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GROUP



Overloaded and Overlooked:

*Investigating How Poverty Drives School Students
Into Paid Work*



Harry Yu Shi

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Founded in 1994, the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) is an independent, registered charity working to eliminate child poverty in Aotearoa NZ through research, education and advocacy.

Our vision

Our vision is an Aotearoa where all children flourish free from poverty. All tamariki will grow up surrounded by loving, thriving whānau within supportive communities where there are resources, opportunities and systems to enable them to live self-determined lives and futures.

CPAG acknowledges that tamariki Māori and whānau have unique rights as tangata whenua, affirmed within He Whakaputanga and Te Tiriti o Waitangi. The significant inequities in wellbeing outcomes and child poverty for tamariki Māori are the result of ongoing colonisation, systemic racism, and neglect. Reducing child poverty in Aotearoa requires our country to address the inequitable distribution of power and resources that prevents Māori from flourishing.

Our work

CPAG produces research about the causes and effects of poverty on children and their whānau and families, and uses this to inform public discussion and promote evidence-based responses. Our work covers issues such as health, housing, education, taxation, disability, employment and income support.

CPAG is funded entirely by grants from charitable trusts and donations from the public. Our members include academics, teachers, health workers, community workers and many others.

Our focus on children

CPAG focuses on eliminating poverty for children because:

Overall effects of poverty are worse for children — Child development is adversely affected by poverty and can lead to detrimental effects for an entire life.

Children are more likely to experience poverty — Children are over-represented among those in deprived households.

Children don't get a say — Decisions affecting children are made without their input; state democracy involves only adults.

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CPAG EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	5
Key Points/ Findings	6
Measuring high school student employment – whether poverty-driven or not - is a neglected area	6
Children’s incomes are counted as adult incomes with real world and statistical effects	6
Current unknowns/ ballpark estimates of the real-life NZ situation	7
Recommendations.....	10
Measuring the problem	10
Mitigate the current situation.....	11
Dealing to the underlying driver	11
1.INTRODUCTION	12
2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS.....	13
The “Threshold” Approach: How many hours of work are too many for students?	14
Work as skills builder (below the weekly time ceiling)	15
Zero-sum approach	16
Orientation approach.....	17
Early Exits: Disengagement	18
3. RESEARCH SCAN: JUGGLING SCHOOL AND WORK IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND	19
Schoolchildren in Paid Employment (2010)	19
Youth12.....	22
Youth19.....	22
What about me?	24
Household Labour Force Surveys.....	25
Children’s income included in household income for child poverty statistics.....	28
4. POST-COVID ATTENDANCE AND OVERWORKING TROUBLES	28
5. RESEARCH IN THE FUTURE	32
Up-to-date research and analysis required.....	33
REFERENCE LIST	35

Figure 1 Proportion of youth aged 15-19 selected employment/education status 2017 – 2023. Data source from Inforshare (2024; 2024b).	8
Figure 2 Proportion of youth aged 15-19 in employment and not in education by ethnicity, Dec 2017 – Dec 2023. Data source: Infoshare (2024c).	9
Figure 3 Proportion of youth aged 15-19-years old in selected employment/education status, Dec 2004 - Dec 2023. Source: Infoshare (2024b).	25
Figure 4 Proportion of 15 – 19 years old in education and employment by ethnicity, Dec 2008 – Dec 2023. Source: Infoshare (2024c)	26
Figure 5 Proportion of 15-19-years old in employment and not education by ethnicity, Dec 2008 – Dec 2023. Source: Infoshare (2024c).	26
Figure 6 NEET rate 15-19 years old by ethnicity Dec 2008 – Dec 2023. Data source: Infoshare (2024c).	27
Figure 7 Proportion of 15 – 19 years old in education, not employment by ethnicity. Dec 2008 – Dec 2023. Data source: Infoshare (2024c)	27
Figure 8 Estimated working hours of 17-years old student in 2022. Data sourced from OHI Data Navigator; graph prepared by Nicholson Consulting.	30
Figure 9 Estimated working hours of 18-years old student in 2022. Data sourced from OHI Data Navigator; graph prepared by Nicholson Consulting.	30
Figure 10 Student attendance across schools and kura 2019 - 2023, primary and secondary schools. Source: Education Counts (2023 December).	31

CPAG EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Despite years of schools ringing the alarm, authorities are not monitoring the issue of poverty-driven student employment, nor do there appear to be any contemporary studies on the drivers and implications of high school students overworking. This neglect – by those who have the power to eliminate this effect of child poverty – is concerning, especially as long hours of paid work while at school can greatly diminish young people’s wellbeing, social and psychological development and educational attainment.

But while the size and spread of the issue is unclear due to this neglect, the number of high school students affected appears to have grown since the beginning of the Covid pandemic. Poverty drives some school students to leave education entirely for fulltime employment; and it is likely that even more students are juggling school and poverty-driven employment, many of them likely struggling with fatigue.

Employment whilst studying can, of course, be beneficial. Benefits may include boosting a young person’s future employability, current sense of purpose and confidence. However, *poverty-driven* student employment can mean overly long hours of work while studying, and even if the hours are manageable, the student can feel trapped, stressed and as if they had no choice, rather than empowered by their own decision to work. In addition, areas of deprivation offer fewer paid-work opportunities. This means poverty-driven student employment is probably more likely than other student employment to come with poor conditions and/or be a long commute from home. (On the flipside, fewer employment opportunities mean fewer students in deprived areas are in paid work than students from other areas on average – meaning fewer students in under-served communities are able to access the benefits of employment.)

Whether they have left school early – which may carry a higher risk of later unemployment, poverty and incarceration (McDermott et al., 2018; Samuel & Burger, 2020)– or working long hours while still in school, deprivation-driven employment robs students of educational achievement and their future potential, further locking them into poverty and lowering medium-term productivity for the country as a whole (Rua et al., 2019).

Put in another way, students living in highly deprived households are confronted with serious decisions about whether to commit oneself to short-term needs of the family or household, in the form of immediate income, or long-term investment into developing one’s human capital. Everyday challenges presented by poverty and financial hardship may remove students’ ability to choose and compel students into pathways of short-term gains that can jeopardise their futures as they lose out on educations that empower their human capital (ERO, 2022, p. 95).

Ultimately, this problem is politically created by successive governments, and it is in the government’s power to prevent it, by addressing the underlying causes: hardship and the cost-of-living crisis, including housing costs. Adolescence is a crucial and sensitive period of psychological and biological development yet many free services – from public transport to GP visits (and prescriptions past and future) – stop after age 12 or 13.

Education is the way out of poverty – but currently systemic poverty and long-term state

neglect of the education-employment issue stand in the way of education. Core elements of the right to education (as specified in international treaties) include “measures developed by the State to ensure full participation in education” (Te Kāhui Tika Tangata, 2024). This must include adequate resources to for students to attend school, rested and alert.

Key Points/ Findings

Measuring high school student employment – whether poverty-driven or not - is a neglected area

- 1) There is a general neglect of monitoring paid employment for high school students in NZ. The last Government report on employment’s impact on secondary educational outcomes was published in 2010 (Dept. Labour, 2010). New Zealand is a different place than it was 14 years ago, especially given the ongoing challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. We need more information about students’ motivations to seek employment with those who are working close to a full-time capacity.
- 2) Current monitoring and assessment of the issue is de-coupled between different ministries and treated as separate issues. As of early 2024, Ministry of Business, Innovation, and Employment (MBIE) has plans on young people’s successful transition from education into employment, and the Ministry of Education has plans to assist with their educational engagement. It is unclear whether these approaches are coordinated and strategic or are siloed or perhaps even contradict one another. It is also unclear whether either of the approaches considers poverty as a driver of youth behaviour.

Children’s incomes are counted as adult incomes with real world and statistical effects

- 3) If children is 16 years of age or older and work more than 30 hours a week then they are no longer considered to be financially dependent on their parents/caregivers. This can have a sudden and enormous effect on family incomes: families are no longer eligible for Working For Families entitlements for their “independent” child, and caregivers’ main benefits and housing assistance can also be affected. CPAG has heard reports of families losing necessary entitlements unawares because of this rule, which seems poorly promoted and largely unknown. An hours-per-week ceiling cannot act as a safeguard against child exploitation if people do not know about it.
- 4) NZ children aged 15 and over are treated in household income statistics as adult earners (StatsNZ, 2022). Their pay is counted towards household income (regardless of the number of hours worked).
 - a. This assumption is pernicious and out-of-date. Teenagers are not adults, nor should they bear adult responsibilities: Adolescence is a key time of development (Viner et al., 2012), and young people need time to rest and spend time with whānau and friends, as well as study. Paid work should be their *choice*, not a necessity to sustain their family’s living costs.

- b. Depending on the older children's (unknown) annual incomes, this way of measuring household income *possibly* has a small (but possibly increasing) effect on child poverty statistics. If it's large enough to be visible, the effect of counting children's incomes would be to reduce the number of children shown to live in poverty. Hence, some children may only be counted as living above the poverty line due to them working excessive hours per week.

Current unknowns/ ballpark estimates of the real-life NZ situation

The deprivation impact on student employment cannot be quantified from available data but reports from schools suggest it is likely that the post-COVID economic downturn is a key driver to the increase in 15-19-year-old student employment and truancy (other likely potential contributing factors include greater employment opportunities due to low unemployment/ low 'working holiday' migration).

Work-related truancy

Number of enrolled students regularly missing school due to work in school hours. Work may refer to paid employment which is easier to track via IRD income data. However, Education Review Office (2022) has reported students missing school due to unpaid labour such as caring for family members and working for family-owned businesses.

Finding

Unknown.

Estimate: 15,000 students or around 5% of the annual Year 9 – 13 enrolments are missing school due to employment of some form.

The most recent studies on that gauge the proportion of students working over 20 hours in a relatively regular manner is the *Youth12 Survey* (2012) and *What about me?* (2021) report by Ministry of Social Development. Education Review Office's (ERO) *Missing Out* report on school attendance provided additional insights.

The *Youth12 Survey* (2012) reported **5%** of all enrolled students worked full-time jobs in the past 12 months while this has dropped in 2021 to **2%** in 2021, likely due to COVID-19 restrictions.

The 2022 ERO report sampled Year 4 – 13 students and reported 3% of the respondents stated that they have missed school in the past two weeks due to employment. Given that 1) Year 9 – 13 students consisted less than half of the sample population at 44%, 2) Year 12-13, the school years students most likely to work excessive hours, account for 14% of the sample population, and 3) low decile 1 – 3 schools only accounted for 24% of the sample population, we believe 3% may be an under-representation of the proportion of students working excessive hours and missing school.

We suggest that the situation from 2022 to now may be relapsing back to circumstances as reported in *Youth12 Survey* (2012) and *Youth'07 Survey* (2007) where Year 9 – 13 students' participation in full-time work hovered between 5 – 6% of the high school enrolment. Especially given the context incapability of our benefit payments to keep up with current cost-of-living crisis, growing school attendance troubles, and students reported to miss school to perform unpaid labour for their family.

