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Exploring the Determinants of Youth Labor Migration over Higher Education

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ABSTRACT **Original research paper**

In modern societies, the decision-making process of youth regarding labor migration versus pursuing higher education is influenced by multiple factors. This study aims to understand the reasons why people choose to migrate for work instead of continuing their higher education. The research uses regression analysis to study how different factors such as social, cultural, economic, educational, political, environmental, and others affect people's decisions to migrate. Research findings indicate that social factors like social status, improving living standards, individual development, and improving household status; cultural factors like supporting family; economic factors, i.e., financial support to family, economic security, and lack of employment; educational factors, like high investment in education but low income; and miscellaneous factors like kinship play pivotal roles. These findings help policymakers, educators, and others to understand why young people do migrate and find out better solutions to promote higher education.

Keywords: youth, labor migration, higher education, determinants, multifaceted factors.

Introduction

A systematic review shows that there are multiple factors, i.e., social, cultural, economic, educational, political, environmental, and miscellaneous, that are motivating youth for the migration (Mahato &Paudel, 2022). There are many sub-factors like social status (DSPD/UNDESA and ILO, 2013), living standard (Bakina, Yaremtchuk, Orlova, &Krasnoperova, 2019), personal development (Chiang, Hannum, & Kao, 2013), household capabilities (Bastianon, 2019), lack of awareness, and personal aspiration (FW, 2017) for social factors. Likewise, family support (Edwin & Glover, 2016), family decision (Gartaula&Niehof, 2013), and family pressure (Subba, Maharjan, Bhatta, & Bhattarai, 2019) are cultural factors; financial support (DSPD/UNDESA & ILO, 2013), economic security, low incentive for educated manpower (Gartaula&Niehof, 2013), job unavailability (Kharel, 2018), and better opportunity of earning (Suciu &Florea, 2017) are economic factors. In the same way,

pursue study (DSPD/UNDESA & ILO, 2013), high investment and low return (Girsberger, 2017), investment for lifelong learning (Suciu &Florea, 2017), and quality of education (Keoviphone& Wibowo, 2015) for educational factors. Moreover, political instability (Blazhevska, 2017) for political factor as well as lack of land to plough (Subba, Maharjan, Bhatta, & Bhattarai, 2019), boredom of farming (Ifeanyichukwu, Enyinnaya, Lazurus, & Innocent, 2016), and absence of natural environment (Suciu &Florea, 2017) for environmental factor; nepotism and corruption (Blazhevska, 2017), and torture (Ifeanyichukwu et al., 2016) for miscellaneous factors are playing a vital role in stimulating youths for the migration. However, which sub-factors are better at motivating youths for the migration is still to be tested in the context of Nepal. Therefore, this study was employed to find out which factors do better explain youth deciding on labor migration rather than higher education.

Methods

A quantitative research design (Creswell and Clark, 2018) was applied for this study. A sample size of 385 labor returnees was determined using a sampling formula ($n_o = Z^2pq/e^2$) of (Cochran, 1977) for an unknown population. The sample was selected using simple random sampling techniques (Levy and Lemeshow, 1999) at airport exits (Prideaux and Sibtain, 2012), considered the best source for labor returnees. Data for the related variables were collected through a survey method. For ethical consideration, the research included clarifying study objectives, ensuring participant confidentiality, obtaining informed consent, and anonymizing data (Waluchow, 2003). The binary logistic regression model (Tranmer et al., 2023)and the chi-square test were applied for the statistical analysis. Overall, the study had followed rigorous methods to investigate the research objective.

Results

Table 1. *Factors Associated with Youth Deciding on Labor Migration Rather Than Higher Education*

Variables		Sig.
Social factors	Social status	.090
	Improving living standard	.015*
	Individual development	.000*
	Improve household status	.027*
	Lack of awareness	.000*
	Individual expectation fulfilment	.905
Cultural factors	To support family	.000*
	Decision of family	.362
	Pressure from family	.196
Economic factors	Economic support to family	.000*
	Economic security	.001*
	Lack of employment	.000*
	Low incentive for capable employer	.558
	Good opportunity of income	.000*
Educational factors	High investment in education low income	.000*
Political factors	Political instability	.583
Environmental factors	Low farmland	.080
	Boredom from farming	.594
	No satisfactory environment disaster contamination	.831
Miscellaneous factors	Kinship	.000*
	Corruption	.826
	Torture	.000*

* $p<0.05$

The study identified several significant factors influencing youth to choose labor migration over higher education. Key significant social factors were improving living standards, individual development, household status improvement, and lack of awareness. Similarly, key significant cultural factors were family support and economic factors like providing economic support, achieving economic security, lack of employment, and better income opportunities. Moreover, educational factors were like high investment with low returns, and miscellaneous factors like kinship ties and experiences of torture significantly impact decisions of youth to choose labor migration rather than higher education.

