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Abstract

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PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS INFLUENCING MIGRATION DECISIONS AMONG HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The mass migration of healthcare professionals from Nigeria, commonly referred to as "japa syndrome," has left a significant gap in the country's healthcare system. While economic and social factors in migration decisions are well-documented, the psychological dimensions remain significantly underexplored. This study aimed to identify key psychological factors and theoretical foundations explaining migration decisions and determine how these factors drive migration in Nigeria. This qualitative study was structured around two research questions: What psychological factors influence migration decisions? and how these psychological factors drive migration decisions and intentions. The study reveals that Nigerian healthcare professionals are driven by work-related stress, burnout, anxiety, and job insecurity, leading to migration for better opportunities abroad. These factors explained by Maslow's hierarchy of needs, push and pull theory, and cognitive dissonance theory, present a comprehensive understanding. The study suggests systemic changes to reduce migration pressures for healthcare workers, including stress management programs, improved working conditions, professional recognition, and effective retention strategies.

Keywords: Healthcare, Healthcare Professionals, Migration, Psychological Factors.

1.0 Introduction

The Nigerian healthcare system is facing significant challenges due to the mass migration of healthcare professionals abroad for better economic opportunities, better working conditions, and career advancement. This phenomenon, known as "Japa Syndrome," is influenced by economic, social, and psychological factors. Work-related stressors, such as heavy workloads and job insecurity, are becoming more prevalent, leading to migration for professional and mental health reasons. The decision to migrate is often driven by healthier work environments, greater career opportunities, and improved well-being. Psychological factors, such as stress, burnout, job dissatisfaction, emotional fatigue, and lack of career fulfillment, are also significant motivators.

For instance, nurses leaving Nigeria surged from 1,393 in 2002 to 5,543 in 2021 (Yakubu, 2023). The departure of healthcare professionals may result in a lack of skilled workers,

heavier workloads, and a drop in the standard of patient treatment. Studies suggest that this brain drain directly leads to heightened stress, burnout, and job dissatisfaction among the healthcare workers left behind (Osigbesan, 2021; Eaton, 2023). Also, the shortage of professionals in the growing population has led to an increased workload, work-life imbalance, and deteriorating mental health for those who remain (Njogwuani, 2022).

According to Nigerian Info (2024), in just five months, ten nurses in particular have left Kano, Nigeria due to insufficient compensation, poor working conditions, and limited career opportunities, causing discontent among healthcare workers and resulting in low doctor-to-patient ratios this has put strain on the remaining staff and jeopardize the quality of care for patients as reported by Musa, (2024). The lack of proper infrastructure has made matters worse for healthcare workers who stay in Nigeria, as they are frequently left without enough institutional support. Professionals are reporting significant levels of job unhappiness, which has led to a marked increase in cognitive burnout and emotional exhaustion (Dada, 2023). As more and more experts leave the field, those who remain must deal with the psychological strain of managing progressively more complex healthcare requirements without enough resources or assistance, in addition to the physical strain of overwork (Mahamid, 2023). Moreover, younger, less experienced workers are frequently pressed into leadership responsibilities due to the declining workforce without proper mentorship, which exacerbates their stress and feelings of inadequacy (Badru, 2024).

The Nigerian government has not been successful in stopping the exodus of medical personnel and increasing retention rates (Aluko, 2023). Healthcare workers increasingly see migrating as a more plausible alternative to remaining in an atmosphere that offers little compensation for their hard work (Njogwuani, 2022). Hence this study seeks to examine the psychological factors driving the emigration of healthcare professionals from Nigeria and how these factors in turn drive migration decisions and intentions. Addressing healthcare workers' psychological distress is critical to enhancing their well-being and improving the overall quality of care provided to Nigerian patients.

The Nigerian healthcare system is facing a significant outflow due to poor working conditions, low compensation, and inadequate professional development opportunities. Psychological challenges, such as stress and burnout, contribute to migration. Despite government policy changes, these strategies have not fully addressed the psychological causes and few studies have examined how these psychological factors have influenced the outflow of healthcare professionals from Nigeria. Understanding these psychological drivers offers insight into the broader migration phenomenon, highlighting the need for policies that address mental health and workplace conditions to reduce migration pressures.

The following research questions will be answered in this Study.

- i. What psychological factors influence the migration decisions of healthcare professionals from Nigeria?
- ii. How do psychological factors influence the migration decisions of healthcare workers?

2.0 Concepts

Concepts such as stress and insecurity, migration decisions, and professional growth, and bureaucratic limitations, and limited growth opportunities.