Deprivation-driven overworking

Number of young people regularly missing school due to tiredness related to poverty-driven employment (including such employment outside of school hours)

Finding

Unknown.

Over a third of learners in Years 4-13 report that tiredness is a barrier to attending school (ERO, 2022), and several anecdotal reports have documents poverty-driven employment is a factor (see ERO, 2022; Stewart, 2023).

COVID-19 economic pressuring students into (excessive) paid-work

Has poverty-driven student employment increased since COVID?

Finding

Unknown.

It seems highly likely. The proportion of 15–19-year-olds being in both education and employment (for any reason) increased by nearly a quarter from 2020 to 2023 (at the expense of education-only rates rather than, for instance, NEET rates) (see Figure 1). It is unclear how much of this age category is aged 15-18 (rather than 19), and how much of it is poverty-driven, but – along with school reports – it does suggest that poverty-driven school student employment is probably increasing.

In 2022, just over one in four schools in an ERO survey (random sample) reported more senior learners working paid jobs and leaving school for work. (ERO, 2022). It is unclear how much of these increases are due to deprivation or poverty, but schools have identified hardship as a main driver. E.g. “Kids are saying I need to work because my family needs the money – used to be because they want extra money” – Teacher 1 (ERO, 2022)

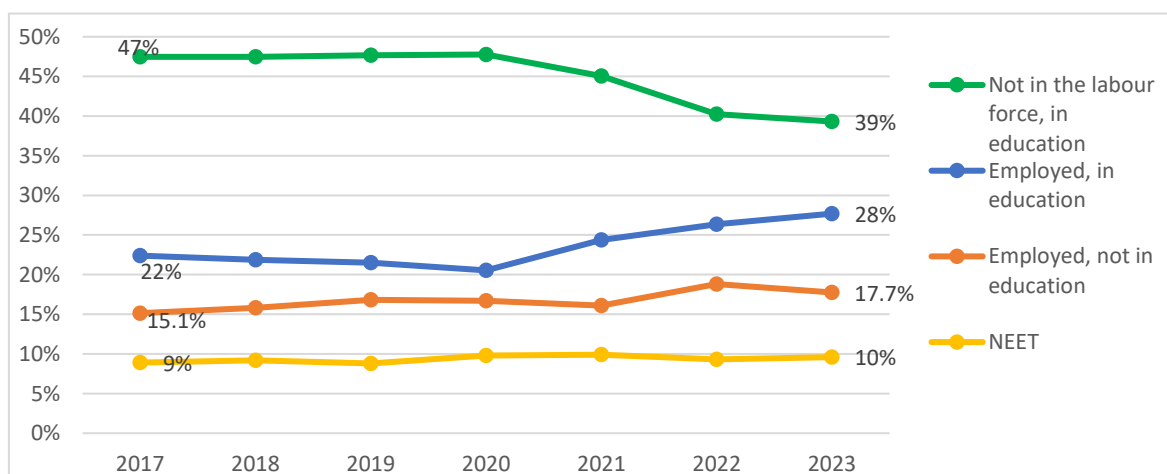


Figure 1 Proportion of youth aged 15-19 selected employment/education status¹ 2017 – 2023. Data source from



¹ Levels don't add up to 100% as another smaller category is not shown: “unemployed in education” accounting for 4.3%-6% each year.

Inforshare (2024; 2024b).

Uneven impacts of cost-of-living crisis on students' ability to stay in school

Are more high school students compelled by poverty/contributions to family income to leave education for paid employment than prior to COVID?

What high school qualifications, if any, have they received before leaving?

Finding

Unknown.

It seems possible more high school students are compelled by poverty to leave education for paid employment than prior to COVID. While Figure 1 above shows the proportion of 15-19-year-olds overall in employment but not education was similar in 2023 (17.7%) as pre-COVID in 2019 (16.8%), the trend for Pacific young people was different: young people in paid work without studying increased from 14% to 18% between 2019 and 2023 – an increase of more than a quarter (see Figure 2). This is potentially relevant to whether motivations to contribute to family income have increased since COVID. Most recent examination of Year 9 – 13 students' motivation in seeking employment was in Department of Labour's 2010 report, Pacific students were most likely to work to support family income (10%), nearly seven times more likely than students overall, and 2.5 times more likely than high deprivation students of all ethnicities (4%). It is difficult to track changes that have happened in the past 14 years as Household Labour Force Survey categorises youth as 15 to 19-years old

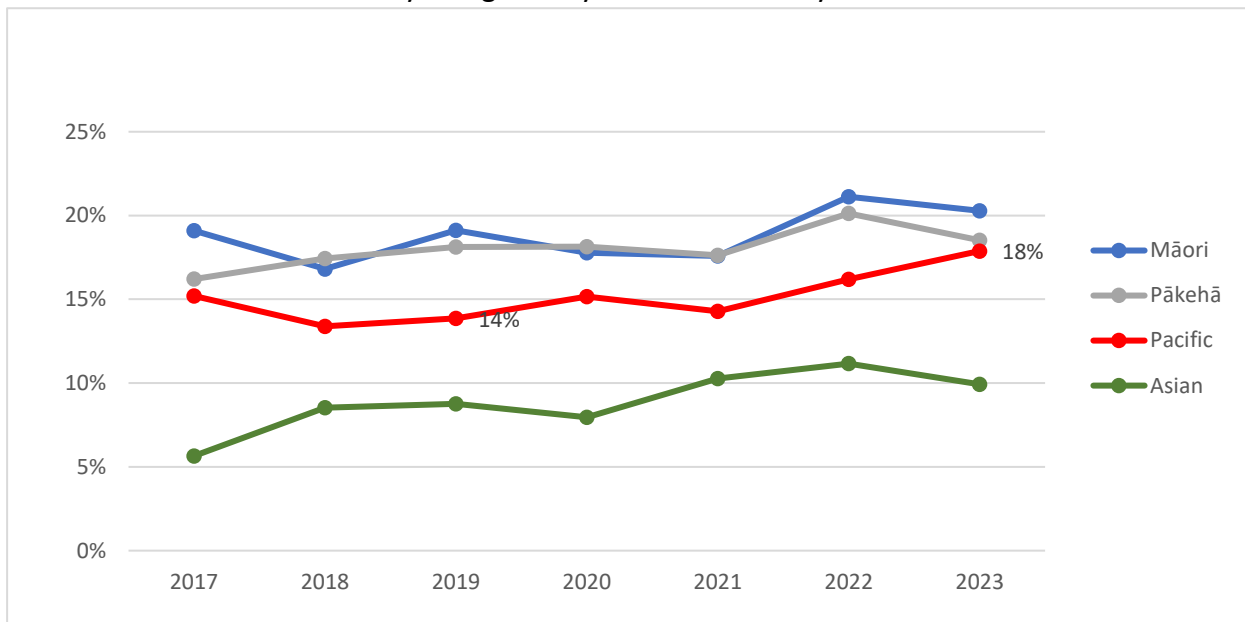


Figure 2 Proportion of youth aged 15-19 in employment and not in education by ethnicity, Dec 2017 – Dec 2023.

Data source: Inforshare (2024c).

Age of students overworking

What are the ages of students in poverty-driven employment?

How many students are employed over 10, 20 and 30 hours a week during term time

due to poverty?

Finding

Unknown.

No estimates available.

These are important issues, as international research shows the younger the student, the more impact long hours of paid work are likely to have on their education. For example, a longitudinal Australian study found that if 14–15-year-olds worked more than 5 hours per week, this increased the likelihood they would not finish their high school education (Vickers et al., 2003). For older students, US research (Hovdhaugen, 2015; Staff & Schulenberg et al., 2010; Staff et al., 2020) and UK research (Payne, 2003) research variously found 16-20 hours a week to be the threshold for detrimental effects – but this only took intensity of schoolwork into account, and not (for example) family and community responsibilities. Working out the thresholds most relevant to NZ would be useful. In 2010, NZ researchers noted there was no data available work out “where any threshold lies and how this could vary by age. Current estimates appear to lie around 10–20 hours per week for secondary school students” (Dept. Labour, 2010, p. 60)

Allocation of student work hours

How many students are working during school hours and nightshifts?

Finding

Unknown, but certainly some students are.

This is an issue as it exacerbates tiredness. It is illegal to hire children under 16 years of age to work between 10pm and 6am and during school hours (Employment NZ, 2022).

Recommendations

Measuring the problem

- 1) Establish a robust data collection system that monitors secondary student employment for better informed and responsive policies. Important indicators may include hours of work per week, allocation of work hours through the week and year, and motivations on seeking employment. Particular attention should be given to students working close to full-time capacity.
- 2) Commission pilot studies on the issue youth education and employment to produce an updated insight from the 2010 Department of Labour *Schoolchildren in paid employment* report. Particular attention should be paid to students working close to a full-time capacity.
- 3) Establish and periodically review the number of hours paid work per week during term time in the New Zealand context which is the threshold for detrimental effects of overworking on students, for different ages of student.

- 4) When reporting household income in measures such as Household Economic Survey and Child Poverty statistics, distinguish income earned by children under 18 from income earned by adults.

Mitigate the current situation

- 5) Create a cross-Ministry approach, led by the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Social Development, to ensure poverty is not forcing any young person out of education, or into an unsustainable employment-education workload. Urgently offer adequate support to school students who are currently overworking while trying to keep up with their education.
- 6) Ensure all communities, whānau and families know that children working 30 hours or more a week can affect their family assistance such as Working for Families and benefits.
- 7) Change regulations so that children working 30 hours or more per week during school holidays are still considered to be financially dependent on their parents/caregivers.

Dealing to the underlying driver

- 8) Substantially increase the Family Tax Credit for older children (aged 14 to 18) in acknowledgement of higher costs associated with that age group – such as fewer free services (e.g. GP visits and public transport), and greater nutrition and space needs. A higher rate of Family Tax Credit for older children would bring NZ welfare system closer to that of Australia's (see St John & Neuwelt-Kearns, 2021).
- 9) Implement the recommendations of the Human Rights Commission Pacific Pay Gap Inquiry (2022) which will all assist all low-income parents in paid work to make ends meet, regardless of ethnicity (in particular mandated pay transparency, raising the minimum wage to the living wage, and improving laws against harassment and violence at work).

1. INTRODUCTION

“The most hours I’ve worked in a school week is 47. Because my parents are sick, it’s only me and my sister and my uncle working as our main source of income. I sometimes work night shift and it gets hard juggling with schoolwork but I just stay motivated to get all my work done.”

- Atareita, Tamaki College prefect (TVNZ’s Q+A, June 2023 (Stewart, 2023))

The interplay between school engagement, educational attainment, student wellbeing and paid employment is a complex matter that subject to wider contextual influences. This report concentrates on one overlapping area of this large set of topics: poverty-driven employment of high-school students.

