

Assessing the Impact of a Summer Jobs Program on Youths' Perceptions of Their Employability

Robert D. Weaver

Abstract

In this study, regression analyses were conducted to ascertain predictors of employment-specific confidence and motivation of youth recruited from low-income neighborhoods to participate in a summer employment program. The study's findings indicated that participants' perceptions of several programmatic features, including their level of preparedness emanating from the program's pre-employment session, were associated with greater confidence and motivation. Furthermore, male participants reported higher levels of employment-specific confidence than did the female participants, thus suggesting the need for programmatic changes. The implications of the study are considered in light of a new policy paradigm that emphasizes investing in education and skills training, particularly for youth.

Keywords: youth, low-income neighborhoods, summer employment program, confidence, motivation

Introduction

This study addressed an important issue when evaluating social service programs: Are outcomes influenced by programmatic characteristics or by the participants themselves (Lundgren & Rankin, 1998)? More specifically, this study considered if various characteristics of youth from low-income neighborhoods, along with their perceptions of programmatic features, influenced their confidence in, and motivation for, securing employment after participating in a summer employment program.

In 2007, the province of Ontario invested approximately \$5.3 million to fund summer employment programs, officially entitled Summer Jobs for Youth Programs, across the province. As part of the Ontario government's Youth Opportunity Strategy (YOS), a province-wide initiative designed to strengthen the employment-related capacity of

young people, the Summer Jobs for Youth Program was developed to help youth acquire workplace skills through job readiness training and paid employment placements for the summer months (Ministry of Children and Youth Services, n.d.; New Beginnings, n.d.).

Alongside promoting the learning of new skills and increasing their employment capabilities, the goal of the Summer Jobs for Youth Program is to boost the self-confidence of youth deemed “at-risk” in that they live in underserved neighborhoods characterized by distress and high rates of unemployment (Ministry of Children and Youth Services, n.d.). According to Alzate, Moxley, Bohen, and Nackerud (2009), employment-specific self-confidence and self-efficacy are strongly linked to motivation. Consequently this study, by assessing if the characteristics and programmatic perceptions of youth participating in a Summer Jobs for Youth Program influenced their employment-specific self-confidence and motivation, fulfilled an important program evaluation objective, that is, determining if the goals of the program were being met (Weiss, 1998).

Literature Review

Impact of Work on Youth

The past couple of decades have been characterized by a growth of jobs in the low-wage sector, including fast-food restaurants, retail chains, and supermarkets, thus providing employment opportunities for adolescents (Hick, 2007; Marsh, 1991; Mihalic & Elliott, 1997). Along with boosting their disposable income, there is evidence that engaging in a certain amount of employment has other benefits for youth. For instance, Mortimer, Finch, Ryu, Shanahan, and Call (1996) found that high school students who worked at moderate intensity, or between 1-20 hours per week, evinced a higher level of academic performance than did their counterparts who did not work or who were employed for more than 20 hours per week. Furthermore, for youth residing in low-income environments, employment has been associated with higher levels of school engagement and better schoolwork performance (Fogel, 2004; Lerman, 2000), lower rates of permanently dropping out of school (Entwisle, Alexander, & Olson, 2004) and “faring better in the labor market later in life” (Entwisle, Alexander, & Olson, 2005, p. 6).

The apparent positive effects of employment on educational performance extend beyond high school. In their analysis of data from the Youth Development Study (YDS), a longitudinal panel study that tracked the

outcomes of youth initially sampled in Minnesota, Staff and Mortimer (2007, 2008) determined that youth were more likely to obtain a university degree if they engaged in a moderate (no more than 20 hours per week) amount of paid employment while in high school.

