

A Surveillance on Average Annual Income for Fresh Graduates of Nutritionists & Dietitians (Degree Holders) in Malaysia Community Pharmacy 2022

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Abstract- The career landscape and prospects of a Nutritionist and Dietitian have evolved rapidly in the last decade. This survey aims to identify the average annual income earned by a fresh graduate with a degree holder as a Nutritionist and Dietitian in various community pharmacies in Malaysia in 2022. An online survey in the form of a questionnaire was sent to alumni from several local universities in Malaysia. A total of 102 complete responses were received with 91.18% (93 participants) in a situation of less than 1-year working experience (fresh graduates). Almost 80% of fresh graduates opt to start their career path in a community pharmacy. It is encouraging to find that fresh graduates of Nutritionist and Dietitian achieved a better average income in community pharmacies, especially chain pharmacies. The total monthly income is more than RM2,601 in 88.18% of respondents, and chain pharmacies provide an overall higher income with Alpro Pharmacy at the top of the ranking with an average of RM3,612 per month for fresh graduates. A phone interview with Alpro Pharmacy was conducted after the online survey to obtain details on its compensation package offered to their Nutritionist and Dietitian. The compensation package and retail sales incentives are the key driver of higher income in community pharmacies.

Index Terms- Community Pharmacy, Dietitian, Nutritionist, Salary Surveillance Survey

I. INTRODUCTION

Income provides economic resources that will influence the choices for living place, level of education, food, and medical care [1]. For the current 2022 fiscal year, even though The World Bank classified Malaysia as an upper-middle income country based on their analysis, many low-income families across the country especially in rural areas, have found it difficult to attain a minimum acceptable living standard as they need to spend extra expenses on facemasks, test kits and medication especially when the COVID-19 pandemic hit [2]. On 19th March 2022, Prime Minister of Malaysia, Dato' Sri Ismail Sabri Yaakob announced that a new minimum wage of RM1,500 will be enforced starting 1st May 2022 [3]. This was a welcome relief especially for the low-income families during the Covid-19 pandemic hit. According to a survey conducted by JobStreet, a leading recruitment company in Malaysia, fresh graduates of degree holders received an average salary of RM2,300 per month as their basic salary [4]. Meanwhile, in the healthcare industry in Malaysia, a new fresh graduate Nutritionist as well as having three years of working experience from various industries, are still getting an average of RM2,300 per month as their basic salary [5]. While fresh graduate Dietitians with degree holders who work less than a year are getting an average basic salary of RM2,321 per month [6]. Both salaries of these Nutritionists and Dietitians are just up to par compare to a freshly graduated degree holder.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The world is currently facing the burden of both communicable and non-communicable diseases apart from the double burden of malnutrition. This situation got worse when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, which has gone beyond the health crisis, especially for those low-income families. This pandemic has caused huge negative impacts not only on the global but also on the local food system, nutrition, economic and psychological distress. Thus, nutrition plays an important role in helping and managing those situations and chronic diseases. In this situation, a Nutritionist or Dietitian makes a difference in providing excellent customer and patient care. They are taking the risk with direct contact especially during the pandemic, affecting the building of customer loyalty based on direct face-to-face interaction.

Nutritionists and Dietitians in Malaysia are classified as a profession registered under the Allied Health Profession (AHPA) Act 774 [7]. Both of these healthcare professionals work closely with individuals or a group to create diets for a group of people and patients. Teaching patients and customers about healthy eating is their primary duty, as well as staying aware of developments in medicine and nutrition [8]. A Nutritionist is a healthcare profession who is trained and registered as a Nutritionist to promote the nutritional well-being of a patient and group of people as well as to prevent and control nutrition-related diseases of various target groups at different settings and levels through policies and regulations, education, training, assessment and monitoring of nutritional status, carrying out nutrition interventions, consultancy, research and also development.[8]. While Dietitians, may work in any of the same settings and roles as nutritionists, however, they have additional accredited qualifications that allow them to work one-on-one with patients in a clinical context, including in hospitals, private clinics, and residential care centers. Dietitians are able to provide patients with medical advice and medical nutrition therapy and are able to prescribe treatments for many conditions such as diabetes, allergies, cancer, and obesity [8].

