

# **Part-time Work and Female Participation in the Hospitality Sector: A Case Study of Greece.**

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## **Abstract**

*Hotels are the type of businesses that traditionally require and need flexible work practices due to the nature of service they provide. This paper analyses the current situation of part-time employment in the hospitality sector in Greece (and more specifically in hotel categories: 5, 4, 3 and 2 stars). The aim is initially to find whether part-time employment is the main form of employment used in hotels and also discover to what extent females play an active role in the overall hospitality labour market. Part-time staffing is examined individually by hotel category and comparisons are made with the overall Greek labour market. Findings are based on research which took place between March and May 2006 and the sample of hotels was randomly selected. Data were collected from a sample of over 100 hotels from all over Greece. The preliminary findings are presented in this paper.*

**Keywords:** International Human Resource Management, Employment, Flexibility, Hospitality, Women

## **INTRODUCTION**

It is evident that flexible working methods are a permanent feature of the modern employment market (Field, 1996). The creation of a single European market as well as the increasing globalisation of markets have forced companies to be able to keep up with all modern management and human resource management trends, such as labour market flexibility, so that they can compete effectively in the constantly changing business environment. However, this issue of flexible employment, has been the cause of public debate in most countries (Voudouris, 2004).

Flexible work (otherwise atypical or non standard forms of employment), is a term which covers a wide range of work styles and employment practices. Broadly speaking, they are used to describe all kinds of employment, which differ from the traditional 9-5 full time work, with a permanent contract (Avramidou, 2001). Otherwise known as "numerical flexibility in employment arrangements" (Gunnigle et al, 1998), it is this, that reflects a company's ability to increase or decrease employment quickly in line with fluctuations in business demand. The use of flexible forms of employment (part-time, shift work, temporary work, fixed term work, sub-contracting, seasonal work, teleworking, homeworking, subsidized employment), is one of the main recent underlying employment trends in European Union (EU) countries. The majority of job openings in EU in the 1990s have been part-time positions, rather than full-time (Voudouris, 2004). Thus, it seems that the overall level of flexible working is clearly increasing. However, the pattern varies substantially across the EU due to differences in labour regulations, resulting in different forms of flexibility in different

countries (Voudouris, 2004). The present paper focuses on part-time work, which will be analysed at a later stage.

Even though labour regulations may vary from country to country, there are certain issues in the EU that stand for all member countries, as they share a common goal. Labour market adjustment and employment issues are at the top of the European social policy agenda (Mihail, 2003). Employment is written into the Amsterdam Treaty, in the employment and social chapter. It commits the Member States to take coordinated action on promoting policies for the creation of employment (Mihail, 2003). All Member States are therefore working towards the model set by the EU, with Greece trying to combat unemployment (which is high and growing) and solve other employment issues, via the use of flexible forms of employment.

Other than combating unemployment on a country level, companies have their own reasons for adopting atypical methods of employment, with the main one being reaching excellence in the workplace. This is translated as: improved recruitment and retention; reducing absenteeism; reducing costs; extending hours of operation; and improving customer service. Therefore, any request for flexible work should be seen not primarily as an obstacle to overcome, but an opportunity to re-evaluate and improve the way work is organized. At the same time, new communication technologies are offering a range of flexible working methods such as hot-desking, tele-working and back-office relocations (Field, 1996). The aim of non-standard forms of employment is to recruit only the required number of staff in the required capacities at any point in the business' life (Kelliher, 1989). Moreover, such flexibility allows employers to adapt more speedily to turbulent and competitive international markets by shedding or increasing labour in response to market demand without the costly overheads associated with full-time permanent employees (Gunnigle et al, 1998). Furthermore, employees may experience less fatigue and exert greater effort during the period of their engagement. Another result of this appears to be that the absenteeism rate of part-timers, is often lower (Allan, 2000).

