# Data Appendix
# Survey of Research Associate Experiences in Economics and Development in India

Prashansa Srivastava Anahita Karandikar

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# 1 Background

Research Associate (RA)[1] experiences have become increasingly common and sought out. They are often seen as gateways to PhD or Master's programs. However, information on these opportunities - how to get them and what they entail - is typically passed only through informal networks. With the aim of making information on RA roles more transparent and accessible, we surveyed 156 current and former RAs working in the economics or development sector in India. We ask respondents about their demographic and academic background, the application process they followed, tasks undertaken as a part of the role, day-to-day work environment and access to opportunities for personal development.

# 2 Survey Methodology

The survey[2] was conducted from 24th January 2021 to 21st February 2021. We shared the survey over email, WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn using our personal accounts. Since we have used our personal networks to reach survey participants, the sample is not representative. However, our survey results represent Research Associates and Research Assistants from 56 different academic and non academic institutions in India.

A number of questions were optional for participants to answer. Table 1 provides the percent of non-missing responses in our final sample for each optional question.]We received a total of 161 responses. We limited our analytical sample to respondents in RA positions in the economics or development sector in India to retain a final sample of 156.

A number of questions were optional for participants to answer. Table 1 provides the percent of non-missing responses in our final sample for each optional question.

Table 1: Percent Non-Missing for Optional Questions

| Variable | Non Missing |
|---|---|
| Caste | 99.36% |
| Religion | 97.44% |
| Name of Institution | 91.03% |
| Name of program, group or lab | 49.36% |
| Leaving date of position | 78.21% |
| Name of bachelor's institution | 90.38% |
| Name of master's institute | 70.51% |
| Name of post graduate diploma/fellowship institute | 12.82% |
| Starting date of application process | 78.21% |
| Ending date of application process | 79.49% |
| Monthly Salary | 68.59% |

**Note:** Percents for name of master's institution and name of post graduate diploma/fellowship institute are conditional on respondents answering that they hold a master's degree and that they hold a post graduate diploma/fellowship, respectively.

[1] We use Research Associate to denote both Associate and Assistant roles

[2] The instrument was adapted from the Survey of Pre-Doctoral Research Experiences in Economics by Zhong Huang, Pauline Liang and Dominic Russel.

# 3 Results

We present results for each question in the survey module in the sections below. Where relevant, results are presented by category, such as current/former RAs or academic/non-academic institution. For questions where multiple responses could be selected, denoted by '*(Select all that apply)*', bar heights represent the share of respondents that selected each option. The remaining of this data appendix will consist of our survey instrument as well as tabulations or summary statistics for every close-ended question.

## 3.1 Demographic Background

### 3.1.1 Are you a citizen/permanent resident of India?

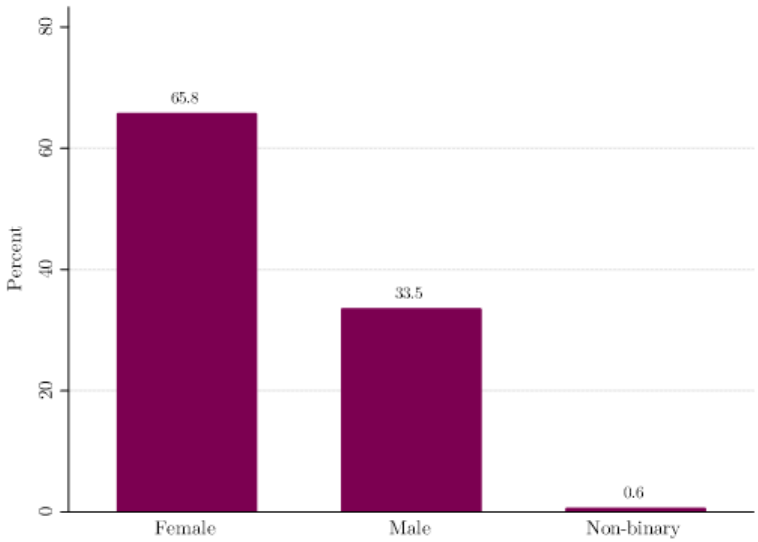
- Yes
- No

Table 2: Citizenship

| | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| No | 7 | 4.49 |
| Yes | 149 | 95.51 |
| Total | 156 | 100.00 |

### 3.1.2 With which gender do you most identify?

- Male
- Female
- Non binary
- Other




*(N = 155)*

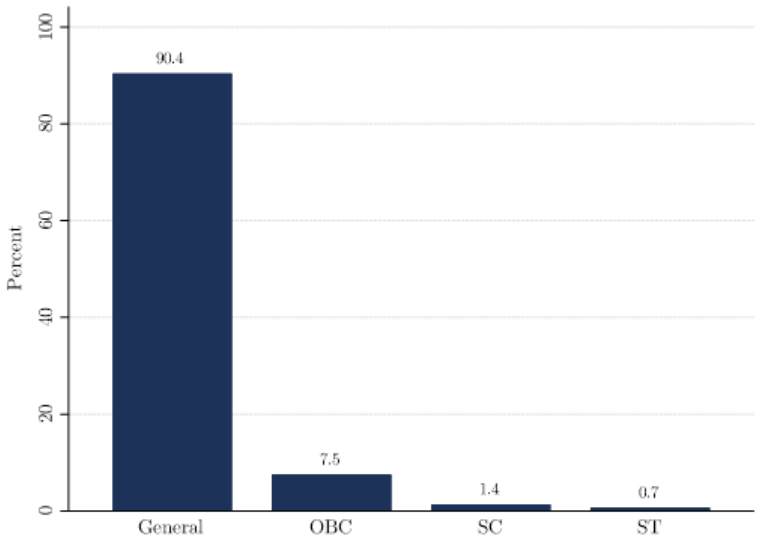
Table 3

| | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Female | 102 | 65.81 |
| Male | 52 | 33.55 |
| Non-binary | 1 | 0.65 |
| Total | 155 | 100.00 |

### 3.1.3 What is your caste category?

*(Optional)*

- SC
- ST
- OBC
- General
- Do not know
- Prefer not to say




*(N = 146)*

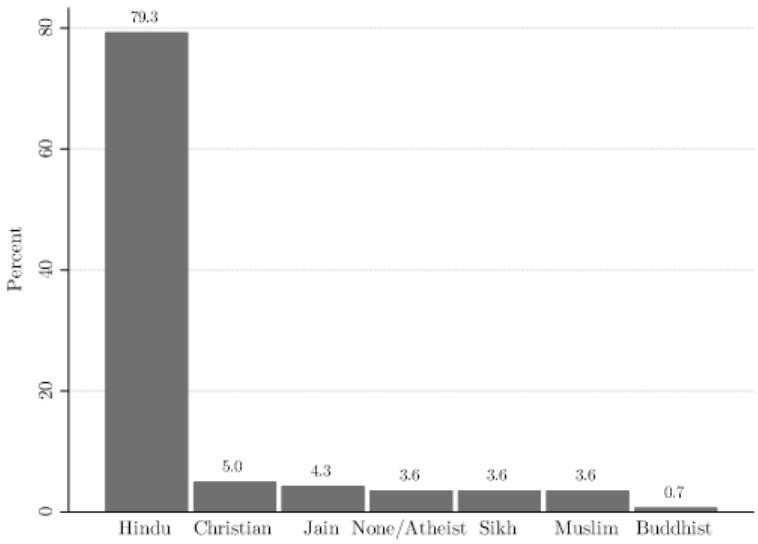
Table 4

| | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| SC | 2 | 1.37 |
| ST | 1 | 0.68 |
| OBC | 11 | 7.53 |
| General | 132 | 90.41 |
| Total | 146 | 100.00 |

### 3.1.4 What is your religion?

*(Optional)*

- Hindu
- Muslim
- Christian
- Sikh
- Adivasi/Sarna (indegenious faith)
- Other
- Do not know
- Prefer not to say




*(N = 140)*

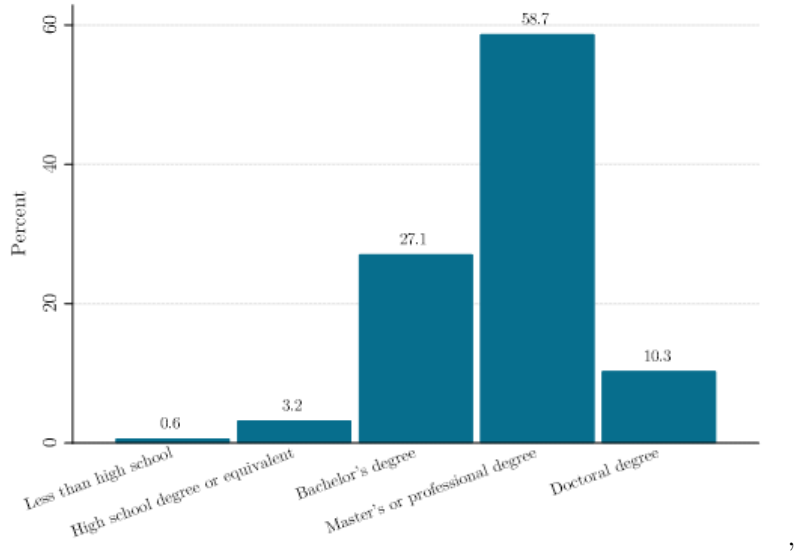
Table 5

| | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Hindu | 111 | 79.29 |
| Muslim | 5 | 3.57 |
| Christian | 7 | 5.00 |
| Sikh | 5 | 3.57 |
| Jain | 6 | 4.29 |
| Buddhist | 1 | 0.71 |
| None/Atheist | 5 | 3.57 |
| Total | 140 | 100.00 |

### 3.1.5 What is the highest level of schooling completed by your parents or guardians?

- Less than a high school degree

- High school degree or equivalent
- Associate's degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's or professional graduate degree (e.g., MD, MBA, JD)
- Doctoral degree




,

*(N = 155)*

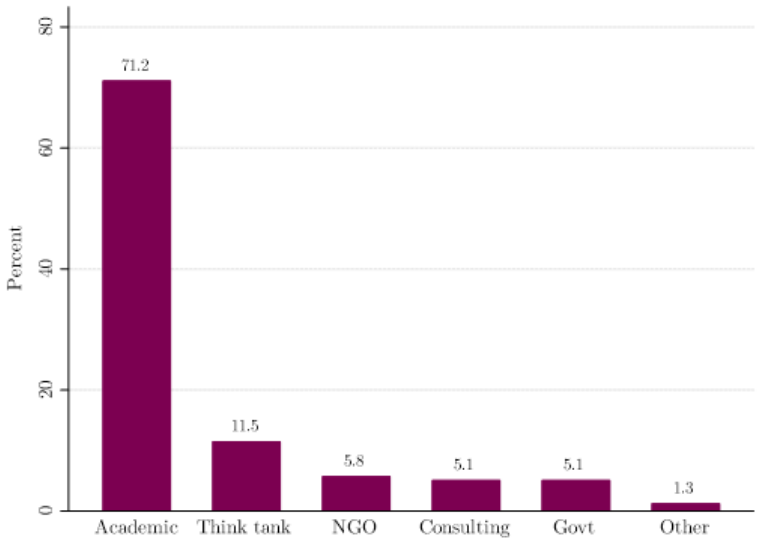
## 3.2 Characteristics of Current Institution

**Please tell us about the institution for your current position. If you are a former RA, please answer all questions referring to current position as if you were still in your most recent RA position.**

### 3.2.1 What is the type of institution affiliated with your current position?

- Academic (e.g., a university or research lab such as JPAL, GBL, IFMR LEAD)
- Government agency (e.g., RBI, NITI AYOG)
- Economic consulting firm (e.g., PwC, Dalberg, Bain  Company)
- Think tank (e.g. RAND, Brookings, CPR, etc.)
- NGO (e.g. Pratham, SEWA Bharat etc.)
- Other

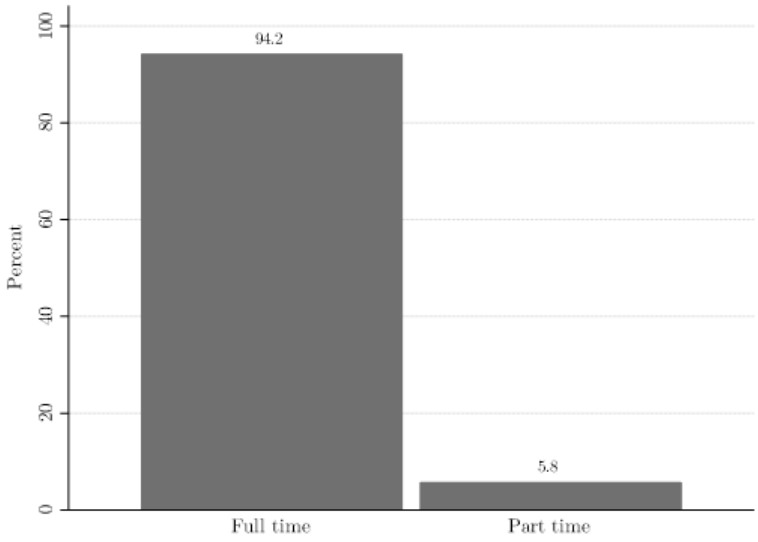
*From here on, non-academic has been classified as Economic consulting firm, Think tank, NGO and Other.*




*(N = 156)*

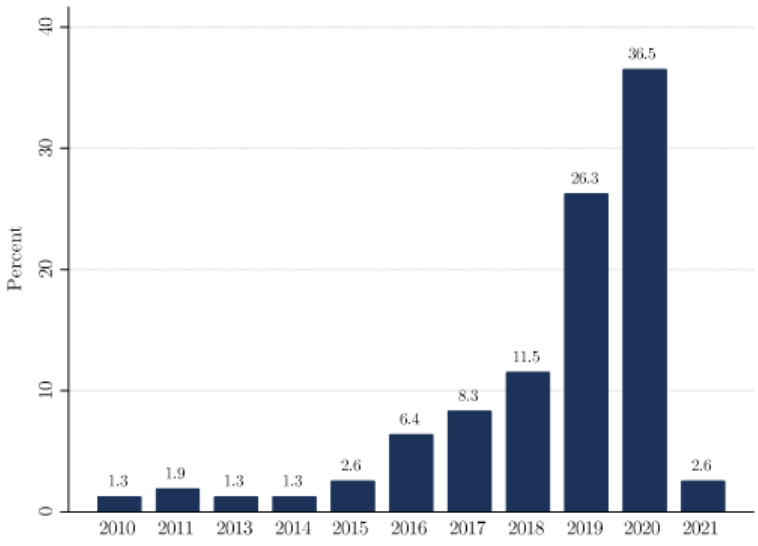
### 3.2.2 Is your current position part-time or full-time?