In the healthcare industry, there are different types of Nutritionist and Dietitian positions in different industries and earning different salaries. For example, Nutritionist and Dietitian in clinical, community pharmacy, management, consultant, or even in a corporate company. Each of these positions offers different career options, such as food Nutritionist and Dietitian services in hospitals, nutrition counseling in public health agencies and fitness clubs, or clinical management in food service systems.

III. METHODS

This survey involved conducting an anonymous online survey from 1st April to 15th May 2022. An Alumni survey was used as a data collection method in this survey. The online survey form was sent to multiple local universities in Malaysia include International Medical University (IMU), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), UCSI University, and Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM). The lecturers and coordinator will forward the survey link to the alumni. Further, each of the respondents had to be graduated and certified as a Nutritionist or Dietitian who currently working as a Nutritionist or Dietitian in any industry. A phone interview will conduct after the survey, with the community pharmacy who have the highest paid for their Nutritionist and Dietitian to obtain further details on the compensation package offered.

IV. ANALYZED FINDINGS

A total of 102 respondents were received. 91.18% (n=93) of the respondents are fresh graduated Nutritionists and Dietitians. 5.88% (n=6) respondents were having a working experience of 1 to 3 years and 2.94% (n=3) respondents were working as a Nutritionist or Dietitian for 3 to 7 years. The demographic characteristics of the participants are summarized in Table 1 below which include the respondents' age, gender, years of working experience, working industry, monthly salary, and income as well as the community pharmacy they currently serve. The highest participation respondent was from community pharmacy, which is 79.41% (n=81). There are 12.75% (n=13) were male and 87.25% (n=89) were female. As a result, female employees are involved significantly more as a Nutritionist or Dietitian compared to a male in this survey. In terms of age, the majority of respondents involved were aged 21 - 24 years (n=79), 25 – 30 years (n=20), and 31 – 40 years (n=3). The median average income per month is from RM2,901 to RM3,200.

Variable	Category	Counts	Percentage (%)	Variable	Category	Counts	Percentage (%)
Age	21 - 24	78	76.47	Years of working experience	0 - 1	93	91.18
	25 - 30	21	20.59		1 - 3	6	5.88
	31 - 40	3	2.94		3 - 7	3	2.94
	Total	102	100.00		Total	102	100.00
Gender	Male	13	12.75	Working Industry	Clinic	3	2.94
	Female	89	87.25		Pharmacy Chain	81	79.41
	Total	102	100.00		Corporate Dietitian	5	4.90
Monthly Average Base Salary (MYR)	1800 - 2000	11	11.83		Foodservice	5	4.90
	2001 - 2200	7	7.53		Hospital	8	7.84
	2201 - 2400	30	32.26	Total	102	100.00	
	2401 - 2600	27	29.03	All Day	11	13.58	
	> 2601	18	19.35	Alpro	19	23.46	
Monthly Average Income (MYR)	Total	93	100.00	AM PM	12	14.81	
	2000 - 2300	6	6.45	BIG	12	14.81	
	2301 - 2600	5	5.38	Georgetown	5	6.17	
	2601 - 2900	24	25.81	Health Lane	11	13.58	
	2901 - 3200	24	25.81	Independent Pharmacy	11	13.58	
	3201 - 3500	15	16.13				
	> 3501	19	20.43	Total	81	100.00	
Total	93	100.00					

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of respondents related to average monthly income earned by the Alumni as a Nutritionist & Dietitian (n=102).

Based on the Nutritionist and Dietitian Salaries Survey conducted by PayScale 2022, a fresh graduated Dietitian in Malaysia with less than one year of working experience is expected to earn an average income of RM27,861 per annum which is equivalent to RM2,321 per month [6]. Meanwhile, a Nutritionist with less than one year of experience is expected to earn an average income of RM2,375 per month or RM28,500 per annum [5]. However, based on the survey result received and stated in Table 1, only 6.45% (n=6) of the respondents earn an average income of RM2,000 to RM2,300 and 5.38% (n=5) earn an average income of RM2,301 to RM2,600. Meanwhile, 20.43% (n=19) of the alumni earn an average income of more than RM3,501 per month. This proves that working in a community pharmacy as a Nutritionist or Dietitian earned a better income compare to Nutritionists or Dietitians from other industries.