The fact that there is marked absence of empirical studies on this issue, (Mihail, 2001), makes it necessary to search the current situation of flexible forms of employment in the Greek hotel industry. The present study focuses on a particular type of non-standard form of employment, that of part-time work, and its aim is to discover what the current situation, as far as part-time work arrangements is in the hospitality sector, and also find the place that women hold on this type of work, in comparison to men.

## **PART-TIME WORK - THEORY**

Part-time work is the employment in which the daily or weekly working hours are shorter than those of standard or full-time employment, accompanied by correspondingly reduced pay. It requires an individual agreement between employee and employer, which may be concluded at the commencement of the employment relationship or during its existence, and must be in writing (Law 1892/1990, Article 38).

Part-time employees have lower pay and worse social security coverage and may suffer from serious psychological problems on account of being "second-class" wage earners, while the unions add that part-time work has a negative impact on trade union activity. However, it is also organizations which are faced with certain disadvantages of a more flexible workforce. Employing more staff on a part-time basis entails higher administrative costs, in terms of record maintenance, payroll calculation, supervision, training and recruitment (Allan, 2000). Other, more intangible disadvantages may include: less time commitment by staff and arguably less

psychological commitment to the organization, which can lead to problems of motivation, communication, confidentiality and higher turnover by part-time, than standard type employees (Allan, 2000).

In the light of the above discussion, it could be said that the main motive for employees in choosing part-time work is the fear of long-term unemployment. Meanwhile, as far as employers are concerned, the positive results of part-time work in enterprises explain their interest in agreeing to its extension over recent years. However, a section amongst the employers, especially the more dynamic ones, recognise that the long-term use of part-time work, leaving aside its positive effects (mainly on the reduction of labour costs), results in the reduction of competitiveness since it is directly connected to factors which have a negative impact on productivity, such as the lack of skills.

All Human Resource (HR) practices have both positive, as well as negative effects. It depends on each employer, after carefully considering the company's needs, to adopt or not, part-time employment methods. It is important to state at this point, that even negative effects can be minimized with the use of the right HR practices. To be more specific, in those companies where flexible working methods are being taken seriously, concerted efforts can be made to integrate flexible workers into the mainstream of the organisation's existence. Major issues concerning the management, motivation and involvement of this new type of workforce can be addressed, and new models of partnership between companies and their flexible workers can be formed (Field, 1996). The adoption of the "correct" practices is a job for the HR managers, who have a vital role to play in the process of adjusting to the new realities in the workplace. These practices may include training, leadership and policy planning, particularly in the areas of management, communication and technology.

## **THE GREEK LABOUR MARKET - WOMEN AND WORK**

The Greek labour market, as compared to other EU member states, is believed to be one of the most regulated and least flexible (OECD, 2001). The lack of flexibility in the workplace was the cause of many problems, and the adoption of such atypical forms of employment was viewed as an illegal course of action from the part of businesses. The result of this was the increase of shadow economy in Greece to a large 27,2% (IMF Shadow Economies around the world, 1999). Flexible forms of employment were late introduced to the Greek labour market, compared to other EU countries, and as it has already been mentioned, it is now viewed as an attempt to combat high rates of unemployment. In 2004, unemployment was as high as 10,5% (percentage of the unemployed out of the total active workforce population). The male unemployed held a 6,55% (percentage of the male unemployed out of the total male active workforce population), whereas the female unemployed was at an extremely high 16,23% (percentage of the female unemployed out of the total female active workforce population). In 2005, unemployment fell by 0,65% to 9,85% of the total active workforce. The male unemployed were at 6,1% of the total male active workforce, whereas the percentage of the female unemployed fell to 15,3% of the total female active workforce.

The differences between male - female in the workplace can also be seen in the statistics of the overall workforce population. Greece has been, and still remains, one of the countries with a large difference in the percentage of male - female active work population. To be more specific, in 2003, the male active workforce was 72,4%, and the female active workforce was at a low 43,8% (Greek National Action Plan for Employment, 2004). It is evident from the pie-chart below (figure 1) that the difference in the working population was nearly as large as 30%.

