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# **The Impact of Caregiver Employment Experiences and Support on Adolescents' Work Ethics.**

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A research project submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of

**Master of Science in Applied Psychology**

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationships between adolescent work ethics and caregiver support and employment experiences. For this study, 114 adolescents from a local High School and their caregivers completed questionnaires. The adolescent's questionnaire contained questions on demographics, caregivers support, perceptions of optimism and pessimism toward employment, and work ethics. The caregiver's questionnaire included questions on demographics, educational attainment, and employment situation, status and type. Caregiver support and adolescents' perceived optimism toward employment had a significant relationship with adolescents' work ethics, where more support was associated with stronger work ethics, affecting a considerable number of the work ethic dimensions. The caregiver employment variables had a lesser impact, where any significant outcomes showed a relationship with only one or two of the adolescents' work ethic dimensions. Overall, the caregiver group that was identified as primarily mothers had a stronger effect on the adolescents' work ethics than the other caregiver group of mostly fathers.

These findings suggest that caregiver support and the perceived optimism adolescents have toward employment, when evaluating their caregivers' employment experiences, have a stronger influence on adolescents' work ethics than the caregiver employment situation, status, or type. The implications of these findings are discussed.

## **Introduction**

Compared to a century ago, becoming an adult today follows a different course, with adolescents following increasingly diverse and more self-directed paths. Young people are continuing their education at different stages in life, and living more independently from their immediate families prior to marriage. They are delaying the age at which they start a family, and there is greater overall variety in the lives they lead. This “de-standardisation and de-institutionalisation” (Kirkpatrick-Johnson & Monserud, 2010, p.200) is a change from traditional controls in life. Kirkpatrick-Johnson and Monserud propose that adolescents now have the ability to construct their own life path, including employment. Nevertheless, societal changes, a rapidly changing economy, increased globalisation and frequent improvements in technology and subsequent changes in employee demand have made employment for the future hard to predict, such that even the most well-informed adolescent may have to adjust to different work experiences and opportunities than those expected.

Rapid changes in society imply there is a compelling need for knowledge about vocational development for the next generation of workers, as the nature of work, as well as expectations and opportunities, are likely to keep changing. Vondracek (2001) suggests that social psychologists, in particular, may be asked to answer questions from children and adolescents about the world of work. Furthermore, Vondracek believes that social psychologists and career counsellors may struggle to gain knowledge about the specific ways the family and caregivers influence the vocational development of their children, as previous research has mostly ignored how children's work attitudes develop in families where employment is not always guaranteed.

## **Work, Family, and Vocational Development**

Work is broadly defined by Fox and Grams (2007) as any activity in which one exercises the ability to do or perform something requiring solid physical or mental effort to overcome obstacles and achieve an objective or result. With this definition in mind, work ethics apply to a range of settings including school work, social, sports, and the work of the family. It can be difficult to assess work ethics with adolescents as they typically have not been exposed to employment themselves (Fox and Grams, 2007); instead, Ryu and Mortimer (1996) propose a direct effect of parental values on adolescent work ethics. They find it plausible to assume that adolescents will learn work ethics directly from their parents by simply observing behaviours and listening to them talk about their jobs.

Through social identification and role modelling, adolescents are likely to be motivated to internalise the values that the caregivers consider to be important. Ryu and Mortimer (1996) refer to this as value transmission. This value transmission, referred to in previous literature as “The Occupational Linkage Model” (p.169) presumes that the task characteristics of caregiver employment establish certain behavioural demands, which subsequently influence major dimensions of parental behaviour and attitudes such as work ethics. Such personal characteristics may encourage certain orientations towards parenting and socialisation that, in turn, affect adolescent psychological attributes, including work ethics.

Vocational development is a central task of adolescence, with the formation of work ethics a key component of this task. Whiston and Keller (2004) see vocational development as an interactive process where the individual both influences and is influenced by the social, educational, and physical features of his or her environment. A primary purpose of the

present study is to investigate the immediate family environment and gauge the impact of caregiver employment factors and support on the development of adolescent work ethics.

Vondracek, Lerner, and Schulenberg (1986) see family influences as critical to understanding the complexities of vocational development. More specifically, they report that employment attitudes, expectations and career developments are created within the family micro-system. Whiston and Keller (2004) state that there are many definitions of family, including terms with biological, sociological and psychological implications. My study focuses on the influence of the family in which an individual is raised, otherwise referred to in this study as the immediate family and its caregivers. A systemic approach to employment development was further theorised by Bratcher (1982), who proposed that the family establishes certain patterns of and principles that attempt to keep a sense of stability within the family. As a result, established rules and principles are expected to influence attitudes and behaviour, including employment attitudes and behaviour.

Adolescence is a stage in life where attitudes are impressionable. It is a time where children are most likely to form their identity, career aspirations, and work values (Loughlin & Barling, 1998). It is therefore seen as the stage of life where crucial decisions are made toward their direct and indirect opportunities in terms of education and employment, such as vocational planning and attainment. As realistic planning for the future increases during adolescence, thinking and planning about one's future is a particularly critical occurrence (Nurmi, 1987). A study conducted by Staw and Ross (1985) found that attitudes towards work stayed relatively stable over time, even with job and employer changes. Moreover, these prior work attitudes were also a strong predictor of subsequent job satisfaction, more so than a change in pay or social status of a job. If work attitudes and work ethics are indeed

stable over time, there is a need to identify how these work ethics are influenced to gain insight on how the next generation of workers are socialized for employment.

## **Work Ethics**

It is part of human nature to differ in views and belief systems, including views or beliefs about work. As stated by Buchholz (1978), “Beliefs constitute assumptions about the world a person lives in, the validity of which he does not question, nor need he do so in the ordinary course of events” (p. 451).

The current study concentrates on work ethics as part of the adolescents' belief system. The work ethic is concerned with the notions that work is good in itself and that it bestows dignity on a person. It also implies that everyone should work and those who do not are not useful members of society (Buchholz, 1987). Blood (1969) proposes that the greater an individual's work ethic, the more satisfied they would be with their work as well as life in general. Buchholz (1978) supports these ideas with the belief that, by working hard, a person has more power to overcome every obstacle that life presents and make his or her own way in the world. Success is thus directly associated with one's own efforts, and the material wealth someone has accumulated is a measure of how much effort he or she has expended. Consistent with this work ethic is the belief that wealth is something that should be wisely invested to earn greater returns and not thoughtlessly spent on personal consumption or for leisure.

The concept of work ethics has been studied by social psychologists for many decades. It has been defined by McCortney and Engels (2003) as a multidimensional construct composed of two distinct parts: internal attitudes or values held by individuals and the work-related behaviours that outwardly reflect these attitudes or values. Woehr, Arciniega and Lim (2007) propose that modern notions of work ethics originated from Max Weber's

Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism concepts. In his essays on capitalism and subsequent industrialisation in Western Europe, Weber claims the Protestant work ethic is based on “the complete and relentless devotion to one’s economic role on earth” (p. 453, Miller, Woehr & Hudspeth, 2002).

This Protestant Work Ethic (PWE) has been the basis of much literature on work ethics. However, it has been suggested by Woehr et al. (2007) that this literature requires a more contemporary approach to measurement, and the identification of distinct components within the concept of work ethics. Much of the work using the PWE concept has looked at the relationship between PWE beliefs and various other work beliefs, as well as reactions to unemployment (Furnham, 1987).

A more contemporary approach to measuring work ethics was used by Miller et al. (2002), who constructed the Multidimensional Work Ethic Profile (MWEP). The MWEP is based on the notion that work ethic is not a single unitary construct, such as the Protestant Work Ethic. Instead Miller et al.’s research shows it to be a collection of attitudes and beliefs affecting work behaviours, defined as “a commitment to the value and importance of hard work” (p. 452). An individual espousing a high work ethic would place great value on hard work, autonomy, wise and efficient use of time, delay of gratification, and the intrinsic value of work.