There is considerable evidence that employment can also have positive psychosocial benefits for youth. Phillips and Sandstrom (1990) report that parents of employed youth attributed a host of positive consequences to their children's work experiences, including boosting their self-esteem, fostering better work habits, and managing their time more effectively. Stone III and Mortimer (1998) note the link between youth employment and their acquisition of traits such as punctuality, personal responsibility, and dependability, and for adolescent males who report learning new skills on the job, employment is associated with a better relationship with their fathers. Other psychosocial benefits of employment for youth include a reduction in problematic behaviors (Cone & Glenwick, 2001) and an increased capacity to formulate goals for the future (Zimmer-Gembeck & Mortimer, 2006). In a similar vein, Cunnien, MartinRogers, and Mortimer (2009) outline how steady employment increases youths' self-efficacy within the economic realm (e.g., a perception that in the future they will find a job that they enjoy and that pays well). Cunnien et al. (2009) also detected an increase in the generalized efficacy (e.g., belief that in the future they will have a happy family life and will be respected in their community) of youth who received consistent support from their supervisor at work.

It should be noted that the effects of employment on youth are not always beneficial. Youth who work in excess of 20 hours per week during the school year tend to have a lower grade point average, score lower on standardized tests, and exhibit a greater likelihood for dropping out of school (Staff & Mortimer, 2008; Zimmer-Gembeck & Mortimer, 2006). Youth engaged in long hours of work are also at greater risk for engaging in substance abuse and delinquent behaviors (Mihalic & Elliott, 1997; Stone III & Mortimer, 1998). Thus, though the findings are not conclusive, there is evidence that participating in a moderate amount of paid employment can promote the educational achievement and psychosocial well-being of youth while engaging in immoderate hours of work may be to their detriment.

Strategies to Boost the Employment-readiness of Youth

Given the potential employment has for improving the well-being of adolescents, it is important to consider the effect of programs and strategies designed to boost the likelihood that their transition into the labor market will be a successful one. One such strategy is career-centered high school education, which attempts to cultivate a connection between school-based and work-based learning. Students who embark on this educational pathway are referred to as “career majors” and focus on vocational preparation in a number of fields, including child care, electronics technology, and the automotive trades. Longitudinal research with young adults who were career majors in high school suggests this strategy was associated with benefits to subjective measures of job quality, such as the belief that high school learning adequately prepared young adults for their current job activities (Gore, Kadish, & Aseltine, Jr., 2003). Moreover, in a study with 165 college seniors, Brooks, Cornelius, Greenfield, and Joseph (1995) assessed the impact of students’ participation in an internship in which they received “supervised preprofessional career-related experience, paid or unpaid ... with measureable learning objectives and formal evaluations” (p. 336). The authors determined this program boosted participants’ levels of self-concept crystallization, which was operationalized by the statement “I know myself well enough to know what kind of job fits me” (p. 337).

Another strategy to boost the employment-readiness of youth is job training programs, which may occur during the summer months and are not necessarily delivered through a secondary or post-secondary educational institution. Such programs have been associated with improvements in various indicators of youths’ psychological well-being, such as decreased loneliness, increased self-esteem and self-confidence, and heightened levels of life satisfaction and optimism for the future (Finn, 2003; Matsuba, Elder, Petrucci, & Marleau, 2008; Robitschek, 1996).

Behavioral changes linked to employment-readiness are also associated with job training programs. For example, in their evaluation of a summer employment program for low-income youth that incorporates both a work experience component and a career development curriculum, Loughhead and Liu (1995) detected a link between program completion and improvements in career planning, job search skills, work habits, and basic life skills. Moreover, Campbell (1995) outlines evidence suggesting that a program targeting low-income youth that simulated employment

opportunities decreased the participants' levels of impulsive behavior and attention problems.

Employment programs targeting youth are also associated with favorable labor market outcomes. For instance, Ekstrom, Freeberg, and Rock (1984) found that youth who participated in employment and career employment programs were employed for significantly more months during a three-year follow-up period than were non-participants. Additionally, Lundgren and Rankin (1998) found that, for ethnic minority youth, participation in a job training program that provided occupational skills training was associated with their receiving higher post-programmatic wage levels. This association was particularly strong for African-American participants.