Besides, there are few factors that contribute to an individual's income over time as a Nutritionist or Dietitian in a community pharmacy. Some of the factors include the number of years working in the particular industry as well as their skillset. In Malaysia, the annual growth rates by industry will change depending on the level of experience of the employee. For a junior-level employee, there will be a salary increment of average 5% from their basic salary [9]. Referring to Table 1, 91.18% (n=93) of the fresh graduate Nutritionist or Dietitian are expected to have these salary increments. The line graph in Figure 1 shows the annual salary of these healthcare professionals in this survey. In this graph specifically, it is indicated that as the years of experience increase, their wages increase as well. For a fresh entry of Nutritionist and Dietitian in a company, their income starts at around RM31,800 per annum. As the years of working experience reach one to three years, there is a significant increase in income, estimated at around RM35,400 per annum. Once the Nutritionist or Dietitian reaches three to seven years of working experience, their annual salary would increase again to a total of RM54,000 per annum, adding RM 18,600 from the last salary increase.

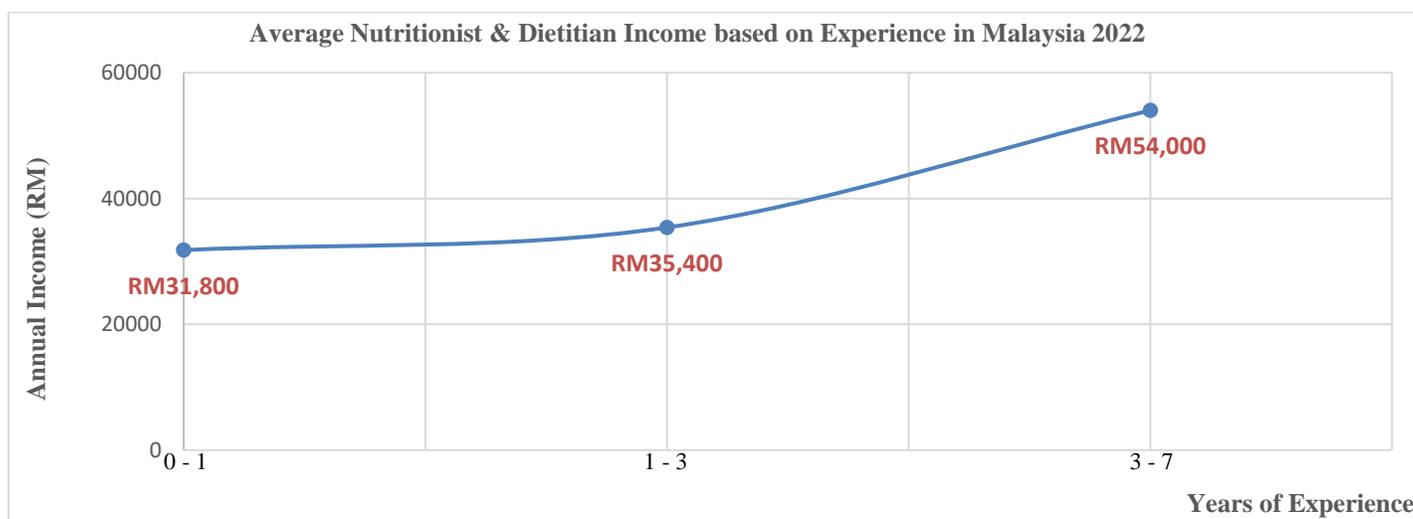


Figure 1: Average Nutritionist and Dietitian Income based on Experience.

The annual income includes incentives, bonuses, and allowance for a fresh graduate Nutritionist and Dietitian from various community pharmacies and industries were shown in Figure 2. The chart shows that the Nutritionist and Dietitian in Alpro Pharmacy - the number one Prescription Pharmacy in Malaysia, earn an average annual income of RM43,344, an estimated RM3,612 per month. A phone interview was conducted after the online survey on 21st May 2022 with the Human Resources Manager of Alpro Pharmacy, to obtain details on their career development opportunity and compensation package offered to their Nutritionist and Dietitian, which makes them the highest-paid professional among other community pharmacies and industries in this survey.

