

## PREVALENCE, INFLUENCING FACTORS AND PERCEPTION OF PART TIME EMPLOYMENT AMONG UNDERGRADUATE MEDICAL STUDENTS IN A PUBLIC UNIVERSITY IN MALAYSIA

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### Abstract:

#### Background:

Commitment in academic medicine due to high work load, packed study hours and a lot of curriculum leads one to question whether part time work is really an option. However, there is limited data on what extend of medical students in Malaysia towards part time employment. The aims of the study are to determine the prevalence, influencing factors and perception of part time employment among undergraduate medical students in Universiti Putra Malaysia.

#### Methodology:

A cross sectional study, conducted on 150 undergraduate medical students in the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, Universiti Putra Malaysia. A self-developed questionnaire was used.

#### Results:

Respondents were Year 2 – Year 5 medical students of UPM. Majority of respondents aged 19-20 years, female, Malay and their monthly household income ranged between RM5 000-RM10 000 (USD1580-3200). Most of the respondents had scholarships. The prevalence of part time employment was 12%, which was highest among male, Malay, aged 21-22 years with monthly household income of less than RM5 000. About 27.3% of respondents had good perception towards part time employment. Significant associations were found between age and part time employment, and between monthly household income and part time employment.

#### Conclusion:

Prevalence of part time employment is relatively low among undergraduate medical students in UPM if compared to those in overseas. Majority of the respondents have poor perception on effect of doing part time job. Age and monthly household income are in significantly associated with part time employment.

**Keywords:** medical students, employment, prevalence, influencing factors, perception

## 1.0 Introduction

According to the Employment Act 1955, Act 265, Laws of Malaysia, 'part time employee' means a person who work between 30% – 70% of normal hours per week. Salamonson and Andrew, who conducted a study in 2006, found that, in Australia, 73.7% of his respondents had part time jobs while studying, while in a study done by Poorterman et al. in 2009 showed that 75% of the respondents have part time employment. Age, gender, ethnicity and family income are the most fundamental socio-demographic factors which may influence the probability of student employment (Auers et al., 2007). According to Oi and Morrison (2005), financial necessity, supporting a certain lifestyle and accumulating work experience have been cited as the most important underlying reasons for taking part time jobs.

It is important to know their opinion on how part time jobs influence students' life, whether part time employment will contribute to their career direction, help to build their character, support their economic necessity, affect their academic performance or will give rise to social problems with their family and friends. Although previous researches had done this kind of studies on undergraduates, the data on part-time employment among medical students are limited. In Malaysia, there is hardly a research of the same topic which was conducted. It is interesting to find out how common are the employment of part time job among medical students, the factors that influence and their perception towards part time employment.

## 2.0 Methods and materials

### 2.1 Subjects:

The study population was students from Year 1 to Year 5 who were pursuing their studies for Medical Degree (MD) in the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM). A number of 150 respondents were selected. The sampling method used was simple random sampling.

### 2.2 Materials:

The data was collected by using a self-developed questionnaire. There were four sections in the questionnaire. The first section was about the socio-demographic background of the respondent. The second section focused on the respondent's study background and financial status. The third section was about the part time employment of respondent (those respondents who were not working have to skip this section). The last section was about respondent's general perception on part time employment. Pretesting of the questionnaire of 10% from the sample size was done before the real data collection. Reliability test for the pretest was performed and the result of Cronbach's Alpha was 0.706.

### 2.3 Data collection:

Questionnaire was distributed in June 2014 to the respondents by hand. Researchers were around the respondent when they were answering the questionnaire. The questionnaire was collected immediately after they have finished answering the questions.

### 2.4 Data analysis:

Data was analyzed by using IBM SPSS statistics version 21.0. Descriptive statistics including frequencies and percentages were calculated for each item in the questionnaire. Descriptive analysis was carried out and then followed by bi-variate analysis. Chi Square test was performed at a significant level of  $p < 0.05$  to analyze the association of variables. The results were considered statistically significant if  $p < 0.005$ .

### 3.0 Results

Out of 150 respondents, 18 of them (12.0%) reported that they had undertaken work whilst on the course. Majority of the respondents, 132 (88.0%) did not do any part-time job.