Stress and Burnout

Chronic job conditions, lack of resources, fatigue, decreased engagement, and conditions like workloads, physical and emotional exhaustion, rates and experience, likely to migrate, working conditions, can lead to severe depression, practitioners, compromised, also cause, encourages

Career Stagnation

Limited professional growth, characteristics, administrative, experience, workplaces, Due to the advancement, surrounding

Anxiety and Concerns

Concerns about job instability, occupational discomfort

2.0 Conceptual Framework

Concepts such as stress, burnout, career stagnation, anxiety, depression, emotional fatigue, and insecurity are often cited in the literature as factors playing significant roles in migration decisions as they negatively impact the well-being and engagement of healthcare professionals. These conditions, exacerbated by excessive workloads, limited resources, and bureaucratic challenges, can lead to high turnover rates, compromised patient care, and limited growth opportunities.

Stress and Burnout

Chronic job conditions like stress and burnout are brought on by excessive workloads, a lack of resources, and administrative difficulties. Healthcare professionals experience fatigue, decreased motivation, and emotional disengagement from their work when they are subjected to excessive stress without the proper coping mechanisms. Chronic job conditions like stress and burnout in healthcare professionals are common due to excessive workloads, limited resources, and bureaucratic challenges. These conditions lead to physical and mental exhaustion, negatively impacting job performance, well-being, and engagement. Emotional exhaustion, a core component of burnout, can lead to high turnover rates and compromised patient care (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Professionals who experience burnout are less productive and generally happier, which makes them more likely to migrate in pursuit of better work-life balance, more resources, and healthier working conditions. Without appropriate coping mechanisms, excessive workplace stress can lead to severe psychological effects, including emotional disengagement, cynicism, and even depressive symptoms (Schaufeli et al., 2009). These factors not only affect individual practitioners but also contribute to high turnover rates, reduced productivity, and compromised patient care (Schaufeli, Bakker & Van Rhenen, 2009). Stress at work can also cause employees to have a bad opinion of their existing working conditions, which encourages them to look for other opportunities overseas.

Career Stagnation

Limited prospects for advancement, skill acquisition, and recognition in one's sector are characteristics of career stagnation, frequently made worse by structural inefficiencies and administrative roadblocks. According to Blomkvist and Hagen (2017), employees who experience stagnation see few to no opportunities for growth and little innovation in their workplaces, which lowers their level of happiness and may even cause them to disengage. Due to these restrictions, people migrate in search of opportunities for professional advancement, exposure to cutting-edge medical procedures, and work-related surroundings.

Anxiety and Insecurity

Concerns about personal safety at work, job instability, and political and economic instability are all closely related to anxiety and insecurity. Unpredictable job conditions, occupational instability, and socioeconomic volatility might cause psychological discomfort and anxiety in healthcare professionals (Llosa et al., 2018). As demonstrated

during the COVID-19 pandemic, such experiences increase uncertainty and encourage aspirations to move to nations with more stable and predictable conditions (Arafa et al., 2021). Therefore, migration is a coping strategy to attain psychological stability and ease ongoing anxieties and fears related to one's profession

Emotional Fatigue and Depression

Apathy, low morale, and mental exhaustion are common symptoms of emotional fatigue, a condition of protracted mental and emotional exhaustion brought on by repeated exposure to high-stress situations (Ornek et al., 2022). This is frequently made worse in healthcare settings by very emotional encounters and the needs of patient care. Chronic unhappiness, diminished interest, and poor energy are hallmarks of clinical depression, which can develop from such exhaustion and make daily tasks challenging. People migrate in search of healthier surroundings in order to regain their emotional stability and resilience, and migration is perceived as a means of escaping these psychological responsibilities.

2.1 Theoretical Reviews

Theories like Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943), cognitive dissonance theory, developed by Festinger (1957), and the Push-Pull theory, which emphasizes pull factors like better career prospects and supportive work environments that draw healthcare professionals to host countries and push factors like stress, burnout, and career stagnation that drive them away from their country of origin, support the conceptual framework. Furthermore, migration as a way to ease psychological strain is motivated by contradictory realities in job aspirations against actual experiences, as explained by cognitive dissonance theory. Using data from the provided research, this conceptual framework explains how systemic factors and personal psychological experiences interact to impact migration decisions.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory (1943)

Healthcare workers' motives are explained by Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory. It distinguishes five levels of needs: self-actualization, esteem, safety, belongingness, and physiological. Basic necessities including food, shelter, and income are examples of physiological needs. Anxiety and job insecurity are two safety concerns that push healthcare professionals to look for safe settings. Moving to a friendly company might help you meet your social requirements, which include support and belonging. Career stagnation and the need for professional advancement are examples of wants related to self-esteem. The drive to reach one's greatest potential, known as self-actualization, can be attained by migration. This theory supports the study's findings by showing that unfulfilled requirements at different levels are what motivate healthcare workers to migrate.

