

The impact of part-time employment on students' health: A Georgian Case

Tengiz Verulava, Revaz Jorbenadze

OBJECTIVE

During the university studies, students not only acquire knowledge but are actively involved in various activities and part-time employment. Students employment may have effects on their physical or mental health as well as learning performance. The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between part-time working, health and academic performance.

METHOD

An analytic cross-sectional study was conducted in Caucasus University (Georgia).

RESULTS

The majority of the undergraduate students (61%) had part-time jobs. The average duration of the working hours was 18 hours in a week. Most of the students (76%) believed that the main reason for employment was financial necessity to earn additional income to support their families and payment of expenses incurred. Most students have chosen simple part-time jobs that did not relevance for future career. According to the students, their sleep disturbance reasons was the difficulty of combining work and study, which has a negative effect on their physical and mental health, and therefore on academic performance (44%).

CONCLUSION

Universities must implement flexible, accessible and targeted supporting activities in achieving their educational and career goals. Increasing awareness of mental and physical health issues could also be delivered to students to enhance their experience.

Tengiz Verulava* MD, PhD
School of Medicine and Healthcare
Management, Caucasus University,
Tbilisi, Georgia
Teaching University Geomedi,
Tbilisi, Georgia
tverulava@cu.edu.ge

Revaz Jorbenadze MD, PhD
Chapidze Emergency Cardiology Center,
Tbilisi, Georgia

*Corresponding author

INTRODUCTION

During the university studies, students acquire not only knowledge but are actively involved in part-time employment. Part-time employment means any additionally work, besides major activities and learning. The scale of the part-time employment of students is characterized by a growth trend. By the mid-2000s almost 50% of students in the US were employed, while in the 1970s they were only a third (34%).¹ A similar situation is observed in Europe, where the share of such students varies from 48% (in France) to 77% (in the Netherlands).² Studies in British universities have revealed that 70-80% of students have a paid job.³ In Russia, according to various studies, the number of employed students is 65-85%.⁴

The part-time employment of students depends on the teaching course, the specialty, the territorial location of the higher education institution (in the capital and large cities the employment market is bigger). Students have different motives for part-time employment.⁵⁻⁷ The primary motivation for part-time employment is pragmatic and is meant to satisfy their material needs. It is particularly seen in developing countries, where families have limited financial aid for students, as a result of the socio-economic crisis.⁸⁻⁹ Most students work because they want to get additional resources for their own needs. In some low-income countries the main motivation of student's part-time employment is family support.¹⁰ Part-time employment of students in European countries is mainly related to the need to get funding for higher education.¹¹

By taking on occasional jobs, students which strive for career growth, recognition, prestige may gain valuable work experience and enhance their future opportunities in the labour market.¹² If related to their field of study, student employment has even a

larger positive impact on labour market outcomes in the form of lower risk of unemployment, shorter job search duration, and higher wage.¹³ The job gives opportunities for expanding relationships and business contacts, accumulating experience, acquiring new friends and development of communication, teamwork and time management skills.¹⁴

Combining academic studies with paid work also has negative consequences. According to researchers, employed students have problems with balancing the workload they take on and obligations related to their studies.¹⁵ Employment at full-time students hinder their academic achievement and limits the time for studying.¹⁶ They are less likely to study successfully at university because their work takes too much time and energy.¹⁷ Secondary jobs have a negative effect on the quality of teaching, especially those students who work over 35 hours,¹⁸ or more than 15 hours in a week.¹⁹

According to studies, students work-related problems affect health, cause constant stress, anxiety and social integration deficit.²⁰ This includes changes in energy, lack of sleep, appetite, loss of interest or pleasure in activities, difficulty concentrating, and feeling sad, empty, hopeless, worthless, or guilty.²¹ Student population have significantly lower levels of mental health,^{22,23,24,25} which was related to working part-time and working longer hours.²⁶

The aim of the research is to analyze the student part-time employment in three aspects: demand and reason of part-time employment, health status of student in part-time employment, effects of part-time employment on students, especially on students' health and learning process.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

An analytic cross-sectional study was conducted. In November 2019, the questionnaire was emailed to a representative sample of Year 2 full-time undergraduate students ($n=700$) from Caucasus University (Georgia).

The survey instrument was a semi-structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was based on a combination of literature review and specificities of students at Caucasus University. In order to access the difficulty of the questionnaire, 15 pilot interviews were initially conducted.

Survey instrument was trying to assess socio demographic profile of students (such as: age, gender, employment status, working position & working hours per week). In addition, survey instrument was constructed in a way to evaluate student's demand and reasons of part-time employment, attitude of students regarding employment. Results are summarized.

Data Collection and Analysis. After the questionnaire had been established, the information of students was collected by a convenient sampling method. Data entry and analysis were done using Microsoft Excel and SPSS.

Ethics. The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Health Policy Institute of Caucasus University. The protocol was in accordance with the declaration of Helsinki. Students were informed of the purpose of the study prior to administration of the questionnaire. An informed consent was taken from each participant. Those participants who did not agree to participate in the study were also excluded from the study.

RESULTS

Three hundred twenty-two students (46%) returned questionnaires. The mean ages of the respondents

are 20 for males and 19.3 for the females (range 18 years to 25 years). Fifty-six per cent ($n=112$) of respondents were female and 44% ($n=88$) were male.

Sixty-one per cent ($n=200$) of the respondents had part-time jobs, and of these 16% had more than one job. Thirty-nine percent ($n=122$) of students without a job were trying to get a job.

The duration of the working hours varied from 2 to 50 hours in a week, and the average duration was 18 hours in a week. Majority of students (57%) were working at least part-time, from 10 hours to 20 hours a week (Table 1).