As the name suggests, the MWEP is multidimensional measuring the strength of work ethics through a number of constructs. It is relevant to work and work-related activity in general, learned, referring to attitudes and beliefs, a motivational construct reflected in behaviour, secular, and not necessarily tied to any religious beliefs. Miller et al. (2002) identified seven dimensions to represent the work ethic construct, including Self-Reliance,

Hard Work, Leisure(Anti-Leisure when reversed), Morality, Centrality of Work, Wasted Time (referred to as Productive Time in the method, results, and discussion sections), and Delay of Gratification. Miller et al. list the dimensions and definitions as follows: Self-Reliance is defined as one's "striving for independence in one's daily work"; Hard Work is characterised by a "belief in the virtues of hard work"; Leisure is described as "pro-leisure attitudes and beliefs in the importance of non-work activities"; Morality is labelled as "believing in a just and moral existence"; Centrality of Work is defined as "belief in work for work's sake and the importance of work"; Wasted Time is characterised by "attitudes and beliefs reflecting active and productive use of time"; and Delay of Gratification is defined as "orientation toward the future and the postponement of rewards" (p. 464). Analysis conducted by Miller et al. (2002) on the MWEP indicated adequate levels of reliability.

A recurring theme in literature on work and adolescents has been declining work ethics and concern about work attitudes (Fox and Grams, 2007). Knowledge on how these work ethics might develop could provide a window into understanding adolescents' eventual vocational directions (Galambos and Sears, 1998), particularly as it is widely believed that positive work ethic traits are just as important in employment success as psychomotor or cognitive competencies. More so, it is mentioned that more people fail at their job or lose their work because of personal qualities or problematic attitudes than because of insufficient knowledge or skills (Fox and Grams, 2007).

### **Adolescents, Family, and the World of Work**

In the context of working, Isralowitz and Singer (1986) refer to adolescents as "workers to be" (p. 146). This means that an adolescent does not start out as a worker, but is transformed in to one through a learning process. The basis of such learning happens in the family environment between caregivers and children.

How adolescents' work attitudes and ethics develop has been of interest to psychologists for some time (Barling, Dupre, & Hepburn, 1998). The focus of previous research on children and work has been gender differences in parental employment and their subsequent investment in parenting (Greenberger & Goldberg, 1989), psychological effects of unemployment on children (Eisenberg & Lazarsfeld, 1938), the effects of employment on academic and social competence (Schmitt, Sacco, Ramey, Ramey, & Chan, 1999), and more specifically the effect of maternal employment on areas such as the child's self concept, school achievement, and sex-typing (Abramovitch & Johnson, 1992). However, limited research has been conducted on the association between caregiver employment and how children view the world of work. At some point in their teenage years, adolescents face important decisions to make about employment. Therefore, it may be critical to identify how their work values are structured. Chaves et al. (2004) propose that the transition from school to work can be a challenging time and adolescents could potentially struggle to find meaning in work.

Kohn, Smoczynski, and Schoenbach (1986) suggest that a basic principle of socialisation theory is that adolescents' core value orientations are learned within the family, and refer to this process as value transmission. Focussing on work ethics as one of the main core values in adolescents, this present study is based on the view of Galambos and Sears (1998) who believe that the family is a major influence on adolescents' view of the world of work. With family typically being the main source of socialisation for children, they begin to make meaning of the world of work as they observe their family members in and out of employment. Young individuals are most likely to seek assistance with vocational development and employment from family members (Whiston and Keller, 2004), as the

caregiver-adolescent relationship is the “conduit through which vocational socialisation occurs” (Ryu and Mortimer, 1996, p. 174).

Throughout the years of a child growing up, expectations about work and employment may have developed, including what the adolescent does and does not value. A study conducted by Nurmi (1987) suggests that adolescents who reported a negative climate in their family had fewer educational plans than other adolescents. Furthermore, there was a particular tendency for male adolescents to be more apprehensive about future employment for those who were exposed to a negative family climate while growing up.

A study conducted by Whiston and Keller (2004) identified two interdependent family contextual factors that influence adolescent career development. These two factors are: family structural variables, such as caregivers' education and occupation; and family process variables, such as family involvement and support. Lindstrom, Doren, Metheny, Johnson, and Zane (2007) propose that caregivers in a family environment have a large impact on how adolescents view the world of work, with caregivers often having greater impact on the adolescents than their peers.

Using Whiston and Keller's two domains, Lindstrom et al. (2007) identified that family process variables appeared to have a slightly larger influence on career development than the family structural variables. Family process variables include early and ongoing relationships with caregivers; level of family involvement in school and other activities; family support and advocacy; caregiver career aspirations and expectations; and the presence of intentional vocational related activities all positively influenced vocational development and post-school outcomes. On the other hand, the same study showed that family structure variables such as the mother and father's education and occupation did not seem to be directly linked to post-school employment outcomes.

## **Caregiver employment experiences**

By the time children reach adolescence they have developed the capability to solve complex problems, as well as strong processing and decision making abilities. This gives the perceptions adolescents develop about caregiver support and employment experiences the potential to influence the adolescents' own future orientation towards work. These perceptions can be developed through direct and indirect exposure of caregivers' employment experiences, such as caregivers' affective responses to children or the caregivers' manner of communication in the family environment (Garner Neblett and Schnabel Cortina, 2006).

Buchholz (1987) suggest that any pre-employment influences on the development of attitudes of the world of work are important for two main reasons: First, the perceptions the adolescents form of their caregivers' work experiences supply a clarification and simplification of the world of work; second, attitudes in general are prone to change during adolescence, while changes in attitudes are less likely once adolescents reach adulthood. Perceptions of caregiver work experiences are subsequently used as a screening tool for the adolescents' own opportunities. Pautler and Lewko (1987) suggest that the career decision-making process is active during middle childhood and adolescence. This means that certain views adolescents maintain of the world of work could bring difficulty for them.

A study conducted by Ryu and Mortimer (1996) found that caregivers' work conditions were related to caregivers' work ethics. These work ethics then influenced similar work values in adolescents. Not only do the actual experiences of caregiver employment affect the work ethics developed by adolescents, the perceptions of the employment experiences add to the development of the world of work by adolescents also.

Abramovitch and Johnson (1992) raised an issue with adolescents' perception and awareness of caregiver employment experiences. More specifically, if children have some

knowledge of the work their parents do and of their caregivers' attitude toward their work, this perception and awareness might directly affect the adolescents' own attitudes toward work. Their study found that adolescents were generally aware of their caregivers' employment experiences, including their caregivers' satisfaction with work. Overall, the study showed a significant association between the adolescents' and caregivers' reported satisfaction levels.

Barling et al. (1998) suggest that perceptions of caregiver employment have a strong impact on adolescents over a wide range of elements, including academic competence, socio-emotional functioning, and most importantly work ethics. In fact, studies conducted by Barling et al. and Garner Neblett and Schnabel Cortina (2006) strongly indicate that adolescents' perceptions of caregiver employment attitudes and experiences shape the development of their own work beliefs and attitudes. In particular, the more positive adolescents perceive their caregivers employment to be, the more optimistic they may be about their own future.

Furthermore, adolescents' perceptions of caregivers' self-direction, stress, and rewards also predicts how positive or negative they perceive the future to be. Conversely, negative perceptions by adolescents may drive a more pessimistic view about their future and employment. Kelloway and Watts (1994) support this idea in their own study which found that perceptions that adolescents have of their caregivers' work beliefs influence their own work beliefs and can be critical in producing the work beliefs and ethics the adolescents carry into their working life. More specifically, O'Connor (1997) suggests that when caregivers are exposed to negative experiences with employment, such as job loss, unstable employment, and low wages, adolescents' perceptions of their own personal life chances with employment may be negatively affected.

Pressures that arise from changes in employment and family structures due to economical changes and employment levels go beyond the caregivers affect children as they develop their own views around the place of work in their lives (Pautler & Lewko, 1987, cited in Lewko, 1987). In particular, Pautler and Lewko's (1987) research found that adolescents who had been exposed to an economic downturn affecting caregivers' employment had a more pessimistic view of the world of work than adolescents who had not been exposed to adverse economic impacts. On the positive side, Barling et al. (1998) suggests that when children see their parents involved in, and satisfied with their work, their well-being is enhanced, and they develop positive work attitudes

The negative outcomes of unemployment on children and adolescents are well studied, and numerous psychological effects can be listed. Families exposed to unstable employment situations may be characterised by a substantial amount of anxiety, stress, discomfort, and possibly violence within the family environment and its social contexts (Schmitt et al., 1999). These effects on the children and adolescents are likely to be long-term, and have a substantial impact on later life, especially since the development of attitudes towards employment and the world of work are considered to be part of the transitional stage between adolescence and adulthood (Santilli & Furth, 1987). Therefore, knowledge of the impact of positive caregiver support on adolescents may minimise the effect of unstable employment conditions in families.

