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Job-seeking and job-acquisition in high school students

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ABSTRACT

We surveyed 225 Year 9 and 10 students at T1 regarding their attitude, social norms, control, experience, plans and intentions to find a part-time job while at school. Of these, 149 did not have a job and were surveyed again four months later about their job-seeking and job outcomes (104 responded at T2). Job-seeking intentions at T1 were associated with past experience, plans and beliefs that getting a job was the right thing to do. Job-seeking at T2 was associated with beliefs about the value of job-seeking. Job interviews attended were related to job-seeking, and job offers were related to interviews attended. Students with higher job-seeking intentions and behaviours differed on most variables from students with lower intentions and behaviours. Students need to be aware of the relationship between job-seeking, interviews and offers, and be provided with strategies that increase their interviews and assist to manage unsuccessful job attempts.

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1. Introduction

It is increasingly common for adolescents to work in part-time paid jobs while still at school. In Australia, 34% of eligible students were working part-time in 1990. This figure was 42% in 2000 (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2002) and 50% in 2003 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2005). Australian students work an average of 11 h per week (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2002). Students benefit from part-time employment by earning money, making new friends, developing occupational skills and learning about the world of work (Curtis & Lewis, 2001; Lucas & Lammont, 1998), although detrimental effects, such as impaired school performance and attendance and deteriorated relationships with family and friends, have also been noted, especially when students work long hours (Mortimer, Finch, Ryu, Shanahan, & Call, 1996; Vickers, Lamb, & Hinkley, 2003). Student employment also benefits employers, who, for example, find students easier to hire and fire than full-time workers, and more prepared to work unsociable hours (Lucas & Ralston, 1996). Thus, having a part-time job can be a significant activity in the student's life and a key consideration for the economy. Understanding the influences on students that lead them to seek a part-time job is important as it can assist them with their employment goals and help them manage these first steps into work. The present study sought to identify the factors that led students to decide to search for a part-time job and to differentiate between those who were successful in this task and those who were not.

Job-seeking is a "purposive, volitional... (behaviour) that begins with the identification and commitment to pursuing an employment goal" (Kanfer, Wanberg, & Kantrowitz, 2001, p. 838). It includes activities such as preparing a resume, reading job advertisements, contacting employers and going to job interviews. Job-seeking identifies the potential jobs that are available, has an important influence on whether the student becomes employed, and influences the quality of that employment

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(Kanfer et al.). Research has identified a wide range of antecedents to job-seeking in adults, including personality, generalized expectancies such as self-efficacy and locus of control, life history variables such as work experience and job-seeking experience, barriers such as a disability, financial obligations, social skills and social support, effort, intensity and presentation to prospective employers (Eden & Aviram, 1993; Gowan, Riordan, & Gatewood, 1999; Kanfer et al., 2001; van Hooft, Born, Taris, & van der Flier, 2003; Wanberg, Kanfer, & Rotundo, 1999). However, no study has investigated the predictors of job-seeking in students; where adolescents have been examined they have been college graduates, unemployed or job-to-job seekers (Kanfer et al.). The current study addressed this gap by examining the antecedents and consequences of job-seeking among high school students.

We examined these antecedents and consequences in the context of Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behaviour (TPB). According to the TPB, the immediate determinant of behaviour is the person's intention to perform it. Intention, in turn, is determined by the individual's attitude (salient beliefs about whether the behaviour leads to a valued outcome), subjective norms (perceptions of social pressures), and perceived behavioural control over the behaviour. Perceived behavioural control taps beliefs about factors that may further or hinder performance, such as ability, resources, skills and the co-operation of others. As a general rule, the more favourable the attitude and subjective norm, and the greater the perceived control, the stronger is the individual's intention to perform the behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). For behaviours under volitional control it is the combination of intentions and perceived behavioural control that predicts behaviour (Ajzen, 1991).

The TPB has been useful in predicting a range of health and risk related behaviours, such as smoking, exercise and food choice (Armitage & Conner, 2001), and has been applied to predicting job-seeking in unemployed adults (van Hooft et al., 2003; Vinokur & Caplan, 1987) and graduating college students (Caska, 1998). Vinokur and Caplan, for example, found that attitude and subjective norms were the main determinants of job-seeking intentions in unemployed adults, and that intention was, in turn, the main determinant of job-seeking. Caska found that job-seeking intentions and job-seeking were explained by attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control in graduating college students.

Meta-analyses have shown that the TPB has been able to account for 40–50% of the variance in intentions, but that intentions and perceived behavioural control account for only 19–38% of the variance in behaviour (Sutton, 1998). Because of this discrepancy, other variables have been proposed to augment the TPB. We included three suggestions that appeared salient to job-seeking. The first of these was effects of past experience (Bagozzi, Baumgartner, & Yi, 1992). Students who have past job-seeking experience, should, for example, have more accurate perceptions of their job-seeking self-efficacy and control than those with no job-seeking experience. The second was a broader measure of social norms (we included injunctive, descriptive and moral norms, i.e., others' social approval/disapproval, what others might do, and personal rules of conduct; Conner & McMillan, 1999). For example, findings in the developmental literature suggest that adolescents may be influenced differently by parents and peers (Ianotti, Bush, & Weinfurt, 1996). We thus included the standard measure of subjective norms, as advocated by Ajzen (1991), as well as separate questions on the normative influence of parents, teachers and peers to enable assessment of a wider range of these referents. The third was implementation intentions, or having specific plans about the behaviour (Gollwitzer, 1993). Individuals are more likely to have stronger intentions and to carry out those intentions to perform a behaviour if they make a specific plan about when and where they will do it. Intentions commit a person to achieving a goal, whereas implementation intentions commit the person to executing the specific intended behaviour.

Thus, from the TPB, and suggestions for its augmentation, we proposed four main hypotheses: (a) that job-seeking attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control would predict intentions to job-see, (b) that past experience and implementation intentions would improve prediction of intentions to job-see, (c) that intentions, perceived behavioural control, past experience and implementation intentions would predict subsequent job-seeking, and (d) that successful job-seeking students would differ from unsuccessful students on the TPB variables, past experience and implementation intentions.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

At T1, we surveyed all Year 9 and 10 students from three Australian high schools (one state and two independent). Two hundred and twenty-five responded to the survey (response rate = 41%), and of these, 149 (66.2%) indicated they did not have a paid part-time job and were retained in the study. There were 90 girls (60.4%) and 59 boys (mean age = 15.0 years; range = 13.9–16.6; $SD = .6$). Only one of these students indicated that he did not want to find work. The remainder indicated that they would like to work an average of 3.9 h per week ($SD = .8$), with a strong preference for jobs in the service sector (e.g., sales assistant, checkout operator). Adolescents can legally work in Australia in their 14th year. At T2, approximately 4 months after T1, we administered a second survey to the same 149 students who did not have a job at T1. We received responses from 104 students (response rate = 70%). These were 63 girls (60.6%) and 41 boys (T1 mean age = 15.01 years; range = 13.9–16.6; $SD = .6$). At T2, 38 students (36.5%) indicated they had found a paid job in the interim.

2.2. Materials

At T1, the survey contained measures of job-seeking attitudes (attitude and work value), subjective norms (descriptive, moral and injunctive), perceived behavioural control (job-seeking self-efficacy and control), past experience, implementa-

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