The Push-Pull Theory developed by Lee (1966)

The Push-Pull Theory, developed by Lee, suggests that both push and pull factors influence migration decisions. In healthcare, push factors include workplace stress, burnout, career stagnation, and job insecurity, leading to dissatisfaction. Pull factors include better working conditions, career growth opportunities, job security, and favorable healthcare infrastructure in destination countries (Khalid & Urbański, 2021). These factors, combined,

create a powerful incentive for healthcare professionals to migrate, especially during economic uncertainty and crises like the COVID-19 pandemic.

Cognitive Dissonance Theory, developed by Festinger (1957)

Cognitive Dissonance Theory, developed by Festinger, suggests that individuals seek internal consistency when faced with conflicting beliefs, attitudes, or behaviors. In healthcare professionals' migration decisions, dissonance can arise when professional goals clash with work environments, leading to psychological discomfort and seeking alternative opportunities. Migration can also serve as a resolution, aligning personal and professional aspirations with external realities, and reducing cognitive dissonance.

Alignment with and Deviation from Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

The study reveals that psychological stressors and work-related dissatisfaction are more central to migration decisions among Nigerian healthcare professionals than socio-cultural and peer influence factors. Economic factors were found to be more influential than psychological motivation for migration. The cognitive dissonance theory suggests people seek to reduce psychological discomfort caused by conflicting beliefs and realities. However, the study's results suggest a deviation in how migration decisions are framed, potentially necessitating additional theoretical integration. The push-pull framework explains migration dynamics by emphasizing both adverse conditions in the origin country and attractive factors in the destination countries. Comprehensive interventions are needed to address these issues and retain skilled professionals.

2.2 Empirical Review

"Brain drain" refers to the migration of health workers abroad for better opportunities, influenced by economic differences, poor working conditions, and career prospects in low-income countries (Boldbaatar, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these issues, increasing the likelihood of healthcare workers leaving their jobs (Poon et al, 2022). Twenty-five percent of the world's diseases are not being adequately addressed due to the migration of Nigerian medical experts to rich countries (Ipinnimo, et al, 2023). Due to high levels of stress, burnout, and job discontent, over 65% of Nigerian healthcare workers have thought about leaving the nation (BusinessDay, 2024). Talatu's (2024) concerns about the impact of migration on hospital care are noted in Nigerian Info, (2024). It was reported that there is a need for systemic reforms to address the migration of healthcare workers in Nigeria (Nigerian Info., 2024). The Nigerian Info., (2024) also highlighted the ongoing issue of healthcare worker migration from a part of Northern Nigeria, Talatu, (2024) in the Nigerian Info., (2024) reported that approximately 500 doctors and nurses from the National Orthopedic Hospital, Dala, have migrated abroad due to increasing challenging local conditions. This migration trend reflects broader concerns about the state of the Nigerian healthcare system, exacerbated by inadequate resources and unfavorable working conditions. The National Orthopedic Hospital in Lagos has experienced a "Japa Syndrome" resulting in the loss of 500 medical personnel in three years. The medical brain drain, fueled by poor working conditions and low pay, worsens Nigeria's healthcare shortage and calls for immediate policy changes to improve the working environment and job satisfaction.

The study by Olufela, et al, (2024) found a significant association between years of practice and migration intention, recommending that implementing competitive salary packages could improve job satisfaction and reduce migration plans among healthcare workers.

A substantial amount of important knowledge is being lost in Nigeria's healthcare system as a result of migration, a problem marked by unfavorable working conditions, insufficient pay, and little prospects for professional growth. This problem was made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has caused over 13,000 Nigerian medical professionals to go abroad. Adenipekun, (2023) outlined the push and pull factors such as inadequate working conditions, insufficient pay, and overworked healthcare systems causing the brain drain. The article suggests legislative solutions to this dilemma, including bettering working conditions, investing more in healthcare, and developing alliances with other nations. To keep medical talent in the field, it also highlighted how crucial it is to improve professional growth and education initiatives. International collaboration and global alliances are also suggested as ways to facilitate skills exchange programs and improve the local healthcare system (Adenipekun, 2023; Jalloh et al. 2024). There are serious repercussions for mass healthcare workers's migration, such as higher workloads, worse mental health for the remaining professionals, lower-quality patient care, and a major loss of vital knowledge within the Nigerian healthcare system, which may result in a decrease in in-country medical services and a rise in out-of-country medical travel (Adenipekun, 2023). Medical brain drain brought on by inadequate leadership in the health system exacerbates the scarcity of healthcare workers in sub-Saharan Africa, which includes Nigeria. Twenty-five percent of the world's diseases are not being adequately addressed due to the migration of medical experts to rich countries (Ipinnimo, et al, 2023).