### **Parents support and involvement with adolescents**

Greenberger and Goldberg (1989) define caregiver support as parental investment in children or adolescents. This establishes a foundation for a children's or adolescents' own ability to support themselves or their own offspring. Ryu and Mortimer (1996) state that, when caregivers and children have close relationships, the work values between the two

parties are most likely to be similar. They gauged the influence of supportiveness in the caregiver-adolescent relationship through the value transmission concept mentioned earlier, where caregiver work values are translated into adolescent work values. Ruy and Mortimer propose warmth and communication between caregivers and adolescents to be crucial factors affecting identification with caregivers and the transference of caregiver work values and ethics.

Support and relationships with significant others are part of a multidimensional construct. This multidimensional construct, as devised by Cutrona and Russell (1990) and Cutrona (1996), includes emotional support (love, empathy, concern, ability to turn to others for comfort and security), social integration (feeling part of a group with people who hold similar interests and concerns), esteem support (boosting another's self-confidence through respect for other's qualities, belief in another's abilities, validation of thoughts, attitudes, or actions), information support (factual input, advice or guidance, appraisal of the situation), and tangible assistance (active assistance with tasks or resources).

Palladino Schultheiss, Kress, Manzi and Jeffrey Glasscock (2001) suggest that supportive relations on any such facets between caregivers and adolescents may prepare a person to deal effectively with future situations, such as vocational development. A number of positive outcomes as a result of family support are listed by Palladino Schultheiss et al. (2001), including development of self-esteem and self-efficacy beliefs, faith in the availability of caregiver assistance when needed, confirmation and validation of the adolescents' adequacy in valued life roles, and social control. Further positive employment-related outcomes for adolescents include better physical and mental health, less burnout, beneficial outcomes with unemployment, and adolescents' perceptions on educational and employment opportunities.

Adolescent perceptions of caregiver employment, as mentioned earlier, are not limited to the caregiver employment and work ethic development association. A study conducted by Garner Neblett and Schnabel Cortina (2006) found that caregiver support given to adolescents had a positive impact on the association between the adolescents' perceptions of employment and their own future orientation. Subsequently, these adolescent perceptions of their caregivers and their employment have implications for adolescents' preparations for working life. Trommsdorf, Burger and Fuchsle (1982) studied the effects of social interaction within family systems, and found that children and adolescents who perceived that they received little family support felt less optimistic about their future and were less convinced in their ability to influence personal future events than were those who received more family support.

The goal in the present study is to examine how the combination of caregiver support and the optimism and pessimism of adolescents toward employment (based on perceptions of their caregivers' employment experiences) structure adolescents' work ethics. As work ethics have been found to be important determinants of vocational choice, adolescents entering the workforce are likely to choose vocations that are consistent with their work ethics. This way, adolescents get to maximise the rewards they deem most important. It would be useful for organisations to be aware of these processes as future employees who experience incongruence between work ethics and work experiences may lead to dissatisfaction in employment. For both parties an understanding of the antecedents to the work ethics of the next generation of workers may help prepare both adolescents and organisations adjust to the possible outcomes.

Furthermore, employment factors such as stability, full-time employment, and educational attainment of caregivers are examined as further associations with adolescents'

work ethics are expected. As employment, and its associated benefits or issues, impacts on the family process and structure variables, the whole family is affected. In particular as employment affects parenting efforts and abilities, a change in perceptions and attitudes in adolescents is highly likely.

## **Hypotheses**

This study aims to identify, with the application of the MWEP and its individual work ethic dimensions, how exactly the adolescents' work ethics are influenced by family structure and process variables discussed earlier. In this study, the caregivers are expected to play a key role in the development of adolescents' work ethics, through support and their own work experiences.

As work ethics are a key component of vocational development in adolescence (Ryu and Mortimer, 1996), any source of influence and knowledge on how these work ethics arise will provide a window into understanding how the next generation of workers may comprehend the constantly changing world of work.

The goal is to find out which of the caregiver support and employment variables are related to the adolescent work ethics, and how strong the relationships are. Overall, the analyses might paint a picture of the role family plays in the potential vocational development of the next generation of workers. In order to be able to paint this picture, the following hypotheses have been identified as important questions in this study:

*Hypothesis 1:* The stronger the adolescents' perception of caregiver career support, the stronger the adolescents' work ethics across all individual work ethic dimensions.

*Hypothesis 2:* The stronger the adolescents' optimism toward employment based on his or her caregivers' work experiences, the stronger the adolescents' work ethics across all

individual work ethic dimensions. (Vice versa for adolescent pessimism toward employment).

*Hypothesis 3:* If caregivers are engaged in stable, full-time employment, the work ethics of the adolescents will be stronger across all individual work ethic dimensions.

## **Method**

### **Measures**

#### **Caregiver Questionnaire**

The questionnaires completed by the caregivers contained questions on demographics, education, and employment factors. Demographics included a question regarding their sex and age brackets.

*Education Level.* The question on education asked for the highest level of education completed by the caregiver. "What is the highest educational level you have completed?"

0. None
1. School Certificate
2. Higher School Qualification
3. Vocational Qualification (e.g. Industry Training Organisations)
4. Bachelors Degree
5. Higher Degree (e.g. Masters, Doctoral)

The questions on employment factors included employment status; employment situation; employment type; and how many hours the caregiver worked out of the last 10 years, and are described in more detail in the following sections:

*Employment Status.* Employment Status included options of "Employed", "Not in the labour force by choice", or "Unemployed".

"From the list below, please tick the box that describes your current employment status:"

1. Employed (including self-employed)
2. Unemployed
3. Not in the labour force (by choice)
4. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

*Employment Situation.* The caregivers' employment situation item was based on Flanagan and Eccles's (1993) longitudinal study on changes in caregivers' work status. For this study, the four categories covered in the study of Stable, Recovery, Declining, and Deprived were used for the caregivers to describe their own employment situation. "How would you best describe your employment situation?"

1. Stable (refers to those in secure full-time or part-time employment, where the caregivers feel their employment is assured for the foreseeable future)
2. Recovery (refers to those in improving employment situations, such as increased hours of work or permanent employment offers, where caregivers feel a general sense of progress in employment)
3. Declining (refers to those in an insecure employment situation, where caregivers feel their organisation or particular occupation is facing economic deterioration and a questionable state of survival)
4. Deprived (refers to those in poor employment situations, where caregivers feel discontent over their chances of gaining employment, or have given up looking for employment due to their withdrawal from society)

*Employment Type.* Employment Type was applicable only to those in employment, and included "Casual", "Part-Time", and "Full-Time". "If employed, how many hours do you work per week?"

1. Part-time (less than 40)
2. Full-time (40 hours or more)
3. Casual employment

### **Adolescent Questionnaire**

The questionnaires completed by the adolescents contained questions on demographics, perceived caregiver support received from the caregiver(s), perceived optimism and pessimism when looking at caregiver(s) employment, and the work ethics of the adolescents. Demographic questions included categories for sex and age, with age ranging from 13 to 18.

The questions on caregiver support included Career Support, Optimism and Pessimism, and were completed separately for each caregiver.

*Perceived Career Support Received From Caregiver.* This 5-item scale measured adolescents' perceptions of their caregivers' instrumental and emotional support for their career goals on a scale of 1 "Very much disagree" to 7 "Very much agree" (Gardner Neblett & Schnabel Cortina, 2006). A sample question for this section is "My caregiver helps me find out about different careers and jobs for my future". The 5 item scale met Nunnally's (1978) criteria for internal consistency of 0.7 for both the Caregiver 1 and Caregiver 2 groups, as shown in Table # below.

*Perceived Optimism and Pessimism when Looking at Caregiver Employment.* The optimism and pessimism scales consisted of 5 and 4 questions respectively. The questions in the scales were based on the adolescents' optimism and pessimism toward future employment opportunities when thinking about their caregivers' experiences with employment. The items for these scales were designed by Gardner Neblett and Schnabel Cortina (2006) and the same format was used. Adolescents reported how much they agreed with the statements on a scale of 1 "Very much disagree" to 7 "Very much agree". Examples of questions in the optimism and pessimism scales include "When I think about my caregivers' experiences with work, I feel good about the opportunities to work that I will have as an adult" and "When I think

about my caregivers experiences with work, I expect to have difficulty keeping a job as an adult". These two separate subscales also met Nunnally's criteria for internal consistency. The only exception was the Caregiver 1 Optimism scale (see Table 1), whose slightly lower Cronbach alpha coefficient suggested a slightly lower consistency among the items measuring this scale.

