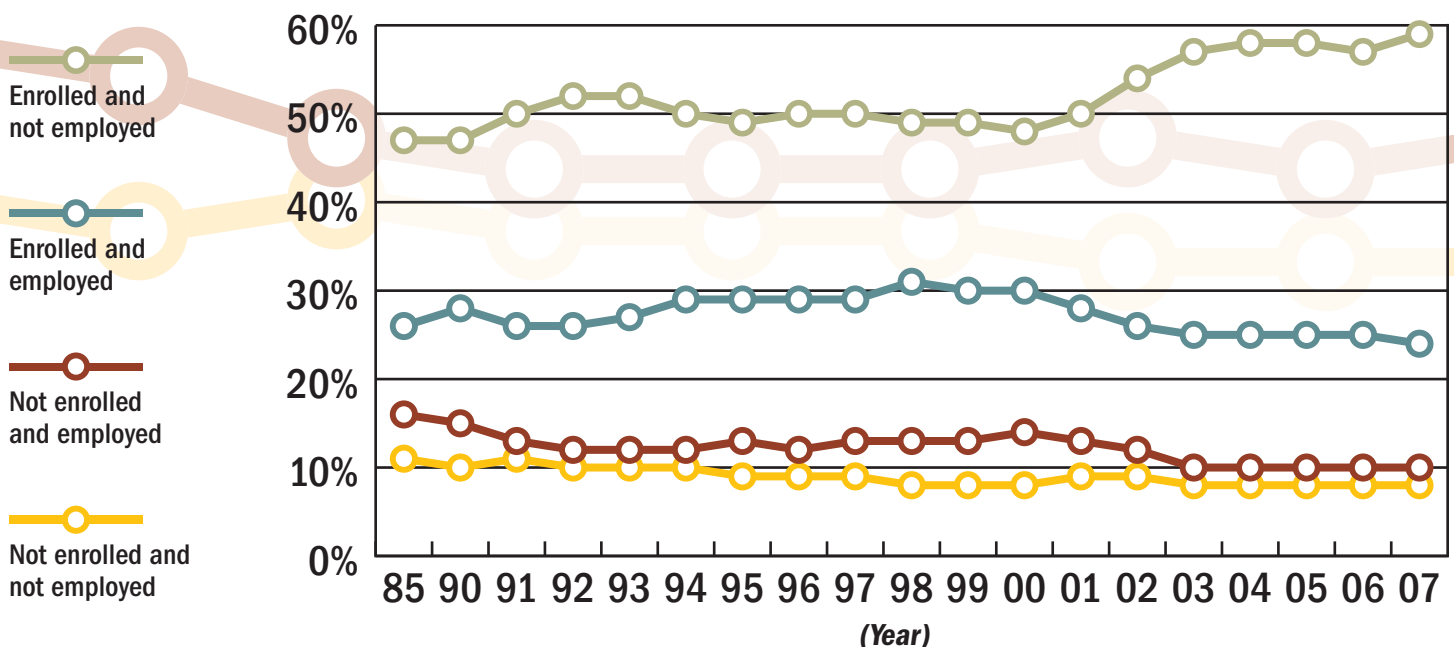
- Boys and girls who work 20 hours or fewer per week are more likely than other youth to have attained some college education by the age of 30; however, boys and girls who work *more than 20 hours per week* may be at risk for negative outcomes, such as dropping out of high school, engaging in delinquent behavior, and abusing substances.^{7,8,9}

Connecting Work with School and Other Activities

- A 2007 study showed that boys and girls who were employed while in school learned how to more efficiently manage their time, were more motivated, and learned about workplace norms and responsibilities.¹⁰
- In 2007, high school boys and girls who took career and technical education classes were less likely to drop out.¹¹
- In 2007, employed high school students spent more time participating in religious, spiritual, and volunteer activities.¹²

Percentage of youths aged 16–19 by enrollment/employment status in school months

Source: Youth enrollment and employment during the school year, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008



What Factors Contribute to Positive Employment Outcomes Among Boys?

By studying young people's employment patterns and how employment affects certain aspects of boys' and girls' lives, researchers have learned valuable lessons about risk factors—those traits and life experiences that can jeopardize a person's healthy development—and protective factors—the characteristics and life experiences that can increase a person's likelihood of positive outcomes.

Reasons young people may struggle with employment:

- Hard drug use among boys is related to poor job quality outcomes as much as 10 years after high school. Poor job quality may mean lower skill employment or jobs with fewer benefits, such as health insurance.¹³
- Employment that raises social status among youth leads to increased delinquency.¹⁴
- Working more than 20 hours per week is associated with higher rates of dropping out of high school.¹⁵
- Boys and girls who age out of foster care tend to be unemployed or underemployed as young adults.¹⁶

Family, school, and community factors that affect young people's employment:

- Youth in two-parent families are more likely to work than those in single-parent families.¹⁷
- Youth who say their peers intend to go to college are more likely to be employed.¹⁸
- Youth in low-income households are less likely to be employed than those in households with higher incomes.¹⁹
- Youth who live in areas with high unemployment or high poverty rates have a lower probability of employment.²⁰



Employment-related factors that help young people succeed:

- Working less than 20 hours per week is associated with positive family relationships.²¹
- Students who work in order to save money for college report the most positive influence from working, including attending college.²²
- When students' jobs support academic achievement and offer genuine opportunities to learn something useful, employment can reduce delinquency.²³
- Compatibility between work and school is related to less drinking and lower probability of arrest.²⁴
- On the contrary, jobs in which students worked alone and were paid high wages were associated with increased delinquent behavior.²⁵

Conclusion

Given that a quarter of high school-age boys work, researchers have made considerable effort to understand the role of employment in the lives of young people. While some point to the negative effects, saying that working distracts students from school, others suggest benefits, claiming that working builds character and self-esteem.²⁶

Specifically, research has shown that young people who work more than 20 hours per week are more likely to drop out of high school, engage in risky behavior, and become delinquent, among other negative consequences. Young people who work fewer than 20 hours per week are more likely to have positive family relationships and go to college.

Complicating the research landscape is the fact that not all boys want to work, and only a portion of those who do can find a job. For example, researchers have found that boys who live in a two-parent family and expect to go to college are more likely to be employed. Boys who live in low-income households and in areas with high rates of poverty and unemployment are less likely to have a job.

Gabriel appears to be one of the fortunate boys who enjoys his work, finds it compatible with his school schedule, and has a supervisor who recognizes his efforts. But not all boys can find jobs like these.

Research into what works to build boys' strengths and reduce the challenges they face is still growing. Although the results are promising, efforts continue to pinpoint what strengths make some boys more likely to succeed and what risks, or challenges, increase the likelihood that they will struggle.

Additional Resources

To download an electronic copy of this document visit:
<http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/08/boys/FactSheets>

For additional fact sheets in this series or for more information and resources on boys, including promising interventions and federal approaches to help boys, visit:

Fact Sheets

<http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/08/boys/FactSheets>

Findings Brief

<http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/08/boys/Findings1>

Annotated Bibliography

<http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/08/boys/Biblio>

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