- Full time
- Part time




*(N = 156)*

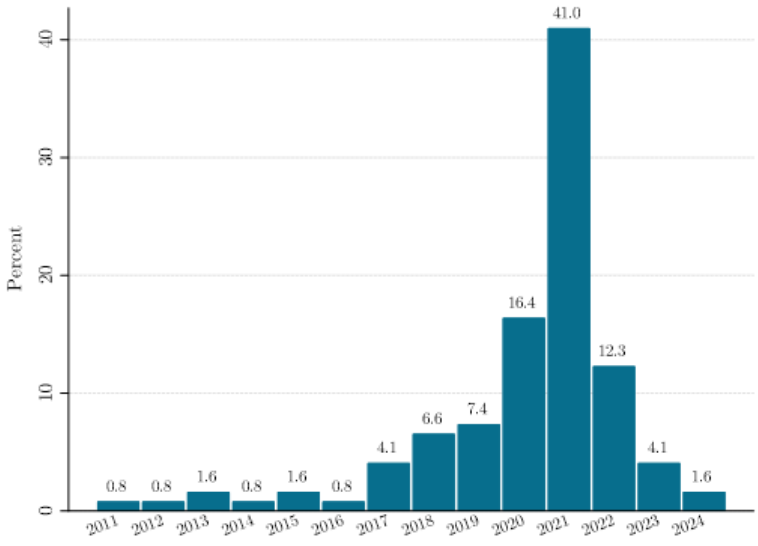
### 3.2.3 When did you start your current position?




*(N = 156)*

### 3.2.4 And when do you plan to leave/when did you leave?

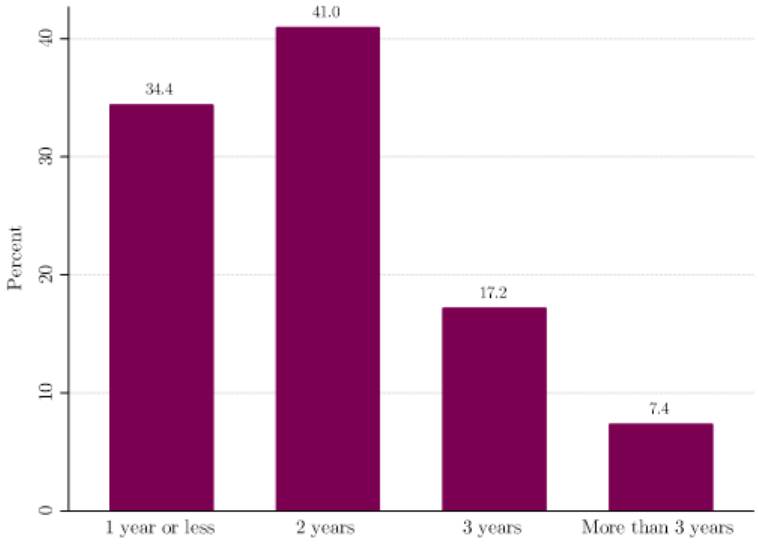
*(Optional)*




*(N = 122)*

### 3.2.5 Duration of the RA role

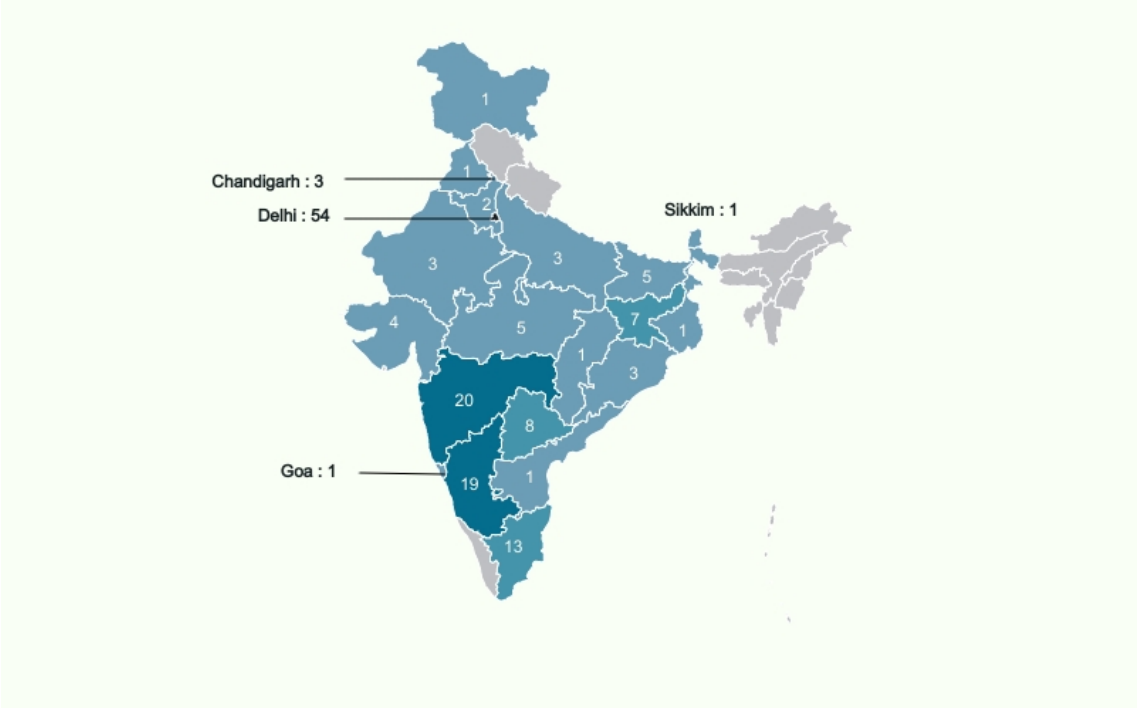
*(calculated from responses to questions about start date and end date)*




*(N = 122)*

### 3.2.6 What is your primary project/work location?

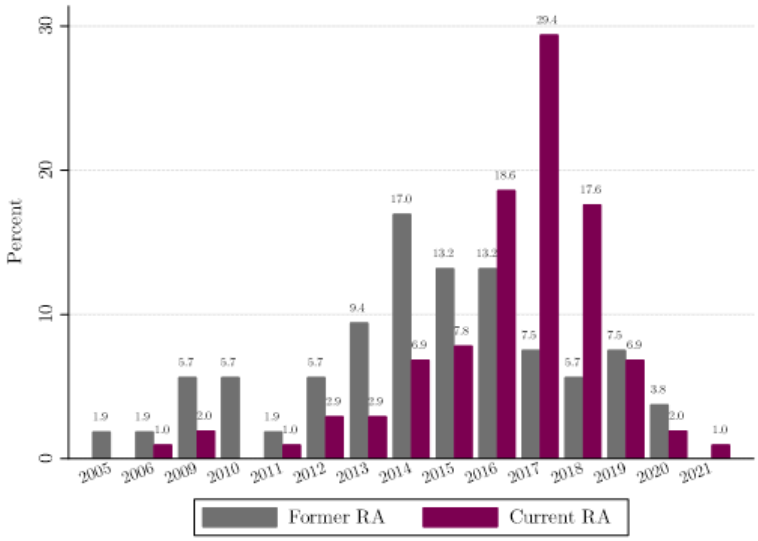
- Selecting from a list of states in India




*(N = 156)*

## 3.3 Academic Background

### 3.3.1 In which year did you receive your Bachelor's degree?



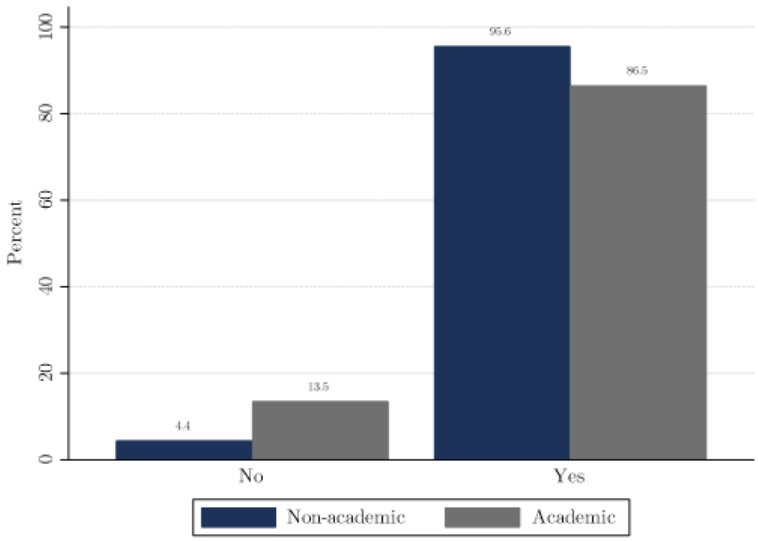

*(N (Former RA) = 53 ; N (Current RA) = 102)*

Table 6

| | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| 2005 | 1 | 0.65 |
| 2006 | 2 | 1.29 |
| 2009 | 5 | 3.23 |
| 2010 | 3 | 1.94 |
| 2011 | 2 | 1.29 |
| 2012 | 6 | 3.87 |
| 2013 | 8 | 5.16 |
| 2014 | 16 | 10.32 |
| 2015 | 15 | 9.68 |
| 2016 | 26 | 16.77 |
| 2017 | 34 | 21.94 |
| 2018 | 21 | 13.55 |
| 2019 | 11 | 7.10 |
| 2020 | 4 | 2.58 |
| 2021 | 1 | 0.65 |
| Total | 155 | 100.00 |

### 3.3.2 Did you complete your undergraduate studies in India?

- Yes
- No




*(N (Non-Academic) = 45 ; N (Academic) = 111)*

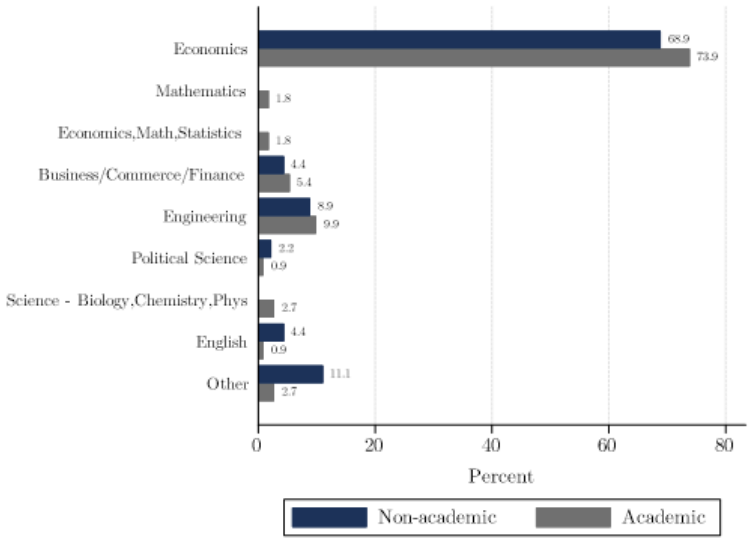
Table 7

| | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| No | 17 | 10.90 |
| Yes | 139 | 89.10 |
| Total | 156 | 100.00 |