Table 1.

*Cronbach Alpha Coefficients for the Career Support, Optimism, and Pessimism Scales.*

	Cronbach Alpha
Career Support Scale	
Caregiver 1	.76
Caregiver 2	.89
Optimism Scale	
Caregiver 1	.66
Caregiver 2	.81
Pessimism Scale	
Caregiver 1	.76
Caregiver 2	.90

*Work Ethics.* The short version of the Multidimensional Work Ethics Profile (MWEP) scale (Lim, Woehr, You & Gorman, 2007) is based on Miller et al.'s (2002) original measurement of work ethic as a multidimensional inventory. The 35 items were established by Lim et al. through exploratory factor analysis to determine the best 5 items from each dimension that retained the unique characteristics of the original 65-item MWEP scale. The scale is divided into a total work ethic measure and 7 individual work ethic dimensions, for which the individual 7 dimensions are each measured with 5 items. The 35-item Multidimensional Work Ethic Profile has an internal consistency value of  $\alpha=.747$ , which meets Nunnally's criteria. Definitions, sample items, and Cronbach Alpha coefficients for the individual work ethic dimensions from the present study are outlined in Table 2.

Table 2.  
*MWEP Dimension Definitions, Sample Items, and Cronbach Alpha Coefficients.*

Dimension	Definition	Sample Item	Cronbach's Alpha
Self reliance	<i>Striving for independence in one's daily work.</i>	"People would be better off if they depended on themselves"	.66
Morality/ethics	<i>Believing in a just and moral existence, including behaviours around work.</i>	"One should always take responsibility for one's actions"	.40
Leisure (“Anti-leisure” when reversed)	<i>Pro-leisure attitudes and beliefs in the importance of non-work activities. (Anti-leisure attitudes and believes in the importance of work activities when reversed).</i>	"I would prefer a job that allowed me to have more leisure time"	.82
Hard work	<i>Belief in the qualities of hard work.</i>	"If one works hard enough, one is likely to make a good life for oneself"	.80
Centrality of work	<i>Belief in work for work's sake and the significance of work in one's life.</i>	"Even if I were financially able, I would not stop working"	.80
Productive time	<i>Attitudes and beliefs reflecting active and productive use of time.</i>	"It is important to stay busy at work and not waste time"	.78
Delay of gratification	<i>Orientation toward the future; the postponement of rewards.</i>	"I get more fulfilment from items I had to wait for"	.78

## **Procedure**

The adolescent participants were recruited on a voluntary basis in consequence of 3 assembly speeches at the same high school across a week. On reception of the volunteering students, approximately 300 envelopes were handed out. These envelopes contained an information sheet, consent form, and two questionnaires, one for each involved caregiver, to be completed at home.

Once the consent forms and questionnaires were completed at home in the dedicated 2 weeks, the adolescents were instructed to take the sealed envelopes back to school. Designated teachers had received instructions to gather the envelopes, check for proper completion, and subsequently provide these adolescents with their own consent form and questionnaire to complete. The adolescents were given 30 minutes for this process, and returned the forms to the teacher upon completion. The teachers were instructed to move the completed sets, as well as any incomplete sets, to a safe storage place in a locked room at the school office for security.

The teachers and students were given two weeks to complete this process. Following this, the envelopes were collected and adolescents' and caregivers' questionnaires matched up by matching up the special codes on the forms and envelopes. The special codes were put placed on all forms and envelopes before they were handed out, including a particular number for each set ranging from 1 to 300, and the letter "A" for each adolescent, and the letters "B" and "C" for each caregiver that completed a questionnaire.

## **Participants**

The sample for the study consisted of 114 adolescent children and their caregivers, recruited from a rural high school in Canterbury. All of the 114 response sets included data from one adolescent and at least one caregiver. Amongst the 114 sets of responses, there were 76 complete matched pairs including one adolescent and his or her two caregivers. The other 38 response sets included responses from 12 solo caregivers and 26 sets where Caregiver 2 data was omitted.

The adolescent participants included 32 males and 82 females. The age for both genders ranged from 13 to 18 years of age. The gender and age differences amongst the caregivers are indicated in Table 3. Note that the vast majority of the Caregiver 1 group were female.

Table 3.  
*Sex and Age of Caregiver Participants.*

	Caregiver 1 (N=114)	Caregiver 2 (N=76)
Sex		
Male	18	62
Female	96	14
Age		
25-34	1	1
35-44	49	24
45-54	57	45
55-64	7	5
>65		1

## **Results**

SPSS Statistics 19 was used for the data analysis. Data analysis was conducted in three stages. Stage 1 concerned the descriptive statistics of the adolescents and caregivers, including means and standard deviations. T-tests were conducted to check whether differences in the descriptive statistics for adolescents and caregivers were statistically significant.

Stage 2 concerned correlations. These were calculated between two groups. Firstly, between adolescent perceptions on caregiver employment and support and the individual work ethic dimensions. Secondly between caregiver employment factors and the individual work ethic dimensions. Examination of these correlations demonstrated that the adolescent perceptions on caregiver employment and support had stronger relationships with the individual work ethic dimensions than the caregiver employment factors.

Stage 3 consisted of the multivariate regression analysis for each individual work ethic dimension. This was the main focus of the data analyses. Regressions were separately calculated for each individual work ethic dimension as the dependent variables. This procedure was done through backward regression, which simultaneously led to only using statistically significant independent variables in the final regression models for each individual work ethic dimension. Beta weights were recorded for each significant independent variable, as well as the regression statistics for each dimension.

The five Leisure and three of the five Morality dimension questions were reverse coded in order to combine them with the other dimensions and establish an additive Total Work Ethics Dimension.

## Adolescent Data

Table 4.  
*Descriptive Statistics for Work Ethic Dimensions for all Adolescents and Separate Gender Groups.*

	All Adolescents (N=114)		Male Adolescents (N=32)		Female Adolescents (N=82)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Total Work Ethics	175.05	21.22	172.06	21.40	176.22	21.16
Morality	32.10*	3.10	31.59	3.77	32.29	2.80
Hard Work	27.41*	4.99	26.78	6.13	27.66	4.48
Centrality of Work	25.71*	5.36	26.75	5.42	25.30	5.32
Delay of Gratification	25.52*	5.08	25.03	4.65	25.71	5.25
Productive Time	23.82*	5.47	23.63	5.51	23.90	5.49
Self Reliance	23.20*	4.73	22.91	5.20	23.32	4.56
Anti-Leisure	17.29	5.73	15.38*	5.69	18.04*	5.61

*Note.* The Mean values for the 7 work ethic dimensions are aggregates of the scores for the 5 questions per dimension. The Likert-scale response format is based on 1=Very Much Disagree – 7=Very Much Agree.

*Note.* Significant differences from the neutral point (two-tailed t-test,  $p < .05$ ) are marked with an asterisk.

Table 4 illustrates each of the totals of the mean values from highest to lowest for the individual work ethic dimensions for the 114 adolescents, which range from a high of 32.10 for Morality to a low of 17.29 for Anti-Leisure. The neutral point for all the dimensions was 17.50. For example, the high average morality score of 32.10 shows that the 114 adolescents rated themselves much in the favour of believing in a moral and just existence.

To determine whether or not the individual work ethics dimensions for the 114 adolescents are significantly different from this neutral point of 17.5, a single sample t-test was conducted for each dimension. The dimension means marked with an asterisk in Table 1 reveal the mean values for each dimension that are statistically different from the neutral point. All work ethic dimensions, except for Anti-Leisure are significantly different from the mean of this dimension, and in this case are higher than the mean of 17.5.

In order to see if there is a gender difference across the individual work ethic dimensions, an independent sample t-test was conducted between the male and female adolescents. There was no significant effect for gender for six of the dimensions. The only exception from this independent samples t-test is the Anti-Leisure dimension, which showed a significant difference between male and female adolescents,  $t(112) = -2.27, p < .05$ . Compared to the neutral point of 17.5, males rated weaker and females stronger towards Anti-Leisure, with respective mean values of 15.38 and 18.04. The male adolescents were more leisure-oriented than the females.