To compare with another European country, the UK in 2003 held the following statistics: the male workforce being at 79,2% and the female at 69,8% (UK National Action Plan for Employment, 2004). It is evident that the difference between the two sexes is less than that of Greece for the same year, with the UK percentage difference being at a low 9,4% (Pie chart above).

In the last quarterly of year 2005 in Greece, the percentage which shows the difference between male and female workforce, has fallen to about 22%, but still remains high (male = 64,7% and female=42.3%) (Greek Labour Statistics, 2005). However, we should take under consideration the fact that this percentage is falling, as is the total percentage of the male and female workforce population.

According to the Greek National Action Plan for Employment (2004), part-time work has had its ups and downs, though still remains notably low, with a total of 2,3% of the overall workforce. What is interesting though is that from the total percentage, females hold a 3,2%, which is higher to the equivalent of male, who hold a 1,4% for part-time work, as shown in figure 2. In the last quarterly of 2005, the percentage of the total workforce population has risen to a 5,23% (Greek Labour Statistics, 2005).

Having viewed those very interesting labour statistics of Greece, we aim in the present paper to analyse the labour statistical information in the hotel industry.

## **THE HOSPITALITY SECTOR**

Tourism has been and still remains one of the main sources of revenue for the Greek economy. It is very unfortunate though, that tourism and hospitality have not been developed enough. This can be clearly shown by the very low percentage share that the Hospitality and Catering sector cover out of the overall working population, which is a low 6.84% for the year 2005 (Greek Labour Statistics, 2005).

Hotels, especially, are the type of businesses that traditionally require and need flexible work practices due to the nature of service they provide. A great number of resorts operate on a seasonal basis, while all hotels need to provide certain services on a 24 hours basis, during operation. An issue which dramatically influences industry employment, is that of seasonality. Seasonality leads to widespread seasonal employment, which is defined as "a non-permanent" paid job that will end once the seasonal peak has passed (Jolliffe & Farnsworth, 2003).

Clearly, the incentive for employers in adopting employment flexibility has been the need to improve competitiveness and reduce operating costs. Such flexibility allows employers to adapt more speedily to turbulent and competitive international markets by shedding or increasing labour in response to market demand without the costly overheads associated with full time permanent employees (Gunnigle et al, 1998). The selection of temporary working and fixed term contracts, mainly, is based on the premise that such arrangements are primary employer driven. These arrangements effectively reduce employment security and make such workers liable to lay-off or termination once reasonable notice is given and/or the contract term or purpose expires. However, in a sector such as the hospitality, where costs are high and customer satisfaction lays upon details, there is a tremendous need for flexibility in employment.

All research on hospitality shows that the main focus on this particular industry is customer oriented. Therefore, to reach excellence in the hospitality, the basic aim should be to organize the business in such a

way, that customer satisfaction and commitment will be achieved. The basic step for doing that is through employment. Employment is a big issue in the service sectors, as the effectiveness of service organizations is often linked with the individual qualities of their employees (Lockyer & Scholarios, 2004).

Hotels are considered service sector organizations. It is important to provide an explanation though, of what service really is. Services are frequently described as "intangible" and their output is viewed as an activity, rather than a tangible object. This distinction is not a clear one, because much service output has a substantial tangible component (Johns, 1998). However, especially in service companies, it is customer focus that makes all the difference in pursuing customer satisfaction. Issues such as quality, understanding, communication, and service performance are four components, which when they are combined, they can lead to excellence.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The present paper is a result of a research conducted through both secondary and primary sources. The theoretical background is based on secondary information such as journals, books, newspaper articles, the internet, as well as different papers and proposals published through various international and local organizations (e.g. OECD, Public Employment Services - OAEED etc.).