### 3.3.3 What is your undergraduate major/concentration?

- Economics
- Mathematics
- Statistics
- Computer
- Science (Biology, Physics, Chemistry, etc.)
- Engineering
- Commerce
- Psychology
- Sociology
- Philosophy
- History
- Political Science
- Law
- Geography
- English
- Other foreign languages

- Indian languages
- Other



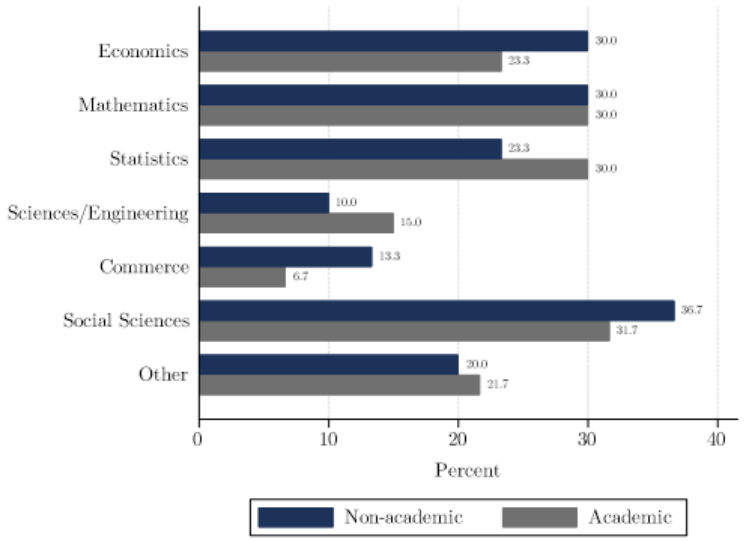

*(N (Non-Academic) = 45 ; N (Academic) = 111)*

### 3.3.4 What is your/are your undergraduate minor(s)?

*(Select all that apply)*

- Do not have a minor/Not Applicable
- Economics
- Mathematics
- Statistics
- Computer
- Science (Biology, Physics, Chemistry, etc.)
- Engineering
- Commerce
- Psychology
- Sociology
- Philosophy
- History
- Political Science
- Law
- Geography
- English
- Other foreign languages

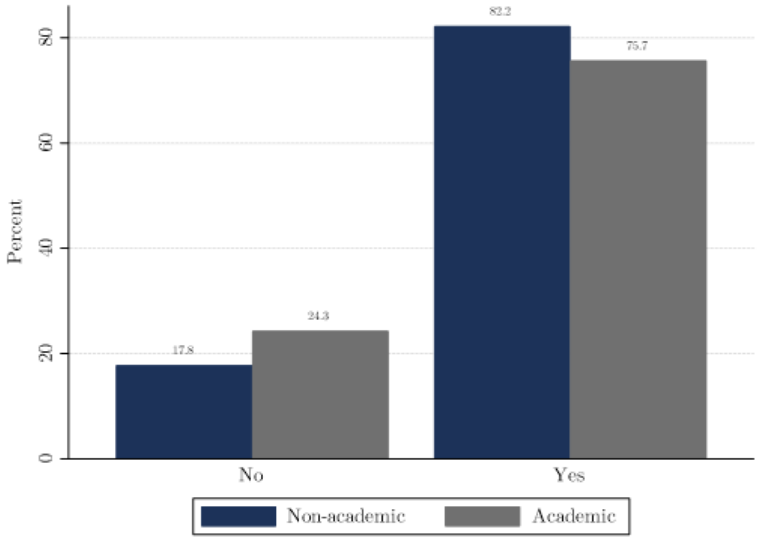
- Indian languages
- Other




*(N (Non-Academic) = 45 ; N (Academic) = 111)*

### 3.3.5 Do you hold a master's degree?

- Yes
- No



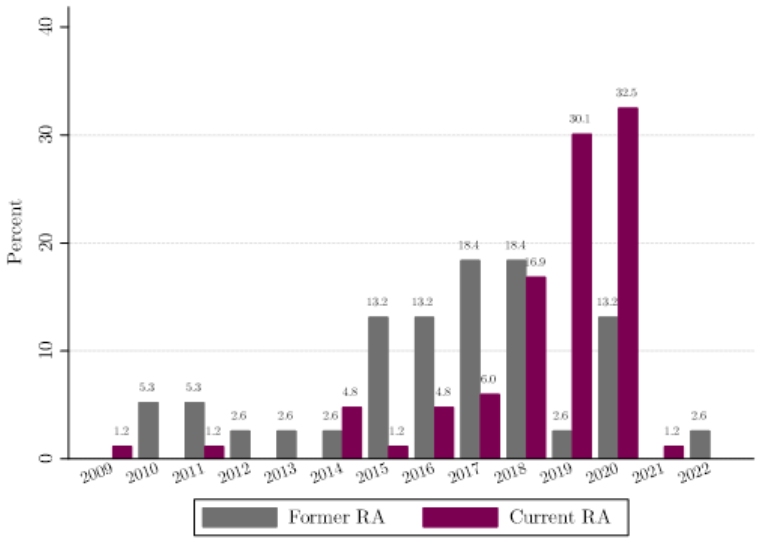

*(N (Non-Academic) = 45 ; N (Academic) = 111)*

Table 8

| | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| No | 35 | 22.44 |
| Yes | 121 | 77.56 |
| Total | 156 | 100.00 |

### 3.3.6 In which year did you receive your master's degree?

*(If respondent has a master's degree)*

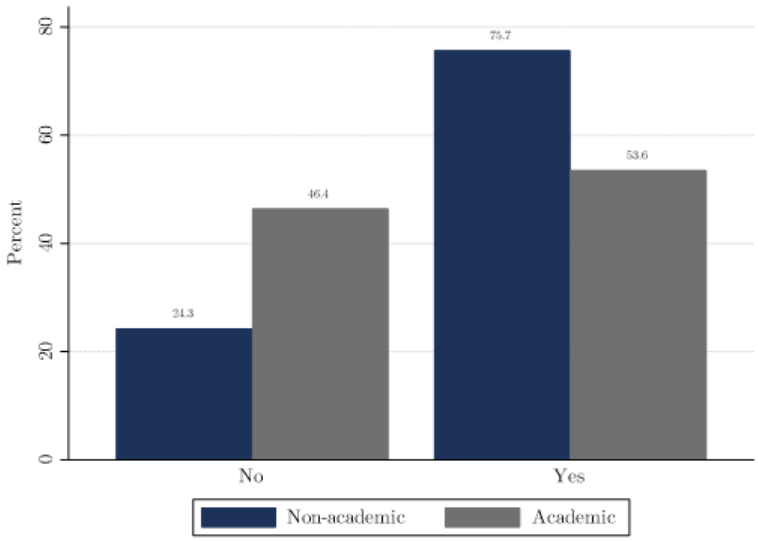



*(N (Former RA) = 38 ; N (Current RA) = 83)*

### 3.3.7 Did you receive your master's degree from India?

*(If respondent has a master's degree)*

- Yes
- No




*(N (Non-Academic) = 37 ; N (Academic) = 84)*

Table 9

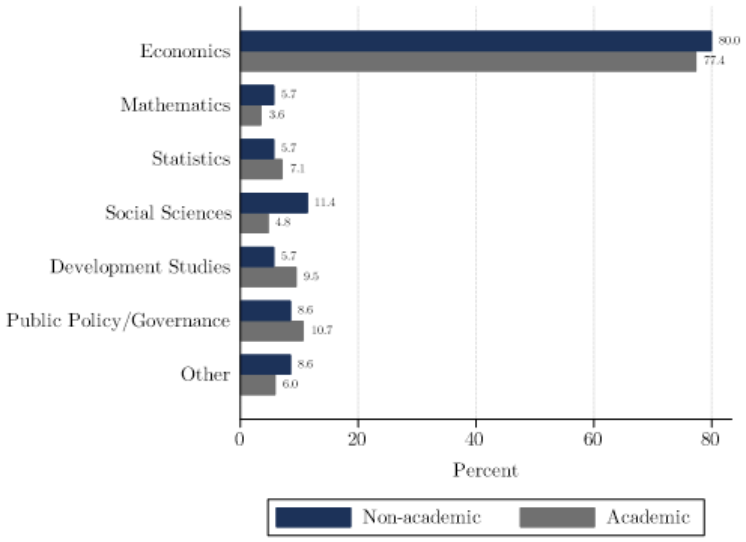
| | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| No | 48 | 39.67 |
| Yes | 73 | 60.33 |
| Total | 121 | 100.00 |

### 3.3.8 Graduate field(s)/subject(s) of study

*(If respondent has a master's degree ; Select all that apply)*

- Economics
- Mathematics
- Statistics
- Computer
- Science (Biology, Physics, Chemistry, etc.)
- Engineering
- Commerce
- Psychology
- Sociology
- Philosophy
- History
- Political Science
- Law
- Geography

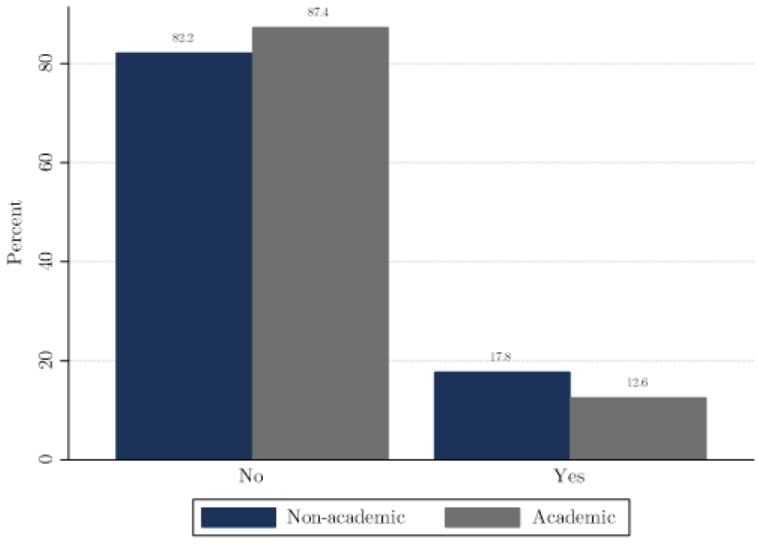
- English
- Other foreign languages
- Indian languages
- Other




*(N (Non-Academic) = 37 ; N (Academic) = 84)*

### 3.3.9 Have you completed a postgraduate diploma/fellowship/certificate course? (For example, Young India Fellowship, Teach For India Fellowship, Levels of Actuarial/CA exams, etc.)

- Yes
- No




*(N (Non-Academic) = 45 ; N (Academic) = 111)*

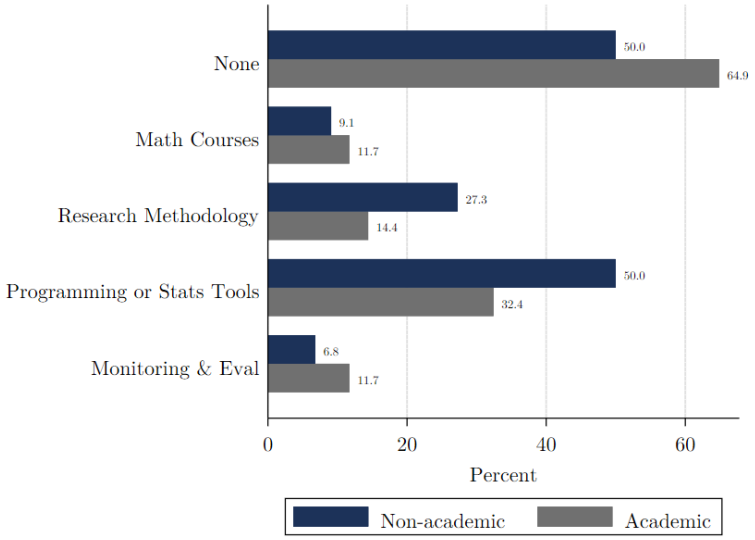
Table 10

| | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| No | 134 | 85.90 |
| Yes | 22 | 14.10 |
| Total | 156 | 100.00 |

### 3.3.10 Have you taken additional courses/classes in any of the following subjects PRIOR to the start of your position (outside of your UG or graduate coursework)?