### **Caregiver Data**

The data set has a slightly larger Caregiver 1 group, as the Caregiver 2 subset has missing values in the case of solo parents and omitted data. Caregiver 1 was female 84.2% of the time ( $\chi^2(1, 113) = 53.37, p < .001$ ). Conversely, Caregiver 2 was male 81.6% of the time ( $\chi^2(1, 75) = 30.32, p < .001$ ).

Table 5.

*Descriptive Statistics for the Caregivers' Career Support and Employment Perceptions as Perceived by the Adolescents, and the Employment Factors as Indicated by the Caregivers.*

	Caregiver 1 (N=114)		Caregiver 2 (N=76)	
	M	SD	M	SD
<b>Adolescent perceptions on Caregiver</b>				
<b>Employment and Support</b>				
Career Support	28.63	4.47	27.28	6.11
Optimism	29.39	3.69	29.03	4.94
Pessimism	8.59	3.89	8.81	4.67
<b>Caregiver Employment Factors</b>				
Education Level Completed	2.25	1.22	2.28	1.44
Employment Situation	2.71	.73	2.69	.77
Employment Status	.86	.35	.86	.35
Employment Type	.39	.49	.70	.46
How many years of employment out of the last 10 years	8.29	2.69	8.51	2.83

Notes. 1. The Mean values for the 3 adolescent perception dimensions are sums of the scores for the number of questions per dimension. Including 5 questions for Career Support and 4 questions for Pessimism. The Likert-scale response format is based on 1=Very Much Disagree – 7=Very Much Agree.

2. All caregivers completed the first 3 questions on “Education Level Completed”, “Employment Situation” and “Employment Status”. Only employed caregivers (as indicated by “Employment Status”) completed questions on “Employment Type”.

3. The caregiver employment factors (as indicated by the caregiver) are based on a response format as introduced previously in the method section. Educational attainment is rated as “None” as 0 through to “Higher Degree” as 5. Employment status ratings include “Employed” as 1, and “Unemployed” as 2. “Not in Labour Force” and “Other” were coded as “Unemployed”. Employment Situation included “Stable” as 3, “Recover” as 2, “Declining” as 1, and “Deprived” as 0. Employment Type included ratings of “Full-Time” as 1, and “Casual” or “Part-Time” as 0.

Results presented in Table 5 indicate that the “Education Level Completed” by caregivers received a slightly higher mean for the male dominated group of Caregiver 2, suggesting a slightly more educated Caregiver 2 group. The means for the Employment Situation are almost identical, with both caregiver groups reporting employment situations that suggest a larger number of stable rather than unstable employment situations in the family. The Employment Status has equal means for both caregiver groups, suggesting both caregiver groups have an equal number of caregivers in employment. Caregiver 2 received a higher mean than the Caregiver 1 group for the Employment Type. This suggests the Caregiver 2 group has more caregivers in full-time employment than Caregiver 1 group. Based on the question of “How many years of employment out of the last 10 years”, Caregiver 2 appeared to have a higher average number of years in employment than Caregiver 1. Due to the different sample sizes of Caregiver 1 and 2, testing for significant differences between the 2 groups was not practical.

## Adolescent Perceptions on Caregiver Employment and Support

Table 6.  
Correlations between the Work Ethic Dimensions and the Adolescents' Perceptions of Perceived Caregiver Support and Perceived Optimism and Pessimism around Caregiver Employment Opportunities and Outcomes.

	Total Work Dimensions	Self Reliance	Morality	Anti-Leisure	Hard Work	Centrality of Work	Productive Time	Delay of Gratification
<b>Career Support</b>								
Caregiver 1	.47**	.32**	.28**	.04	.41**	.42**	.39**	.20*
Caregiver 2	.38**	.15	.24*	.06	.35**	.28**	.33**	.27**
<b>Optimism</b>								
Caregiver 1	.56**	.33**	.27**	.07	.40**	.54**	.52**	.26**
Caregiver 2	.53**	.33**	.29**	.01	.38**	.45**	.52**	.35**
<b>Pessimism</b>								
Caregiver 1	-.23**	-.18	-.16	-.05	-.07	-.30**	-.17	-.08
Caregiver 2	-.19	-.13	-.19	-.07	.01	-.22*	-.16	-.10

\* $p < .05$

\*\* $p < .01$

Table 6 shows that most correlations between the work ethic dimensions and the career support and optimism variables are statistically significant. These significant correlations suggest that those adolescents with stronger perceptions of career support as well as more optimistic adolescents had a stronger work ethics across the Self Reliance, Morality, Hard Work, Centrality of Work Productive Time, and Delay of Gratification dimensions. These correlation coefficients vary from .20\* to .47\*\*. The exception is the Anti-Leisure work dimension which was not significantly related to these variables.

The perceived pessimism that adolescents associate with their caregivers' employment opportunities and outcomes was mostly non-significantly related to the work ethic dimensions, except for the Centrality of Work Dimension for both Caregiver 1 and Caregiver 2 which have strong negative correlations of -.30 and -.22 respectively. This suggests that the stronger the adolescents' perceived pessimism about both caregivers' employment opportunities and outcomes, the less the adolescent holds beliefs in work for work's sake and the importance of work in one's life (Centrality of Work).

### Caregiver Employment Factors

Table 7.

Correlations between the Work Ethic Dimensions and Caregiver Employment Factors for both Caregivers

	Total Work Dimensions	Self Reliance	Morality/Ethics	Anti-Leisure	Hard Work	Centrality of Work	Productive Time	Delay of Gratification
<b>Educational Level Completed</b>								
Caregiver 1 (N=114)	-.04	.15	-.06	-.08	.09	-.04	-.04	-.18
Caregiver 2 (N=76)	.02	.17	-.09	-.08	-.09	.04	.07	.03
<b>Employment Situation</b>								
Caregiver 1 (N=114)	.08	.02	.02	.04	-.12	.12	.17	.06
Caregiver 2 (N=76)	.03	.03	-.13	.32**	-.13	-.12	.06	.02
<b>Employment Status</b>								
Caregiver 1 (N=114)	.11	.06	-.02	.00	-.05	.10	.23*	.08
Caregiver 2 (N=76)	.06	.08	.03	.16	-.17	.03	.04	.08
<b>Employment Type</b>								
Caregiver 1 (N=114)	.17	.13	-.06	.00	.04	.12	.29**	.16
Caregiver 2 (N=76)	.08	.07	.02	.14	-.11	.05	.0	.10

\* $p < .05$

\*\* $p < .01$

Table 7 indicates correlations between Caregiver Employment Factors and the adolescents' individual Work Ethic dimensions. Even though the majority of correlations are non-significant, a handful of associations showed statistical significance. Associations with the individual work ethic dimensions and caregiver employment factors included: adolescents scored higher on Self-Reliance if Caregiver 1 had been employed for a longer period of time; adolescents scored more in the favour of work rather than leisure when Caregiver 2 was in a more stable employment situation; adolescents showed more interest in Hard Work if Caregiver 1 had been employed for a longer period of time; and lastly, adolescents scored higher on the productive use of time when Caregiver 1 was both employed and in full-time employment.

### **Regressions Predicting Adolescent Work Ethic**

The regression outcomes were determined through backward regression with the individual work ethic dimensions as the dependent variables. The independent variables examined were:

- The perceived caregiver Career Support, Optimism, and Pessimism for Caregiver 1 and Caregiver 2 as provided by the 114 adolescents.
- The Caregiver Employment Factors as indicated by the caregivers, including Education Level Completed, Employment Situation, Employment Status, Employment Type, and the Number of Years out of the Last 10 Years the Caregivers were employed for. Depending on the number of participating caregivers, these variables ranged in sample sizes from 76 to 114.

Once the backward regression identified the significant independent variables for each of the individual work ethic dimensions, the independent variables were simultaneously entered into a final regression, the results of which are summarised below.

**Total Work Ethics**

Table 8.

*Independent Variable Details from the Regression on the Total Work Ethics Dimension*

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable 1	$\beta$	Independent Variable 2	$\beta$
Total Work Ethics	Caregiver 1 Career Support	.26	Caregiver 1 Optimism	.43

The regression predicted a significant relationship between the total work ethic dimension and Caregiver 1 Career Support and Optimism ( $R^2 = .36$ ;  $F(2, 113) = 31.49$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Those adolescents with a stronger perception of Caregiver 1 Career Support and more optimism for their own future education and employment prospects based on Caregiver 1 experiences, had stronger overall work ethics.