Summary

Alzate et al. (2009) explain that self-confidence is “a psychological factor that affects performance” (p. 59) and is closely related to the concept of self-efficacy. As noted above, employment-specific self-confidence and self-efficacy are intertwined with motivation. Consequently, motivated individuals are apt to develop “task-centered plan(s) for securing employment” (p. 69). Self-efficacy may also influence behavior. For instance, in their study of persons in receipt of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), the employment-driven welfare program introduced in America in 1996, Sullivan, Larrison, Nackerud, Risler, and Bodenschatz (2004) determined that TANF recipients who exhibited higher levels of self-efficacy were more likely to exit the welfare rolls. While it would be premature to state that higher levels of self-efficacy will boost employment rates of youth, this study by Sullivan et al. (2004) provides preliminary evidence that this might be the case.

As discussed above, a moderate amount of employment during high school can improve the well-being of youth and there is evidence that various employment-readiness interventions can boost both the employment rates and psychosocial well-being of youth. Little is known, however, about what specific aspects of employment programs that combine both skills training components as well as on the job experience may be associated with particular outcomes in youth, such as improvements in their work-related self-confidence and motivation. It should also be noted that amongst the studies on employment-readiness programs discussed above, only two (Campbell, 1995; Matsuba et al., 2008) are Canadian-based, as the remainder were conducted in either the

United States (Brooks et al., 1995; Ekstrom et al., 1984; Gore et al., 2003; Loughhead & Liu, 1995; Lundgren & Rankin, 1998; Robitschek, 1996) or the United Kingdom (Finn, 2003). Hence, this study provides a noteworthy contribution to the relatively sparse Canadian literature in this area. Moreover, little is known about how potentially influential attributes of the participants themselves, including their gender, the structure of the household in which they reside, previous work experience, and their national origin, as well as their perceptions of various programmatic features, may be linked to successful outcomes in the form of increased self-confidence and motivation (Garg, Melanson, & Levin, 2007; Ngo & Schleifer, n.d.; Weaver & Habibov, 2010). Thus, by considering the influence of the variables outlined above, this study performs a dual function in that it evaluates how the program is meeting its explicit goal of boosting the self-confidence and motivation of participant youth as well as helping to fill important gaps within the literature.

Methods

Data Collection

The participants in this study were recruited by an urban-based social service agency in Ontario to participate in an employment program during summer 2009. The agency developed partnerships with various schools and youth-oriented agencies through which the employment program was advertised and which elicited several hundred applications from youth interested in participating in the program. The program was aptly entitled Summer Jobs for Youth. All of the participant youth resided in one of four low-income neighborhoods located in the same urban area as the social service agency administering the program. In each of these low-income neighborhoods youth face a multitude of barriers, including a lack of access to employment opportunities (New Beginnings, n.d.).

The program assessed in this study consisted of a pre-employment session and a job placement. The pre-employment session included work orientation and job readiness skills training, in which youth learned skills in communicating with co-workers as well as conflict resolution in the workplace. The youth also received basic training in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and in the Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS) (New Beginnings, n.d.).

Following their completion of the pre-employment session, the participant youth were placed in a six-week publically subsidized job. A total of 112 employers participated in the program, with over 50% of them located within the private sector. The rest of the placements were in the government and non-profit sectors. The occupational classifications of the job placements were varied, including social services, food services, health and medicine, the automotive industry, and the arts, culture, and entertainment fields (New Beginnings, n.d.; personal conversation, B. Mastromattei, April 1st, 2010).

After completing their job placements, the youth were requested to fill out a survey. This survey yielded quantitative data in a variety of relevant domains, including participant demographic information, as well as their job placement experience, educational aspirations, neighborhood attachment, and work-related attitudes. The survey was developed following a thorough review of the literature, agency materials, and a pilot test with four agency youth who were representative of the participants in terms of age and background. It should also be noted that prior to commencing with the study, the Research Ethics Board (REB) located at the university in which the author is employed granted its approval of the study. This included a formal approval granted by the agency administering the employment program that is evaluated in this study.

Independent Variables

The independent variables consisted of both participant characteristics as well as their perceptions of program characteristics. In terms of participant characteristics, the independent variable *gender* was coded 0 = Male and 1 = Female. The variable *place of origin* was measured by one item (“Were you born in Canada?”) and in a dichotomous fashion with 0 = No and 1 = Yes. Likewise, *household structure* (“Do you live with both of your parents at the same time?”) and participants’ *previous work experience* (“Have you ever had a legitimate job you were paid for?”), were both single-item, dichotomous measures.