*(Select all that apply)*

- None
- Additional mathematics courses on Real Analysis, Linear Algebra, Calculus, etc.
- Data analysis /Research methodology
- Programming or statistical tools such as STATA, R, Python, etc.
- Monitoring and evaluation such as MIT's MicroMasters



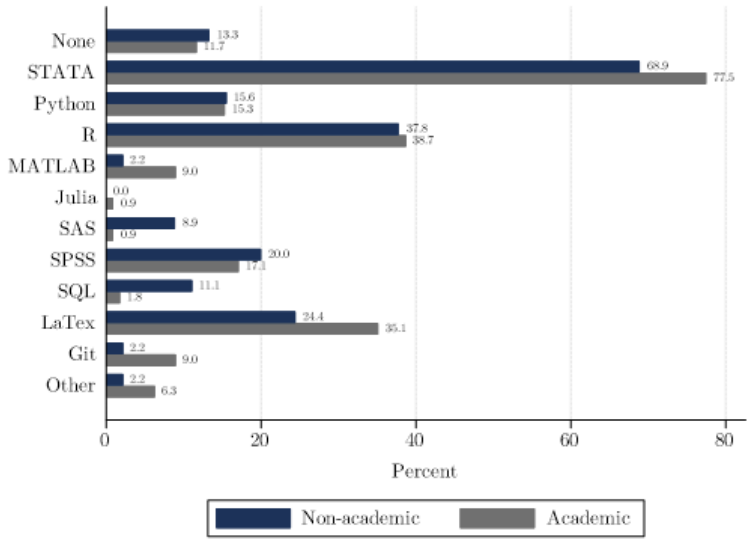

*(N (Non-Academic) = 45 ; N (Academic) = 111)*

### 3.3.11 What programming or statistical tools did you know PRIOR to the start of your position?

*(Select all that apply)*

- None
- Stata
- Python

- R
- MATLAB
- Julia
- SAS
- SPSS
- SQL
- LaTeX
- Git
- Other

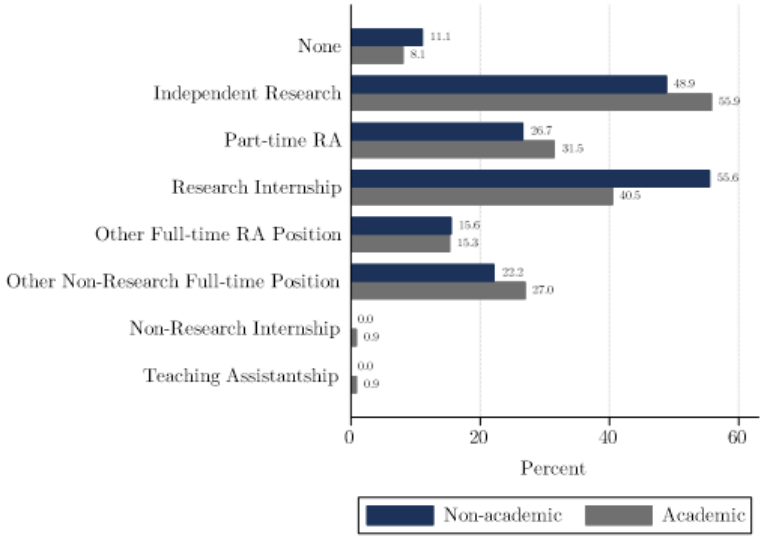



*(N (Non-Academic) = 45 ; N (Academic) = 111)*

### 3.3.12 What research and/or professional experience did you have PRIOR to the start of your position?

*(Select all that apply)*

- None
- Independent research (e.g., honors thesis)
- Part-time undergraduate/graduate RA
- Summer RA internship/training (e.g., Research intern in the same institution)
- Other full-time RA position
- Non-research full-time professional experience (e.g.,position in private sector)




*(N (Non-Academic) = 45 ; N (Academic) = 111)*

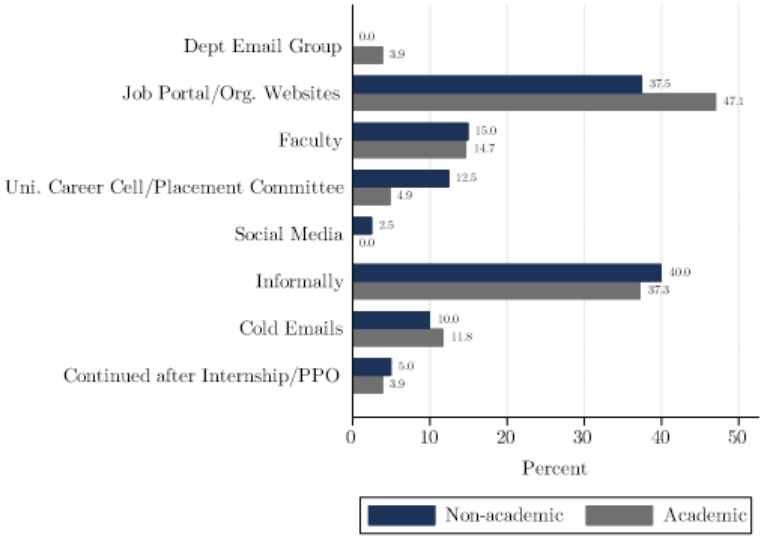
## 3.4 Application Process

**Please tell us about the application process of your current position. If you are a former Research Associate tell us about the application process for your last role.**

### 3.4.1 How did you find out about your current/latest position?

*(Select all that apply)*

- Department email group
- Job portal
- Faculty
- University career center / Placement committee
- Social media (e.g., Twitter)
- Informally (e.g., through friends or acquaintances, by approaching professors)
- Cold emails
- Continued after internship/PPO

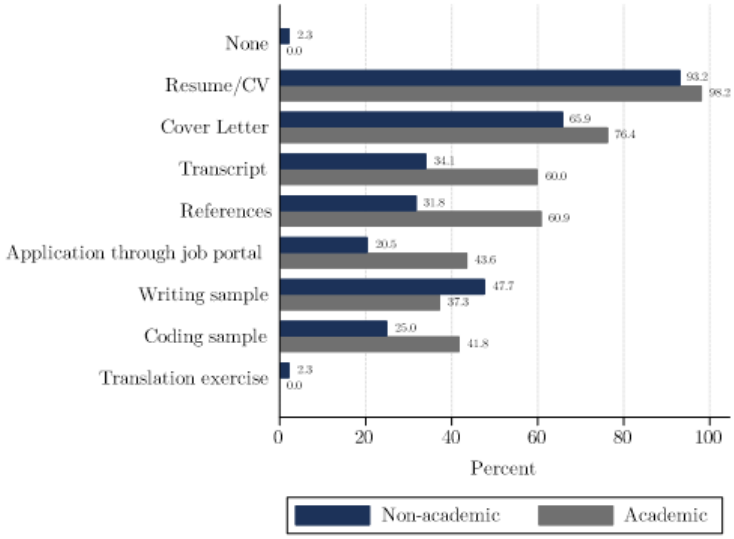



*(N (Non-Academic) = 45 ; N (Academic) = 111)*

### 3.4.2 What materials did the application process for your position require you to submit?

*(Select all that apply)*

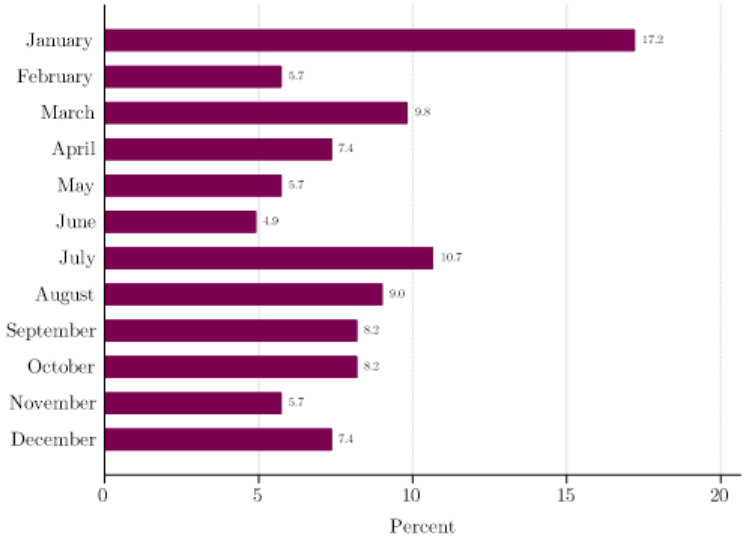
- None
- Resume/CV
- Cover letter
- Transcript
- References
- Application through job portal
- Writing sample
- Coding sample
- Translation sample




*(N (Non-Academic) = 45 ; N (Academic) = 111)*

### 3.4.3 When did you start the application process?

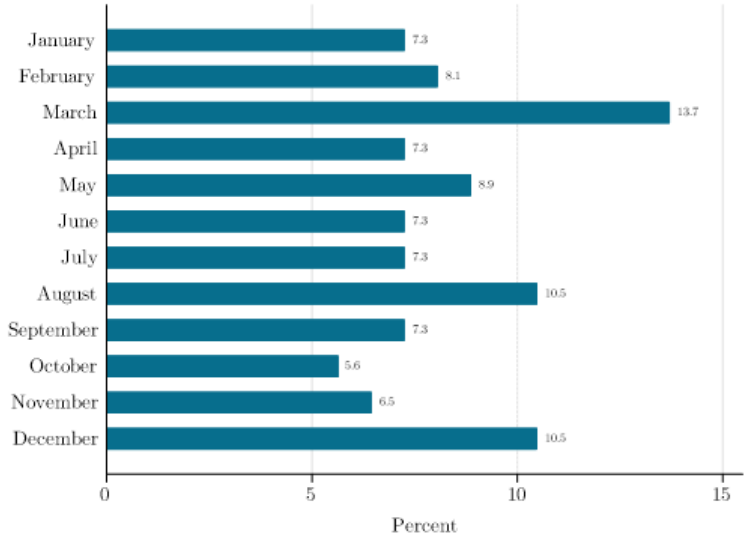
*(Optional)*
- Month when the application process began




*(N = 122)*

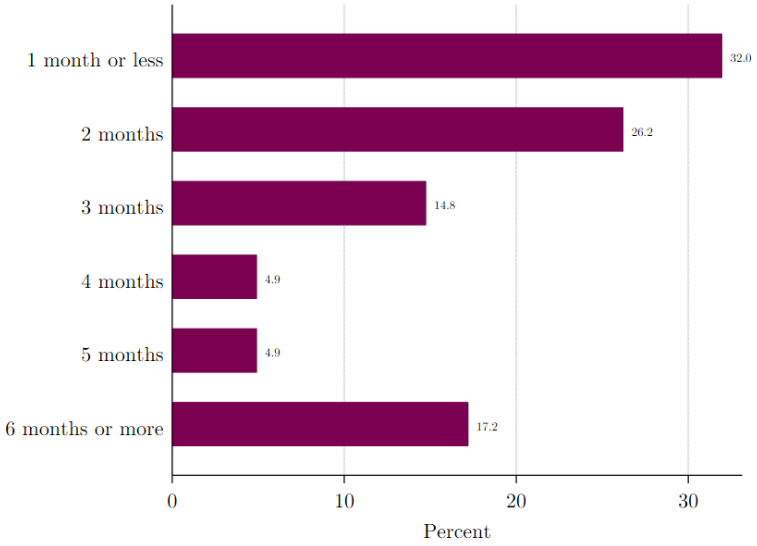
### 3.4.4 When did you receive an offer?