**Self Reliance**

Table 9.

*Independent Variable Details from the Regression on the Self Reliance Dimension*

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable 1	$\beta$
Self Reliance	Caregiver 1 Career Support	.32

In predicting the Self Reliance dimension, the regression outcomes showed a significant relationship between the Self Reliance of adolescents and the career support of Caregiver 1, as shown in Table 6 ( $R^2=.10$ ,  $F(1, 113) = 12.73$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Adolescents with a stronger perception of Caregiver 1 Career Support are more self-reliant.

**Morality**

Table 10.  
*Independent Variable Details from the Regression on the Morality Dimension*

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable 1	$\beta$
Morality	Caregiver 1 Career Support	.28

Similar to the Self-Reliance dimension, the regression on the adolescents' Morality predicted a significant relationship with Career Support from Caregiver 1 as shown in Table 10 ( $R^2=.08$ ,  $F(1, 113) = 9.23$ ,  $p<.01$ ). Therefore, those adolescents with a stronger perception of Caregiver 1 Career Support are more likely to believe in a just and moral existence (Morality).

**Anti-Leisure.**

Table 11.  
*Independent Variable Details from the Regression on the Anti-Leisure Dimension*

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable 1	$\beta$
Anti-Leisure	Caregiver 2 Employment Situation	.32

When predicting the adolescents' anti-leisure, the regression indicated a significant relationship with the Employment Situation of Caregiver 2 ( $R^2=.10$ ,  $F(1, 74) = 8.15$ ,  $p<.01$ ) as shown in Table 11. The more stable the Employment Situation of Caregiver 2, the more the adolescent is likely to value work over leisure.

**Hard Work**

Table 12.  
*Independent Variable Details from the Regression on the Hard Work Dimension*

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable 1	$\beta$	Independent Variable 2	$\beta$
Hard Work	Caregiver 1 Career Support	.28	Caregiver 1 Optimism	.27

The regression results in Table 12 indicate that the adolescents' belief in the virtues of hard work is associated with the career support from Caregiver 1 and the number of years Caregiver 1 was in employment out of the last 10 years ( $R^2=.21$ ,  $F(2, 113) = 15.51$ ,  $p<.001$ ). The stronger the perception of career support and optimism of employment opportunities, the more enhanced the adolescents' belief in the merits of hard work will be.

**Centrality of Work.**

Table 13.  
*Independent Variable Details from the Regression on the Centrality of Work Dimension*

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable 1	$\beta$	Independent Variable 2	$\beta$	Independent Variable 3	$\beta$
Centrality of Work	Caregiver 1 Optimism	.40	Caregiver 1 Pessimism	-.32	Caregiver 2 Employment Situation	-.23

Table 13 demonstrates that the Centrality of Work amongst adolescents is associated with the optimism and pessimism of Caregiver 1, as well as the employment situation of Caregiver 2 ( $R^2=.37$ ,  $F(3, 74) = 14.12$ ,  $p<.001$ ). The stronger the perceived Optimism and the weaker the Pessimism the adolescent generated after having observed the caregivers' work opportunities and outcomes, the more the adolescent believes in work for work's sake. The same impact is generated with Employment Situation of Caregiver 2 (of whom the majority is the father-figure in the family), where the more stable the employment situation, the better the chances of the adolescent having a stronger sense of Centrality of Work.

**Productive Time.**

Table 14.  
*Independent Variable Details from the Regression on the Productive Time Dimension*

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable 1	$\beta$	Independent Variable 2	$\beta$	Independent Variable 3	$\beta$
Productive Time	Caregiver 1 Career Support	.21	Caregiver 1 Employment Status	.20	Caregiver 2 Optimism	.40

As indicated in Table 14, there is a significant interaction between the Productive Time dimension and the Caregiver 1 Career Support and Employment Status, as well as Caregiver 2 optimism ( $R^2=.35$ ,  $F(3, 101) = 17.23$ ,  $p<.001$ ). The stronger the adolescents perception of Caregiver 1 Career Support and a more optimistic perception of employment opportunities with Caregiver 2, the stronger the adolescents' attitudes and beliefs in terms of active and productive use of time. Additionally, the more stable the employment status of Caregiver 1, the stronger the adolescents' beliefs about the active and productive use of time.

**Delay of Gratification.**

Table 15.  
*Independent Variable Details from the Regression on the Delay of Gratification Dimension*

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable 1	$\beta$	Independent Variable 2	$\beta$
Delay of Gratification	Caregiver 2 Optimism	.38	Caregiver 1 Education Level Completed	-.24

Table 15 demonstrates that the Delay of Gratification dimension is significantly associated with Caregiver 1 Optimism and the Education Level Caregiver 1 has completed ( $R^2=.18$ ,  $F(2, 101) = 10.54$ ,  $p<.001$ ). Adolescents who delay gratification are more likely to be optimistic about their work prospects when considering Caregiver 2, and to have a more educated caregiver 1.

## **Discussion**

Exposure to social and economic changes, such as technology, and globalisation, with consequent effects on traditional family interactions and relationships, are assumed to have affected adolescents' view of the world of work. We expect that as caregivers are exposed to pressures on employment and parenting, adolescents may have an altered view of the world of work compared to recent generations. Therefore, additional understanding is required for the next generation's assessment of employment, and how this may impact on their work-related priorities. The primary goal of this research was to determine the relationship between caregiver employment experiences and support and adolescent work ethics.

The three elements of the hypotheses include:

1. Adolescent perceptions of caregivers include the perceived support, as well as the perceived optimism and pessimism of employment, taking in mind their caregivers employment experiences.
2. The caregiver employment experiences are separated into employment situation (stable employment versus unstable employment), employment status (employment versus unemployment), employment type (full-time versus part-time), and educational level.
3. The impact of the caregiver employment experiences and support were measured across the individual work ethic dimensions. The work ethics consisted of: Self-Reliance - defined as one's "striving for independence in one's daily work"; Hard Work - characterised by a "belief in the virtues of hard work"; Anti-Leisure - described as "anti-leisure attitudes and beliefs in the importance of work activities compared to leisure"; Morality - labelled as "believing in a just and moral

existence”; Centrality of Work - defined as “belief in work for work’s sake and the importance of work”; Productive Time - characterised by “attitudes and beliefs reflecting active and productive use of time”; and Delay of Gratification is defined as “orientation toward the future and the postponement of rewards (Miller et al., 2002)”.

The findings and implications of how adolescents’ work ethics are developed, or a lack of development, in relation to their caregivers employment experiences and support, or lack thereof, will be explained as the findings are discussed in summaries for the hypotheses, which are divided into three sections. The findings will be followed by a discussion of the implications, limitations of the current study, and future research.

### **Adolescents’ Perceptions of Caregiver Employment Support**

Firstly, this research examined the relationship between adolescents’ perceived caregiver employment support and the development of the adolescents’ work ethics. It was hypothesized that the stronger adolescent perceptions of caregiver employment support, the stronger the adolescents’ work ethics across all individual work ethic dimensions.

Results from perceptions of caregiver support and the Multidimensional Work Ethic Profile (MWEP) from adolescents indicate that adolescents whose caregivers (identified the majority of the time as mothers) were perceived to provide more vocational support had a positive association on a substantive number of the work ethic dimensions. Accordingly, adolescents with stronger perceptions of caregiver employment support were more likely to have a stronger sense of self-reliance and morality. Furthermore, stronger perceptions of caregiver employment support was indicative of a more productive use of time, stronger

beliefs in the virtues of hard work, and also of a higher score on the total work ethic dimension of adolescents.

The significant findings of the impact of caregiver support on the strength and structure of the adolescents' work ethics is supported by Gardner Neblett and Schnabel Cortina's (2006) theory that perceived caregiver support in terms of the adolescents' vocational development has a positive impact on the adolescents' optimism toward future. It is this positive outlook developed by the adolescent that is connected with Barling, Dupre and Hepburn's (1998) theory that the more positive adolescents' perceptions of their caregivers' work are, the stronger their work ethic. A study conducted by Whiston and Keller (2004) also supports the positive relationship of caregiver support with adolescent work ethics. They found that adolescents reported a positive influence on adolescents' vocational aspirations and expectations based on reports from the adolescents mentioning a great deal of caregiver support.