The increasing international movement of healthcare professionals particularly those from less wealthy countries has negatively impacted the delivery of healthcare services in low- and middle-income countries. Eaton, et al, (2023) concluded that further training for physicians and nurses is important to prevent adverse migration from compensating for deficiencies in the medical workforce. As mentioned in the Abuja Declaration, to maintain a stable labor force, countries should develop and extend their healthcare systems. The main goals of this should be to empower individuals and support local practice. The scarcity of human resources is exacerbated by inadequate funding for healthcare institutions and inadequate training opportunities, particularly in the nursing and specialized care areas (Lanati & Thiele, 2021; Botezat et al., 2024). Bilateral agreements, moral hiring procedures, and better working circumstances are ways to resolve the issues associated with health worker migration. Policies to reduce injustices and guarantee the sustainability of the global health system require comprehensive data (WaltonRoberts et al, 2024). To efficiently manage migratory flows and lessen the detrimental effects on the countries of origin, promotes international cooperation and policy coherence (Chamie, 2020). In addition to increasing diversity and addressing labor shortages in their new countries, migrant health workers bring with them cultural disparities, integrating difficulties, and difficulty having their credentials recognized. Policies for integration are essential for

assimilation to go well. Despite this, their contributions are vital for maintaining health systems during crises (Winkelmann-Gleed et al, 2022; Bandyopadhyay et al., 2020).

Jalloh et al. (2024) discussed the brain drain in West Africa's health sector, highlighting the need for better opportunities and improved working conditions. Olufela et al. (2024) highlight factors influencing healthcare professionals' migration decisions, including dissatisfaction with low remuneration, poor working environments, and limited career advancement opportunities. Boldbaatar, (2020) examined the impact of international nurse migration on low- and middle-income countries, highlighting both push and pull factors. Poon et al. (2022); Lanati and Thiele (2021) found that the pandemic has led to increased turnover intention among healthcare workers due to workloads, stress, and burnout. Factors contributing to turnover include job demands, personal health concerns, inadequate support, and insufficient compensation. They recommend urgent strategies to retain workers, such as improving working conditions, mental health support, and compensation. They also found that countries with higher income per capita have lower emigration rates among medical workers. Health workers departing low-and middle-income countries (LMICs) worsens health outcomes and service delivery; shortages of human resources, particularly in nursing and specialized care, also occur (Botezat et al., 2024; Lanati & Thiele, 2021). In addition, a study conducted by Botezat, et al, (2024) examined the trends of nurse migration over 20 years, emphasizing the impact of health and economic shocks on nurse emigration. Their results support those of Lanati and Thiele (2021) in that they demonstrate that deplorable working conditions and financial considerations are important emigration drivers. To reduce the brain drain of medical experts, both studies offer insightful information about the international mobility of healthcare workers and highlight the necessity of specific measures that enhance healthcare infrastructure and economic stability in developing nations Botezat et al, (2024).

Balogun (2021, 2022) analyzed Nigeria's health system challenges, focusing on the migration of healthcare workers. Systemic inefficiencies, extreme poverty, and poor remuneration drive this migration, exacerbated by inadequate funding, poor working conditions, and weak governance. Balogun (2021, 2022) highlighted the system's fragility, worsened by external shocks like pandemics and economic recessions. Nigeria lags in universal health coverage and healthcare worker retention compared to stable countries. Policy recommendations include increasing investment in health infrastructure, providing competitive salaries, and offering career development opportunities. Destination nations face challenges in integration, qualification recognition, and cultural differences. Winkelmann-Gleed et al. (2022) analyzed the factors motivating nurses to migrate and the challenges they face in the UK's healthcare system. They highlight the significant reliance on migrant nurses to address staff shortages and the challenges they face in integrating, such as language barriers, cultural differences, and complex regulatory frameworks. Despite these challenges, migrant nurses contribute significantly to the UK healthcare system, enhancing patient care through diverse skills and perspectives. Standley et al. (2023) examined the mistreatment of women during childbirth in major hospitals in Yenagoa, South-South Nigeria, and its impact on healthcare migration decisions. The study

highlighted the negative working environment for healthcare professionals, leading to a preference for better conditions abroad. Systemic issues like lack of training and inadequate infrastructure exacerbate dissatisfaction among healthcare workers. The study suggests policies to address these issues and encourage retention in underserved and rural areas.