Table 2.*Factors Better Explain Youth Deciding Labor Migration Rather Than Higher Education*

Variables		B	S.E.	Wald	Sig.	Exp (B)
Social factors	Social status	1.193	.431	7.641	.006*	3.296
	Improving living standard	-1.037	.424	5.974	.015*	.355
	Individual development	-1.214	.421	8.324	.004*	.297
	Improve household status	-.876	.397	4.875	.027*	.416
	Lack of awareness	-.109	.326	.111	.739	.897
	Individual expectation fulfilment	.044	.365	.014	.905	1.045
Cultural factors	To support family	-1.391	.467	8.884	.003*	.249
	Decision of family	.318	.349	.831	.362	1.374
	Pressure from family	-.631	.477	1.747	.186	.532
Economic factors	Economic support to family	-1.036	.513	4.084	.043*	.355
	Economic security	1.490	.447	11.102	.001*	4.439
	Lack of employment	2.159	.436	24.477	.000*	8.660
	Low incentive for capable employer	.203	.346	.343	.558	1.225
	Good opportunity of income	-.001	.134	.000	.992	.999
Educational factors	High investment in education low income	-1.175	.301	15.227	.000*	.309

Political factors	Political instability	-.164	.299	.301	.583	.849
Environmental factors	Low farmland	-.635	.381	2.785	.095	.530
	Boredom from farming	.187	.351	.283	.594	1.205
	No satisfactory environment	.055	.388	.020	.887	1.057
	disaster contamination					
Miscellaneous factors	Kinship	-1.987	.758	6.862	.009 *	.137
	Corruption	-.119	.540	.048	.826	.888
	Torture	.606	.864	.492	.483	1.834

* $p<0.05$

Social Factors

The analysis of the table shows the impact of various social factors on the dependent variable: youth deciding labor migration rather than higher education. Social status has a significant positive impact on the outcome variable of youth deciding for labor migration. For each step up in social status, the chances of the outcome happening increase by about 3.296 times, while keeping other factors the same. The p-value (0.006) is less than 0.05, indicating that the effect is statistically significant. However, improving living standards is negatively associated with the outcome variable. For each step up in efforts to improve living standards, the chances of the outcome happening go down by about 64.5%, and the effect is statistically significant as the p-value is 0.015.Moreover, individual development significantly decreases the odds of the outcome. A one-unit increase in individual development efforts is associated with a 70.3% reduction in the odds (1 - 0.297 = 0.703). The p-value of 0.004 shows a strong statistical significance. In addition to that, improving household status also shows a significant negative relationship with the outcome. A one-unit increase in efforts to improve household status reduces the odds of the outcome by 58.4% (1 - 0.416 = 0.584); however, the p-value of 0.027 confirms statistical significance. Nevertheless, lack of awareness does not have a significant effect on the outcome (p = 0.739), and the odds ratio as it closes to 1 (0.897) suggests a negligible impact. Similarly, individual expectation fulfillment also does not significantly affect the outcome (p = 0.905) because the odds ratio of 1.045 indicates a very slight, non-significant increase in the odds.

In this way, the regression analysis provides insights into the relationships between social factors and the dependent variable. Some social factors, such as "social status," "improving living standard," "individual development," and "improving household status," were found to be statistically significant, while others, like lack of awareness and individual expectation fulfillment, did not show a significant association. In summary, despite “social status” not being associated with youth labor migration during the chi-square test, it is statistically significant here. Also, though the “lack of awareness” was associated with youth labor migration during the chi-square test, it is not significant here. These results help in understanding how these social factors influence the outcome of interest of youth labor returnees.

Cultural Factors

Out of various cultural factors, "to support family" is the variable that shows a statistically significant impact on the dependent variable, as the p-value is 0.003. This factor significantly reduces the odds of the outcome, as the odds ratio is 0.249. Both "decision of family" and "pressure from family" do not have a statistically significant impact on the dependent variable, as their p-values are greater than 0.05.