As for the participants’ perceptions of the pre-employment session, *level of pre-employment preparation*, was measured through one item (“Do you believe the pre-employment training helped prepare you for your job?”) with five response categories. The distribution of the participants’ responses was very uneven. For instance, only 1.8% of the respondents reported they were “Very unprepared,” and another 1.8% reported they

were “Unprepared” while over 70% reported they were either “Prepared” or “Very prepared.” In order to allow for a more proportionate distribution of participant responses, this variable was recoded to 1 = Not prepared (originally coded as Very unprepared, Unprepared, Neither prepared nor unprepared), 2 = Prepared and 3 = Very prepared.

Another program-related independent variable, *value of acquired skills*, was also measured through one item (“Did you learn valuable skills by participating in the Summer Jobs for Youth Program?”). As was the case with the perception of the pre-employment session variable discussed above, this item initially had five response categories that were unevenly distributed. Consequently, this item was recoded to 1 = Not valuable, 2 = Valuable, and 3 = Very valuable. Finally, the variable *job provided opportunity to learn new things* was a continuous variable measured through a six-item scale (e.g., “My job [gave] me a chance to learn a lot of new things”) found in Stern, Stone III, Hopkins, and McMillion (1990) (p. 280). In terms of missing items regarding this six-item scale, an imputed mean was used with cases involving no more than one missing item. Any cases with more than one missing item were discarded from the analysis (personal conversation, D. Edelstein, February 5th, 2010).

Dependent Variables

There were two dependent variables in this study. The first, *confidence in finding a job*, was measured through one item (“As compared to before my job this summer, I now feel more confident in my ability to find a job when I want one.”). This item originally had five response categories but, similar to the response patterns pertaining to the independent variables discussed above, the distribution of the participants’ replies to this item was very uneven. For example, slightly less than two percent of the respondents reported either “Very untrue” or “Untrue” while 90% responded either “True” or “Very True.” Hence, this variable was recoded to 1 = Not true (Very untrue, Untrue, and Neither true nor untrue), 2 = True, and 3 = Very True. A similar response pattern characterized the other dependent variable, *motivation to find a job*, which was also measured through one item (“How important is it to you to find a job in Fall 2009?”) and which had five response categories. Consequently, this variable was also recoded to 1 = Not important (Very unimportant, Unimportant, and Neither important nor unimportant), 2 = Important, 3 = Very Important. It should be noted that both of these dependent variables were based on the participants’ responses following their participation in the Summer Jobs for Youth program.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

A total of 208 youth participated in the summer employment program considered in this study. Due to employment-based commitments that restricted their availability, only 168 of the participant youth were able to complete the survey described above. None of the youth who were available to complete the survey refused to fill it out (personal conversation, B. Mastromattei, June 28th, 2011). Despite the fact that all 168 of the youth agreed to participate in the study they did not all complete the entire survey. As a result, any case in which at least one of the items measuring one of the independent or dependent variables was missing was automatically discarded from the analysis (the only exception to this was the six-item scale with which an imputation procedure was conducted, as discussed above). Consequently, a total of 143 youth participated in this study. Of these, 77 (53.8%) were male and 66 (46.2%) were female and their mean age was 16.92 years ($SD = .84$). They reported working an average of 33.55 hours per week ($SD = 7.9$) during their summer job placements. One hundred and thirteen (79%) of the youth reported being born in Canada while 30 (21%) were born outside of Canada. Seventy youth (49%) indicated they lived with both of their parents at the same time and 71 (49.7%) stated they had a legitimate job from which they received a wage or salary prior to their participation in the program. In terms of the value of the skills they learned by participating in the Summer Jobs for Youth program, 72 (50.3%) stated "Very Valuable," 60 (42%) stated "Valuable," and 11 (7.7%) reported "Not Valuable." As for their perception of their level of preparedness for their summer job following the pre-employment training, 62 (43.4%) of the youth indicated they were "Prepared," while 44 (30.8%) and 37 (25.9%) reported they were either "Very prepared" or "Not prepared," respectively.