Walton-Roberts and Bourgeault's, (2024) study highlighted the inequities caused by health-worker migration, particularly from low and middle-income countries. They argue that this migration exacerbates healthcare access disparities, with wealthy nations benefiting at the expense of poorer nations. They suggest that data sharing can improve global governance by enabling countries to anticipate migration trends and adjust policies accordingly. They also highlight the role of international organizations like the World Health Organization in setting global standards for health-worker migration. Chamie's, (2020) study examined migration policies' evolution in response to crises and long-term trends of COVID-19, he highlighted the importance of migrant workers in healthcare, agriculture, and essential services. Countries faced shortages of essential workers, worsened by travel restrictions and border closures. Economic repercussions of halted migration included income drops for countries relying on remittances. The study emphasizes the need for adaptive migration policies to address global health crises and economic downturns.

3.0 Research Methodology

Research Design

The study employs a qualitative research design with in-depth interviews to investigate the psychological factors influencing the migration of healthcare professionals and how these factors drive migration decisions.

Study Population and Sample

The study population consists of 25 healthcare professionals selected across Nigeria through purposive and snowball sampling techniques using face-to-face and telephone interviews. The healthcare providers comprised of 2 medical doctors, 10 nurses and midwives, 2 clinical psychologists, 2 health psychologists, 2 psychiatrists, and 5 auxiliary nurses. The sample was drawn from various healthcare centers including government health centers, and private hospitals, and the psychologists were drawn from private practices and educational institutions.

Sampling Technique

A convenient and snowball sampling techniques were employed to select participants: (those who are well known to the researchers, those recommended by those who already participated and recommended their colleagues to the researcher), those who have experienced the migration trend directly (those who have migrated, those considering or who have attempted migration) and indirectly (those who have witnessed colleagues migrating). The sample included a diverse group of healthcare professionals to capture a broad range of experiences and perspectives. The sample size of 25 was adopted as was done by Vasileiou et al. (2018) which discussed the ongoing debate and uncertainty surrounding sample size selection in qualitative research, particularly in health-related studies, highlighting inconsistent reporting and justification across various disciplines,

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despite the importance of justifying sample size sufficiency. Vasileiou et al. (2018) highlighted that justifying sample size sufficiency is a quality marker in qualitative research. Boddy's (2016) approach concluded that for qualitative studies focusing on deeper insights rather than population-level generalizations, fewer participants (e.g., 10-30) are often sufficient to reach saturation and explore nuanced themes.

Data Collection Methods

Unstructured in-depth interviews were conducted with healthcare professionals through face-to-face and telephone conversations. The responses were then written down and not recorded due to ethical reasons (the participants insist their voices should not be recorded) to explore their motivations for considering migration and the psychological stressors they experience in their work environment. Each interview lasted between 30-45 minutes and was written down only. Follow-up interviews were also conducted to capture in-depth data as most of the participants did not accept that their voices be recorded, but we were permitted to write the interview down only. Document analysis was also done through reviews of relevant policy documents, government reports, and media articles related to healthcare worker migration and retention strategies to complement the findings from the interviews. This includes reviewing policies from the Nursing and Midwifery Council of Nigeria (NMCN) and other relevant bodies.

Data Analysis

Data collected from interviews were coded and analyzed using thematic analysis with Atlas.ti version 24. The first step was familiarization with the data collected during the interview. The researcher examines the data by reading and re-reading the written responses to gain a thorough understanding of the content. Followed by initial code generation from the data, identifying significant phrases, quotes, and patterns related to psychological factors influencing migration, and experiences of the participants. Theme development was done through codes grouping into broader themes that capture the essence of participants' experiences and perceptions. Themes include stress and burnout, career stagnation, anxiety and insecurity, emotional fatigue, and depression, migration as an escape, work-life balance, career progression, and fear of being left behind. The themes were reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately represent the data and answer the two research questions. The final themes were interpreted in the context of existing literature on healthcare migration and the psychological well-being of healthcare workers. Co-occurrence analyses were carried out with Atlas.ti version 24 to find the relationship between the codes generated in the study. Findings were presented in code-frequency tables, co-occurrence tables, and narrative format with direct quotations from participants only because of the number of pages required for this study, the result is also supported by direct quotes referring to participants in figures (e.g participant1, 2,.) to illustrate their expression in supporting the findings.