To discover the current employment situation, in terms of part-time work arrangements, in the Greek Hospitality Industry and also to find the extent of female participation in the specific workplace arena, required the use of quantitative research (primary sources). To achieve that, a questionnaire was handed to 240 hotels, in 5star, 4 star, 3 star and 2 star categories (working both on all-year round basis - city hotels, as well as on some seasonal resort hotels), in Greece. The geographical distribution of the hotels covers all over Greece, mainland mainly and also some islands. The questionnaire was based on a European project (Department of Business and Project Management: "Flexibility in Thessaly region enterprises") conducted at TEI of Larissa. The authors have changed some of the questions and also added other questions, which are best suited to the hospitality industry and its needs.

The questionnaire used for the present research was divided in four parts. The first part is concerned with the general company information, such as name of company, hotel classification, number of employees etc. The second part aims to provide information on the forms of employment used on each hotel, especially on full and part-time work, whereas the third part is based on female employees. The final part of the questionnaire is concerned with the views of the respondents on the current situation of FFE adoption from companies.

It is of great importance to state at this point that the total sample of beds used in the present paper constitutes the 4,38% of the overall number of beds in all Greek hotels from all categories.

The number of explicit refusals was high: 109 potential respondents (out of the 240) indicated that they were not willing to cooperate. The relatively high refusal rate proves the fact that even though anonymity is kept, Greek businesses still remain very dubious and reluctant to giving information regarding issues, which are viewed internal, such as flexible forms of employment.

Despite the difficulties encountered with retrieving information from the respondents, the present paper aims in providing a view of flexibility in employment in hotels, with a main focus on part-time work, which reflects the current situation in the Greek hospitality labour market. Moreover, the second goal is to discover to what extent females play an active role in the overall hospitality labour market.

## **RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **FLEXIBLE FORMS OF EMPLOYMENT IN THE HOSPITALITY SECTOR**

As mentioned above, the main aim of the present research is to discover the current labour market situation in the hospitality industry, as far as part-time employment method is concerned. Below are presented the preliminary findings (table 1), of the research conducted.

To have a better and more accurate view of the labour market situation in the hospitality industry, all data is presented according to hotel category. Most hotels that participated in the survey were of 3 star category, and least were from 5 star category. The survey sample is large, and includes a total number of 26664 beds with 6556 employees in all 131 hotels responders. To have a better comparability of the research findings, the following, table 2, shows all the percentages of the different types of employees, according to hotel categories.

Taking a look at the labour statistics, it is obvious from figure 3, that full-time employment holds a much larger percentage, an overall 59.29%, which is much higher than that of part-time employment.

Looking at each hotel category separately, one can form a better picture of the overall hospitality labour situation and at the same time, pin point the differences based on the different category needs.

As it was aforementioned, the largest overall percentage of staff is in the 5 star hotel category (if we compare the percentage of hotels in such category to the percentage of staff), even though these hotels are only 17 out of the total sample. As we drop in category, the overall number of staff decreases. This is understandable because one of the main differences between hotel categories is customer service. In 5 and 4 star categories (De Lux and A) the hotels are usually larger in size and require better services than those hotels in categories B and C (3 and 2 stars).

As it has already been mentioned, according to the Greek National Action Plan for Employment (2004), part-time work has had its ups and downs, though still remains notably low, with a total of 2,3%. However, this does not seem to be the case for the hospitality industry, as the research findings show that part-time employment has an overall 6.92% of the total employment. Even though this is a high percentage for the Greek labour market, it is still low compared to other European countries. If one looks at the different categories, it is clear that 5 star category has the highest percentage of this flexible type of employment (11.02%), where all the rest vary slightly between 6.10-8.33%.

## **FEMALE EMPLOYEES IN THE HOSPITALITY SECTOR**

The issue of the differences between the sexes as far as both employment and unemployment rates are concerned in Greece, has been covered at the theoretical background of this paper. It has shown that even though Greece holds a very high percentage in these differences, in part-time employment females rate higher than males. This is also the case in the hospitality sector (figure 4).