Statistical Procedures

Ordinal logistic regression was used to determine which independent variables predicted a greater likelihood of youth being more rather than less confident in securing employment as well as their motivation for doing so. A multivariate model was developed and with this model two separate regression analyses were conducted. One regression analysis focused on factors predicting the participants' confidence in finding a job

subsequent to the program while the other regression analysis dealt with predictors of their motivation to find employment.

In order to address multicollinearity, the author utilized the method employed by Habibov and Fan (2008), in which the author conducted ordered logit regression between each individual predictor that yielded significant results within the full model and the outcome variable. Then, the sign of the regression coefficient was recorded. Any predictor variable whose coefficient in the full model was in the opposite direction from its coefficient in the one-by-one regression would be deemed multicollinear. No evidence of multicollinearity was detected in either of the models.

Determinants of Confidence

In terms of having more confidence in their ability to find a job following their participation in the Summer Jobs Program, 16 (11.2%) of the participant youth reported this was “Not true,” while 78 (54.5%) reported this was “True” and 49 (34.3%) indicated “Very true.” The results from the regression analysis indicate that being male was associated with a log odds increase of .72 in responding “Very true” to the confidence in finding a job item (see Table 1).

Table 1. Predictors of confidence in finding a job ($n = 143$)

| Variable | Coeff. | SE | Sig. |
|------------------------------|--------|------|---------|
| Gender (0) | .723 | .357 | *.043 |
| Place of Origin (0) | -.669 | .450 | .137 |
| Household Struct. (0) | .130 | .362 | .718 |
| Prev work exp. (0) | .223 | .360 | .535 |
| Value of acquired skills (1) | -2.058 | .835 | *.014 |
| Value of acquired skills (2) | -.471 | .398 | .237 |
| Level of Pre-employ prep (1) | -1.942 | .573 | ** .001 |
| Level of Pre-employ prep (2) | -.423 | .432 | .328 |
| Job Prov Oppt Learn | .021 | .055 | .708 |

-2 Log Likelihood = 219.880; Chi-Square = 40.597; Nagelkerke Pseudo R-Square = .291

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Conversely, participants who reported that they did not learn valuable skills in their summer job placements exhibited an expected log odds

increase of 2.06 in not being confident about finding a job when they wanted one. Moreover, participants who believed their pre-employment training did not prepare them for their summer job placements displayed an expected log odds increase of 1.94 in reporting not being confident in securing employment. Refer to Table 1 for the results of the ordinal logistic regression analysis of predictors of confidence in finding employment.

Determinants of Motivation

As for importance in finding a job following the program, 27 (18.9%) stated “Not important,” 36 (25.9%) stated “Important” and 79 (55.2%) reported this was “Very important.” The results of this regression model indicate that for every one unit increase in their score on the *job provided opportunity to learn new things* scale, there was an increase of .15 in the expected log odds for participants to report it was “Very important” that they found a job following the program. Furthermore, those youth who reported that the pre-employment training prepared them for their summer job placement (as opposed to being very prepared) demonstrated an expected 1.5 log odds increase in their reporting that finding a job in Fall 2009 was “Not important” to them (see Table 2). Interestingly enough, there was no associated decrease in employment-related motivation for youth who indicated that the pre-employment training left them “Not prepared” for their summer employment.

Table 2. Predictors of motivation to find a job ($n = 143$)

| Variable | Coeff. | SE | Sig. |
|------------------------------|--------|------|---------|
| Gender (0) | -.033 | .357 | .926 |
| Place of Origin (0) | .546 | .469 | .244 |
| Household Struct. (0) | .715 | .367 | .052 |
| Prevworkexp. (0) | .112 | .359 | .755 |
| Valueofacquiredskills (1) | -.196 | .751 | .794 |
| Valueofacquiredskills (2) | .251 | .396 | .526 |
| Level of Pre-employprep. (1) | -.149 | .577 | .796 |
| Level of Pre-employprep. (2) | -1.529 | .471 | ** .001 |
| JobProvOpptLearn | .148 | .057 | * .010 |

-2 Log Likelihood = 239.286; Chi-Square = 33.206; Nagelkerke Pseudo R-Square = .240

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

It should also be noted that not living with both of their parents at the same time was very close to being significantly associated with reporting that it was “Very important” to find a job in Fall 2009, as $p = .052$. Despite this variable not being a significant predictor in this study, the fact that it nudged so closely to the threshold of significance warrants recognition. Refer to Table 2 for the results of the ordinal logistic regression analysis of predictors of motivation of finding employment following the program.