But to set the context: employment in paid work overall for children is widespread in NZ and can range from jobs for pocket money or personal disposable income, to working a range of hours in a family business (for examples, see Zhu, 2022) or to assist with family living expenses. More than a quarter (27%) of the 6,000 participants in *Growing up in New Zealand* (2023) reported of having a paid job at the age of 12 in 2020. At a minimum, every second 15- to 19-year-old is taking on at least a part-time job in New Zealand (Infoshare, 2024a).

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, secondary school principals from low-income areas have reported a high number of students juggling long hours of paid work, with some even dropping out of the school system because they can no longer balance the demands of school and employment – for example, in August 2020, it was reported that around 200 students from one Auckland high school alone “hadn’t returned to the classroom after lockdown in order to help their families financially” (1News, 2020).

Principals have raised the alarm presumably in the hope that the government and society as a whole will help to eliminate or at the very least mitigate this crisis for the young people and communities concerned. More than ever, it is necessary for leaders and decision-makers to guarantee universal access to education, in order for young people and their communities to exit deprivation. If society does not empower young people with adequate resources to even obtain basic high school qualifications, we greatly reduce their options and increase their risk – and their children’s risk – of being locked into long-term poverty.

Reports and case studies generally suggest that the phenomenon of increasing student employment is poverty-driven and has been exacerbated by surging inflation and the cost-of-living crisis that followed the pandemic. Long-term, chronic poverty will also be a factor: more than a quarter of Māori children and nearly four out of 10 Pacific children live in food-insecure households (Duncanson et al., 2022).² Those rates suggest entire geographic and social communities that are experiencing the toxic stress of deep and



² Food-insecure defined as a family sometimes or often run out of food.

chronic deprivation.

Moreover, the poverty-driven student employment burden is not over. In 2023, there were reports of multiple secondary school students working 25-50 hours a week to help their families to pay bills such as rent, water and power (see Stewart, 2023).

Each and every story of children working long hours is an avoidable tragedy – but what is being done about the issue, both in regard to the underlying driver (poverty) and in regard to mitigating the effect on students' educational attainment? And how widespread is the issue of school students entering into full-time employment prematurely to alleviate financial pressures faced by their household? How severe is this issue within priority communities for child poverty reduction (Māori, Pacific and disabled households)? Can the “decision” to prematurely enter the workforce comprise a young person's future opportunities thereby transferring poverty to the next generation?

The Child Poverty Action Group wanted to analyse how this trend of poverty-driven student employment is being monitored, measured and what practical steps are being taken to help children in this situation.

As it turns out, we found there is no systematic monitoring or measurement of student employment (whether poverty-driven or otherwise) and while many schools are doing their creative best and their staff are going above and beyond to assist students with heavy poverty-driven workload burdens, we could find no practical steps being taken at a collective (Ministry) level. The last time New Zealand school students in paid work were subject to governmental research was in 2010 by the Department of Labour – which no longer exists.

This report includes a scan of international literature on high school student employment; an attempt to identify research in the area of student employment in Aotearoa New Zealand over the past two decades – including a brief consideration of how student income is treated in the Household Economic Survey and Household Labour Force Survey analysis (including for the purposes of official child poverty statistics); and a call for further research on the topic of student employment in general – including poverty-driven employment – as very few have investigated the motivations for and impact of employment on secondary educational outcomes in recent years.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

High school student employment is shaped by opportunity as well as a range of motivations. International studies have shown students' labour market participation is mediated by demographic, geographic, socio-economic, and personal factors (Bridgeland et al., 2006; Staff et al., 2020; Vickers, 2011; Vickers et al., 2015; Hovdhaugen, 2015; Mortimer, 2003). These key factors shape students' labour market access, experiences and outcomes. In the United States, adolescents' participation in the workforce was impacted during the 2008 Global Financial Crisis. Non-Hispanic and Hispanic black youths were less likely to participate in paid employment while non-Hispanic Caucasians had increased likelihood to take on paid work during high school (Staff et al., 2020).

Staff *et al.* (2020) argue this change can be related to a more competitive labour market in an economic recession when employers were more cautious and could also discriminate – be selective – when hiring. In the case of New South Wales, Australia, Vickers (2011) found geographic regions and suburbs also influenced students' ability to secure a job. Vickers (2011) observed that students in remote-rural towns and western, multicultural suburbs of Sydney had difficulties in securing a part-time job during their secondary education, suggesting the relatively low socioeconomic status of these areas held fewer job opportunities and students had to compete with adult residents of the area. Fewer students in deprived areas being employed in paid work than students from other areas on average is a pattern that holds in Aotearoa New Zealand also, as shown in the next chapter: students in areas of deprivations have fewer paid-work opportunities.

More broadly in Australia and the United States, more female students were in paid employment than male students and often engaged with the labour market at a much younger age (Vickers, 2011; Staff & Schulenberg, 2010; Mortimer, 2003).

The “Threshold” Approach: How many hours of work are too many for students?

Many scholars conceptualise the impacts of student employment on educational outcomes via a threshold framework (Staff & Schulenberg, 2010; Payne, 2003). This approach generally models work hours per week against academic performance measures, such as grade points average (GPA), test scores, and graduation rate (Staff *et al.*, 2020; Hovdhaugen, 2015). There is a consensus that when students' work hours go past the threshold, employment has a negative linear relationship with educational outcomes (GPA, test scores, and graduation rate). According to studies of high school students in the United States, working over 20 or more hours per week is regarded as intense and is argued to have a direct impact on students' likelihood to exit secondary education early (Staff *et al.*, 2020; Hovdhaugen, 2015; Staff & Schulenberg *et al.*, 2010). Scholars further suggested that intensive work hours can increase youth delinquency and substance use (Holford, 2020; Kaestner *et al.*, 2013; Paternoster *et al.*, 2003; Staff & Osgood *et al.*, 2010).

Where this threshold is drawn remains contested between scholars, especially as the weight of mediating factors varies between countries and points in time. Firstly, it has been suggested that the content and standard of an academic curriculum can influence the threshold. For example, Payne (2003) found the threshold to be lower at 16 hours or more per week for high school students in the United Kingdom enrolled under Cambridge International AS and A syllabus. She argues the threshold is lower for these UK students compared to the 20 hours threshold suggested from US studies due to the Cambridge syllabus being relatively more challenging than the US high school curriculum.

Secondly, the age of when students enter the workforce may also influence the threshold. It has been suggested that the threshold is much lower in early adolescence. Drawing from longitudinal surveys of high school students in Australia, Vickers *et al.*'s (2003) account suggests that working more than 5 hours per week will increase the likelihood of students in Year 9 (equivalent to NZ Year 10, between 14-15 years old) not completing their final year of high school and such negative relationship between work

hours and early exit from secondary education is linear when students of that age are working over five hours per week.

Thirdly, the allocation of work hours and the industry students are employed in can have different impacts on their educational outcomes (Staff & Schulenberg, 2010; Vickers, 2011). These two variables are often interrelated as jobs of different industries operate at different times of the day and week and therefore varied hours of which student labour is in demand can have contrasting impact on educational outcomes. For example, Staff and Schulenberg (2010) argued that “3Ds” – dirty, dangerous and demeaning jobs – that extend into the late night are more correlated with students’ early exit from secondary education than ‘light’ work that occurs during regular hours. The authors suggest the more severe impact of 3Ds jobs is likely due to night shift hours overtaking time that would otherwise be spent on studying and sleeping (resting for school), aligning to arguments evoked by scholars following an allocation of time and zero-sum approach on secondary student employment and education (see below). In the Australian context, Vickers (2011) suggests hospitality jobs present higher risk of overworking students than other industries students may commonly work in such as retail, recreation, and trades. During the follow-up interviews, a large majority of students working in fast food chains stated that they struggled with balancing school and work and felt pressured by their employers to work more hours than they wanted. Of all student participants who worked in hospitality/fast food chains, only every third student was happy about their situation while the other two felt their job in hospitality made them feel unhappy about their circumstances.

The relationship between student employment during education has been approached through three theoretical frameworks: human capital, allocation of time or zero-sum, and primary orientation, which are explained below.

Work as skills builder (below the weekly time ceiling)

Benefits of adolescent employment as highlighted from a human capital approach align with the positive aspects associated with students working under the threshold, often referred to as the non-intensive range (Marsh & Kleitman, 2005). A human capital perspective argues that student employment can be complementary to education, particularly in relation to students’ future education-employment transition. Employment during adolescent ages allows youth to accumulate additional skills and knowledge while working and scholars have highlighted several ways employment can contribute to youth’s human capital (Rothstein, 2007). Firstly, students can acquire non-academic skills, such as work values, interpersonal communication, and time management, that can be transferred to future employment and post-secondary education (Rothstein, 2007; Staff & Mortimer, 2007; Buscha et al., 2012). Secondly, adolescent employment can provide a “signalling effect” which enhances one’s future employability in one’s 20s (Jackson, 2024; Van Belle et al., 2020; Krahn et al., 2002). This includes disabled youth (Ballo et al., 2022). Indeed, it has also been argued that the signalling effect of adolescent employment extends into college or university applications, particularly in the context of the United States (Staff et al., 2020; Lee &

Orazem, 2010).

Scholars have also highlighted that adolescent employment correlates with students' increased participation in extracurricular activities (Mortimer, 2003; Johnson & Mortimer, 2002) and their sense of independence and self-confidence (Howieson et al., 2006). In turn, these benefits build onto students' ability and success in navigating subsequent life stages, whether it is into tertiary education or the workforce (Jacob *et al.*, 2020).

Student employment is also argued to provide opportunities for students to apply classroom learning in practice (Hotz et al., 2002). And some authors suggest that student employment provides the opportunity for students to reflect on their interests and aspirations and may aid students to decide on their future pathways, often committing themselves to pursue higher education or certain career pathways after high school (Oettinger, 1999; Rothstein, 2007).

Zero-sum approach

The allocation of time and zero-sum approach sees student employment and education as substitutes of each other (Marsh, 1991; Steinberg & Dornbusch, 1991; Kalenkoski & Pabilonia, 2012; Darolia, 2014), as students are understood to have a fixed amount of time. This perspective generally follows a zero-sum theory and suggests that any positive gains from employment is cancelled out by students' loss of study hours (Marsh, 1991; Steinberg & Dornbusch, 1991). This position is supported by studies conducted with Australian and American high school students using survey data over different years in the 1980s (Marsh, 1991; Steinberg & Dornbusch, 1991). Employment is understood to constrain students' use of time on activities that would enhance their academic performance (Bozick, 2007; Kalenkoski & Pabilonia, 2012; Darolia, 2014) and therefore employment can negatively impact students' educational outcomes (Stinebrickner & Stinebrickner, 2008; Arulampalam et al., 2012).

Several studies have challenged the notion of employment directly substituting students' time on academic activities and the implied negative causality of employment on educational outcomes (Neyt et al., 2019). For one, academic activities, such as homework, studying, and class attendance, may not be what students are sacrificing when undertaking employment. Instead, leisurely, social, and extracurricular activities, such as TV watching, sports, and meeting friends, are what students reduce their time expenditure on (Triventi, 2014; Schoenhals et al., 1998; Warren, 2002; Kalenkoski & Pabilonia, 2012).