As is seen from figure 4, female employment is slightly higher in both cases examined. This is a rather interesting finding for the hospitality industry sector, taking into account the fact that, in most cases male employment is higher than female, especially in Greece. To be more specific, in the last quarterly of year 2005 in Greece, the percentage which shows the difference between male and female of the overall workforce, is a large 22% (male = 64,7% and female=42.3%) (Greek Labour Statistics, 2005). Therefore, it is obvious that females are preferred for employment in the hospitality sector. If a connection is made with the results shown on the previous section, according to which female part-time employment holds a large overall 4.1% (table 2), it leads to the conclusion that this could be the reason why female employees are more to male in the specific sector. In paternalistic societies, such as Greece, women tend to have more family responsibilities, so flexibility in employment is a labour situation that could be preferred by women. However, this is only an explanation if we look at the actual employee's point of view. This research is based on findings from the employer's point of view and in the question "what would be the reasons that threaten the hiring of female employees?" a large 65.79% stated that they have no reason for not hiring female employees.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

In this paper an attempt was made to discover the current situation of part-time employment in the hospitality sector and also to find out the extent to which females play an active role in the specific sector. The findings presented are only the preliminary of the research conducted.

It is evident from the research analysis that part-time employment is used in the hospitality sector, throughout all hotel categories. The overall percentage of this type of flexible employment method is 6.92%, which is higher than the overall percentage of part-time work in Greece. This is probably due to the fact that the nature of work in the hospitality sector is such that requires long hours of operation (which means longer shifts). This creates the need for more employees (semi-skilled or unskilled) and the creation of a flexible rotation system amongst the staff, to help in providing the best possible service, according to each hotel's ranking. It is indeed the case that part-time flexible employment is used in lower hierarchical positions that require semi or unskilled workers.

As far as the female workforce is concerned, the percentage in both full and part-time work is higher than that of male. This poses a great deal of interest, as the overall female workforce in Greece is lower to the male, as shown earlier in the study. This is of great importance, because we can see that Hospitality is a sector that is not male dominated. It has already been mentioned previously, in the theoretical background section, that in a paternalistic society, such as the Greek, females play a more active role at home, taking care of the family (even though this is slowly changing), which means that the types of jobs that they might be interested

in is part-time. This could explain the higher rates of females in part-time employment in the hospitality industry.

Finally, the responses of the hotel representatives as to their views on the extent of the development of flexible forms of employment (FFE) in Greece are provided in figure 5. A 12.60% hold the belief that FFE have been developed very much. On the other hand, an 18.40% state that FFE have not been developed in Greece at all and a very large 69% share the view that FFE have only been developed a little. The truth is that this is a new form (legally) of employment for Greece and does not hold a large percentage of the overall labour situation (Greek Labour Statistics, 2005). However, the situation in the hospitality industry seems to be different, as it has already been supported from the field data presented in this paper.