Discussion

Implications

There are several important implications emanating from the results of this study. For one, male youth exhibited a greater gain in their confidence following their job placement than did the female youth. While it would be premature to conclude that the program increased the confidence of males more than females, this finding suggests the need for programmatic changes that might remedy this apparent gender-based inequity. In Canada, women employed full-time throughout the year earn approximately 70% of the earnings of their male counterparts (Hick, 2007), which indicates there is gender-based inequality within the Canadian labor market. Hence, it is important that programs such as the one evaluated in this study promote women’s equality within the labor market, both in terms of earnings, opportunity for employment and advancement, and *perceptions* of opportunities for employment and advancement, as the findings in this study suggest the program needs improvement in this area.

Another key finding was the positive association between the participants’ perception of how valuable the skills they learned in their job placement were and their confidence in securing subsequent employment. As discussed above, the participants engaged in a variety of jobs, so it may be helpful to conduct further research on the types of jobs that might lend themselves to the acquisition of more valuable skills, at least valuable from the participants’ perspective.

Likewise, there was a positive association between how prepared the participants believed they were for their job placements from the pre-employment sessions and their confidence in finding employment following their placements. It is noteworthy that perceptions of two

programmatic components (i.e., the job placement and the pre-employment session) were linked to employment-related confidence. The participant youth attended one of the two separate pre-employment sessions, so it could be helpful if further studies were conducted to assess if there were particular aspects of the pre-employment sessions that may have boosted their perceptions of preparedness (personal conversation, B. Mastromattei, April 1st, 2010).

There was also a positive association between the youth believing they learned new things in their job placements and their motivation to find employment following the end of the program. This suggests that exposure to a stimulating and intellectually enriching work environment can strengthen the employment-related motivation of youth. This finding is particularly noteworthy when one considers that having a job prior to their programmatic job placement was not associated with employment-related motivation. Hence, it may be that the quality of the job in the form of a stimulating environment is a much stronger determinant of employment motivation than merely having a job per se.

An interesting relationship was found between the youths' perception of their level of preparedness from the pre-employment session and their motivation to find work. Those who stated the pre-employment session left them "prepared" were less motivated than those who stated the session left them "very prepared," but no such relationship was found for those reporting the session left them "not prepared." It is difficult to say why this occurred; it may have been the case that less motivated youth had a more lukewarm attitude toward the pre-employment session (i.e., stating that it left them "prepared" rather than "not prepared" or "very prepared") rather than their perception of the pre-employment session actually influencing their motivation. The uncertainty in this matter reflects the limitations of cross-sectional research in which relationships are more associative than causal (Sullivan, 2005).

As noted above, the association between youth not living with both of their parents at the same time and greater motivation to find employment nudged very closely to the significance threshold of $p < .05$. Though one should be extremely cautious about drawing conclusions from a non-significant association, it may have been the case that these youth from low-income backgrounds were more motivated to find employment than their two-parent counterparts, as their domestic situation prompted them to assume more of a so-called "breadwinner" role relatively early

(personal conversation, B. Mastromattei, June 9th, 2009). Clearly, this area warrants further investigation.

Limitations

There were several limitations in this study. First, the participants constituted a convenience sample that was relatively small, thus limiting the representativeness of the study. Moreover, as discussed above, the participants applied to the employment program. This suggests there was sample selection bias, in that the participants may have been more motivated than those youth who were eligible for the program but did not apply (Remler & Van Ryzin, 2011). Second, as noted above, the cross-sectional nature of this study impedes the possibility of making time order conclusions from the observed associations between the independent and dependent variables. Third, the absence of a comparison or control group also compromises the confidence with which one can draw conclusions regarding any causal inferences between the independent and dependent variables (Sullivan, 2005). Finally, both of the dependent variables were measured through single items. While single-item measures are generally easy to administer and readily understood by respondents, there are concerns about their capacity to adequately represent the constructs being measured (Larsen & Fredrickson, 1999). For instance, in this study the constructs of employment-related confidence and motivation were operationalized by very specific questions regarding the participants' level of confidence to secure employment following their summer job placement and how important it was for them to find a job in Fall 2009. While these questions led to valuable insights, future studies could consider the influence of employment-readiness programs on similar constructs that are measured through multidimensional and multi-item scales, such as economic self-efficacy and orientation toward work (Cunnien et al., 2009; Stern et al., 1990).