**Table 1:** Distribution of part time employment among respondents

Variables	Part Time Employment		x <sup>2</sup> value	p-value
	Yes (N=18) (%)	No (N=132) (%)		
<b>Age group (year)</b>				
19-20	3 (16.7)	66 (50.0)	9.534	0.009
21-22	14 (77.7)	52 (39.4)		
23-24	1 (5.6)	14 (10.6)		
<b>Gender</b>	9 (50.0)	56 (42.4)	0.370	0.543
Male	9 (50.0)	76 (57.6)		
Female				
<b>Ethnicity</b>	11 (61.1)	74 (56.1)	-	-
Malay	6 (33.3)	42 (31.8)		
Chinese	0 (0.0)	12 (9.1)		
Indian	1 (5.6)	4 (3.0)		
Others				
<b>Monthly household income (RM)</b>				
4999 and below	12 (66.7)	62 (47.0)	-	0.015*
5000-9999	2 (11.0)	53 (40.1)		
≥10000-	4 (22.3)	17 (12.9)		
<b>Scholarship availability</b>				
Yes				
No	18 (100.0)	125 (94.7)		
	0 (0.0)	7 (5.3)	-	1*

\* p-value from Fisher's exact test

Table 1 shows the distribution of part time employment by socio-demographic characteristics and scholarship availability among respondents. The highest prevalence of medical students who are involved in the part time employment (14, 77.7%). There is an association between age group and part time employment among medical students in UPM, ( $\chi^2 = 9.534$ ,  $Q=0.009$ ). Meanwhile, for monthly household income, the highest prevalence of part time employment was among medical students who has monthly household income RM4999 and below (12, 66.7%). The results from Fisher's Exact test indicated that the research hypothesis is failed to be rejected ( $p=0.015$ ). This means that, there is an association between monthly household income and part time employment among medical students in UPM.

There is no association between gender and part time employment among medical students in UPM ( $\chi^2=0.370$ ,  $p=0.543$ ). Besides, all of the medical students who are working part-timely were taking scholarship (18, 100.0%). Since the  $p=1$  from Fisher's Exact test, it is not significant. Therefore, there is no association between scholarship availability and part time employment among medical students in UPM.

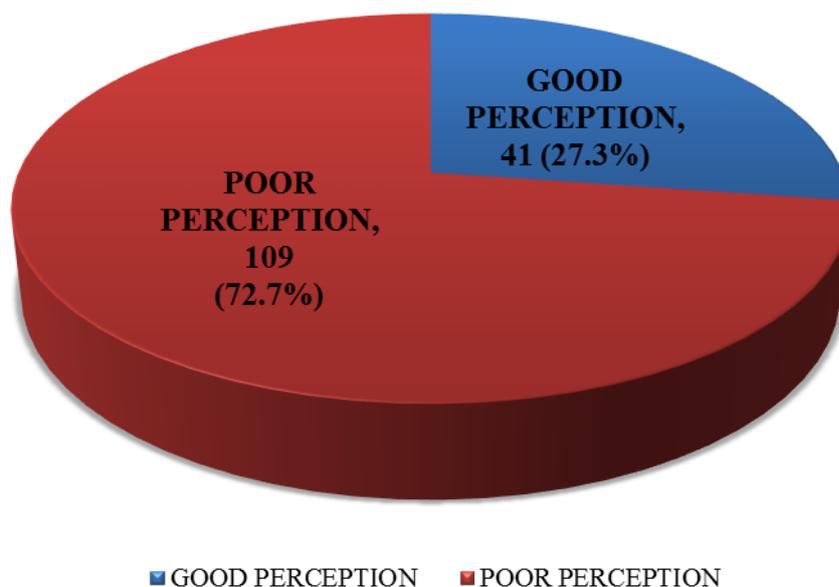
**Table 2:** Perception of medical students towards the effect of doing part time job

Perception	Mean (SD)	Strongly disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)
i) A part time job can guide the *worker to his/her future career direction.	3.39 (0.88)	4 (2.7)	15 (10.0)	63 (42.0)	55 (36.7)	13 (8.7)
ii) A part time job cannot help to build-up the worker's character or personality.	3.72 (1.10)	37 (24.7)	66 (44.0)	21 (14.0)	20 (13.3)	6 (4.0)
iii) A part time job can give the worker economical support.	4.17 (0.64)	0 (0.0)	3 (2.0)	11 (7.3)	94 (62.7)	42 (28.0)
iv) A part time job is not able to improve the worker's knowledge.	3.73 (0.99)	29 (19.3)	76 (50.7)	24 (16.0)	17 (11.3)	4 (2.7)
v) A part time job will negatively affect the worker's academic performance in university.	2.95 (0.87)	7 (4.7)	36 (24.0)	68 (45.3)	36 (24.0)	3 (2.0)
vi) A part time worker will have insufficient study time.	3.31 (0.85)	2 (1.3)	24 (16.0)	57 (38.0)	59 (39.3)	8 (5.3)
vii) A part time worker will have less time for sleep.	3.52 (0.88)	3 (2.0)	17 (11.3)	42 (8.0)	75 (50.0)	13 (8.7)

viii) A part time worker performs great in his/her exam.	3.05 (0.58)	3 (2.0)	18 (12.0)	114 (76.0)	13 (8.7)	2 (1.3)
ix) A part time worker will have emotional problems due to mental stress from work.	3.19 (0.80)	3 (2.0)	22 (14.7)	74 (49.3)	46 (30.7)	5 (3.3)
x) If someone is having a part time work, he/she will have no time to maintain a good relationship with his/her families.	2.67 (0.99)	20 (13.3)	42 (28.0)	60 (40.0)	24 (16.0)	4 (2.7)
xi) A part time worker will have a good relationship with his/her friends.	2.70 (0.76)	2 (1.3)	13 (8.7)	81 (54.0)	46 (30.7)	8 (5.3)
xii) A part time worker will have poor attendance in class.	2.95 (0.95)	14 (9.3)	23 (15.3)	76 (50.7)	31 (20.7)	6 (4.0)

\*worker : Medical students who are taking part time job.