In this way, it is argued that time expenditure on work and study may not substitute another on a one-to-one ratio as the allocation of time or zero-sum approach may suggest. Indeed, Babcock & Marks (2011) challenge this one-to-one ratio by showing that the overall time allocated to class attending and studying by US tertiary students have decreased in the 2000s. Hence, the authors suggest that students in employment may not necessarily be sacrificing time that would otherwise be spent on academic activities. Marsh and Kleitman (2005) also question this time allocation approach through their

study of students' engagement in extracurricular activities. They demonstrate that students who had allocated substantial amounts of time in extra-curricular school activities had better educational outcomes in Year 12 and post-high school than students who worked part-time or did not work nor participated in extracurricular activities.

This is in keeping with understandings that adolescence is a crucial and sensitive period of psychological and biological change and rapid brain maturation, second only to early childhood in the rate and breadth of developmental change (Viner et al., 2012). Students need time for social activities, leisure and extracurricular activities for current wellbeing as well as future development – they are not automatons who can thrive solely on study, sleep and work.

Overall, it appears that the impact of employment on secondary educational outcomes cannot be assessed solely through an allocation of time framework where one hour of paid employment means one hour away from studying.

Orientation approach

Other scholars argue the negative relation between work hours and educational outcome points to an issue of selectivity and demonstrates one's primary orientation, that is the commitment of oneself, between either educational pathways or the labour market (Bozick, 2007; Baert et al., 2017; Entwisle et al., 2000). The orientation approach body of research argues the relatively poor academic performance of students working intense hours, when compared to non-working students or students in non-intensive work hours, suggest these students were already disengaged from secondary education and orient their focus towards building a career within the local labour market. Then, the negative relation between intense work hours and educational outcome may not be indicative of employment impacting students' education but a reflection of students 'choosing' to abandon their schooling in favour of seeking employment (Bozick, 2007; Staff & Mortimer, 2007; Triventi, 2014).

Looking at grades of US high school students over a period of four years, Staff *et al.* (2020) note that students who consistently scored poorly in tests and exams were more likely to commit themselves to intense work hours per week. The authors suggest that this persistent struggle with the curriculum may drive students into seeking an alternative future that is away from the secondary-to-tertiary education pathway and aligned themselves with an immediate entry into the labour market. The primary orientation literature, then, points to the necessity to consider educational disengagement and early exits as significant factors in the uptake of work hours by youths and students. It leads to the question of whether adolescent employment entices students into the labour market and away from educational pathways. This paper will now review international studies on the relationship between educational (dis)engagement, early exits, and employment in the adolescent life stage.

Early Exits: Disengagement

Both Rāhera and Miriama became familiar with precarity in their childhood and both dealt with hardship early in their lives. Neither was a stranger to work, since both were employed at an early age in casual and insecure work, which in turn impacted on their ability to gain further qualifications necessary for accessing secure and higher paid work. Both hold tuakana (senior) positions in their whānau, where cultural obligations to assist other whānau, even in their own precarity, are at times a source of both strength and stress. These same wāhine have also lived in multiple cities, locations and types of accommodation over the past five years, including caravans, cars, cabins, social housing and refuges. - Rua et al. (2019)

Internationally as well as in NZ, early exits from secondary education occur more frequently in populations experiencing high deprivation (eg Bridgeland et al., 2006). An overview is provided here.

The impact of an early exit from secondary education on an individual's life is well documented in the American context (McDermott et al., 2019; Samuel & Burger, 2020). Those who dropout are much more likely to become unemployed, live in persistent poverty, require social welfare, become incarcerated as well as leading to a life of material hardship (McDermott et al., 2019; Samuel & Burger, 2020). The consequence of an early exit from secondary education is not only tragic on an individual level, but also at a societal level in the loss of potential productive labour and increased costs of incarceration, healthcare, and social welfare (Catterall, 2011).

Studies of student employment's impact on educational outcomes tend to adopt a quantitative approach, primarily using data from governmental longitude surveys as a basis for statistical modelling (Johnson & Mortimer, 2002; Mortimer, 2003; Staff & Mortimer, 2007; Staff & Schulenberg, 2010; Robinson, 1999; HRSCET, 2009; Vickers et al., 2015; Payne, 2003).

Beyond making assumptions about the influences of unobservable variables, quantitative studies may not fully account for nuances that are caused by unobservable variables such as a delay in completing high school, and employment pushing students to choose easier subjects to reduce their academic workload (Triventi, 2014).

More critically, existing studies on the relationship between student employment and educational outcomes diminish the processual nature of early exits from secondary education. For instance, studies drawing from longitudinal surveys often examine a given student's work hours and grade at two points in time, typically at around the age of 13 and 17 – 18 (see Vickers et al., 2015; Vickers, 2011; Staff & Schulenberg et al., 2010).

These studies indicate that student employment is a strong factor in negative educational outcomes including an early exit – however it is often unclear from the correlation which phenomenon is cause and which is effect – high levels of student employment or negative educational outcomes.

The reasons for student disengagement are varied (ERO, 2022) – and there is also strong

research on reasons for student engagement and success, including affirming and drawing on cultural identity. For example, Webber & Macfarlane (2020) identified five components for Māori student success in their Mana Model: Mana Whānau (familial pride), Mana Motuhake (personal pride and a sense of embedded achievement), Mana Tū (tenacity and self-esteem), Mana Ūkaipo (belonging and connectedness), and Mana Tangatarua (broad knowledge and skills).

3. RESEARCH SCAN: JUGGLING SCHOOL AND WORK IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

Navaiah: The money I earn from working really helps my family really helps pay our rent, and power, and water cos it's really expensive nowadays. My parents are both full-time workers but whatever they've got left it's not enough to pay off our rent so that's where I come in, with the money I have earned to just help them to make sure they are not alone on this. I managed to buy my own uniform, my own stationery – even my brother's uniform.

Jaylin: My family – they are a big part of my life, and I just want to give back to them cos they always provided for me even when times were hard.

Excerpt from interview with two Sir Edmund Hillary Collegiate students (TVNZ's Q+A, June 2023 – [Stewart, 2023](#))

The excerpt above provides an insight to what some New Zealand students are undergoing in the present cost of living crisis – and the admirable expression of love and meaningful contribution that their paid work represents (Foon, 2022; Mayron et al., 2022; Stewart, 2023; Checkpoint, 2023). Currently, the work hours of high school students are not monitored or recorded in governmental data. Those students whose employability is low and under financial pressure may turn to informal employment, which can be riskier to unsafe and exploitative work conditions.

This section aims to provide a stocktake of available data and literature on NZ high school student employment and education thus far, in order to:

- 1) Identify gaps and opportunities for research on NZ high school student employment and education.
- 2) Assess how international studies inform this ongoing issue in NZ and how can such insights inform future NZ studies.
- 3) Inform our policy and research recommendations.

Schoolchildren in Paid Employment (2010)

The issue of high school student employment and education was last investigated by the Department of Labour (whose responsibilities are now part of MBIE) in a 2010 report titled *Schoolchildren in Paid Employment*. This report was preliminary as there was a scarcity of data on high school student employment and its impact on secondary education. The report largely relied on national surveys conducted between 2003 to 2009, namely *Youth'07: National Survey of the Health and Wellbeing of New Zealand*

Secondary School Students - Motivation and Achievement at Secondary School (2007 - 2008), and *Young People and Work (2003)*, and these were complemented by regional data from Wellington and Christchurch.

The 2010 report stated that 79% of NZ secondary students worked for pay in some form during 2007, and around 40% of the secondary students worked in a part-time job throughout the academic year. It identified several key patterns of high school student employment at the time. Firstly, unsurprisingly, high school students' engagement with the labour market intensifies as they approach the final two years in Year 12 and 13 (16–18-year-olds) while less than half of the Year 9 students (13-years old or younger, at 46%) undertook paid work throughout 2007/8, employment participation boosted to 76% for students 16 years and over and to 80% at the age of 17 or older.

Along with age, the 2010 report found participation by secondary students in paid employment differed by gender, ethnicity, and geographic locations. In 2007/8, female students were more likely to participate in part-time work, but male students were getting part-time jobs at a younger age.³ (In 2023, young women aged 15 to 19 – so not all high school students – were slightly more likely than young men of the same age to be working while studying: 28.8% vs 26.6%. The rate gap was reversed for those solely in education: 40.4% of young men vs 38.1% of young women (Infoshare, 2024b)).

The 2010 research found that Pākehā and Māori students tended to start working at a younger age compared to Pacific and Asian students. At the age of 13-14, 30% of Māori and Pākehā students had worked during the year 2006/7, one-and-a-half times the rate of Asian and Pacific students (20%), a difference of ten percentage points. This gap increases to at least 14 percentage points at the age of 15-17, with over half of Pākehā and Māori students in employment compared to 36% of Pacific students and 32% of Asian students.

Geographically, students from affluent areas were more likely to participate in paid employment than students from areas of socioeconomic deprivation. International scholars have suggested this pattern can be explained by the disparity in the number of available jobs between each area (Vickers, 2011; Vickers et al., 2015; Staff et al., 2020). Affluent areas are more likely to hold more job opportunities and students are less likely to compete against other adults within the area. In areas of higher deprivation, there may be fewer job opportunities and students may compete with other adults who possess more work experience and human capital (Vickers, 2011).

However, New Zealand students in affluent areas were less likely to work regularly or work during the holidays. Furthermore, rural students were much more active in their labour participation with only 27% not in any form of paid employment while studying,



³ Due to the political landscape at the time, surveys only considered gender in binary terms aligned with one's birth sex and therefore ignoring possibilities of students being identified with non-binary genders. The more recent Youth'19 survey has included non-binary genders but no longer reports data on high school student employment and education beyond their participation rate.

compared to the 39% of urban students. The rural and urban disparity contradicts findings within international studies as studies have found rural students tend to struggle with seeking employment due to the lesser number of jobs in the countryside compared to the city. The NZ trend may be attributed to a strong agricultural sector and rural-to-urban migration, but this is not properly examined.

Students' industries and jobs are also influenced by age and gender. Before the age of 16, young female students were highly represented with in-housework such as babysitting and cleaning while young male students were predominantly engaged in outdoor work such as gardening and labouring. Students aged 16 and over of both genders converge toward jobs within hospitality and retail industries. Over 50% of students aged 16 or older were employed in hospitality or retail. However, rural students were twice as likely to work outside at all ages (13-18 years old) and slightly less likely to work in a storefront.

Pacific and Māori students were more represented in labour-intensive cleaning jobs. Twenty percent of Pacific student and of Māori students worked in a cleaning job compared to 17% of Pākehā students and 12% of Asian students. Māori and Pākehā were the ethnicities most likely to be employed in babysitting jobs, sitting above 25%; while Asian students were more likely to work in shops and eateries. The ethnic and gender distribution of the type of jobs students are employed in was not thoroughly explored in the 2010 report but international scholars suggest this can be a result of both employer preferences and one's social network (including family) providing access to different job opportunities (Staff et al., 2020).