Exporting and Importing to Atlas.ti

Using Atlas.ti, we created codes and assigned them to the relevant sections of the transcripts. The result was exported as a codebook for easy categorization under the identified themes, the codebook was imported back to Atlas.ti software version 24 for co-

occurrence analysis. The co-occurrence analysis was carried out to explore relationships between codes (e.g., how "psychological factors" co-occur with "migration consideration"). Systematic analysis of the connections between different codes was carried out. This process revealed which psychological factors, challenges, and professional concerns are most closely linked, providing insights into the co-occurrence of how psychological act as drivers of healthcare worker migration in Nigeria.

4.0 Data Presentation, Analysis, and Discussion of Findings

Table 1: (RQ1) What Psychological Factors Influence Migration Decisions?

S/N	Codes	Codes and Quotations	Freq.
1.	Psychological stress	"Constant Psychological Stress at Work," "Psychological Stress at Work," "Elevated Stress Experiences"	3
2.	Overwhelming work pressure	"Feeling overwhelmed by the pressure of work," "Feeling unmotivated and disengaged from work"	2
3.	Heavy workload For few staff	"Heavy workload," "Overburdened by the workload makes me feel serious stress"	2
4.	High Success Expectations from Society	"High expectations," "societal and cultural expectations"	2
5.	Physical and mental exhaustion	"I was constantly exhausted," "completely drained," and "Emotional and mental exhaustion from toxic or highly stressful work environments"	3
6.	Anxiety and job insecurity	"Anxiety," "job insecurity," "Anxiety and depression related to job insecurity"	3
7.	Fear of career failure and stagnation	"Fear of failure in my career," "No sense of job security," "Uncertainty about my career path"	3
8.	Fear of falling behind in life compared to peers	"Fear of not meeting up with my friends," "Fear of being left behind"	2
9.	Emotional fatigue from work demands	"Emotional fatigue has deeply affected me," "I was mentally exhausted from my job," "emotional fatigue and migration decisions"	3

Source: Field Study (2024)

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Table 2: (RQ2) How Psychological Factors Influence Migration

S/N	Codes	Codes and quotations	Frequency
1.	Unproductive and unhealthy work environment	"Unproductive work environment," "unhealthy work practices"	2
2.	Poor work-life balance	"Poor work-life balance," "I struggle with severe work-life imbalance," "no clear boundaries between work and personal life"	3
3.	Job dissatisfaction and career stagnation	"Lack of fulfillment with my job," "I experience career stagnation," "Serious sense of disengagement"	3
4.	Desire for a career change and progression	"Lack of clear career progression," "career change," "fresh career start with more stability," "explore new professional paths in a different country"	4
5.	Migration as an escape from work-related stress and burnout	"Migration is a way to escape from pressure," "escape from unrealistic career expectations," "I was constantly looking for a way to escape from the burnout," "Migration is a way to reset emotionally"	4
6.	Migration for better job satisfaction and well-being	"Finding a more fulfilling job abroad," "more security and personal satisfaction," "finding a job with more reasonable expectations and better mental health support," "seriously planning to find a job where employee well-being is prioritized"	4

Source: Field Study (2024)

Co-occurrence Analysis

Many co-occurrence relationships can be presented in this study but the most relevant co-occurrence analysis for this study will be presented, focusing on the psychological factors influencing migration decisions (Research Question 1) and how these factors drive migration (Research Question 2). The co-occurrence relationships that stand out in this context will be discussed, based on both the co-occurrence table and thematic relevance.

Table3:**Research Question 1: What Psychological Factors Influence the Migration Decisions of Healthcare Professionals?**

S/ N	Psychological Factors Influencing Migration	Stress and Burnout	Career Stagnation	Anxiety and Insecurity	Emotional Fatigue and Depression
1	Stress and Burnout	10	6	5	7
2	Career Stagnation	6	12	8	5
3	Anxiety and Insecurity	5	8	9	6
4	Emotional Fatigue and Depression	7	5	6	15

Source: Field Study (2024)