Table 2 shows the perception of doing part time job among UPM undergraduate medical students based on the Likert scale.



**Figure 1:** Perception of medical students in UPM towards part time employment

In this study, the perception of medical students towards part time employment is categorized as having poor or good perception. The cut-off point to classify the total percentage of each respondent into poor and good perception was 70% (Callender and Wilkinson, 2012). From

150 respondents, 109 or 72.7% of the respondents had poor perception and the other 41 respondents or 27.3% had good perception towards part time employment (Figure 2). The respondents' perception towards part time employment was assessed based on the pros and cons of part time job of whether part time employment will positively contribute to their career direction, help to build their character, support their economic necessity, affect their academic performance or will give rise to social problems with their family and friends.

#### 4.0 Discussions

In this study, the prevalence of respondents having part time job (12.0%) is very low as compared with previous studies done overseas. A study conducted in New Zealand found that 81% of undergraduates held a part time employment (Manthei and Gilmore, 2005). Tam and Morrison (2005), in a study conducted among undergraduate in China, found that 66.9% of students held a part time job. One possible explanation for the lower prevalence of part time employment is that medical students do not have much time to work part-timely because of high work load and packed study hours in pursuing their degree (Cloon, 2004). University life of medical students are too hectic since they have compacted study hours and a very heavy curriculum syllabus. This might caused students to think twice of whether taking part time job is really an option as they would have limited time to focus on their study.

The respondents in this study engaged with different types of job such as online business, snack selling, being research assistants and products distributors. Those jobs have a very flexible working hours and they spent their weekends and holidays to do part time job. This could be due to compacted study hours of academic medicine and causing the students to have very limited time during the weekdays and would only free when weekends. To compare, the types of job that the respondents engaged with were different from the finding of Hirschman et al. (2007), who observed that some patterns of part time employment participated by undergraduate students ranging from semi-professional to technical positions such as clerical jobs, factories workers as well as receptionists. The difference may be due to the choices of part time job in Malaysia which may not be the same as in the overseas. It could be that, in Malaysia, there is less choice of part time job and employers are not hiring students as their workers. Plus, this also can be due to students having no transportation. The transportation may be one of the difficulty because in UPM, undergraduate students are not allowed to bring their own vehicles and less public transports available for the students to work outside the campus. This could be the reason why the prevalence of part time employment among undergraduate students in Malaysia is quite low than those overseas.

The respondents are involved in part time job because of personal interest and for economic support. The reason of personal interest is supported by Tony et al. (1999) which clarified that the personal satisfaction might be related to enjoyment of work and meeting new colleagues. Meanwhile, the rationale of economic support can be considered as an attempt to produce extra income and trying to avoid having big debt, while maintaining a certain standard of living (Moreau & Leathwood, 2006; Richardson et al., 2009). Another driving force that encouraged the respondents to participate in part time job is to improve soft skills. This is emphasized by Watts and Pickering (2000) which found that part time employment could increase self-esteem and improve valuable skills such as communication skills and effective time management for the worker.

As for the age groups, the findings of Pooterman et al. (2009) is consistent with this study, in which they stated that the students who were involved in part time job were positively correlated with age. The results from this study showed that there is an association between age group and part time employment. As they grow older, they may experience the changes in social life circle. They may have love relationship or getting more friends. So, they need extra money to socialize. According to the study done by Evans et al. (2014), university students at this age seemed to try to maintain certain standard of lifestyle by buying branded clothes, and purchasing cars were high on the agenda and a part time job allowed an acceptable standard of living to be maintained.

From this study, it was found that gender is not associated with part time employment among medical students in UPM. The result of the study showed an equal number of male and female respondents are working. This might be due to both male and female respondents share the same attitude towards studying and working. In contrast, Darolia in 2013 found that females are not similar with males where they might have definite characteristics and deal with work demands differently. Besides, the researcher in this study did not determine the association of ethnicity with part time employment among respondents. This is because the data of part time employment from Malaysia could hardly be found. Plus, the literature review from previous studies were mostly being done in other countries which have different ethnic groups which were incomparable with Malaysian ethnicity.

