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# Pre-registration paid employment practices of undergraduate nursing students: A scoping review



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## KEYWORDS

Undergraduate nurse;  
Paid employment;  
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## Summary

**Objectives:** This article presents findings from a scoping review that sought to highlight what is known about pre-registration paid employment practices of undergraduate nursing students.

**Background:** Researchers have identified large numbers of undergraduate nursing students engaging in paid employment. This review was prompted by our interest in the different employment choices that students make and whether these choices have any impact on transition to practice.

**Design:** A scoping review was designed to map the existing evidence base on undergraduate student nurse employment practices. Scoping reviews support the identification of a broad range of literature, which encompasses all types of study design.

**Data sources:** Utilising key search terms, databases searched included MEDLINE, CINAHL, Psych INFO, EMBASE, SCOPUS, SCIRUS, Joanna Briggs Institute, Web of Science, Informit Health and the Cochrane database.

**Review method:** We utilised Arksey and O'Malley's five-stage approach: identifying the research question; identifying relevant studies; study selection; charting the data; and collating, summarising and reporting the results. Based on the research question, relevant literature was selected which was reported in accordance with Arksey and O'Malley's framework.

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**Results:** The scoping review identified 40 articles that explored the nature of undergraduate student nurse paid employment activity. Highlighted themes included: reasons for engaging in paid employment; specific paid employment models; paid employment and academic performance, and paid employment choice and transition to graduate practice.

**Conclusion:** The review highlighted a lack of studies detailing the relationship between paid employment and transition to graduate nurse practice, particularly those studies situated within the hospitality sector.

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## 1. Introduction

This article presents findings from a scoping review that sought to identify what is known about the paid employment practices of undergraduate nursing students. In the Australian context, the transfer of nurse education from hospital-based schools of nursing to the higher education sector was formally completed in 1993 (Heath, 2002). This resulted in nursing students no longer deriving an income from what was previously an apprenticeship style paid model of training (Kenny, Nankervis, Kidd, & Connell, 2012). Australian nursing students are now classed as supernumerary, when undertaking the approximately 1000 h of unpaid clinical experience over a three to four year bachelor of nursing degree or equivalent (Phillips, Kenny, Smith, & Esterman, 2012). The transfer of nurse education to the higher education sector had significant financial implications for students (Kenny et al., 2012); with most now seeking paid employment in addition to their university studies (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2012; Rochford, Connolly, & Drennan, 2009).

The key focus of our scoping review was to document what was known internationally about the paid employment activity of undergraduate student nurses. Our focus was on the type of paid employment undertaken, the reasons for that choice, and the skills acquired from employment activity. We were particularly interested in identifying whether any paid employment type was viewed as more successful for future graduate nurse transition, and if undergraduate nursing students believed that certain employment types were strategic for this purpose. Our cursory review of the literature identified only a small number of studies that explored the relationship between paid employment and university study, with a focus on academic performance (Curtis & Lucas, 2001; Moreau and Leatherwood, 2006; Salamonson, Everett, Koch, Andrew, & Davidson, 2012). This provided the rationale for a more systematic and robust search approach.

## 2. Background

Whilst the Australian Government provides some financial support to university students these are heavily means tested with many undergraduate students are ineligible for assistance. As a consequence, many student nurses struggle to avoid poverty, necessitating them to seek paid employment in addition to their university studies (Kenny et al., 2012). This situation also exists in other countries such as the United Kingdom (Curtis, 2007), with student bursaries only partially covering living costs (Karstad, 2012; Sturgeon, 2012).

Current Australian research suggests that undergraduate student nurses undertake paid employment in a wide variety of work places; with a major focus concentrated in two areas; work in a health service (clinical role), and the hospitality or retail sector (non-clinical roles) (Phillips et al., 2012). Evidence suggests that health services are targeting undergraduate nursing students through the provision of specific paid employment opportunities in healthcare (Department of Health South Australia, 2004; Kenny et al., 2012), with the argument that such programmes afford greater clinical experience, ensuing that new graduates are more 'job ready' than those who pursue employment outside the healthcare system.

Little is known regarding the paid employment choices of undergraduate nursing students, the skills that they acquire from this engagement and any relevance to their future transition to the registered nurse role. The link between paid employment and transition to practice is of interest because of challenges faced by newly qualified graduate nurses in assimilating into a health service (Johnstone, Kanitsaki, & Currie, 2008) and the current global concern of graduate nurse attrition in the first year of practice or shortly thereafter (Rhéaume, Clément, & LeBel, 2011; Laschinger & Grau, 2012). The purpose of our review was to scope the available international literature to gain an understanding of paid employment practices of undergraduate student nurses and any impact on transition to practice.

## 3. Methods

Mays, Pope, and Popay (2005) suggest that a scoping review is an effective means of highlighting the relevant literature in a particular research area, with the aim of rapid mapping of key concepts. These types of reviews are useful to identify the main sources and types of evidence available, especially in areas where little might be known. Davis, Drey, and Gould (2009) argue that a scoping review is a robust method of identifying primary and secondary sources of literature with its success based on both a developmental and intellectual approach, identifying meaning to the 'what' and 'why' of an inquiry, rather than the 'who' 'were' and 'how' (p. 1387). Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) work on scoping reviews supported our approach in identifying gaps in the available evidence and drawing conclusions about the current state of research activity. Their five-stage framework provides a rigorous scoping review process to support transparency, and enable replication of the search strategy, thus increasing the reliability of findings. The stages included identifying the research question, identifying relevant studies, study

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