4.1 Discussions of Findings

Work-Related Stress and Burnout versus Anxiety and Job Insecurity

The result of the cooccurrence analysis showed a strong link between work-related stress and burnout and anxiety and job insecurity as individuals who experience constant stress at work tend to feel insecure about their jobs. This relationship highlights that work environments causing mental exhaustion contribute to anxiety, as individuals fear losing their jobs or not achieving career stability. This could be attributed to the fact that employees who are overburdened by workload tend to develop job insecurity, feeling they cannot keep up with expectations. Participant 9: *"The idea of migration became appealing when I realized that I could escape the constant stress. I just wanted a fresh start in a healthier work environment."* Participant 5: *"The fear of losing my job and not being able to support my family kept me up at night. I thought moving abroad might provide me with a more secure and predictable career path."* Participant 6: *"I was constantly anxious about my future here. The uncertainty about my career pushed me to start exploring migration as an option for more stability."* Participant 1: *"The constant psychological stress at work was unbearable. I felt like I was just surviving, not thriving. It wasn't long before I started considering moving abroad to find a healthier environment where I could balance my personal and professional life better."* Participant 2: *"Burnout hit me hard. I was exhausted all the time, and there was no escape from the heavy workload. That's when the idea of migration came up — to leave behind this overwhelming pressure."* The connection between stress and anxiety is well-documented in psychological literature, emphasizing how overwhelming work pressures can increase anxiety levels. This becomes a key driver of the decision to migrate, as individuals seek to escape these emotionally exhausting environments.

Stress and Burnout versus Emotional Fatigue and Depression

High overlap between these themes (7 co-occurrences) suggests that prolonged stress at work contributes to emotional exhaustion and may trigger depressive symptoms. Participant 8: *"Depression was my daily reality because of the overwhelming demands at work. I knew I had to leave and find a place where mental health is prioritized, so I started planning my move."* Participant 7: *"I felt completely drained emotionally, and the constant pressure was taking a toll on my mental health. Migration started to feel like the only way to escape this emotional fatigue and find peace."*

Career Stagnation versus Anxiety and Insecurity

The moderate co-occurrence (8) between career stagnation and anxiety indicates that individuals who feel stuck in their careers often experience anxiety about their future, possibly due to uncertainty regarding career advancement. Participant 3: *"I wasn't growing in my career. There was no fulfillment, no excitement, just stagnation. Migration seemed like the only way to find new opportunities where my efforts would be appreciated."*

Participant 4: "I got to the point where I felt disengaged from my job entirely. I started looking for ways to migrate because I needed something more productive and satisfying."

Emotional Fatigue Versus Career Stagnation

A lower co-occurrence (5) between these two themes suggests that emotional fatigue can result from a lack of career fulfillment, but this may not always lead to burnout or migration as a first solution. *Participant 10: "Migration offered me a way to reset emotionally. The mental exhaustion from my job here was unbearable, and I couldn't wait to leave it all behind."*

Lack of Fulfillment, Career Stagnation versus Emotional Fatigue, and Depression

Lack of fulfillment and career stagnation often co-occur with emotional fatigue and depression. The reason could be that when individuals feel unfulfilled in their careers, they tend to suffer from emotional exhaustion, leading to depression. *Participant 3: "I wasn't growing in my career. There was no fulfillment, no excitement, just stagnation. Migration seemed like the only way to find new opportunities where my efforts would be appreciated."* *Participant 4: "I got to the point where I felt disengaged from my job entirely. I started looking for ways to migrate because I needed something more productive and satisfying."* Career stagnation without clear progression can contribute to the feelings of being sad and fatigued, making migration seem like an escape route to restart one's professional life. This relationship is important because it explains how mental health issues such as depression often arise when individuals feel trapped in unproductive or unsatisfying careers. This feeling of hopelessness and emotional exhaustion is a significant push factor for migration.

Table 4:

Co-occurrence Analysis for Research Question 2: How do Psychological Factors Influence Migration Decisions of Healthcare Professionals?

S/ N	Role of Psychological factors in influencing Migration	Migration as an escape	Work-Life Balance	Career Progression	Fear of Being Left Behind
1	Migration as an escape	15	7	9	6
2	Work-Life Balance	7	10	5	3
3	Career Progression	9	5	12	4
4	Fear of Being Left Behind	6	3	4	8

Source: Field Study (2024)

Migration as an Escape from Stress and Burnout versus Desire for Better Work-Life Balance and Well-being

Many healthcare workers view migration as a way to escape stress and burnout while also seeking a better work-life balance and well-being. A notable co-occurrence (7) between work-life balance and migration as an escape reflects that those who feel overwhelmed by poor work-life balance often turn to migration to find healthier work environments. This co-occurrence reflects the dual motivation of leaving behind a toxic work environment and the desire to move toward a healthier lifestyle. *Participant 11: "I saw migration as a way to achieve a better work-life balance. Where I am now, it's impossible to focus on my mental health or personal well-being."* *Participant 12: "I was looking for a job where my well-*

being would be taken seriously. Migration seemed like the answer to finding a more supportive workplace." This finding highlights a push-pull dynamic where the push of burnout and unhealthy work environments is met with the pull of opportunities abroad that promise better work-life balance and mental health support. Individuals prioritize their well-being and see migration as an avenue to achieve this balance, improving their overall mental health and career satisfaction.