Despite the limitations of this study, it did provide important suggestive evidence into how particular features of employment programs, such as enriching pre-employment sessions and job placements, can increase the employment-related confidence and motivation of youth from low-income neighborhoods. Moreover, the fact there was a gender discrepancy in terms of confidence in securing employment suggests that program designers need to develop more strategies and interventions aimed at promoting gender equality within the labor market.

Conclusion

Employment-based programs such as the one assessed in this study have never been more essential. This is because Canada and other western nations have adopted a new policy paradigm which eschews the host of income maintenance programs that characterized the traditional post-World War II welfare state and have instead embraced a social investment state that emphasizes knowledge and skills training, particularly for younger persons. Consequently, it is hoped that the findings from this study can help build a receptacle of useful information upon which program planners can draw when designing programs aimed at helping low-income youth exit their distressed environments and prosper within the competitive and dynamic economy of the 21st century (Banting, 2005).

References

- Alzate, M.M., Moxley, D.P., Bohon, S.A., & Nackerud, L. (2009). The influence of perceived health status on poor women's confidence in leaving welfare: Implications for social work. *Social Work in Health Care, 48*(1), 57-75.
- Banting, K.G. (2005). Do we know where we are going? The new social policy in Canada. *Canadian Public Policy, 31*(4), 421-429.
- Brooks, L., Cornelius, A., Greenfield, E., & Joseph, R. (1995). The relation of career-related work or internship experiences in the career development of college seniors. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 46*(3), 332-349.
- Campbell, D.S. (1995). Evaluating an intervention for at-risk adolescents: The case of the BreakAway Company. *Canadian Journal of Education, 20*(4), 437-454.
- Cone, S.L., & Glenwick, D.S. (2001). The effects of employment on youth in residential treatment. *Residential Treatment for Children & Youth, 19*(1), 45-57.
- Cunnie, K.A., MartinRogers, N., & Mortimer, J.T. (2009). Adolescent work experience and self-efficacy. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy, 29*(3/4), 164-175.
- Ekstrom, R.B., Freeberg, N.E., & Rock, D.A. (1984, August). The effects of youth employment program participation on later employment and education/training. Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association, Toronto, Ontario.
- Entwisle, D.R., Alexander, K.L., & Olson, L.S. (2004). Temporary as compared to permanent high school dropout. *Social Forces, 82*(3), 1181-1205.
- Entwisle, D.R., Alexander, K.L., & Olson, L.S. (2005). Urban teenagers: Work and dropout. *Youth & Society, 37*(1), 3-32.
- Finn, D. (2003). The "employment-first" welfare-state: Lessons from the new deal for young people. *Social Policy and Administration, 37*(7), 709-724.
- Fogel, S.J. (2004). Risks and opportunities for success: Perceptions of urban youths in a distressed community and lessons for adults. *Families in Society, 85*(3), 335-344.
- Garg, R., Melanson, S., & Levin, E. (2007). Educational aspirations of male and female adolescents from single-parent and two biological parent families: A comparison of influential factors. *Journal of Youth & Adolescence, 36*, 1010-1023.