Although "decision of family" has a positive odds ratio (1.374), "pressure from family," however, has a negative odds ratio (0.532), and the effect is not statistically significant. In this way, the regression analysis provides insights into the relationships between cultural factors and the dependent variable, youth labor migration. Cultural factors, such as "to support family," were found to be statistically significant, while "pressure from family" and "decision of family" did not show a significant association. In summary, “to support family” was associated with youth labor migration during the chi-square test, and it is also statistically significant here. These results help in understanding how these cultural factors influence the outcome of interest of youth labor returnees.

Economic Factors

Economic support has a coefficient (B) of -1.036, indicating that for each unit increase in economic support, the log odds of the outcome decrease by 1.036. The Wald statistic is 4.084, and the significance level (Sig.) is 0.043, indicating that economic support has a significant effect on the outcome decision of youth labor migration. The odds ratio (Exp(B)) of 0.355 suggests that the odds of the outcome decrease by approximately 64.5% for each unit increase in economic support. Similarly, economic security with a coefficient of 1.490 has a significant positive effect on the outcome. The odds ratio of 4.439 indicates that for each unit increase in economic security, the odds of the outcome occurring increase by approximately 343.9%. Moreover, lack of employment has the highest coefficient of 2.159, indicating a strong positive effect on the outcome. The odds ratio of 8.660 suggests a significant increase in the odds of the outcome with each unit increase in lack of employment. With a low incentive for capable employers with a coefficient close to zero (0.203) and a non-significant p-value (Sig. = 0.558), this variable does not significantly predict the outcome. Good opportunity of income also does not show a significant effect on the outcome, as indicated by the non-significant p-value (Sig. = 0.283).

In summary, economic security and lack of employment emerge as strong predictors of the outcome, with significant positive effects. Economic support to families has a significant negative effect on the outcome. The presence of a low incentive for a capable employer or a good opportunity for income does not significantly affect the outcome. In this way, the regression analysis provides insights into the relationships between economic factors and the dependent variable. Some economic factors, such as "economic support to family," "economic security," and "lack of employment," are found to be statistically significant predictors, while others (low incentive for capable employer and good opportunity of income) do not show a significant association. Despite "good opportunity of income" being associated with youth labor migration during the chi-square test, it is statistically insignificant here. These results help in understanding how these economic factors influence the outcome of interest of youth labor returnees.

Educational Factors

The logistic regression analysis indicates that "high investment in education but low income" is a significant predictor of the outcome. The negative coefficient (-1.175) suggests that higher investment in education coupled with low income is associated with lower odds of the outcome. Additionally, the statistically significant p-value (p = .000) further supports the significance of this predictor. These results suggest that among the educational factors considered, the combination of high investment in education with low income significantly impacts the outcome variable. Individuals facing this situation may have lower odds of the outcome than those with different educational circumstances.

Political Factors

The logistic regression analysis results suggest the coefficient for "Political instability" is negative (-0.164), indicating that an increase in political instability is associated with a decrease in thelog odds of the outcome. However, the coefficient is not statistically significant, as indicated by the Wald statistic (0.301) and the associated p-value (0.583). The odds ratio of 0.849 suggests that, for each unit increase in political instability, the odds of the outcome decrease by approximately 15.1%. The analysis does not find a statistically significant association between political instability and the outcome variable. This suggests that, based on the data provided, political instability may not be a significant predictor of the outcome. However, it's essential to consider other factors and conduct further analysis to understand the full context and potential impact of political instability on the outcome variable.

Environmental Factors

The coefficient for limited land to farm is -0.635, suggesting a decrease in the likelihood of youth labor migration, but it is not statistically significant (p = 0.095). Also, the coefficient for boredom from farming is 0.187, suggesting a slight increase in the likelihood of youth labor migration, but it is not statistically significant (p = 0.594). Similarly, the coefficient for no satisfactory environment is 0.055, suggesting a minimal increase in the likelihood of youth labor migration, but it is not statistically significant (p = 0.887). The environmental factors tested do not significantly influence youth labor migration according to this model.

Miscellaneous Factors

Kinship is significantly associated with youth labor migration, as p = 0.009 is smaller than <0.05. Perceived corruption does not have a significant effect on youth labor migration (p = 0.826 is greater than 0.05). Also, experiences of torture do not have a significant effect on youth labor migration (p = 0.483 is greater than 0.05). Among the miscellaneous factors analyzed, only kinship shows a significant association with youth labor migration; neither corruption nor torture are significant predictors of youth labor migration in this model. In this way, despite the association between youth labor migration and torture during the chi-square test, they are not significant here.