The 2010 report found 6% of students worked more than 20 hours per week. Around 4% of students reported that they worked 20 to 30 hours per week on average while 2% worked more than 30 hours per week. This meant that in 2007/8, 94% of the students in employment were either not employed in paid work at all or were working part-time according to the definition whereby part-time employment is 20 hours or less per week. The average enrolment number between Year 9 to 13 in each year between 2007 to 2009 was estimated to be around 282,000 students by the Ministry of Education data (Education Counts, 2023a). This means that 5,640 students were working more than 30 hours per week and 11,280 students were working more than 20 hours per week, bringing the 6% of students working over 20 hours to almost 17,000 nationally. This is concerning as the exact age distribution of students working over 20 hours was not made clear within this data set nor were the causes and effects of such intensive work hours on their educational outcome investigated in the 2010 report. We note the youngest in this category were 12-13 years old and the oldest students were 17+ years old: the Youth'07 study found that 2.5% of 13-year-olds worked in excess of 30 hours per week (reported in Dept. Labour, 2010).

For three quarters of these Year 9 to 13 students in employment, work hours were distributed across one to three days of the week with two days being the most common number of days worked at 32% of the students. One day of work and three days of work follow at over 20% respectively. (Dept. Labour, 2010).

More Year 9 to 13 female students were employed in paid work, but more male students were working over 20 hours per week, indicating that, at least around 2007, male students were more at risk for intensive work hours. The gendered nature of intensive work hours intersects with geographic factors where more proportion of students living in rural, and areas of high deprivation were working over 20 hours per week. Higher proportions of Pacific students and Māori students were working over 15 hours per week and their shifts tended to go past 10 pm.

Pacific students had the highest proportion in citing family income as the motivation for seeking employment at 10% of the respondents. This is 6 percentage points higher than the second identifiable group, students living with high deprivation, of whom 4% cited family income as their motivation. Pacific students – along with Asian students - were also the least likely group to report working for money for themselves.

Youth12

Since 2010, no comprehensive data has been collected on high school students' work hours nor have the impacts of employment on students' educational outcomes been investigated. The *Youth'12* survey, a follow-up to the 2007 survey referred to by the 2010 Department of Labour report, did collect the student employment rate of Year 9 - 13 students across 91 New Zealand schools. Of the 8,500 student respondents, 48% of the students participated in paid employment in the past 12 months. This was composed of 26% students holding a regular part-time job, 15% doing occasional work during the school term, and 19% of students working during the school holiday. Concerningly, a further 19% worked for a family business without payment in the last 12 months. The *Youth'12* survey found more rural and older students were holding a regular part-time job than urban and younger students. Three quarters (75%) of the students in paid or unpaid employment worked less than 10 hours in the week before the survey was conducted. In the same timeframe, about five percent of the students worked over 20 hours. The *Youth'12* survey reporting only details secondary school employment to the level described here. Data was not provided for working students' demographic and socioeconomic characteristics nor was analysis provided on employment's impact on students' educational outcome at the time.

Youth19

One subsequent youth survey, *Youth19*, surveyed a total of 7,891 youths, 7,721 Year 9 - 13 students in 49 schools and kura, 92 students in alternative education, and 78 NEETs, across Northland, Auckland, and Waikato regions, areas with the most diversity. The issue of student employment has not (yet) received much attention in the reporting of this survey; instead – understandably – there is a focus on youth NEETs. Outside of this scope, paid employment appears in three instances. First, Fenaughty *et al.* (2023) provides a comparison of employment rate between rainbow and cis gender youth as well as between those involved and not involved with Oranga Tamariki. For rainbow youths (n=698), little difference is observed in terms of being in some form of paid

employment in the last 12 months between those involved (50.5%, n=92) and not involved (51.9%, n=597) with Oranga Tamariki. Data on cis-heterosexual students (n=6,266) displayed a greater disparity in employment rate with those involved with Oranga Tamariki sitting at 42.1% (n=508) and those not involved at 48% (n=5,758).

Table 1 Youth19 Survey Year 9 – 13 Student aspirations by gender Source: Fenaughty et al. (2023)

Aspirations								
	Student plans to stay at school until Year 13		Student plans to get more training or education		Student plans to start work or look for a job		Student has other plans, such as starting a family, or has no plans	
	n (N)	% [95% CI]	n (N)	% [95% CI]	n (N)	% [95% CI]	n (N)	% [95% CI]
Gender category								
Cisgender	6,540 (7,411)	88.5 [86.5-90.5]	4,716 (7,439)	64.0 [60.2-67.9]	1,670 (7,439)	21.4 [18.0-24.9]	1,053 (7,439)	14.5 [13.4-15.6]
Trans	47 (69)	66.3 [53.0-79.5]*	41 (71)	60.3 [47.7-72.9]	11 (71)	14.4 [5.8-23.0]	19 (71)	25.3 [13.1-37.5]
Unsure	35 (45)	76.6 [59.0-94.1]	20 (46)	43.6 [27.5-59.6]*	12 (46)	28.4 [13.4-43.4]	14 (46)	28.0 [15.2-40.8]

The Youth19 survey reported on Year 9 - 13 students' aspirations (see Table 1). In general, most students were engaged with their secondary education, observing 88.5% (n=6,540) of the cisgender students planning to stay until Year 13 while a smaller proportion of transgender (66.3%, n=47) or students who question their gender (76.6%, n=45) were interested in staying until Year 13. Lesser overall proportion of students were planning to pursue further education or training. Over half of cisgender (64%, n=4,716) and transgender (60.3% n=41) students were planning for post-secondary education or vocational training while students unsure about their gender (43.6% n=20) were the least sure about further education or training. Joining the workforce is a much lesser apparent aspiration for most students but a substantial proportion of them were planning to seek employment over post-secondary education or training. Students who were unsure about their gender are the most likely to seek employment directly after high school mounting at 28.4% (n=12), noting the very small number of students were unsure about their gender (N=46).

Findings on student aspirations invite questions regarding to the changing place of secondary and tertiary education in relation to the labour market for young people of New Zealand. This dataset invites further investigate on how young's people perspective on school are shifting in a fast-changing world with ongoing and emerging economic, social, and environmental challenges.

During the Youth19 2019 survey shows a substantial proportion of students were experiencing financial hardship in many ways (see Table 2). Food affordability was an issue that affected the most students across gender identification with cisgender at

26.4% (n=1,870), 32% for transgender (n=24), and 22.8% for those unsure regarding their gender (n=9). This is followed by housing costs which affected 14.5% (n=985) of cisgender students, 36.9% of transgender students (n=24), and a third (33.7%, n=11) of the gender curious students.

Financial hardship								
	Parents worry about money for food sometimes, often, or all of the time		Parents worry about money for electricity sometimes, often, or all of the time		Parents worry about money for rent or mortgage sometimes, often, or all of the time		Parents worry about money for petrol or transport sometimes, often, or all of the time	
	n (N)	% [95% CI]	n (N)	% [95% CI]	n (N)	% [95% CI]	n (N)	% [95% CI]
Gender category								
Cisgender	1870 (7,039)	26.4 [21.9-30.8]	644 (7,024)	9.2 [6.5-11.9]	985 (6,887)	14.5 [12.2-16.8]	942 (7,015)	13.4 [10.0-16.9]
Trans	24 (70)	32.0 [20.1-43.8]	13 (71)	18.6 [7.8-29.5]	24 (69)	36.9 [24.0-49.7]*	16 (70)	21.5 [10.3-32.8]
Unsure	9 (40)	22.8 [9.8-35.8]	6 (42)	18.8 [4.8-32.7]	11 (38)	33.7 [15.6-51.7]	9 (42)	23.3 [6.4-40.2]

Table 2 Youth19 Survey Year 9 - 13 student financial wellbeing (Source: Fenaughty et al., 2023)

The impacts of financial hardship on young people’s home environments and parental involvement were expressed through Youth19 participants’ open-ended responses. Financial hardship pushes parents into intensive work hours and this cuts into parents’ availability for family time and staying involved with students’ education, in addition to their present struggle of meeting the household needs.

What about me?

The Ministry of Social Development’s 2021 *What about me* survey offers a snapshot of secondary education and employment during the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey reached 7,209 young people across 71 schools and kura. This was complemented by an additional 502 young people embedded in the communities and not in school, bringing the survey sample to a total of 7,711 young people from 14 to 18 years old. The overall proportion of young people in a regular part-time job was the same in the 2021 *What about me* survey as in the Youth12 survey: 26% of the sampled population.⁴ The proportion of students in casual or occasional work was different between the two surveys by three percentage points, from 15% to 18%, while those working during school holidays decreased by three percentage points, from 19% to 16%. The proportion of students who worked 20 hours per week appeared to have reduced by more than half, going from 5% in 2012 to 2% in 2021. The distribution change in the types of employment students were undertaking may be reflective of COVID-19



⁴ The Youth19 survey did not include types of employment.

pandemic restrictions and their impact on the economy and labour market, making flexible contracts, like part-time, casual, and fixed-term, preferable for employers.

The *What about me* report also collected information about how students felt about their employment. The question of whether “my work leaves me enough time for my studies” is particularly relevant to this paper. Overall, on average, students were confident about their employment not interfering at an 8.2 out of 10, with 10 being agreeing with the statement. There are disparities between gender and ethnicities with MELAA⁵ (7.7), female (7.8), disabled (7.6), rainbow (7.8), Māori (7.9), and Pacific (7.8) students showing below average confidence in general. On the other hand, European (8.2), male (8.6), and junior (8.6) were the most confident cohorts about balancing work and study. It’s unclear what the range was for each demographic group – group averages on their own do not offer any insight into those students who do think their work is impinging on their study.

Household Labour Force Surveys

Household Labour Force Surveys show the employment rate of 15–19-year-olds (whether in education or not; whether in full-time employment or not) climbed to a 15-year high in 2022 and stayed there in 2023 (see Figure 3 – which simply expands the year range of Figure 1).