*(Optional)*
- Month when the application process ended




*(N = 124)*

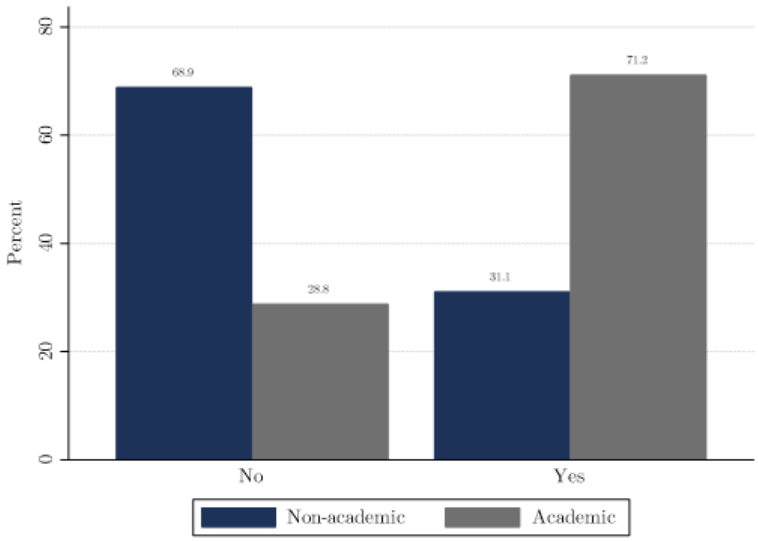
### 3.4.5 Duration of application process (in months)




*(N = 122)*

### 3.4.6 Did the application process for your position include coding exercises?

- Yes
- No




*(N (Non-Academic) = 45 ; N (Academic) = 111)*

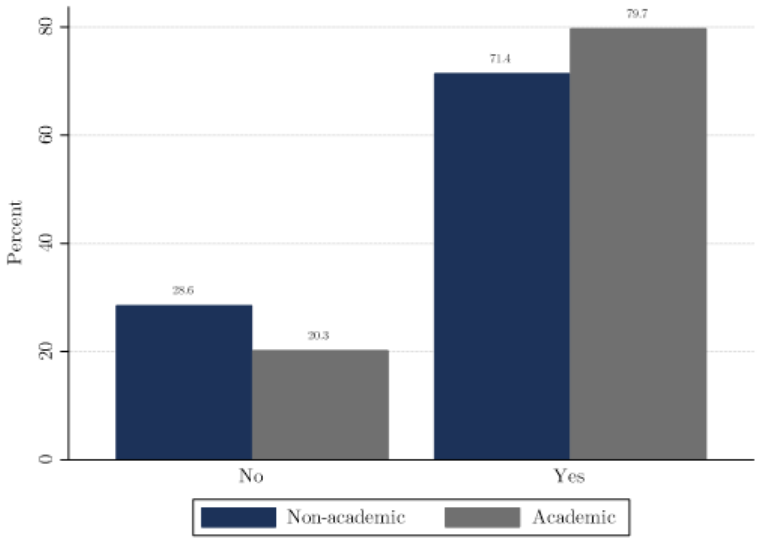
Table 11

| | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| No | 63 | 40.38 |
| Yes | 93 | 59.62 |
| Total | 156 | 100.00 |

### 3.4.7 Did the coding exercise require a specific programming or statistical tool?

*(If application required a coding exercise)*

- Yes
- No




*(N (Non-Academic) = 14 ; N (Academic) = 79)*

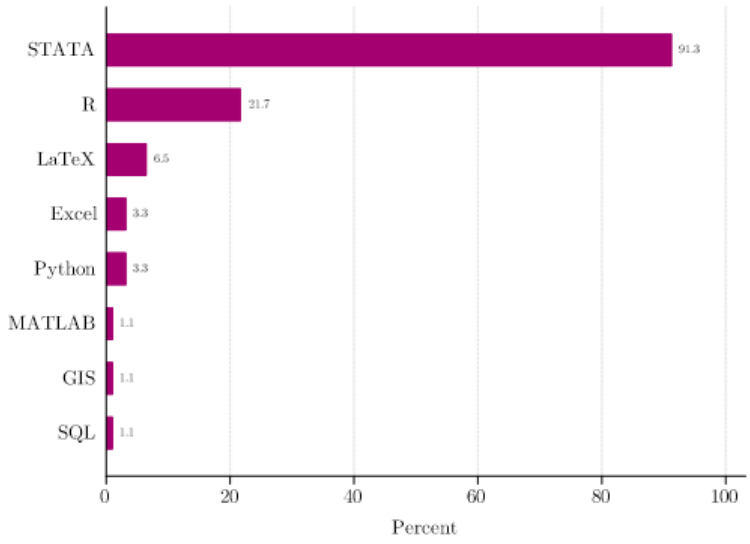
Table 12

| | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| No | 20 | 21.51 |
| Yes | 73 | 78.49 |
| Total | 93 | 100.00 |

### 3.4.8 What programming or statistical tools did you use for your coding exercises?

*(If application required a coding exercise ; Select all that apply )*

- Stata
- R
- LaTeX
- Excel
- Python
- MATLAB
- GIS
- SQL

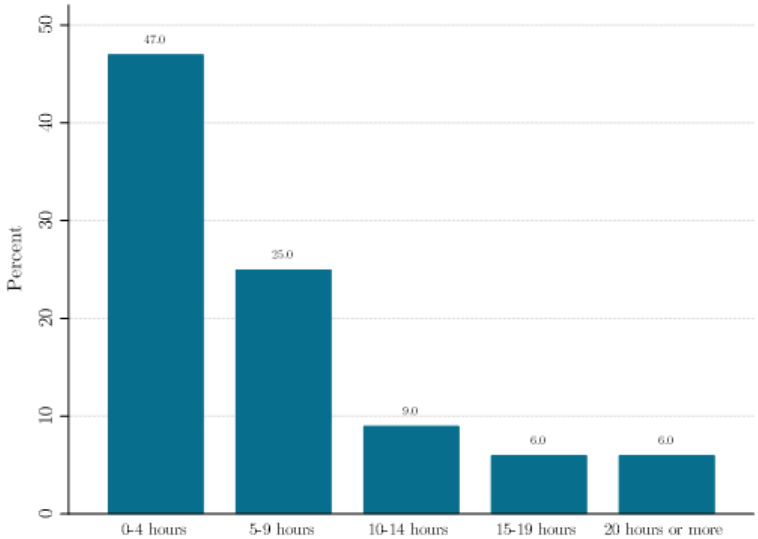



*(N = 93)*

### 3.4.9 How long did the coding exercises cumulatively take?

*(If application required a coding exercise)*

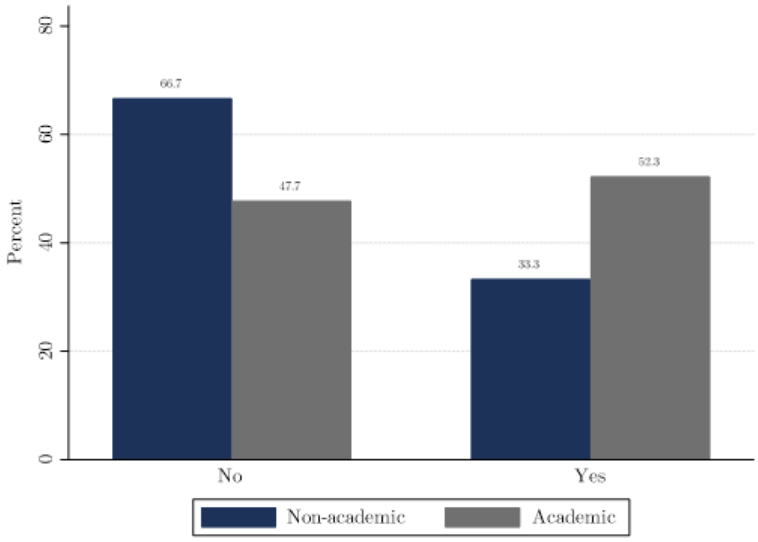
- 0-4 hours
- 5-9 hours
- 10-14 hours
- 15-19 hours
- 20 hours or more




*(N = 93)*

### 3.4.10 Did the position require a written exercise involving solving a case study?

- Yes
- No

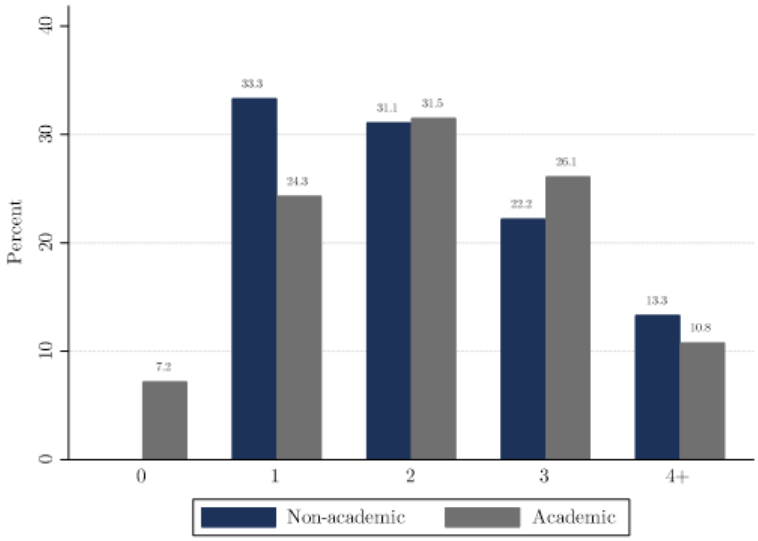



*(N (Non-Academic) = 45 ; N (Academic) = 111)*

Table 13

| | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| No | 83 | 53.21 |
| Yes | 73 | 46.79 |
| Total | 156 | 100.00 |

### 3.4.11 How many interviews did you have to complete as a part of your application process?




*(N (Non-Academic) = 45 ; N (Academic) = 111)*

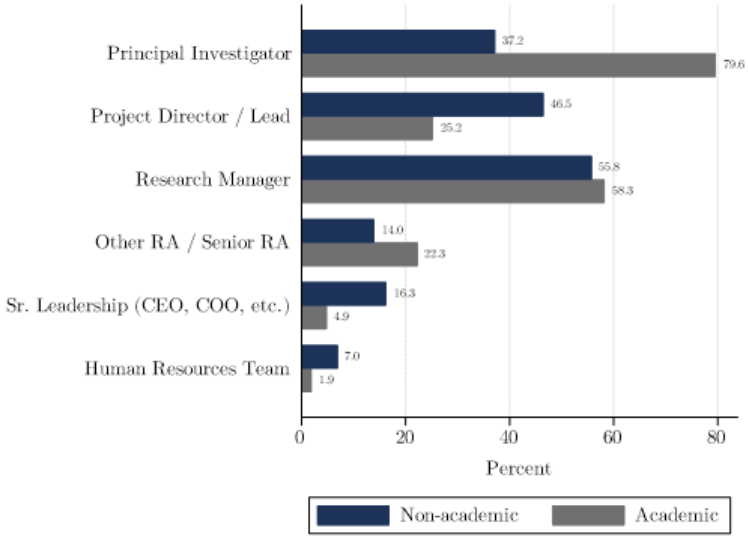
Table 14

| | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | 42 | 28.38 |
| 2 | 49 | 33.11 |
| 3 | 39 | 26.35 |
| 4 | 9 | 6.08 |
| 5 | 7 | 4.73 |
| 7 | 1 | 0.68 |
| Total | 148 | 100.00 |

### 3.4.12 Who interviewed you?

*(If number of interviews is not 'None' ; Select all that apply)*

- PI
- Project Director
- Research Manager
- Other Research Associate/ Senior Research Associate
- Senior Leadership
- Human Resources Team

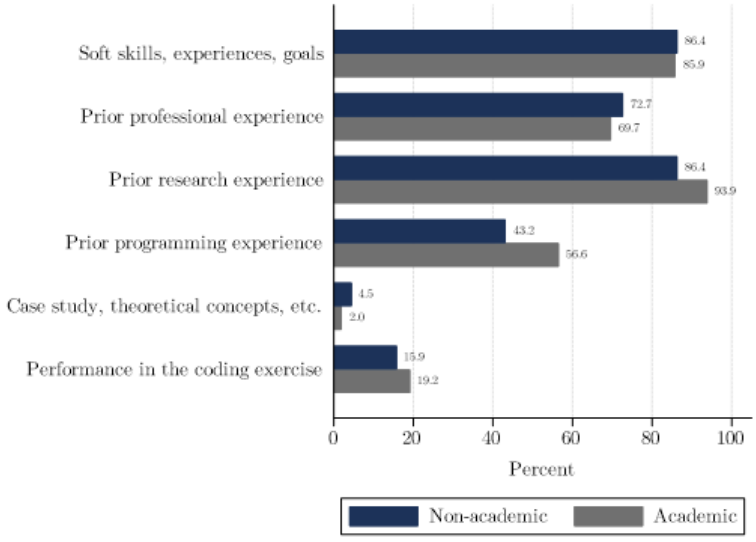



*(N (Non-Academic) = 45 ; N (Academic) = 103)*

### 3.4.13 What types of topics were discussed during your interviews?

*(If number of interviews is not 'None' ; Select all that apply)*

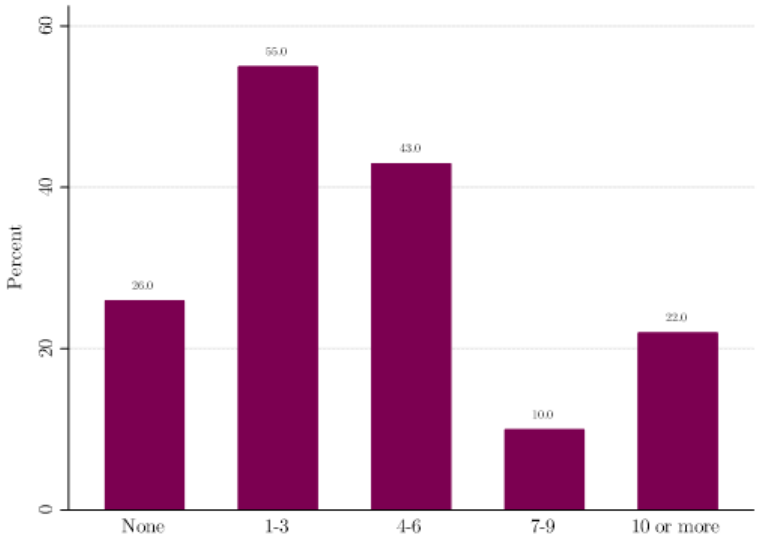
- Questions on soft skills and other personal experiences
- Prior professional experience
- Prior research experience
- Prior programming experience
- Case study questions / Thought experiments
- Performance in the coding exercise