Purcell et al. (2005) emphasized that economically disadvantaged students were having more tendencies to participate in part time employment as they need more money to maintain a good living. This result was parallel with our findings that, the largest prevalence of part time employment was found among medical students who has monthly household income of RM4999 and below (66.7%). Those respondents who were not having financial support from family may get into part time employment to increase their income. Humprey (2006) described that the availability of financial support from family was a major predictor of whether or not students will seek part time employment. Thus, in this research, monthly household income was found to have a significant association with medical students taking part time employment.

Furthermore, the results revealed that there is no association between scholarship availability and part time employment. This findings are in contrast with the results from previous study by Auers et al. (2007) which stated that scholarship covered a moderate living allowance including tuition and fees which would decrease the demand to go for work. Students who are most likely to take employment and taking full-time jobs include those who are without scholarship and pledged for private financial affairs of their studies. In this study, among the medical students who have part time employment, all of them are government sponsored. However, the respondents believed that the amount of their scholarships were not enough due to several reasons such as rising cost of living as well as having to buy expensive medical textbooks. Thus, they are still taking part time job despite having scholarship.

From the results obtained, the respondents had the perception about how part time employment could lead to their positive future career direction. This results are in consensus with a study done by Piotrowski and Cox in 2004, who found that the students who were involved in part time job anticipated that it would lead them to a better employment and enhanced the potential associated with their future career. Besides, the respondents had the perception that part time employment have the potential to build personality, character, as

well as improving their knowledge. This perception could be due to their perspective that by engaging in part time jobs, it would train them to be more responsible and discipline in performing their dual roles, as a student and as worker at the same time. Economic and financial support had become the most influential perception towards part time employment among the respondents. This perception was due to inadequate income that had been the most common factor associated with part time employment (Oakey et al., 2003). Although majority of the respondents had scholarships, high expenses and expensive tuition fees could be the reasons why the respondents believed that they are able to lessen their financial burden and maintain an acceptable standard of living if they have part time job.

The perception of respondents, based on their academic performance, attendance to class and their examination results had also been assessed. It was found that the respondents were in a neutral perception against that statement. Such perception can be due to the majority of the respondents have no part time jobs and they do not know much about how it will affect their studies. Plus, they are probably inexperienced in taking any part time job while studying. Furthermore, the results reported that the respondents had the perception of they would get emotional and psychological problems due to mental stress from work. The majority of respondents believed that they would have less resting time if they have part time job. This may bring serious emotional and psychological problems such as stress if they did not get enough time for resting. As outlined by Vaez and Laflamme (2008), these disturbances in emotional and psychological health might cause worse disorders, which could stop life on its track. There were 41.3% of respondents had the perception that their involvement in part time employment would not affect their relationship with family. This findings contradicted with the finding of Van Dyke et al. (2005) that those who involved in part time job could leave less time spent with family members. The reason why it did not affect the relationship of the family was due to parents that usually supported their children to take part time employment (Mortimer et al., 1991). Meanwhile, 54.0% were in neutral opinion and 36% have the perception that good social relationship with friends could be maintained. This findings were in contrast with the results found by Oi and Morrison (2005) that students could not maintain their social life once engaged with part time employment. The neutral opinion from this research could be due to the low prevalence of part time employment, and those who had no part time job might be unclear about the extent of part time employment towards their relationship with friends.

Nevertheless, some limitations were met while this research was being conducted. First of all, the study population only comprises of undergraduate medical students in UPM. Undergraduate medical students from other medical schools or universities were not included in the study. Since the study population is not a full frame of population in universities in Malaysia, the findings from this research cannot represent and not applicable to every universities in Malaysia. Besides, the questionnaires used in this study were in self-administered format, which may led to self-report bias. Moreover, temporal relationships between the variables (monthly household income, scholarship availability and part time employment) were not well established. There also might be some other factors that associate with part time employment that were not being studied in this research.

## 5.0 Conclusions and recommendations

In conclusion, prevalence of part time employment is relatively low among undergraduate medical students in UPM if compared to those in overseas. Majority of the respondents have poor perception on effect of doing part time job. Age and monthly household income are the main factors that associate with part time employment among UPM undergraduate medical students. Expanding the scope of research to every university in Malaysia is suggested in order to obtain more representative data or findings. The use of questionnaire guided interview is encouraged. It is recommended to study in detail for other determinants of part time employment which are not being done in this research. Suggestion to respondents' scholarship provider is encouraged to be made so that they could review and consider increasing the amount of money of the scholarship to support respondents' life better in future.

## Ethical

Approval for ethical review was submitted to Universiti Putra Malaysia Ethical Committee and permission was asked from the Dean of Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences of Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) in order to conduct this study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants and confidentially assured.

## Declaration of conflict of interest

We as the authors of the article declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding publication of this article.

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