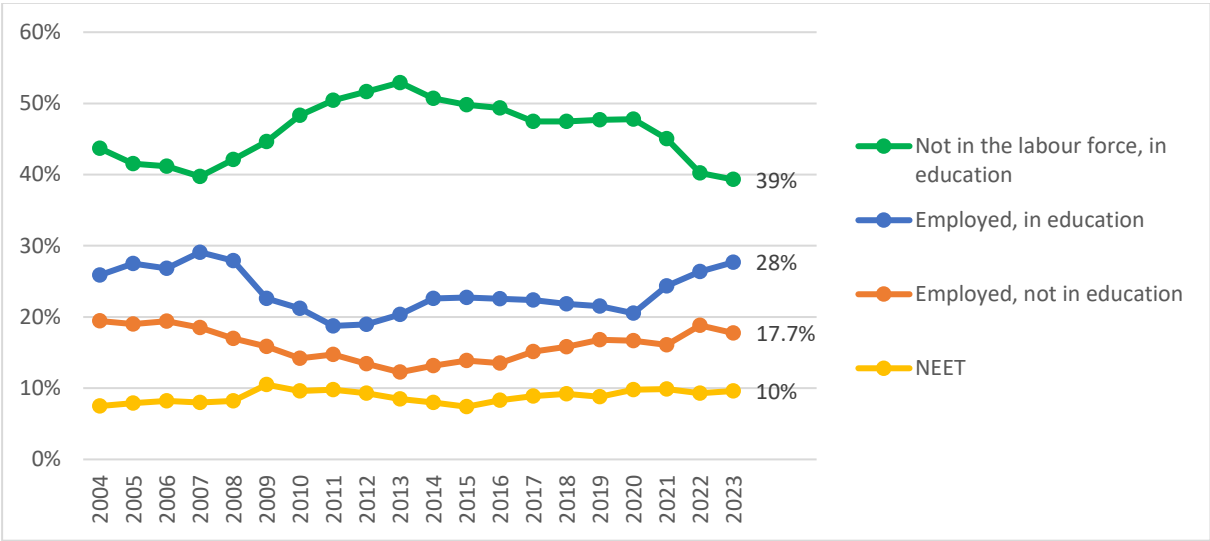


Figure 3 Proportion of youth aged 15-19-years old in selected employment/education status, Dec 2004 - Dec 2023. Source: Infoshare (2024b)

The proportion of 15- to 19-year-old Pacific, Māori, and Asian students juggling paid work and study has overtaken the former peak in 2008 while Pākehā students are trending to match the former peak (see Figure 4). Figure 4 shows the growth in students in paid work between 2020 and 2022 was particularly sharp for all ethnic groups. The proportion of Asian students in paid work leaped nearly 60% (9.8 percentage points) while the equivalent Pacific proportion leaped 70% (7.3 percentage points). However,



⁵ Middle Eastern, Latin American and African

the Pacific rate saw a slight drop-off in 2023, and the Asian rate remained reasonably flat, while the Pākehā and Māori rates of students in paid work continued to climb.

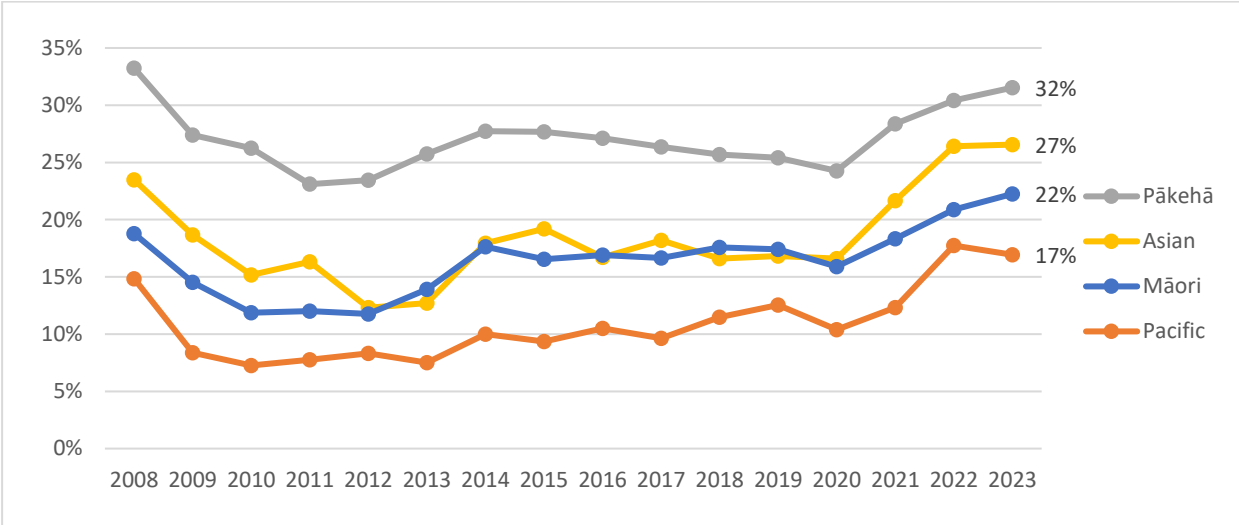


Figure 4 Proportion of 15 – 19 years old in education and employment by ethnicity, Dec 2008 – Dec 2023. Source: Infoshare (2024c)

In addition, the number of young people between the age of 15-19 in employment but *not* in education has also increased over the past decade, although it dropped for all selected ethnicities in 2023, apart from Pacific (see Figure 5).

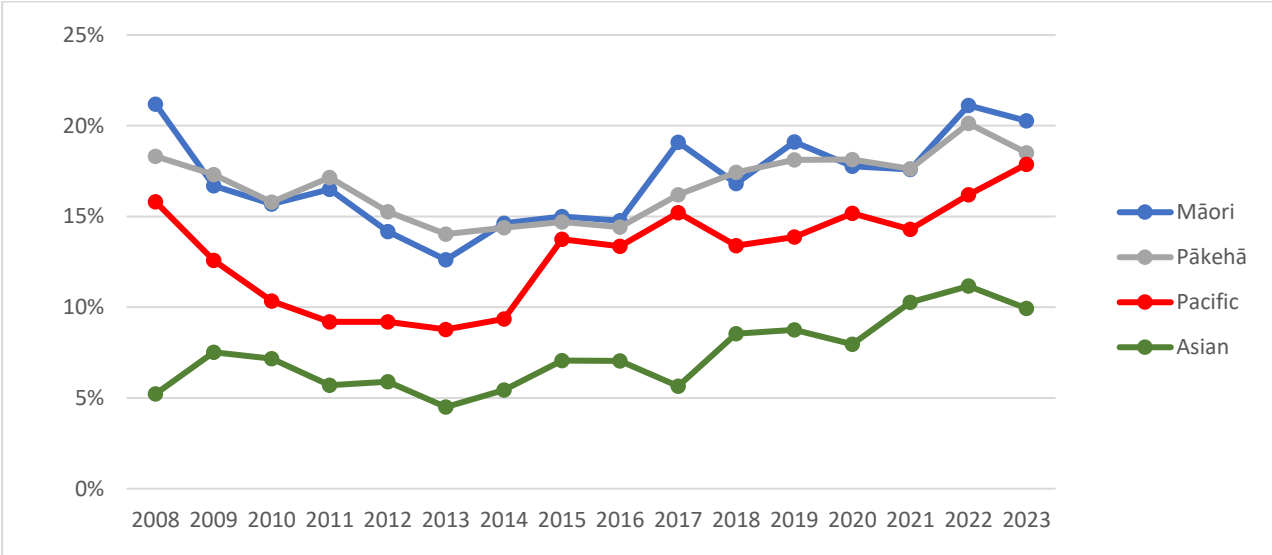


Figure 5 Proportion of 15-19-years old in employment and not education by ethnicity, Dec 2008 – Dec 2023. Source: Infoshare (2024c).

In 2008, about 16% to 21% of Māori, Pacific, and Pākehā young people were in some form of paid employment *without* attending school while only 5% of Asian youths were in a similar circumstance (see Figure 5). The replacement of education with employment then decreased among students of all ethnicities for several years and reached a 14-year low in 2013. This is perhaps due to the lingering effects of the 2008 Great Recession

when young students were less preferred by employers. Since then, exits from education for employment rebounded to a 9-year peak in 2017 for Māori young people and for Pacific young people, and reached at least a 14-year peak in 2022 overall and for all selected ethnicities – with this peak further increasing for Pacific young people in 2023, as previously mentioned (Infoshare, 2024c). The proportion of Asian students who halted education in favour of employment more than doubled in this 14-year period, going from 5% to 11% - although it dropped slightly to 10% in 2023 (Infoshare, 2024c).

However, there is only a slight corresponding decrease in the proportion of young people who are NEET – that is, Not in Education, Employment or Training (with the encouraging possible exception of Pacific young people, although the Pacific NEET rate trend is ‘lumpy’, and tends to jump around, partially due to the relatively small population numbers) (see Figure 6).

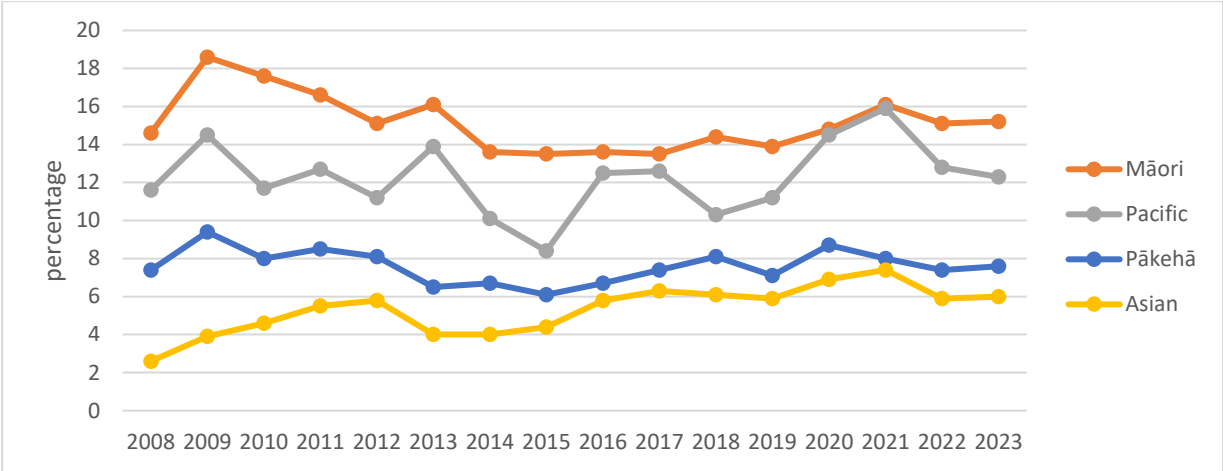


Figure 6 NEET rate 15-19 years old by ethnicity Dec 2008 – Dec 2023. Data source: Infoshare (2024c).

Mostly, the increase in 15–19-year-olds in employment has a corresponding reduction in young people studying without being in paid work (see Figure 7). Since 2013, the number of students between the age 15 – 19 who did not participate in any form of employment reached at least a 19-year low in 2023 (see Figure 1).