*(N (Non-Academic) = 45 ; N (Academic) = 103)*

### 3.4.14 How many Research Associate positions did you apply to concurrently?

- None
- 1-3
- 4-6
- 7-9
- 10 or more




*(N = 156)*

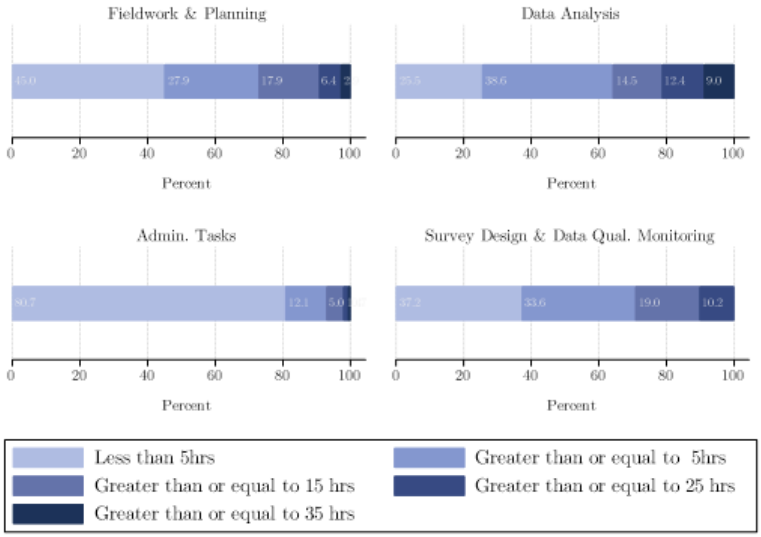
## 3.5 Day-to-Day Work Environment and Experience

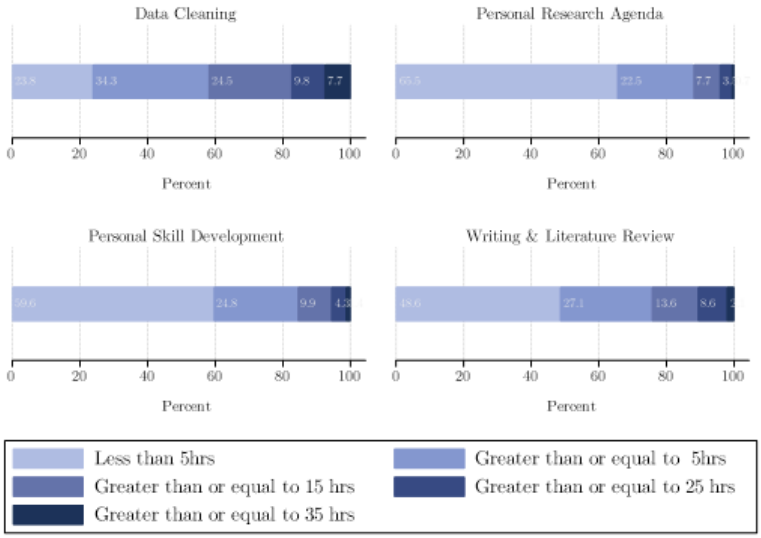
**Please tell us about the day-to-day life at your current position. To the best of your ability, please answer these questions as you would have before any COVID-19 related changes to your work environment.**

### 3.5.1 On average, how many hours per week do you spend on the following activities?

*(Optional)*

- Direct Fieldwork/Field Planning/Training
- Data analysis work
- Administrative tasks such as filing reimbursements, bills, vendor payments
- Questionnaire design/coding up questionnaires/running HFCs- technical tasks related to fieldwork
- Data cleaning
- Personal research agenda
- Personal skill development/Learning goals



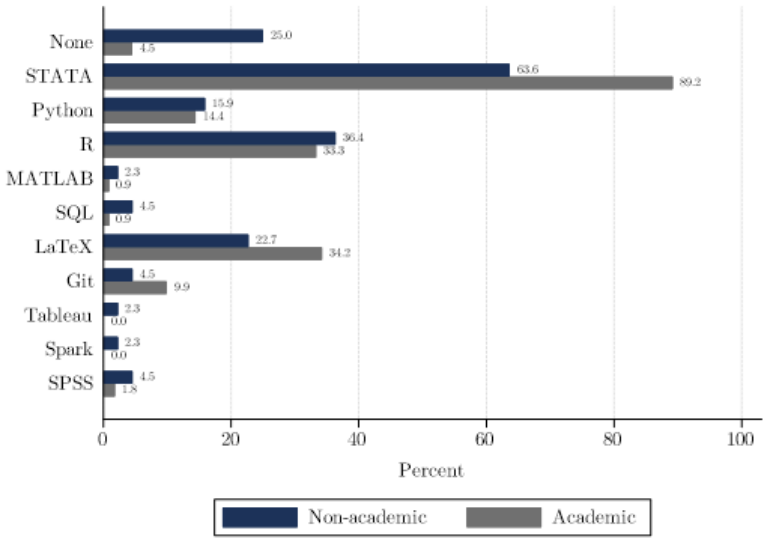




### 3.5.2 Which programming or statistical tools do you use in your position?

*(Select all that apply)*

- None
- Stata
- Python
- R
- MATLAB
- SQL
- LaTeX

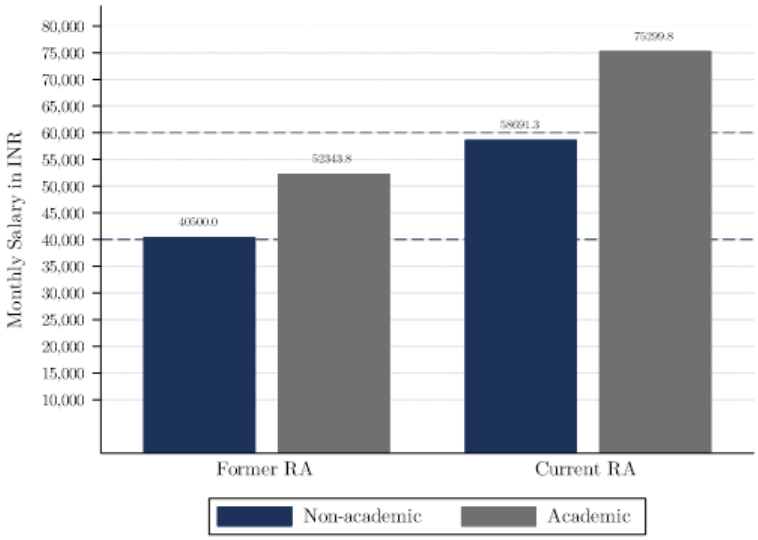
- Git
- Tableau
- Spark
- SPSS




*(N (Non-Academic) = 45 ; N (Academic) = 111)*

### 3.5.3 What is your MONTHLY salary in INR?

*(Optional)*

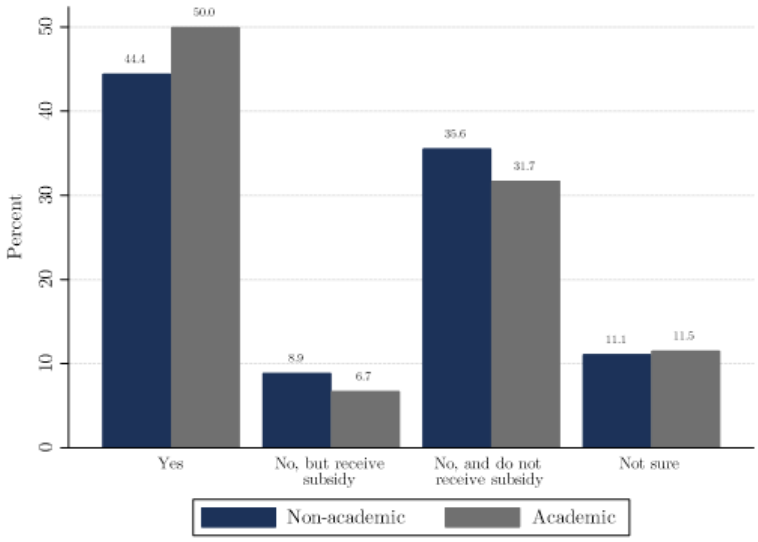



*(N (Non-Academic) = 33 ; N (Academic) = 74)*
*Dark blue dashed line represents median monthly salary for non-academic organizations*
*Grey dashed line represents median monthly salary for academic organizations*

### 3.5.4 Does your position provide free health insurance?

*(Optional)*

- Yes.
- No, but I receive a health insurance subsidy.
- No, and I do not receive a health insurance subsidy.
- Not sure.




*(N (Non-Academic) = 45 ; N (Academic) = 104)*

Table 15

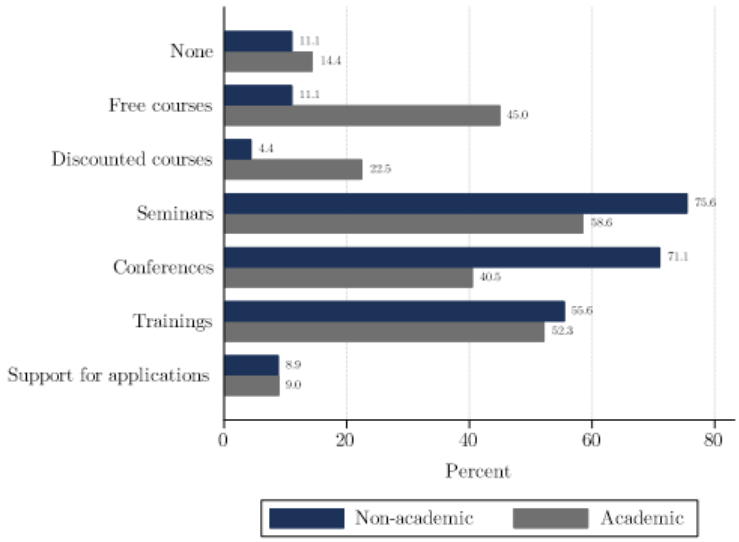
| | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | 72 | 48.32 |
| 2 | 11 | 7.38 |
| 3 | 49 | 32.89 |
| 4 | 17 | 11.41 |
| Total | 149 | 100.00 |

### 3.5.5 Which of the following opportunities for professional development does your institution provide?

*(Select all that apply)*

- None
- Free academic courses
- Discounted academic courses
- Opportunities to attend seminars or guest speaker discussions

- Opportunities to attend conferences
- Training or other skill building opportunities
- Support for applications (e.g., free GRE preparation)



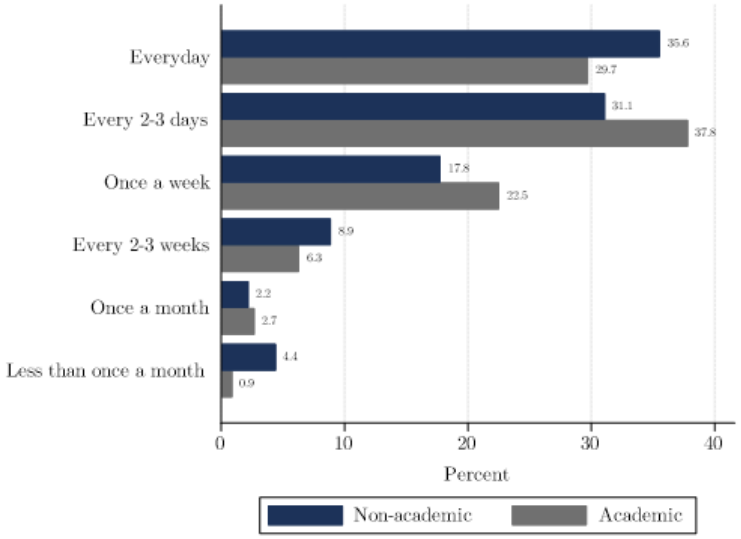

*(N (Non-Academic) = 45 ; N (Academic) = 111)*

## 3.6 Team Interaction and Support for Personal Development

**In this section, we will ask you questions about your principal investigators. Principal investigator (PI) refers to a person who makes the final decision and has ultimate responsibility for a given project (e.g. Professor). This may differ from a supervisor who instructs you on the day-to-day tasks for a given project (e.g. graduate student, senior research assistant). We recognize that this distinction may be difficult to disentangle for your specific situation. Please answer the questions in this section to the best of your abilities.**

### 3.6.1 How frequently do you exchange messages with your PI(s) (e.g. email, Github, Slack)?

- Everyday
- Every 2-3 days
- Once a week
- Every 2-3 weeks
- Once a month
- Less than once a month