Career Progression versus Fear of Being Left Behind

The desire for career progression and stability is often accompanied by the fear of being left behind with a moderate co-occurrence of (4) between them suggesting that some individuals are driven by the fear that staying in their current job or location will leave them behind in comparison to peers who have migrated for better opportunities. Many individuals feel pressured to leave the country because they believe their peers abroad are progressing faster in their careers. Participant 15: "There was this constant fear that I wasn't meeting up with my peers abroad. Migration became my only option to catch up and achieve what they were achieving." Participant 16: "I was scared I'd grow old without achieving what my colleagues abroad had accomplished. The thought of being left behind made me seriously consider moving." This fear amplifies the urgency to leave in pursuit of better career opportunities and economic security. This may be due to the competitive nature of global job markets and the visibility of peers' success abroad which create a sense of urgency and anxiety. Fear of being left behind drives migration, as individuals strive to maintain parity with their peers and achieve personal and professional success in more stable environments.

Migration as Escape versus Career Progression

The strong co-occurrence (9) between migration as an escape and career progression shows that many individuals see migration as a way to restart or improve their career trajectory, particularly in search of more fulfilling or better-paying job opportunities. Participant 13: "I wasn't getting anywhere in my career here. Moving abroad felt like a fresh start, with more opportunities for progression and stability." Participant 14: "I felt stuck in my job and knew that if I didn't migrate, I couldn't find the career growth and security I needed."

Work-related stress and anxiety are deeply intertwined, suggesting that poor working conditions in the local environment are significant push factors for migration. Individuals not only experience stress but also fear long-term career stagnation or job loss, pushing them to migrate. Emotional fatigue and career dissatisfaction are strongly related, highlighting how the psychological toll of stagnant or unfulfilling careers drives individuals to seek better opportunities abroad. The study highlights the increasing importance of work-life balance as a motivator for migration in today's workforce. Participants reported feeling overwhelmed by their jobs, burnout, and stagnation, leading them to consider moving abroad to find a healthier environment. They felt disengaged from their job and worried about losing their job and supporting their family. The fear of losing their job and not being able to support their family kept them up at night. The uncertainty about their

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5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

Work-related stress and career stagnation are closely linked to feelings of emotional fatigue and anxiety. These emotional states are major psychological factors pushing individuals to consider migration as a means to escape the pressures of their work environment or the frustration of stalled career progression. Migration as an escape is strongly influenced by a desire for career progression and a search for a better work-life balance. These psychological factors, along with the fear of missing out on opportunities available to peers abroad, contribute significantly to migration decisions. The substantial contribution of psychological elements to migration is highlighted by the congruence of the study's findings with the conceptual and theoretical frameworks. Deviations present chances to improve or broaden the frameworks, such as the comparatively diminished impact of sociocultural elements or different emphasis on economic aspects. This could entail incorporating other ideas or concentrating on context-specific elements that influence healthcare professionals' migration. The findings support the Push-Pull factor hypothesis, demonstrating that while the desire for a better work-life balance and the opportunity to advance professionally overseas serve as pull reasons, stress, burnout, job instability, and career stagnation are powerful push factors. Participants' accounts of migration as a means of escaping unfavorable working conditions and a chance to live a better life demonstrate this correlation (Adepoju, 2020; Castles et al., 2014). The study supports Maslow's theory that people seek major life changes when their basic and psychological needs are not addressed. This paradigm is supported by participants' desire for career progress overseas to achieve self-actualization, emotional stability, and employment security (Maslow, 1943). Healthcare workers are trying to balance their career goals with the realities of burnout and stagnation, which is partially in line with cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957). However, the pragmatic view of migration as a necessity, rather than an internal conflict resolution, indicates a divergence from the typical dissonance model. These findings suggest that addressing these psychological factors within local work environments could reduce the push factors driving migration showing the importance of creating healthier work environments that prioritize mental health, career fulfillment, and stability which will potentially reduce the need for migration.

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