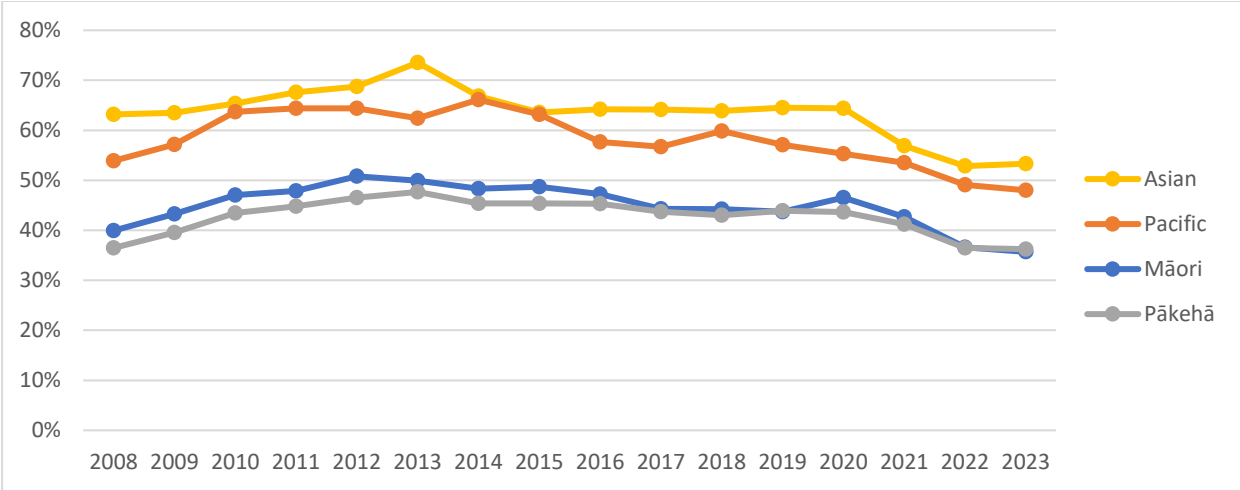


Figure 7 Proportion of 15 – 19 years old in education, not employment by ethnicity. Dec 2008 – Dec 2023. Data source: Infoshare (2024c)

Children's income included in household income for child poverty statistics

Article 3(a) of 2018 Child Poverty Reduction Act clearly establishes child poverty reduction as a focus of New Zealand government and society. Under this Act, a child is defined as a person under the age of 18 years old. The Act requires the Government to set out 10-year long-term and 3-year immediate reduction targets.

One of the primary measures for the Government to track and report its progress towards the reduction targets is household income. However, NZ children aged 15 and over are treated in household income statistics as adult earners (StatsNZ, 2022), despite being counted as children under the Child Poverty Reduction Act. Their pay is counted towards household income (regardless of the number of hours worked).

This approach is pernicious and out-of-date. Teenagers are not adults, nor should they shoulder adult responsibilities: Adolescence is a key time of development (Viner et al., 2012), and young people need time to rest and spend time with whānau and friends, as well as study. Paid work should be their *choice*, not required to pay the rent.

In addition, the inclusion of 15- to 17-year-olds' income within household income may distort the measurement of the level of child poverty in Aotearoa New Zealand; it *possibly* has a small (but possibly increasing) effect on child poverty statistics. The effect of counting children's incomes would be to reduce the number of children shown to live in poverty. For instance, some children may only be counted as living above the poverty line due to their own labour.

It is unclear how effective household income is in capturing the progress on child poverty reduction, particularly among priority communities, particularly when children's income is included in household income totals, just as if it were the income of adults. Can we be confident government programmes are working to lift all children out of poverty when the measure of household income includes income from child employment?

The measurement of child poverty could be improved by disregarding the earnings generated by school-aged children.

4. POST-COVID ATTENDANCE AND OVERWORKING TROUBLES

"We have beautiful children. They are so smart, intelligent, full of capabilities. They love school. Not a single one of our students doesn't want to be successful."

- Soana Pamaka, Tamaki College Principal (Stewart, 2023)

"A number are picking up paid work, working through the night – when it comes to coming to school – too tired; across Year 12 also. Kids are saying I need to work because my family needs the money – used to be because they want extra money."

- Teacher comment (ERO, 2022)

Students in deprived communities are far more likely than students in privileged communities to think attending school is important – including being twice as likely to want to go to school five days a week (ERO, 2022, p. 95). Yet, while school enrolment has

been maintained at around 75% since 2007 (Education Counts, 2023a), it has been noted that regular school attendance has decreased substantially since COVID-19 – particularly for schools serving areas of deprivation (ERO, 2022).

Between 2011 - 2023, regular attendance of school dropped from 69 per cent to 45.9 per cent across primary and secondary schools (ERO, 2022; Education Counts, 2023).

Anecdotal reports suggest that many students are primarily missing schools due to their family's financial hardship and are pressured to take up paid work to boost their household income (Stewart, 2023).

The *Missing out* report from Education Review Office (2022) surveyed around 1,900 high school students and over 1,100 parents of students from Year 4 (Standard 2) onwards. The report showed multiple barriers to school attendance. Paid employment was reported as a reason some students miss out on school – not a particularly common reason, nor the only reason due to financial hardship, but a concerning one nonetheless. Seven percent of the parents surveyed reported they were likely to not send their children to school if they worked a paid job. In a focus group, parents stated they may need a hand on the farm or paid work is more attractive when the workplace is short-staffed, and the student is up to date with schoolwork. While not all these reasons are related to poverty, parents in deprived (decile 1-3) school communities were more likely (11%) to say they were likely to not send their children to school if they worked a paid job.

This contrasted with the view of students. Only 1 percent of students agreed paid work is something they would want to miss school for, yet 3 percent overall missed school in the previous two weeks due to working a job in school hours – equivalent to ~15,000 students in 2022.

About a quarter of the schools surveyed reported financial hardship – including transport and housing, not just employment – as a barrier to attendance. In addition, just over one in four schools reported more senior learners working paid jobs and leaving school for work. (ERO, 2022). The ERO report states “There are no differences between Pacific and non-Pacific learners missing school due to having a job to work during school hours”; however, the relevant graph shows 5% of Pacific students missing school due to paid work, compared to 3% for students overall (and the same - 3% - for Māori students).

The relationship between Pacific youth (dis)engagement from education, deprivation and participation in employment remains an under-explored area. Given systemic deprivation (Te Kāhui Tika Tangata, 2022), the framing could be: how are so many Pacific youth successfully continuing their education, despite working long hours in a bid to increase family wellbeing? Wider health and sociology literature offers suggestions on useful concepts to generate hypotheses, such as the importance in Pacific families' success of cultural identity, communication, family connectedness and a connection to God (Tautolo et al., 2020).

Working with Te Rourou One Aotearoa's OHI Data Navigator, we attempted to capture a snapshot of student education and employment in 2022, the first year after the end of COVID-19 restrictions. We organised data in a way that offers a comparison between

reportedly an area of most child deprivation to the rest of New Zealand according to Ministry of Social Development’s 2022 Child Poverty report (Perry, 2022). This data shows that youth in the Southern ward (with a population of 333,000 people made up of 93,000 children) experience some of the highest rates of poverty in the country. A staggering 28% of children are in material hardship in the Southern ward (compared with an average of 12%).

Drawing from Te Rourou’s OHI Data Navigator, 31% of youth in Manurewa-Papakura Ward are experiencing exclusion and disadvantage, with 27% of youth in Manukau. Twenty-eight percent of Pasifika youth in the same area are experiencing exclusion and disadvantage. This is compared to the national average of 20%. Thirteen percent of children in the Southern wards experience severe material hardship (compared with 5% nationwide). The extended lockdown in Auckland can be expected to have had a significant impact on poverty profiles in this high-risk area, but this data will not be reported until 2024.

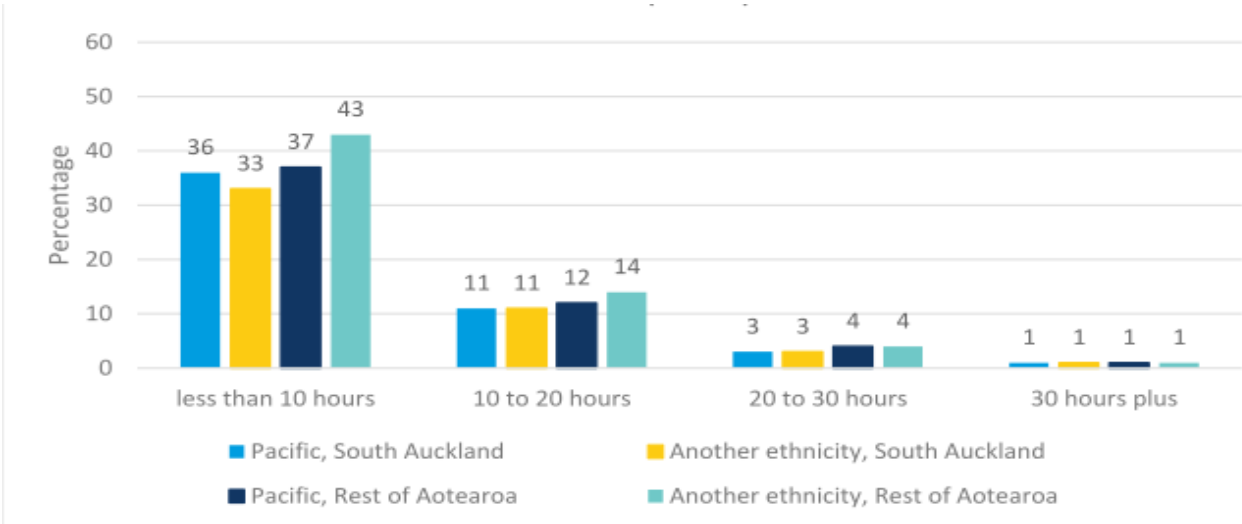


Figure 8 Estimated working hours of 17-years old student in 2022. Data sourced from OHI Data Navigator; graph prepared by Nicholson Consulting.

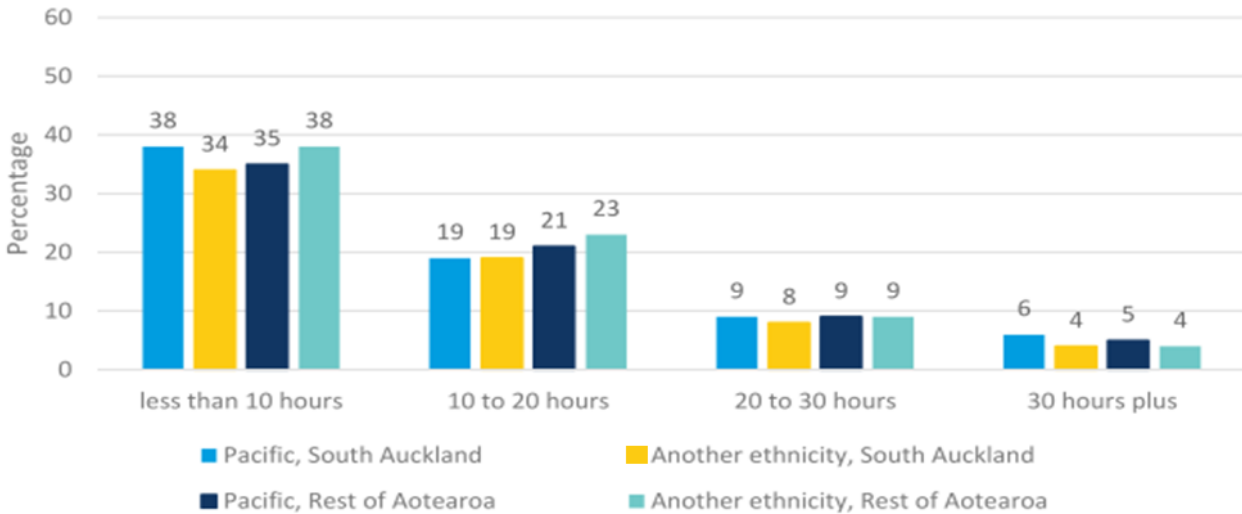


Figure 9 Estimated working hours of 18-years old student in 2022. Data sourced from OHI Data Navigator; graph prepared by Nicholson Consulting.

prepared by Nicholson Consulting.