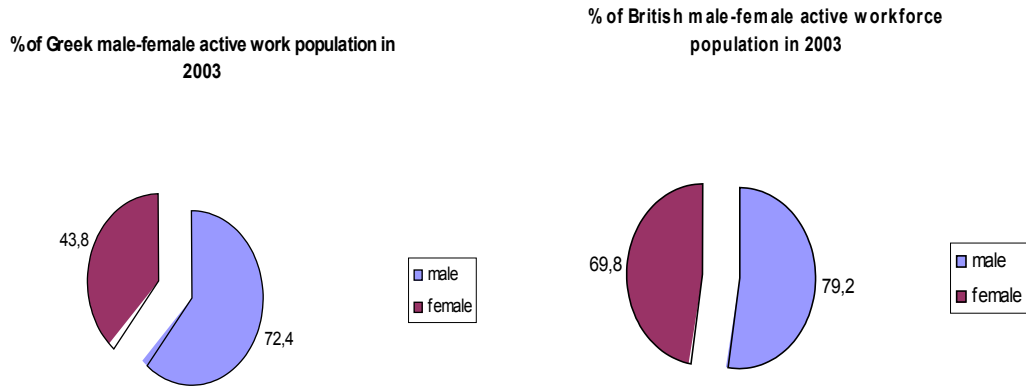
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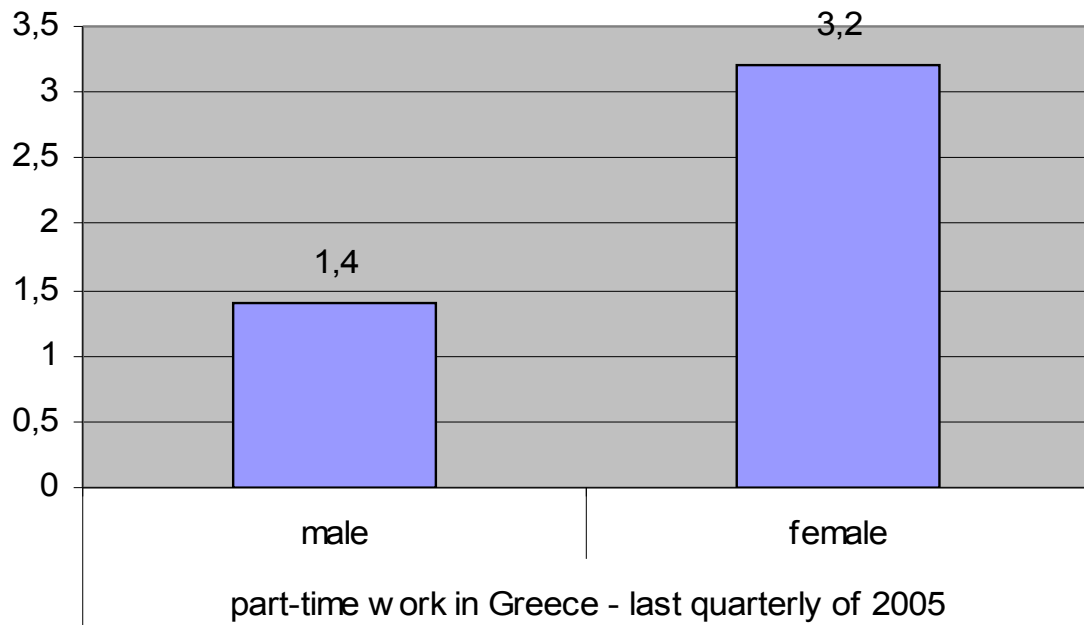
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**APPENDICES**

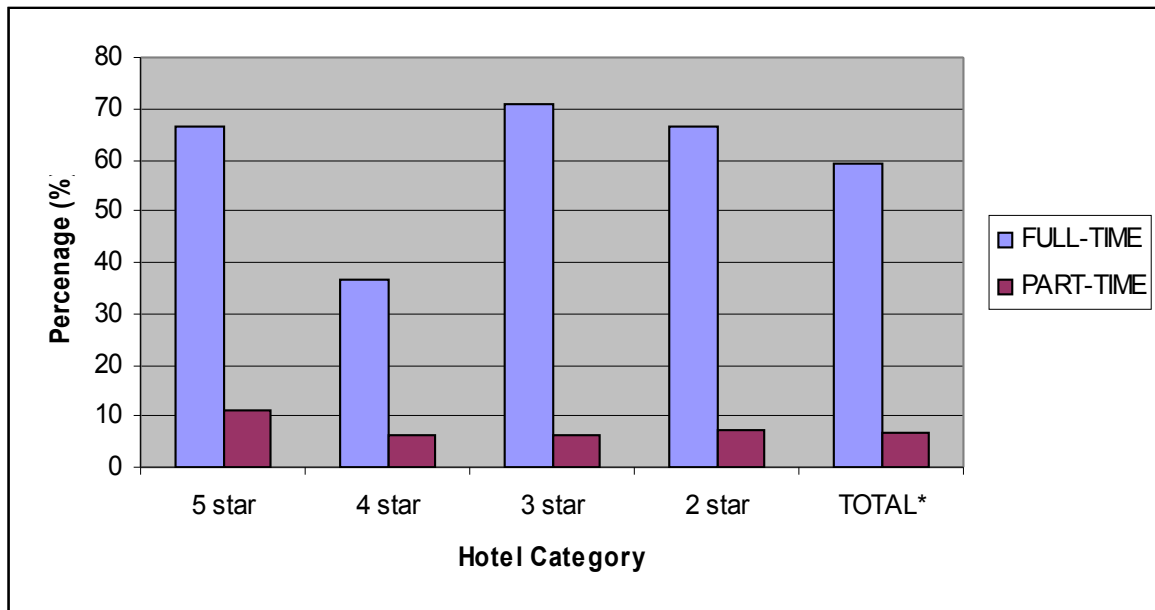
**Figure 1**  
**Comparison of male-female workforce - Greece vs. U.K.**