Students were asked to indicate where they were working. Of those that have part-time jobs ($n=200$), the majority worked in the retail (48%) and food and drink industry (45%). A small number worked in call centres and the University (7%) (Table 2).

Students were asked to assess their reasons for working. Financial necessity ($n=152$, 76%), free for extra cash for fun (46%, $n=92$), improving personal and social skills ($n=72$, 36%) were cited as most important. Professional studies and relevance of job for future career was cited least (Table 3).

According to the majority of students, part-time work affected their academic performance (44%, $n=88$) and some had to work a night shift 3-4 times a week ($n=144$, 72%). Only 32% of students studied more than 3 hours in a day ($n=64$). Nearly a third of respondents say that they did not have enough sleep or in other words have a sleep deprivation ($n=168$, 84%). Majority of respondents agreed that their sleep disturbance reasons was the difficulty of combining work and study ($n=88$, 44%). According to study, employed students believed that sleep deprivation had a negative effect on their physical and mental health. Health problems, which are caused by sleep deprivation are: irritation and bad temper (46%), decrease concentration (52%), headache (38%),

fatigue (44%), deterioration and unpleasant feelings (32%), chronic fatigue syndrome (48%), memory impairment (40%), nervous system

disorder (32%), stress (56%), pressure increase (12%), fainting (6%), lost productivity (46%) (Table 3).

Table 1: Demographic profile, employment and working position & working hours per week of students

	<i>n</i> =200	%
Gender		
female	112	56%
male	88	44%
Age		
18-19	36	18%
20-21	48	24%
22-23	52	26%
24-25	64	32%
Working hours per week		
10	50	25%
20	65	32.5%
30	44	22%
40	36	18%
50	5	2.5%

Table 2: Where are students working?

Retail	%	Food and drink	%	Other	%
Supermarket	18%	Bar/pub	13%	Call centre	5%
Shop	11%	Restaurant	12%	University	2%
Clothes shop	8%	Catering	6%		
Department store	5%	Hotel	3%		
Retail other	3%	Fast food	9%		
Petrol station	3%	Club	2%		
Total	48%	Total	45%	Total	7%

Table 3: The effect of part-time employment according to student reporting

The reasons for the part-time employment:	N=200 yes	%
Financial necessity	152	76%
Raising social connections	64	32%
Improving personal and social skills (soft-skills)	72	36%
Professional studies	44	22%
The job is relevant to my future career	42	21%
Free time use for extra cash for fun, going out, etc.	92	46%
Other	2	1%
Results of Part-time employment		
I work night	144	72%
I have less time for learning	132	66%
If you'll give more attention to the studies I have learned well	100	25%
I spend for learn more than 3 hours a day	64	32%
I can not complete all homework	104	52%
The reasons of employed students' sleep deprivation		
Sleeps 4-5 hours a day	64	32%
Sleeping in 6-7 hours a day	88	44%
Not enough sleep	168	84%
sleep disturbance reason is difficulty of combining work and learning	88	44%
sleep disturbance reason is work	76	38%
sleep disturbance reason is study	24	12%
do not have a similar problem	12	6%
Health problems, which are caused by sleep deprivation		
Irritation and bad temper	92	46%
Decrease concentration	104	52%
Headache	76	38%
Fatigue	88	44%
Deterioration and unpleasant feelings	64	32%
Chronic fatigue syndrome	96	48%
Memory impairment	80	40%
Nervous system disorder	64	32%
Stress	112	56%
Pressure increase	24	12%
Fainting	12	6%
Lost productivity	92	46%

DISCUSSION

Part-time employment appears to be an essential element of the overall student experience. According to the survey, more than half of the respondents have a part-time job and the mean number of hours that students spend working per week is 18 hours. Experts recommend that students work no more than maximum of 10 hours per week,²⁷ which is reasonable balance between the need of students to supplement their basic income and the interests of their educations. According to these survey students are clearly working more than this recommendation. In this respect, it is more important to educate students how to manage time, to help balance both their studies and part-time work.

According to the survey, most of the students believed that the main reason for employment was financial necessity to earn additional income to support their families and payment of expenses incurred. These are similar to findings reported by other authors.²⁸ The survey indicated that most students have chosen simple part-time jobs (in the retail and food and drink industry) that did not relevance for future career. They do not pay adequate attention to factors such as improving professional education and soft-skills. Consequently, these types of work do not require specialized skills gained by the students at the university, and conversely, do not offer them any particular experience which could increase their employability after graduation. Lack of correspondence between the study programmes and the types of work performed by students were consistent with the results of other studies.²⁹⁻³¹

Research has shown that the majority of students are very busy with part-time employment and difficulties constitute work and learning

combinations. Large loading of non-teaching activities disturbs students from engaging in the learning process. Most of the respondents work in night shifts, which affects their sleep. Sleep deprivation have caused serious health problems (Irritation and bad temper, decrease concentration, headache), which has a negative impact on the learning process. Because of busy schedule, they cannot intensive relationships with friends and family. These results are consistent with the results of other studies.³²⁻³³

Our findings noted that part-time working have a significant detrimental effect on both mental and physical health of students. Working more hours increases the probability that a student perceives a negative effect on academic performance.

CONCLUSION

Universities must have an effective policy of employment and must implementing flexible, accessible and targeted supporting activities in achieving their educational and career goals. It is recommended that several measures be implemented to help students, to organize study and part-time work to best effect. This needs to be supported by training in time management skills. Increasing awareness of mental and physical health issues could also be delivered to students to enhance their experience.

The results of the research will be an important source of information for universities, governmental and non-governmental organizations which are involved in the development of employment support policies for students. Further investigation is needed to conclusively establish whether the relationships between part-time working and health exist in the wider university population.

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