According to Indeed Editorial Team, an American worldwide employment website, career development opportunities allow employees to reach new levels of professionalism through networking, skill advancement, continued education, and learning [11]. This may lead to a job with higher seniority or responsibilities in leadership, and thus an increase in their annual income. Through the phone interview, the Human Resources Manager of Alpro Pharmacy mentioned that the working hours for Nutritionist and Dietitian at Alpro Pharmacy's outlet are 45 hours per week based on a rotating shift work schedule with two rest days. The fresh entry of Nutritionist and Dietitian candidates will go through a two weeks training in pharmacy outlets and headquarter. The training will assess their attitude, Nutritionist or Dietitian knowledge, learning behavior, communication skills, and selling skills. The candidate must at least obtain a 60% passing rate to be able to promote as a trainee Nutritionist or trainee Dietitian in these two weeks. Those below the passing rate will continue as a trainee Health Advisor and have a maximum 6 months' timeframe to rechallenge back to become a trainee Nutritionist or trainee Dietitian. Furthermore, for a trainee Nutritionist or trainee Dietitian, there will be another two weeks of training in the pharmacy outlet followed by a three to six months' probation period before they get confirmed and enter into a Nutritionist or Dietitian pathway. Upon confirmation as a Nutritionist or Dietitian in Alpro Pharmacy outlet and with the same effectiveness, the salary increment will follow the Star-Trek scheme, a salary increment scheme that will be reviewed every six months by following the assessment criteria stated in

their Key Performance Indicator (KPI). Only those who score 70% and above are entitled to enjoy the salary increment entitlement which is up to a maximum of 15% of their basic salary.

Besides the Star-Trek increment scheme, all of the staff working at Alpro Pharmacy’s outlets are entitled to enjoy a one-month Attendance Bonus, provided the staff did not take any unpaid leave, emergency leave, or medical leave throughout the year. Further, a retail sales incentive program was implemented in Alpro Pharmacy. Apart from the core duties of a Nutritionist or Dietitian, these professional health care providers undertake outlet sales performance too. Based on past records, a staff can earn up to RM10K per month from the retail sales incentive program, said the Human Resource Manager of Alpro Pharmacy. These retail sales incentive programs are an excellent tool especially for pharmacy chains to reward, motivate and retain the professionals by showing their tangible gratitude towards increasing the overall productivity of the sales in their pharmacy [13].

Health Lane Pharmacy was the second-highest paid annual income for its Nutritionist and Dietitian in this survey. The estimated annual income paid was RM37,800 which includes commission, overtime, and performance bonus pay. The Nutritionist and Dietitian in Health Lane Pharmacy working in a rotational shift with training and coaching provided. The third highest-paid Nutritionist and Dietitian is All Day Pharmacy, with an average paid of RM36,720 per annum. It is then followed by AMPM Pharmacy – RM36,300, BIG Pharmacy – RM35,400, Georgetown Pharmacy – RM34,800, and Independent Pharmacy – RM34,596 per annum.

Meanwhile, Nutritionists and Dietitians from the foodservice sector received the lowest annual income in this survey. They make an average annual income of RM26,400, monthly income of RM2,200, estimated 64.18% different from the income earned by Nutritionist and Dietitian at Alpro Pharmacy. The main difference in income earned between pharmacy chains, clinics, hospitals, and foodservice sector is the retail sales incentive program. Only Nutritionists and Dietitians from pharmacy chains are entitled to this incentive.