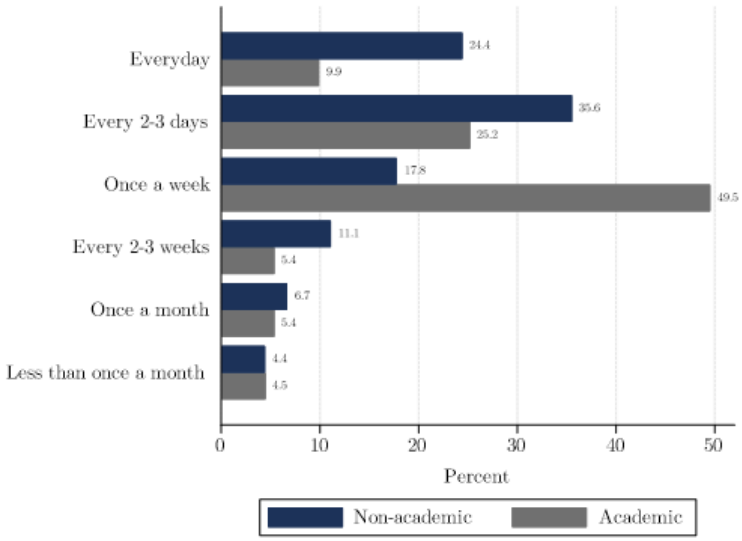

*(N (Non-Academic) = 45 ; N (Academic) = 111)*

Table 16

| | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Everyday | 49 | 31.41 |
| Every 2-3 days | 56 | 35.90 |
| Once a week | 33 | 21.15 |
| Every 2-3 weeks | 11 | 7.05 |
| Once a month | 4 | 2.56 |
| Less than once a month | 3 | 1.92 |
| Total | 156 | 100.00 |

### 3.6.2 How frequently do you have a conversation with your PI(s) (e.g. in-person, phone call)?

- Everyday
- Every 2-3 days
- Once a week
- Every 2-3 weeks
- Once a month
- Less than once a month



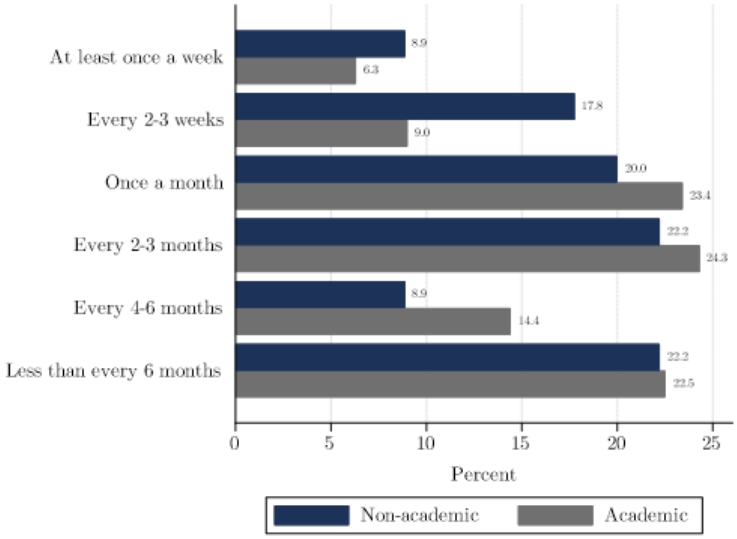

*(N (Non-Academic) = 45 ; N (Academic) = 111)*

Table 17

| | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Everyday | 22 | 14.10 |
| Every 2-3 days | 44 | 28.21 |
| Once a week | 63 | 40.38 |
| Every 2-3 weeks | 11 | 7.05 |
| Once a month | 9 | 5.77 |
| Less than once a month | 7 | 4.49 |
| Total | 156 | 100.00 |

### 3.6.3 How frequently do you discuss your professional development or career with your PI(s)?

- At least once a week
- Every 2-3 weeks
- Once a month
- Every 2-3 months
- Every 4-6 months
- Less than every 6 months



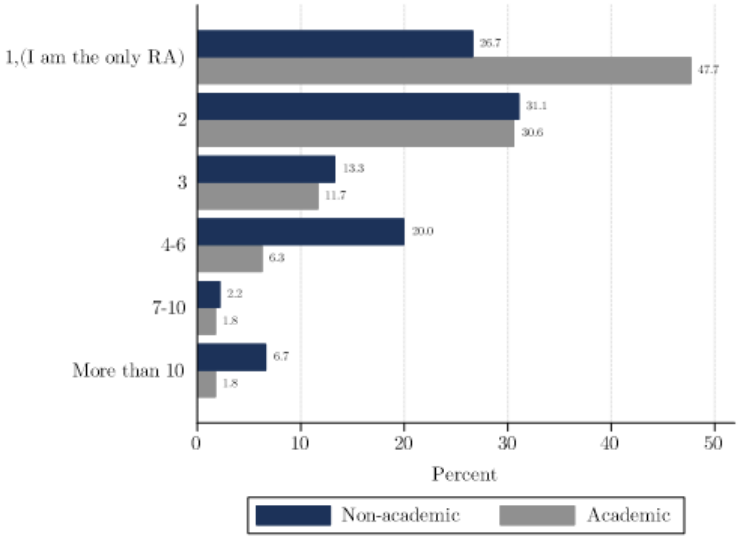

*(N (Non-Academic) = 45 ; N (Academic) = 111)*

Table 18

| | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| At least once a week | 11 | 7.05 |
| Every 2-3 weeks | 18 | 11.54 |
| Once a month | 35 | 22.44 |
| Every 2-3 months | 37 | 23.72 |
| Every 4-6 months | 20 | 12.82 |
| Less than every 6 months | 35 | 22.44 |
| Total | 156 | 100.00 |

### 3.6.4 In your project/workplace, how many people are in a similar position as yours (including yourself)?

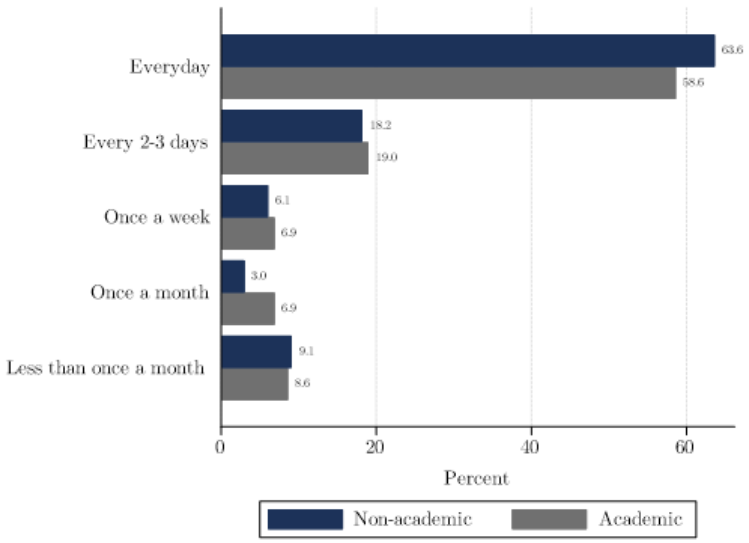
- 1 (I am the only Research Associate)
- 2
- 3
- 4-6
- 7-10
- More than 10




*(N (Non-Academic) = 45 ; N (Academic) = 111)*

### 3.6.5 How frequently do you interact with other individuals in a similar position to you at your workplace?

- Everyday
- Every 2-3 days
- Once a week
- Every 2-3 weeks
- Once a month
- Less than once a month



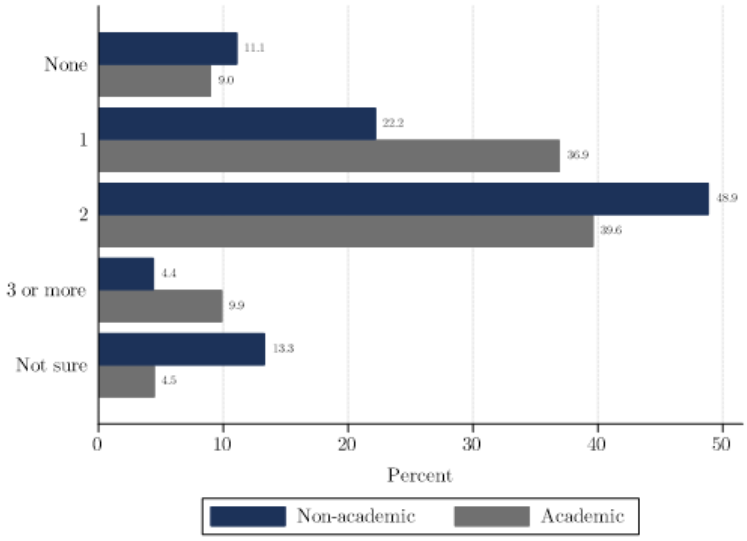

*(N (Non-Academic) = 33 ; N (Academic) = 58)*

Table 19

| | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Everyday | 81 | 51.92 |
| Every 2-3 days | 30 | 19.23 |
| Once a week | 13 | 8.33 |
| Every 2-3 weeks | 3 | 1.92 |
| Once a month | 5 | 3.21 |
| Less than once a month | 24 | 15.38 |
| Total | 156 | 100.00 |

### 3.6.6 How many letters of recommendation do you expect to get from this position?

- None
- 1
- 2
- 3 or more
- Not sure



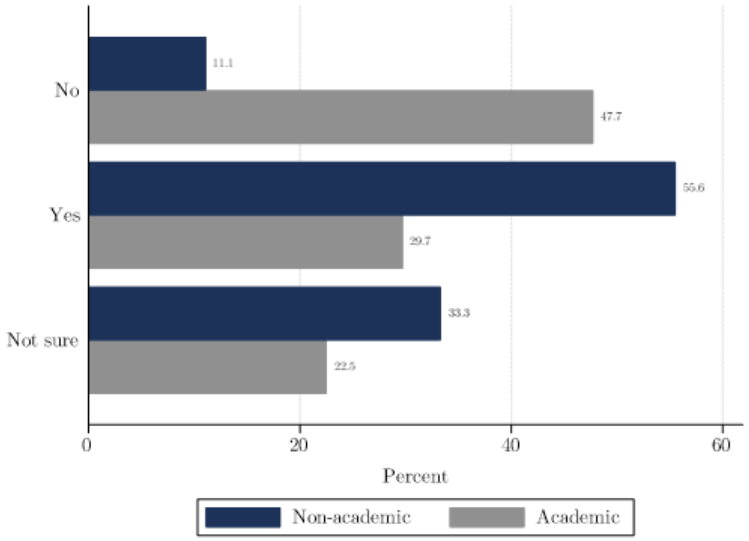

*(N (Non-Academic) = 45 ; N (Academic) = 111)*

Table 20

| | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| None | 15 | 9.62 |
| 1 | 51 | 32.69 |
| 2 | 66 | 42.31 |
| 3 or more | 13 | 8.33 |
| Not sure | 11 | 7.05 |
| Total | 156 | 100.00 |

### 3.6.7 Have you or do you anticipate co-authoring papers with your PIs in this position?

- No
- Yes
- Not sure



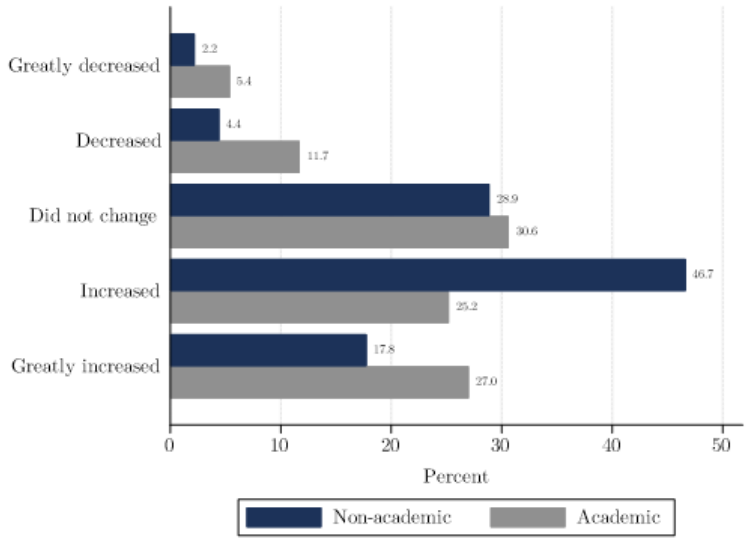

*(N (Non-Academic) = 45 ; N (Academic) = 111)*

Table 21

| | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| No | 58 | 37.18 |
| Yes | 58 | 37.18 |
| Not sure | 40 | 25.64 |
| Total | 156 | 100.00 |

### 3.6.8 How did your current position affect your interest in applying for PhD programs in economics or related fields?