Contrary to the findings on caregiver support from the mothers are the findings by Palladino Schultheiss, Kress, Manzi and Jeffrey Glasscock (2001), who found in their study that adolescents described the importance of their fathers as a source of career information about the world of work and as a source of career advice and assistance. Palladino Schultheiss et al. (2001) suggested that the reason the mothers were not identified as a source of career information is due to the more traditional role of mothers as homemakers. This implies that they may be perceived by the children as not as credible as the father to supply career-related support. However, due to the same proportion of caregiver 1 groups (primarily mothers) and caregiver 2 groups (primarily fathers) engaged in employment in this study, such a theory does not support the current study. The differences between the current study and Palladino Schultheiss et al. (2001) could be due to a number of reasons, including a focus

on socio-economic status, where in higher socio-economic status the mother may not be required to financially contribute to the family, compared to the larger number of working class families in the current study. As a result children would associate their parents with employment, and therefore as a preferred source of information. Secondly, the current study has a higher number of female caregiver respondents, where male caregivers could have been absent from the family relationship, or simply been working and not able to participate in the study. Furthermore, international differences in whether mothers work or not may have impacted on the literature supporting this.

The stronger work ethics the adolescents develop when they perceive their caregivers to provide them with more support is beneficial to a wide array of work-related matters, such as leadership, resilience, and well-being. If adolescents receive support to develop stronger work ethics, they are more likely to join other adults with strong work ethics who take pride in their work, are oriented toward achievement, make wise investments, and have a stronger sense of control over their lives (Porter, 2004).

Furthermore, the findings bring attention to the need for a more supportive home environment, where adolescents will profit from caregivers' supportive and encouraging communication on employment, expectations, and the requirements to achieve these expectations.

### **Adolescent Optimistic and Pessimistic Outlooks on Employment**

This research also examined adolescents' optimistic and pessimistic outlooks on employment, based on perceptions of caregiver employment experiences, and the impact on the strength and structure of the adolescents' work ethics. It was hypothesized that the stronger the adolescents' optimism toward employment, the stronger adolescents' work ethics

across all individual work ethic dimensions. Opposite results were expected for pessimism, where the stronger an adolescents' pessimistic outlook on employment, the weaker the adolescents' work ethics across all individual work ethic dimensions.

The results indicated that adolescents who had a more optimistic outlook on employment, taking in mind the work experiences from the caregiver 1 group (primarily mothers), scored higher on a number of work ethic dimensions, namely stronger beliefs in the advantages of hard work; stronger belief in the importance of work in life; stronger sense of productive use of time; stronger ability to delay gratification from the benefits of work; and the total work ethic dimensions. Furthermore, perceived optimism with the male caregiver employment experiences indicated a more productive use of time and a greater delay in gratification.

The significant finding of the impact of optimistic perceptions of caregiver employment experiences on the strength and structure of the adolescents' work ethics is in line with previous research by Barling et al. (1998) who suggested that the more positive adolescents' perceptions of their caregivers' work are, the stronger their work ethic. Furthermore, Galambos and Sears (1996) believed that adolescent work ethics benefit in a constructive manner when adolescents develop their own positive perceptions of the world of work when seeing their mothers as happy with their work.

As the hypothesis states, it was also expected that adolescents' pessimistic perceptions of employment is related to weaker work ethics. The results indicate that, for those adolescents that indicated their mothers to belong to caregiver 1 group, pessimistic perceptions on these caregivers' work experiences were negatively associated with a stronger belief in the importance of work in life (Centrality of Work) by the adolescent.

This deficiency in believing in the importance of work as the adolescent have a more pessimistic perception of caregiver employment, is partly supported by Barling et al. (1998) who found in their study that the accurate perceptions that adolescents hold of their parents, particularly around negative employment experiences, such as job insecurity, affects the adolescents' own work beliefs and attitudes in an adverse manner. More specifically, Loughlin and Barling (2001) believe that the adolescents, whose perceptions of employment turned into negative expectations of the world of work, may be less willing to make sacrifices for the sake of a job or employment. This finding may help explain the results of the current study regarding the negative relationship between the negative perception of employment and the belief in importance of work with adolescents.

It can be assumed that the lack of impact the negative perceptions of employment has on work ethics is a positive finding. Particularly as the concept of value transmission between caregivers and adolescents are strong. Paulter and Lewko (1987), who discovered that adolescents whose fathers had experienced negative employment experiences were less optimistic about getting another job, as well as undergoing a much more negative perception of employment themselves. In this case, it is encouraging to know that, when considering the potential of value transmissions between caregivers and adolescents, the current study did not find any evidence of a damaging relationship between pessimistic perceptions of employment and the adolescents' work ethics.

The findings on the positive and negative perceptions of employment are endorsed by Wigfield and Eccles (2000), who suggest that these experiences and consequent outlooks on employment influence the expectancies and values placed by individuals, which in turn influence their behaviours, attitudes choices surrounding employment. Perceptions of work can be examined through the expectancy-valence theory. For example, an adolescent's

actions will be influenced by the values of the expected outcomes of his or her actions. This theory suggests that negative perceptions equal negative expectations and that job valence, what an adolescent values in a job, is positively associated with work ethic (Feather and O'Brien, 1987).

Caregivers and adolescents could work to strengthen this relationship by encouraging the communication on topics of positive outcomes of enthusiasm for work and psychological well-being, which are of course only a small proportion of the positive outcomes of work on an individual's self-esteem.

### **Caregiver Employment Experiences**

Finally, this research examined the relationship between caregivers' employment variables, namely: employment stability; employment status (employment and unemployment); employment type (full-time versus part-time and casual); and education level completed, and the development of the adolescents' work ethics. The expectations were that higher educated caregivers and caregivers engaged in stable, full-time employment would bring about stronger adolescent work ethics across all individual work ethic dimensions.

#### ***Caregiver Employment Situation***

Firstly, adolescents whose caregivers were in a stable employment situation were more likely to have stronger anti-leisure attitudes; however, they had a weaker belief in the importance of work in life. These significant findings are based on the caregiver group consisting primarily of fathers.

Supportive literature on the relationship between father's employment characteristics and the adolescents' work ethics has been found by Mortimer (1974), who reported a strong relationship between fathers' employment characteristics and their adolescent sons' employment values were found.

The results also indicate a decrease in the belief in the importance of work (centrality of work) associated with caregiver employment stability. This finding is difficult to explain as the opposite effect on the adolescents' belief was expected. In an attempt to support the finding, an alternative finding by Galambos and Sears (1998) will be described. Galambos and suggest that a father's negative and unstable work experiences are followed by adolescents placing more value on money-related aspects of work. Mortimer and Lorence (1979) support this finding as they suggest that particularly male adolescents from higher income families had higher level of extrinsic values, such as money and other material rewards when their fathers were exposed to unstable employment.

### ***Caregiver Employment Status***

When it comes to caregivers' employment or unemployment, it was hypothesised that there would be a positive relationship between employment and the development of adolescents' work ethics. The findings support this expectation, as the employment status of the caregiver 1 group has a significant positive association with adolescents' sense of productive use of time. Beckman (1978) and Moen (1989) suggest that due to mothers perceiving employment and parenthood as competing roles, the high role conflict may result in a better organisation of time with family members around work hours. The management of a fixed quantity of time, energy, and commitment to both roles can result in highly organised time management. The required use and value of productive use of time demonstrated by the

mother may bring about a value for productive use of time by the adolescent. Furthermore, Moen and Roehling (2005) recognise that families with working caregivers spend their time differently compared to families with a male or female homemaker. As a result, these families with two working caregivers are more likely to participate in organised activities such as sports, music and arts lessons. Equally, Moen and Roehling report a much lower rate of leisure in these families, compared to families with a non-working caregiver.

### ***Caregiver Educational Level***

The hypothesis also states that higher levels of educational attainment in caregivers are related to stronger work ethics in children. The results do not completely support this hypothesis, as there was only one work ethic dimension related to the caregivers' educational level. The results merely demonstrate that adolescents whose caregivers completed a higher level of education were less likely to delay gratification from the benefits of work (indicating a weaker work ethic).

In support of the hypothesis, but contrary to the finding, Ryu and Mortimer (1996) suggest that those caregivers with higher levels of educational attainment had stronger work ethics. Taking into account Kohn et al.'s (1986) linkage model, which demonstrates a transfer from work conditions into caregivers work values into adolescents work values, the caregiver ethics did not translate into their adolescents work ethics in the current study. Effectively, Ryu and Mortimer's (1996) research is consistent with the lack of significant results in the current study, and implies that caregiver educational attainment does not have the same effect on adolescents' work ethics as caregiver employment does.