Looking at the estimated work hours drawn from Te Rourou OHI Data Navigator in Figure 8 and 9, we define South Auckland as a combination of these five local boards: Māngere-Ōtāhuhu, Manurewa, Ōtara-Papatoetoe, Papakura, and Franklin. The enrolment for high schools in these five local boards totals to 70,407 students in 2022 (Education Counts, 2023a). 3,240 of these students were at the age of 17 and 597 at the age of 18. For the 17-years old age group, a total of 6% of enrolled students were working over 20 hours, 3% respectively for Pacific students and students of another ethnicity. This translates to about 194 students in total or 97 students of each ethnic cluster. For 18-years old, 27% worked 20 hours or more per week. This translates to about 162 students working excessive hours. A higher percentage of Pacific students of South Auckland are working 20 or more hours.

Comparatively, the absolute number of 17-18-years-old students working over 20 hours in 2022 is also alarming. There were 41,276 students at the age of 17 and 9,501 at the age of 18 outside South Auckland in 2022. Ten percent of the 17-years old students were working over 20 hours per week, translating to 4,128 students in this age group. At the age of 18, 27% of students outside of South Auckland worked over 20 hours per week, converting to 2,565 students in this age group. This brings the total number of NZ students working over 20 hours per week across the two age groups to 6,693 students in 2022. We speculate that the number may be even higher given the continual decrease of school attendance in 2023 and the growth of absence (see Figure 10).

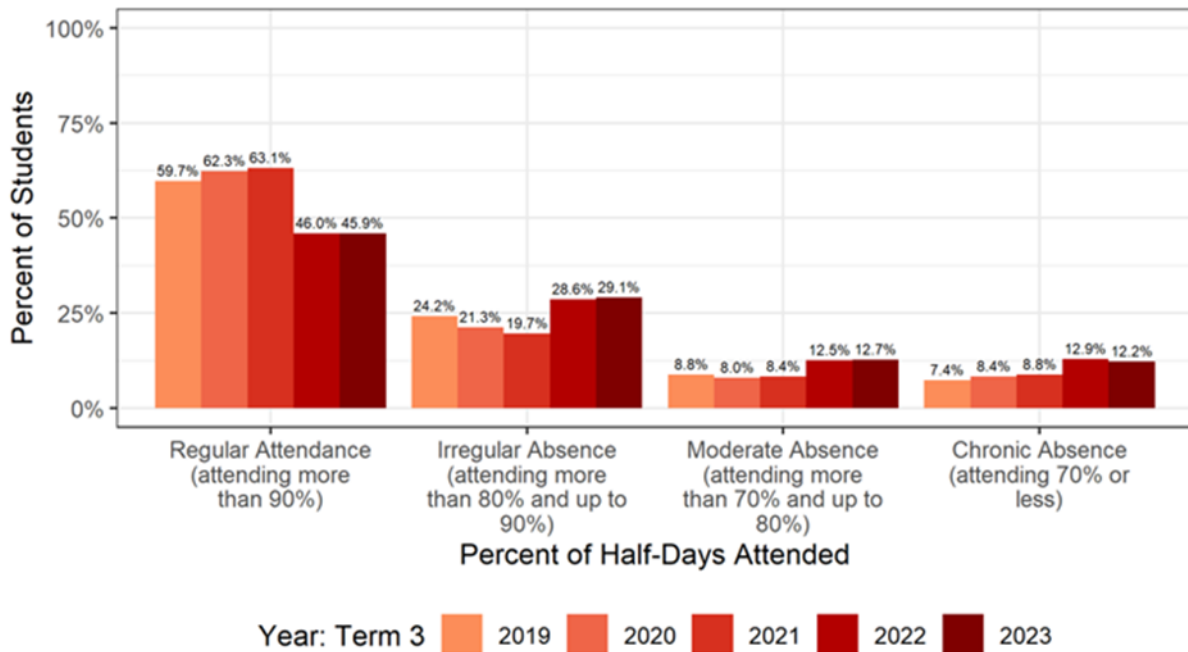


Figure 10 Student attendance across schools and kura 2019 - 2023, primary and secondary schools. Source: Education Counts (2023 December).

Of increasing relevance if student employment is indeed increasing to long hours: if children 16 and over work more than 30 hours a week – which can happen during the

school term and/or holidays – then they are no longer considered to be financially dependent on their parents/caregivers, regardless of how the young person spends (or saves) their money (Inland Revenue, 2024). This can have a sudden and enormous effect on family incomes: as the child is no longer deemed dependent, families are no longer eligible for Working For Families entitlements for them. Further, if the child is an only child (or the only one left at home), then their parents are no longer entitled to “with children” main benefits, and housing assistance can also be affected. CPAG has heard reports of families losing necessary entitlements unawares because of this rule, which seems poorly promoted and largely unknown. An hours-per-week ceiling cannot act as a safeguard against child exploitation if people do not know about it.

5. RESEARCH IN THE FUTURE

...My family has been clipping onions for as long as i remember & man I rllly hate clipping onions w a passion AHAHAHA long hot days of sitting in dirty as plantations, hours of driving away from home, those damn portaloos & having to work in rain or shine. i remember times when i couldn't tell if it was rain, sweat or tears on my face. times when we'd clip til late hours in the night w only the headlights from our car to give us light to work...

- Aigagalefili Fepulea'i Tapua'i @rascal.gal Instagram (2018)

This paper highlights several key issues with the way youth employment and education is (in)actioned and under-researched in Aotearoa New Zealand, especially when compared to international scholarship. We offer the following recommendation:

- Establish a robust system that collects data on a regular basis on young people aged 18 and under in employment, including data on motivations on seeking employment (including hardship / contributing to household income, and use this data to inform strategic joined-up approaches to supporting young people in their aspirations.

A key indicator that is missing from current data is the number of hours a student works per week. The availability of such data is only available through surveys of sampled populations. Work hours per week is a clear indicator that helps identify students who are overworking. In addition, poverty-driven work by younger children – such as that described by Aigagalefili Fepulea'i Tapua'i above – remains virtually unknown outside of the communities where it takes place.

Meanwhile, current monitoring and assessment of youth employment and education is de-coupled between different ministries and treated as separate issues. The Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment has focused on the issue of youth employment and published *Our youth employment action plan* (2019) which was complemented by Employment Action Plans for priority groups such as Māori and Pacific populations in 2022. However, these plans are aimed at better facilitating people's transition into employment from education and training. The quintessential objective of this set of action plans is putting people into paid employment and so progress is monitored

through labour market indicators such as NEET, underutilisation, and unemployment rates.

On the other hand, in 2020, the Ministry of Education set in motion a set of targeted educational action plans for the Pacific population aimed at reducing systematic barriers for Pacific students' educational attainment (Ministry of Education, 2020).

The plan's actions are targeted towards eliminating racism, fostering multi-cultural and -lingual learning environments through better collaboration with community organisations, resource funding, and upskilling of educators. These factors are indeed critical for improving Pacific students' engagement with the New Zealand education system as earlier literature has pointed out (Siope, 2011; McDonald & Lipine, 2012; Taleni et al., 2017). However, the plan overlooks the role of personal and familial circumstances, such as financial hardship, in affecting students' capacity to engage with school, and the pull which the labour market and employment may have for students in these kinds of circumstances.

Up-to-date research and analysis required

There is a clear drought of current research about student employment in Aotearoa New Zealand in general. The dated 2010 Department of Labour report which investigated the impacts of employment on students' educational outcomes relied on secondary analyses which primarily assumed a threshold for detrimental effects of student employment on education. Since then, international scholarship has moved on, pointing to complexities of student employment, (dis)engagement and education, and later life outcomes through various quantitative and qualitative methodologies; as well as the substantial role of unobservable variables such as motivation, aspirations, and biographic journeys that are generally invisible within quantitative modelling and short time-series datasets. As far as we know, *Growing Up in New Zealand (GUiNZ)* is the only longitudinal study that may be examining this topic in the coming years.⁶

This paper identifies the following avenues for future research in regard to the role which deprivation plays in the uptake of paid work by secondary school students:

- How and why are the experiences of and the trends for Māori, Pacific, Pākehā and Asian youth education and employment different from each other; what role does deprivation play in each; and what effect do these different trends and experiences have on subsequent transition into early adulthood?
- Do educational and livelihood outcomes differentiate between jobs and industries for students who work intense hours during high school?



⁶ The GUiNZ cohort were born in 2008 and therefore entered secondary education in 2021. The latest report released in 2024 reports on data from 2020, when the cohort is at the age of 12. The study's major analyses are conducted at a 4-year age period, meaning that the next dataset concludes at the age of 16 in 2024. It is also worth noting that *GUiNZ* do publish snapshot reports in between the four-year period; perhaps a report on student employment could be released.

- How can we better target child poverty reduction policies at students who are obliged to work excessive hours to financially contribute to their families?
- What proportion of students at different ages have deprivation as a contributing factor to their uptake of paid work – and their uptake (or otherwise) of other activities, such as caring for family, and extracurricular activities? How many hours a week are they working? How does this differ in the holidays from term time? What are the effects on their educational attainment? What are the effects on the time of their exit from school, and from education overall? What is the effect on their physical, mental, social, and economic wellbeing, both in the short and long terms?
- What are the contributing factors and consequences of children working without pay in family businesses? How many children are in position, and how old are they and how many hours do they work without pay?
- What are the contributing factors, consequences, and patterns of primary school children in paid work?
- What are the potential benefits and disadvantages of alternative modes of education delivery. Vickers (2011) suggests some benefits of schools offering alternative learning time and four-day school days in New South Wales to improve engagement and educational outcomes of students of lower socio-economic backgrounds. Sir Edmund Hillary Collegiate of South Auckland has experimented with two-day school weeks and is asking the Education Review Office to review if increasing numbers of students undertaking employment need the Ministry of Education to offer support in new and innovative ways (Steward, 2023). However, the potential disadvantages could include normalising long work hours for adolescents with less time available for education for far more students as a consequence.

The research is out of date, and for good quality analysis and problem solving to happen the research needs to be undertaken and used to create evidence-based policies.

But first, decision makers and government – as well as the schools and teachers who've raised the alarm – need to care about our young people and the future of our country.

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