

## Hong Kong think tank warns youth face employment challenges under ‘gig economy’



New survey from MWYO reveals that about 15% of respondents work part-time or are self-employed; youth say working multiple ‘gigs’ could pay more than one full-time job

Those from disadvantaged backgrounds may have fewer qualifications for higher-paying full-time jobs, but further education could help develop skills

**Before you read:** Many companies have transitioned from full-time employment to contract jobs under the “gig economy,” a labour market that relies on temporary and part-time jobs filled by freelancers rather than permanent employees.

**Think about it:** What challenges do Hong Kong youth face in securing their dream jobs?

A Hong Kong youth-oriented think tank has cautioned that more local youth may find themselves restricted to part-time employment, which comes with unstable income and insecure career development amid the growing prevalence of the gig economy.

Results from the latest survey, conducted by the youth-oriented think tank MWYO and the Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies, were released on Thursday. Between July

and October last year, 506 working people aged 18 to 34 were surveyed via phone. The study examined employment trends among Hong Kong youth, how people from different backgrounds define their ideal job, and the methods they use to achieve their career goals.

The study found that most respondents, about 80 per cent, still worked full-time jobs, while about 15 per cent worked part-time or were self-employed.

After speaking to respondents, researchers said some young people take on multiple part-time jobs because it allows them to earn higher wages than working full-time at one that pays less. They also may not have the qualifications for a higher-paying full-time job.

### **China's release of youth unemployment numbers shows a bounce in jobs, but experts question accuracy of statistics**

Nearly half of the 75 respondents without a full-time career cited the need to earn money as the reason for working multiple part-time jobs, while about 34.7 per cent noted a desire for a flexible schedule. Only 2.7 per cent of those polled avoided full-time work for work-life balance.

Peper Yau, associate researcher at MWYO, said society should not oversimplify the reasons why low-income youth opt for part-time work and flexible employment as merely a matter of "lying flat" or lacking concern for the future.

"These youths from disadvantaged backgrounds generally have weaker socioeconomic conditions and often end up in temporary jobs for which they are qualified," he said. Taking these jobs often means sacrificing upward mobility, Yau added, since these youth lack the qualifications to further develop their careers.

"Part-time work is heavily influenced by industries and the economy. If the economy worsens or more industries adopt the gig economy model, we anticipate this number [of part-time workers] will rise."

### **Why do some youth choose part-time work?**

Some respondents think working multiple part-time jobs is a transitional phase towards full-time employment. They aim to accumulate more work experience and ultimately secure a stable source of income through full-time employment, relinquishing low-paying and less meaningful temporary jobs, the group noted.

The think tank found that those without full-time jobs were less satisfied with their job stability, training opportunities, benefits, and chances for promotion. Part-time workers were more satisfied with their work-life balance than full-time workers.

Research also indicated that young people studying medical and nursing programmes were more inclined to take on part-time work. More than 30 per cent of medical and nursing graduates worked part-time or were self-employed, citing long working hours as a reason to avoid full-time positions.

Many respondents ranked “happiness” and “money” as the top two criteria, respectively, for an ideal job. The report noted that the top choice, which scored 8.26 out of 10, could indicate that work-life balance is the most important factor for young Hongkongers choosing a career, followed by higher income and the role’s alignment with their values.

### **More educational support**

MWYO said further education is increasingly important for career advancement in today’s society. The think tank suggested providing financial support for young people from underprivileged backgrounds to pursue vocational courses that benefit their career development.

Apple Tse Ho-ye, deputy director (youth & social rehabilitation) at Hong Kong Christian Service, said the city’s working youth needed a more diverse set of skills to prepare for future challenges and urged others to better understand their motivations.

“Young people working part-time are definitely not lazy; they are genuinely pursuing their dreams,” she said.

Angela Yung, chief executive officer of MWYO, said the group asked the government to establish a centralised career development platform and called for the creative and cultural industries to create a talent pool of part-time working youth.

“We hope to encourage youth to pursue further education, ultimately contributing to the better development of human resources in society,” she said.