### ***Caregiver Employment Type***

The results in the current study were inconclusive concerning the third component, where it was found that whether the employed caregivers are engaged in full-time, part-time or casual work does not affect the adolescents' work ethics.

In conclusion, caregiver support and optimistic perceptions of employment were more beneficial toward developing stronger work ethics in adolescents than caregivers' employment, unemployment; stability, instability; hours of employment, such as full-time, part-time or casual, and lastly; educational attainment of the caregiver. Whether or not caregivers are in employment or perceive themselves to be in a stable or unstable employment situation had little impact on an adolescents' overall view of the world of work, as only a few work ethic dimensions were influenced by the caregivers' employment status and situation. Research by Whiston and Keller (2004) support the notion that family process variables, such as support and involvement, have a greater impact on adolescents' vocational development than structural variables, such as employment status. They also suggest that providing caregivers with training on how to improve support and involvement can be beneficial to vocational development. However, caregiver employment variables are not completely absent of association with adolescent work ethics. Schmitt et al. (1999) propose that work may bring a sense of purpose or stability to a family environment. This sense of stability or purpose, however, may not have been measured correctly through the work ethics questionnaire. Most of the significant findings were associated with the first caregiver group, which was made up of mostly mothers. However, the second caregiver groups, consisting primarily of fathers, also played a significant role in influencing some of the adolescents' work ethics. These findings suggest a slight gender difference for the effects of caregivers' employment experiences and support on the adolescents.

## **Limitations**

A number of limitations challenge the utility of the current study.

The sample size and proportion of female and male adolescents and caregivers may have been too small to draw strong conclusions from the data. A larger and more evenly proportioned number of participants may have provided greater variability in the data, and therefore, an increased ability to find significant results. In addition the small sample size, recruiting procedures also limited the study, where participants were recruited from only one school. Variability may therefore be affected influencing the strength of the findings. In both cases, a greater sample size and increased variability would have enabled more generalisations to be made from the findings.

The results of the MWEPE completed by the adolescents may have been affected by social desirability bias, where some students may have felt uncomfortably providing a truthful response on questions such as “Stealing is all right, as long as you don’t get caught“. Similar to the social desirability bias in the work ethics questionnaire, the caregivers may have also answered with caution. Particularly as the questions are of a sensitive nature, caregivers may have felt apprehensive about providing truthful answers on their demographics or employment details. This leads back to the first limitation, where participation numbers were limited as the caregivers may not have felt comfortable releasing their information or they may have disapproved of the idea that their children complete a questionnaire of such a sensitive nature without their supervision.

Also, some information on caregiver support, such as more specific information on caregiver-adolescent interaction, is. More information on whether the families had 1 or 2 caregivers, and further clarification on the family situation, such as solo parent, single-earner,

dual-earner, and alike, may have provided much more insight into the provisions of the caregiver support variable, particularly as the conclusive results were predominantly related to the caregiver 1 group, which are primarily mothers.

This study did not examine socio-economic status or caregiver occupation. Limited data on further employment-related questions may have reduced the association between the employment variables and adolescent work ethics.

## **Future Directions**

Future research could expand the sample size. It would be beneficial for further studies to include a larger number of schools from different socio-economic backgrounds, and possibly even countries, in order for stronger generalisations to be made. In addition, the effects of a wider range of backgrounds could provide better insight into the caregiver-adolescent relationship. Further research should seek clarification on the exact roles of mothers and fathers, and the presence or absence of them. As a result, a number of relationships may change, including the effects of caregiver support, perceived optimism and pessimism by the adolescents, overall caregiver employment experiences.

Due to the age range used in the study, not all adolescents would have been exposed to work experience. In future research it may be worthwhile exploring a larger range of students who are at the appropriate ages to gain work experience. This, in turn, may provide an additional element to how adolescents develop their work ethics.

To avoid further social desirability bias, an increased number of reverse scored questions could be used in the MWEP. Furthermore, a wider range of employment-related questions should be asked taking into account the sensitive nature of these questions. Perhaps if complete anonymity were assured, along with the caregivers being able to look at the adolescent questionnaire before it is completed, participant numbers might increase.

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## Appendices

### APPENDIX A: Caregiver Questionnaire

#### INFORMATION

You are invited to participate as a subject in the research project "*Caregiver Employment Factors and the Impact on Adolescent Work Ethics*".

The aim of this project is to identify the effect of caregiver employment factors on the work ethics of adolescents under their care. Additionally, caregiver support will be measured to add further insight into the relationship between caregiver employment factors and adolescent work ethics.

Your involvement in this project will require 10 minutes of your time. This will include signing the consent form and completing the questionnaire. Your child(ren) will also sign a consent form and complete the questionnaire at school, where I will provide any necessary support. You and your child(ren) have the right to withdraw from the project at any time, including withdrawal of any information provided. Withdrawal of participation in this project can be done up until the data analysis has been completed. Once this research is complete, the Masters of Science dissertation will be accessible as a public document via the University of Canterbury library database.

The results of the project may be published, but you may be assured of the complete confidentiality of data gathered in this investigation: the identity of participants will not be made public without their consent. To ensure confidentiality, the consent form you sign (the only document that has your name on it) will be removed from the envelope on its return to the researcher. This consent form will be placed in locked and secure storage, and while kept separate from the questionnaires, both copies will be placed in the same locked and secure storage. The data obtained from the questionnaires that is entered into the computer will be kept safe and secure by a secure password.

The project is being carried out as part of a Masters in Applied Psychology Dissertation by Linda Schouten under the supervision of Dr Simon Kemp and Dr Sanna Malinen. Dr Kemp can be contacted on 03 364 2902, ext. 6968 or [Simon.kemp@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:Simon.kemp@canterbury.ac.nz), and Dr Malinen on 03 364 2981, ext. 7006 or [Sanna.malinen@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:Sanna.malinen@canterbury.ac.nz). They will be pleased to discuss any concerns you may have about participation in the project. A copy of the research results can be made available upon request via email at [Lgs25@student.canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:Lgs25@student.canterbury.ac.nz).

The project has been reviewed *and approved* by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee.

## Demographics

1. What is your gender?
  - Male
  - Female
2. In which age group did you fall on your last birthday?
  - < 24
  - 25-34
  - 35-44
  - 45-54
  - 55-64
  - 65 or over

## Education

3. What is the highest educational level you have completed?
  - None
  - School Certificate
  - Higher School Qualification
  - Vocational Qualification (e.g. Industry Training Organisations)
  - Bachelors Degree
  - Higher Degree (e.g. Masters, Doctoral)

## Employment

4. How would you best describe your employment situation?
  - Stable** (*refers to those in secure full-time or part-time employment, where the caregivers feel their employment is assured for the foreseeable future*)
  - Recovery** (*refers to those in improving employment situations, such as increased hours of work or permanent employment offers, where caregivers feel a general sense of progress in employment*)
  - Declining** (*refers to those in an insecure employment situation, where caregivers feel their organisation or particular occupation is facing economic deterioration and a questionable state of survival*)
  - Deprived** (*refers to those in poor employment situations, where caregivers feel discontent over their chances of gaining employment, or have given up looking for employment due to their withdrawal from society*)
5. From the list below, please tick the box that describes your current employment status
  - Employed (including self-employed)
  - Unemployed
  - Not in the labour force (by choice)
  - Other: \_\_\_\_\_
6. If employed, how many hours do you work per week?
  - Part-time (less than 40)
  - Full-time (40 hours or more)
  - Casual employment

## **APPENDIX B: Adolescent Questionnaire**

### **Demographics**

1. What is your gender?  
 Male  
 Female
  
2. How old did you turn on your last birthday?  
 12  
 13  
 14  
 15  
 16  
 17  
 18  
 Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

### **Education & Work Aspirations**

3. What is the highest educational level you hope to complete?  
 NCEA Level 1  
 NCEA Level 2  
 NCEA Level 3  
 Vocational Qualification (e.g. Industry Training Organisations, other national certificates, or diplomas)  
 Bachelors Degree  
 Higher Degree (e.g. Masters, Doctoral)  
 Other (Please specify): \_\_\_\_\_  
 Not sure

### **Work Experience**

Have you had or do you currently have a paid job (this could include a summer job, a casual job, or a part-time job)?

- Yes  
 No