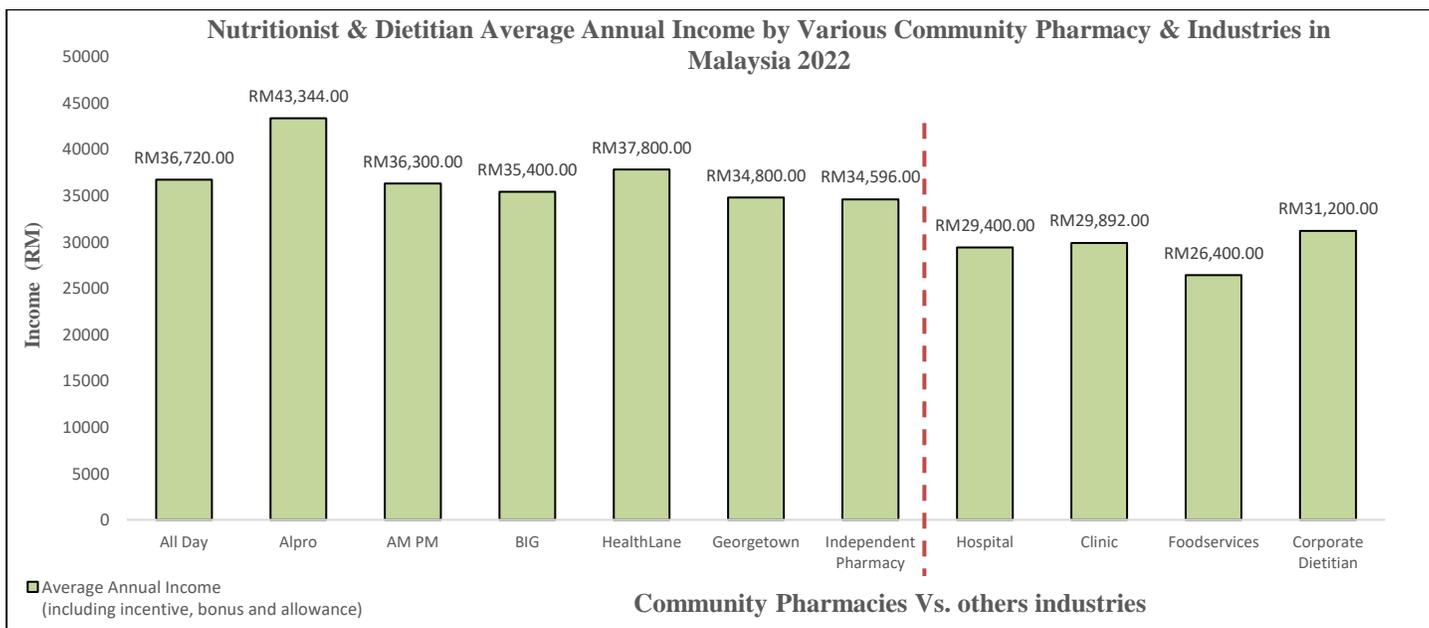


Figure 2: Nutritionist & Dietitian Average Monthly Income by various Community Pharmacy & Industries in Malaysia 2022(N=102).

Nutritionists and Dietitians in community pharmacy work in a high workload environment especially during the COVID-19 pandemic hit. Customers were swarming into the pharmacy for facemasks, and test kits, as well as getting consultations on their medicine and nutrition. Thus, it is important for Nutritionists and Dietitians to adopt certain management skills, which will help them to manage the situation properly as well as contribute to the growth in their income. Effective communication skills with patients, customers, and staff are one of the important elements in the Nutritionist and Dietitian profession. They work with different levels of professionals and individuals must possess effective communication skills. Both written and verbal communication skills are important and necessary for Nutritionists and Dietitians since these professionals educate and present written information to patients and collaborate with physicians and other healthcare professionals in developing the nutrition plans [13]. Meanwhile, time management behavior is a method that contains aspects such as goal setting, planning, administration, minimizing time-wasting, and prioritizing [13]. However, poor time management skills may lead to several implications such as poor work performance, missed deadlines for a certain task, and negative adverse impacts on a career path as a Nutritionist or Dietitian [13]. Excellent time management allows these healthcare professionals to accomplish more tasks in a shorter period of time, which will lead to lower their stress level, leads to career success, and lastly affect the growth in their income.

I. CONCLUSION

In a conclusion, community pharmacy is an encouraging new career prospect for fresh graduates of Nutritionist and Dietitian, particularly chain pharmacy. The implementation of retail sales incentives is a key motivating factor for the higher remuneration, as a tangible gratitude towards their professional services in a community pharmacy. Enhancement of skill sets of fresh graduates besides counseling, such as management skills, digital skills, and others will help young healthcare professionals to triumph higher career achievements in the sector.

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