**Figure 2**  
**Part-time Employment in Greece**

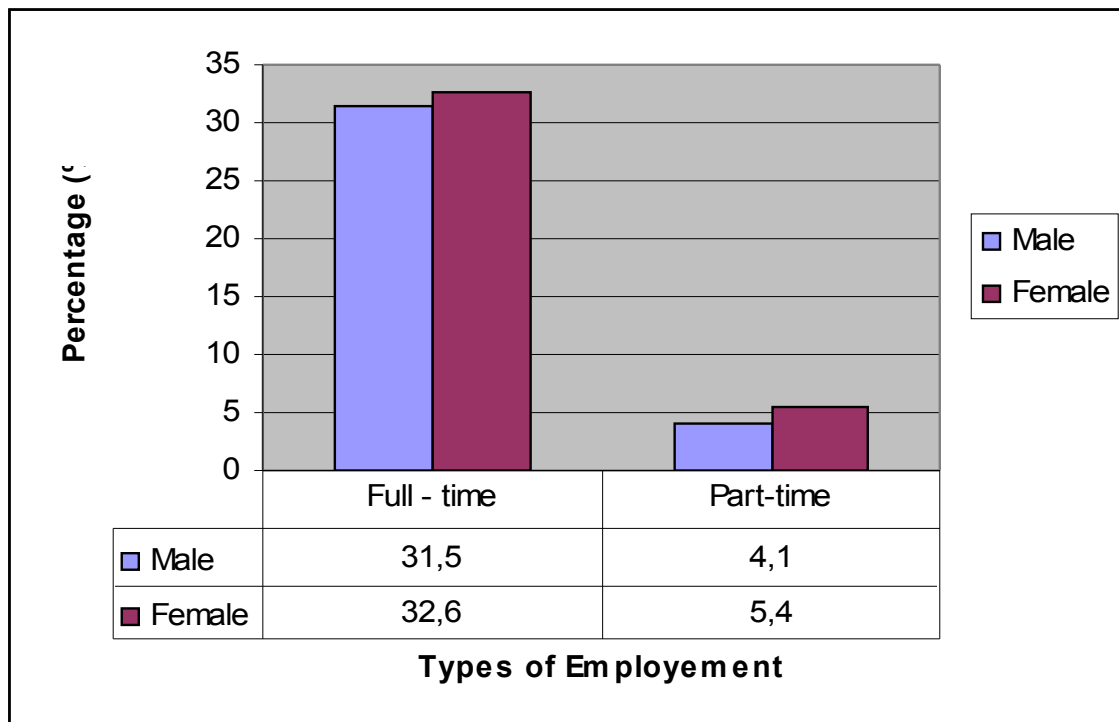


**Figure 3**  
**Part-time Employment in the Hospitality Industry**

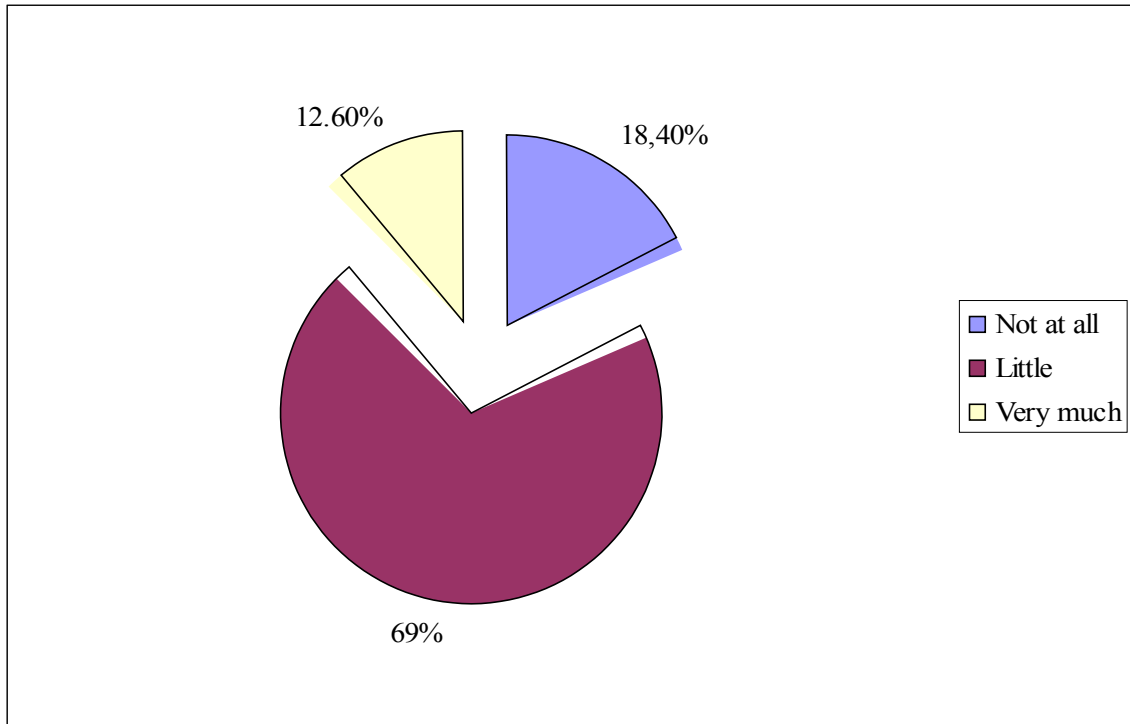


\* The present data of the sample under investigation has been adjusted according to the overall hotel capacity in Greece.

**Figure 4**  
**Male/Female Employment**



**Figure 5**  
**Views of the Respondents on the Current Situation of Flexible Forms of Employment**



**Table 1**  
**SAMPLE HOTEL DATA IN RELATION TO TOTAL HOTEL CAPACITY**

HOTEL CATEGORY	SAMPLE			HOTEL CAPACITY IN GREECE			% OF SAMPLE
	HOTELS	BEDS	STAFF	OVERALL HOTEL CAPACITY	BEDS	% OF EACH HOTEL CATEGORY	% OF SAMPLE IN RELATION TO TOTAL CAPACITY
5 star	17	7158	2803	139	51967	8.54%	13.77%
4 star	39	11539	2401	896	168940	27.76%	6.83%
3 star	47	5855	1066	1660	157495	25.87%	3.71%
2 star	28	2112	286	4473	230281	37.83%	0.91%
TOTAL	131	26664	6556	7168	608683	100%	4.38%

(Source: [www.statistics.gr](http://www.statistics.gr) )

**Table 2**  
**Current Labour Market Situation in the Hospitality Industry by Hotel**  
**Category (in Percentage)**

HOTEL CATEGORY	HOTELS	BEDS	STAFF	FULL-TIME	PART-TIME
5 star	12.98	26.85	42.76	66,61	11.02
4 star	29.77	43.28	36.62	36.40	6.33
3 star	35.88	21.96	16.26	71.01	6.10
2 star	21.37	7.92	4.36	66.43	6.99
<b>TOTAL*</b>				<b>59.29</b>	<b>6.92</b>

*\* The present data of the sample under investigation has been adjusted according to the overall hotel capacity in Greece.*