- Greatly increased
- Increased
- Did not change
- Decreased
- Greatly decreased



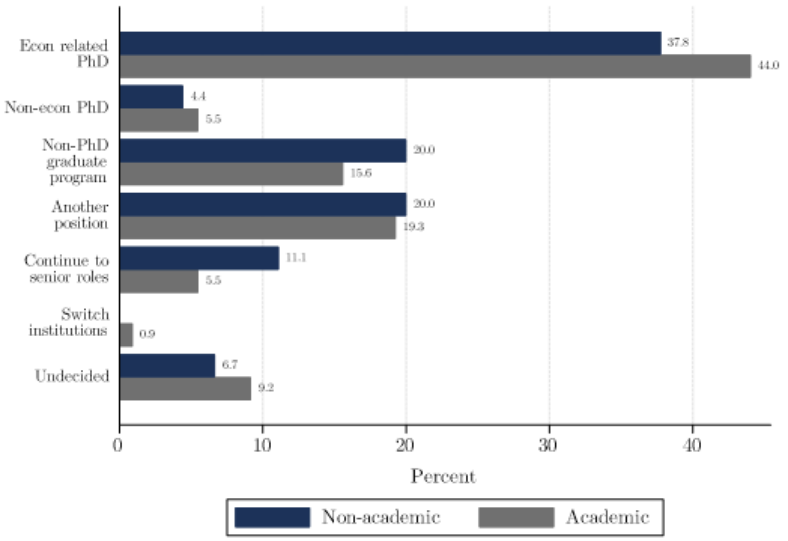

*(N (Non-Academic) = 45 ; N (Academic) = 111)*

Table 22

| | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Greatly decreased | 7 | 4.49 |
| Decreased | 15 | 9.62 |
| Did not change | 47 | 30.13 |
| Increased | 49 | 31.41 |
| Greatly increased | 38 | 24.36 |
| Total | 156 | 100.00 |

### 3.6.9 What do you expect to do post your role as a Research Associate?

- I will apply to or attend a PhD program in a field related to economics (such as applied economics, agricultural economics, development economics, etc.)
- I will apply to or attend a PhD program in a field unrelated to economics (e.g., computer science).
- I will apply to or attend a non-PhD graduate program (e.g., JD, MA, MBA,MPA).
- I will continue in senior roles within the same institution
- I will apply to or switch to a position at another institution.
- Not sure yet/Undecided




*(N (Non-Academic) = 45 ; N (Academic) = 109)*

Table 23

| | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | 65 | 42.21 |
| 2 | 8 | 5.19 |
| 3 | 26 | 16.88 |
| 4 | 30 | 19.48 |
| 5 | 11 | 7.14 |
| 6 | 1 | 0.65 |
| 7 | 13 | 8.44 |
| Total | 154 | 100.00 |

# 4 Open Ended Responses

## 4.1 What has your experience been like while working as a Research Associate so far? These can be about the following broad categories or any other aspect of the position you feel would be relevant.

67 individuals answered the above open ended question and elaborated on different aspects of their time as a Research Associate. We have presented a summary of these qualitative responses and direct quotes are presented in italics.

### 4.1.1 Work/life balance

There were varied experiences of the work life balance not just for different roles but also during different stages of each position. Most respondents agreed that work life balance was heavily tied to the stage of the project, the intensity of fieldwork and the support of supervisors such as Principal Investigators and more importantly closer supervisors such as Research Managers. With lean and peak seasons of the project, the onus of maintaining work life balance usually falls on the Research Associate and their close supervisors.

- *Work/life balance is great. I'm highly satisfied with my work life.- it really matters who you are working for. They ask me about my goals and help me with my requirements as well. They appreciate my efforts and correct me when I am doing something erroneous.*
- *I have lost out majorly on work-life balance. I feel that I am pushing myself for the LoRs and sometimes the PIs also knowingly or unknowingly take advantage of the RA position. Time zones differences are sometimes overlooked, volume of work becomes unmanageable or PIs sometimes allocate non-project related research work which adds to the pile of to-do's.*
- *The work life balance feels worse because of the prevalent power dynamics. Footnote gratitude is rare, any gratitude is rare.*
- *My two cents is that how much ever hard you work there is nothing like having good health. Prioritise your mental health and cultivate a healthy relationship with a superior to make sure you are taking time off and staying on top your mental health.*

### 4.1.2 Personal growth

The work life balance in the role largely determines the amount of personal growth that can be achieved through these roles. RA roles have helped most respondents understand their future prospects and interests. Due to the relative independence of these roles a lot of respondents reported how that has helped them understand their own working style and learn valuable time management skills.

- *There was tremendous personal growth. Most importantly I learned about my own working style and how to balance different things. I learned how to aspire for perfection while respecting deadlines and time sensitive tasks.*
- *My personal growth has been in the form of agendas, schedules and to-do lists. Working in an unstructured environment, where my boss isn't always telling me what to do has made me a more organised and punctual person.*
- *The way it all has been structured makes competitiveness and productivity the default so decide early what is work and what is leisure - reading an academic article for fun that will contribute to your literature review at work is not leisure. It's work-personal goal-leisure balance. Personal goals is a function of work and other activities we engage in outside work. Prioritise personal goals by communicating concrete goals to your PIs.*

### 4.1.3 Professional growth

Professional growth and development in the role was reported to be closely related to the stage of the project. The professional growth came from the hands on experience gained through the role. The skills to understand how to run a study that generally accompany RA roles were reported to be valuable for future academic prospects. Professional growth was reported to be stagnant after a few years in the role, and like personal growth was generally self-driven.

- *I have learnt a lot in terms of understanding how research projects are implemented. I expect this skill to be very useful as I plan independent research as a graduate student*
- *I have had immense growth and learning. Along with learning technical skills like programming in multiple languages, I have also learned to think like a researcher. But most importantly, this has helped me find my area of interest and it is different from what I could have predicted!*
- *I felt that I was a cog in the project wheel, I didn't go through any significant changes in professional growth.*

## 4.2 What is your advice to those applying to RAships/Research Associate positions?

76 individuals answered the above open ended question and had advice on different categories of the application and making the most of the role.

### 4.2.1 Applying to a position

1. **Build a rapport with professors and seek positions directly**
    - *Approach professors directly about RA work. Build a rapport and talk about your research ideas, classroom doubts.If professors at your institution do not hire RAs, then look elsewhere. Hunt for open roles or simply email professors from other institutions, with your materials and keep following up*
2. **Develop coding skills and brush up concepts**
    - *Prior programming knowledge would help greatly*
    - *Pick up software skills and have an understanding of experimental/non-experimental research design, elementary research methodology (via coursework/online courses/prior research experience) before applying to these RA positions.*
    - *Try to get part time RA experience during college by working with your own professors. This can help with programming languages, and makes you a stronger candidate.*
3. **Apply widely**
    - *Don't be afraid of rejection and so cold email as many people as you can.*
    - *If you feel you may be underqualified for a job, apply for it anyway!*
    - *Apply wherever you can, the more applications the better. Your recommendations count here too - so build relationships with your faculty/bosses. Most of these positions will be filled through informal networks, so reach out to old friends/batch mates in the field. Don't be discouraged when things suddenly fall through, this is not personal.*
    - *Apply broadly! Do not self-censor. In the development world, remember hiring is decentralised and project specific and project needs dictate all decisions.*
4. **Send personalised applications**
    - *Do not send the same email to all the places, personalize them.*
    - *It is also necessary to be as clear, concise, and crisp in your CV, cover letter or email.*
    - *Have a neat CV and cover letter with clear motivation, invest in getting quality letters from your referees (explain to them what you'd like to highlight)*

### 4.2.2 Selecting the 'right' position

1. **Ask your potential supervisors questions**
    - *Do your due diligence in inquiring about the roles and responsibilities of the RA, your daily life there, frequency of contact with the PI, what stage the project is at and more. No question is too small!*
    - *Though, it is important to know what you can give to the institute, it is also very important to know what the organisation can give to you (apart from LoRs). The kind of people you work with and the kind of work itself can have an impact on your productivity. Be mindful of both personal and professional growth while applying for such positions. Remember, they need you as much as you need them.*
    - *Make sure to ask the PIs and managers as many questions about the position, work, politics of the organisation, research agenda and anything else. Accept a position when you're 100 percent convinced about it.*

- *For field-based projects, use your interviews to determine what stage your project is in (data collection, intervention or analysis) and figure out if this fits with your personal timeline and what type of work you want to do.*
- *Be confident and don't be afraid to ask confirming questions if you're not sure you understand the question in the interview as employee experiences can vary significantly.*

2. **Talk to previous RAs**

   - *Speak to others who held the position before you. This will help you understand the temperament of your PI, and what you can expect from them in terms of communication.*
   - *Always consult RAs/SRAs before deciding to join an organisation*

3. **Be clear about your expectations and decide accordingly**

   - *Plan out your future educational requirements and be clear about your expectations from the role.*
   - *If you're looking for a PhD, apply to Professors/places from where you can get a strong letter of recommendation and make this clear during the interview. 'Just a letter' is way different from a strong letter. Be clear about when and how many letters you will need for what future graduate schools*
   - *Are the skills that will add to your profile data skills or field work skills-choose a position that lets you build your profile and diversify your skillset. Think about what you want out of the job before accepting it.*

4. **Reputation isn't everything.**

   - *Take the time to understand your (potential) team - co-RAs and PIs - rather than just worrying about institutional affiliations.*
   - *Go beyond PI reputation and think of the location, number of RAs and RMs you can engage and learn from, and your interests in the project's core question.*
   - *Pick mentors who will actually talk to you.*

#### 4.2.3 Succeeding during the position

1. **Be organised**

   - *For succeeding during your tenure, understand what your PI needs and expects of you. Be very clear of what the task is, and ask any doubts you may have when the task is being delegated. This saves time, and helps streamline effort.*
   - *Be clear in your thoughts, process and most importantly presentation of your work. The PIs have minutes to think about what you're saying in an 80 hour week. So if they give you 5 minutes of their time, make it count.*
   - *Make agendas, take copious notes of everything your PIs say. Re-asking the same question is a waste of time and shows lack of initiative on your part. Make to-do lists and set them up on your calendar - this seems obvious but will make managing work-life much easier.*

2. **Be a problem solver**

   - *Go over every question you have for your managers or PIs and try to come up with proposed solutions. This will cut down discussion time and give you ownership of the solution.*

3. **Seek help and keep learning**

   - *Once you get it, do your best, seek help where you feel like you're struggling. Don't be afraid to ask questions!*
   - *Be open to trying and learning new things specially from other RAs. It is guaranteed that someone has faced the same problem as you and can help. There are solutions to most problems as long as you ask.*

- *You have a lot to learn, but don't be afraid to speak out, ask questions, or share ideas. And if you need help, don't be afraid to ask for it.*

4. **Make your mental health a priority**

   - *Set boundaries early on in terms of work life balance. You're an employee and you're entitled to decent working standards and you are entitled to free time, don't let anyone convince you otherwise.*
   - *That one recommendation letter is not worth being mentally drained from overwork. Keep the big picture in mind.*
   - *If something is not working out for you, despite your best efforts, honestly it's okay to quit. Your physical, mental and emotional health are of paramount importance.*
   - *Keep honing your skills but make sure to take a break when you need to!*

5. **Maintain good relationships.**

   - *Maintain a good working relationship with PIs, be open to change and admit your mistakes, invest in having a collegial environment with co-RAs*
   - *Use your time interacting with PIs to talk about research ideas, applications, SoPs, and research in general-them mentioning such conversations in the letter will help your application. If it suits your job, read research papers and gather ideas that can contribute to your project or just discuss them with your PIs.*
   - *Be kind to your surveyors/enumerators.*

6. **Know what you want out of the role**

   - *The more time you spend in doing RA work the better you will know what you want to do. There's lot to learn in every role but make sure you know what you're trying to get out of the role, and remind yourself about that on bad work days.*
   - *Do not be shy to talk about career development and future goals, no-one else is going to do it for you.*
   - *Be proactive about the work you want to do and ask your PIs.*
   - *To make the best use of your time as an RA, think about what aspects of the job you enjoy and what you would do differently. Keep evaluating the skills you want to learn and how that fit in with your professional tasks.*
   - *Be clear about what you want from the PIs - a recommendation, putting in a good word personally, laterally moving to another organisation where they know someone, all perfectly acceptable.*

7. **Overall experience**

   - *To make the best use of your time as an RA, think about what aspects of the job you enjoy and what you would do differently. Keep evaluating the skills you want to learn and how that fit in with your professional tasks.*
   - *Do not underestimate the amount of time you'll need to spend doing admin work - vendor payments, expense tracking,field planning, implementation monitoring and troubleshooting will take up nearly all of your time. But it is fun. You'll enjoy being part of it and once you step back you'll feel like you're part of something bigger.*
   - *Too much RA-ing is a thing. Make sure you join with a deadline as there is an expiry date to the job and leave for graduate school or change your role by that time*

## 4.3 References

Hong, Zuang, Liang Pauline and Dominic Russel "Survey of Pre-Doctoral Research Experiences in Economics", 2020

Kevin A. Bryan. Young "Stars" in Economics: What They Do and Where They Go. Economic Inquiry, 57(3):1392–1407, 2019.