- Gore, S., Kadish, S., & Aseltine Jr., R.H. (2003). Career centered high school education and post-high school career adaptation. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 32(1/2), 77- 88.
- Habibov, N.N., & Fan, L. (2008). Modeling prenatal health care utilization in Tajikistan using a two-stage approach: Implications for policy and research. *Health Policy and Planning*, 23(6), 1-9.
- Hick, S. (2007). *Social welfare in Canada* (2nd ed.). Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing Inc.
- Larsen, R.J., & Fredrickson, B.L. (1999). Management issues in emotion research. In D. Kahneman, E. Diener, & N. Schwarz (Eds.), *Well-being: The Foundation of Hedonic Psychology* (pp. 40 – 60). New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Lerman, R. I. (2000). Are teens in low-income and welfare families working too much? *New Federalism: National Survey of America's Families. Series B, No. B-25. The Urban Institute.*
- Loughead, T.A., & Liu, S.H. (1995). Career development for at-risk youth: A program evaluation. *Career Development Quarterly*, 43(3), 24-34.
- Lundgren, L., & Rankin, B. (1998). What matters more: The job training program or the background of the participant? An HLM analysis of the influence of program and client characteristics on the wages of inner-city youth who have completed JTPA job training. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 21(1), 111-120.
- Marsh, H.W. (1991). Employment during high school: Character building or a subversion of academic goals? *Sociology of Education*, 64(3), 172-189.
- Matsuba, M.K., Elder, G.J., Petrucci, F., & Marleau, T. (2008). Employment training for at-risk youth: A program evaluation focusing on changes in psychological well-being. *Child Youth Care Forum*, 37, 15-26.
- Mihalic, S.W., & Elliott, D. (1997). Short- and long-term consequences of academic work. *Youth & Society*, 28(4), 464-498.
- Ministry of Children and Youth Services. (n.d.). *Ontario youth opportunities strategy*. Retrieved from <http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/news/backgrounders/01162007.aspx>
- Mortimer, J.T., Finch, M.D., Ryu, S., Shanahan, M.J., & Call, K.T. (1996). The effects of work intensity on adolescent mental health, achievement, and behavioral adjustment: New evidence from a prospective study. *Child Development*, 67(3), 1243-1261.

- New Beginnings. (n.d.). *Summer jobs for youth program 2008*. South West Region: Ministry of Children & Youth Services.
- Ngo, H.V., & Schleifer, B. (n.d.). Immigrant children and youth in focus. Retrieved from http://canada.metropolis.net/pdfs/Van_ngo_e.pdf
- Phillips, S., & Sandstrom, K.L. (1990). Parental attitudes toward youth work. *Youth & Society*, 22(2), 160-183.
- Remler, D.K., & Van Ryzin, G.G. (2011). *Research methods in practice: Strategies for description and causation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Robitschek, C. (1996). At-risk youth and hope: Incorporating a ropes course into a summer jobs program. *Career Development Quarterly*, 45(2), 163-169.
- Staff, J., & Mortimer, J.T. (2007). Educational and work strategies from adolescence to early adulthood: Consequences for educational attainment. *Social Forces*, 85(3), 1169-1194.
- Staff, J., & Mortimer, J.T. (2008). Social class background and the school-to-work transition. *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development*, 119, 55-69.
- Stern, D., Stone III, J.R., Hopkins, C., & McMillion (1990). Quality of students' work experience and orientation toward work. *Youth and Society*, 22(2), 263-282.
- Stone III, J.R., & Mortimer, J.T. (1998). The effect of adolescent employment on vocational development: Public and educational policy implications. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 53(2), 184-214.
- Sullivan, M.K., Larrison, C.R., Nackerud, L., Risler, E., & Bodenschatz, L. (2004). Examining the relationship between psychological well-being and the need for continued public assistance benefits. *Families in Society*, 85(3), 425-429.
- Sullivan, M. (2005). Welfare reform transitions: The effects of emotional well-being on job status in current TANF recipients. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 12(2/3), 1-15.
- Weaver, R.D., & Habibov, N.N. (2010). A gender-based comparison of levels and determinants of adolescent well-being: Results from a Canadian national survey. *Currents*, 9(2), 1-21.
- Weiss, C.H. (1998). *Evaluation* (2nd ed.). New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc.
- Zimmer-Gembeck, M.J., & Mortimer, J.T. (2006). Adolescent work, vocational development, and education. *Review of Educational Research*, 76(4), 537-566.

Author's notes

Robert D. Weaver, PhD, Assistant Professor, University of Windsor,
School of Social Work, Windsor, ON. Email:
rdweaver@uwindsor.ca.