Discussion

This chapter explains the results of the study about why young people choose to work abroad instead of continuing higher education. The findings are compared with other studies to better understand what influences their decisions. The study shows that social factors are very important in making young people decide to migrate. Things like social status, better living conditions, personal growth, and improving their family's situation encourage them to move. This means that migration can help them gain respect and a better position in their community. One of the studies from Ghana and Nigeria also shows that 16.6 percent of the young people in Ghana had migrated from the Afikpo South Local Government Area of Ebonyi State for social amenities (Edwin & Glover, 2016; Ifeanyichukwu, Enyinnaya, Lazurus, & Innocent, 2016). However, 68.8 percent of youths in Osun State, Nigeria, were not keen to stay in the rural settings without improved living conditions in their communities (Alarima, 2018). Interestingly, lack of awareness and individual expectation fulfillment do not show any significant impact on migration, suggesting that awareness campaigns or individual aspirations alone may not be strong enough to alter migration decisions.

Cultural factors like supporting family also influenced youth migration decisions because supporting family was a major reason why some youth choose not to migrate. It was found that those who focus on family responsibilities are less likely to migrate, showing the cultural importance of family unity and support. This finding is similar to studies by Gartaula&Niehof (2013), which highlight how family duties can discourage migration. However, family decisions and pressure do not have a strong impact, meaning cultural factors do not always influence migration behavior. In the same way, economic factors also played the biggest role in migration decisions. The lack of local employment opportunities was the most important reason for youth to migrate. In the absence of job opportunities, they are more likely to move abroad in search of work. Moreover, economic security was also a strong factor, as people seek financial stability. On the other hand, those who provide financial support to their families are less likely to migrate. These results align with research by Mlambo &Mpanza (2019) and Yadav et al. (2018), which show that unemployment and financial insecurity are major reasons for migration in Africa and South Asia. About 38.64 percent of people agreed that they were not covered by the employment guarantee schemes of the government of India, like MGNREGA (Yadav, Sharma, &Gangwar, 2018). Also, the study of Farah, Zafar, and Nawaz (2012) as unemployed people in the rural settings induced migration to the cities for finding better job opportunities in response to improving their income. Economic factors, such as low incentives for capable employers and good income opportunities, do not have a significant effect on migration. This suggested that larger economic challenges may be more important than individual job-related benefits.

Educational investment presents an interesting situation because young people invest heavily in education; however, they earn low incomes; therefore, they are less likely to migrate. This shows their frustration with not getting expected financial returns despite their education. Similar trends are seen in the United States, where financial struggles prevent educated individuals from pursuing further studies (Witteveen, 2020). Other educational factors do not

have a major impact, emphasizing that financial outcomes matter more than educational goals when deciding to migrate. Political instability does not significantly affect migration decisions. This finding differs from studies in politically unstable regions, where it is a key reason for migration. In the context of Nepal, economic and social issues seemed to be more urgent than political problems. Also, environmental factors, such as small landholdings, boredom with farming, and dissatisfaction with environmental conditions, do not strongly influence migration. In this way, although having less farmland had a small negative effect, other factors are not significant. This suggests that environmental issues alone are not enough to drive migration unless combined with economic or social challenges. The results were similar to studies in rural areas, where migration is often influenced by both environmental and economic factors (Subba et al., 2019). Among miscellaneous factors, kinship played an important role in reducing migration. In addition, strong family and social ties kept youth from moving abroad. However, factors like experiences of torture, despite being significant in earlier chi-square tests, do not directly impact migration. This indicates that while they contribute to migration discussions, they may not strongly influence individual decisions.

Conclusion

The study highlighted the factors that were associated with decisions of youth for labor migration rather than continuing their education. Among various factors, economic factors, especially unemployment and financial insecurity, were the biggest reasons for labor migration for youth. In addition, social and cultural factors such as family support and social status also played an important role in deciding youth for labor migration. Moreover, educational challenges added to the problem, as high investment in education with low financial returns discouraged youth from continuing higher education. However, political and environmental factors were not associated with the decision of youth for labor migration. In this way, the findings provided useful insights for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders about how reducing unemployment and improving financial security should be a top priority effort in relation to promoting higher education for youth. To ensure higher education for youth with skill and guarantee better financial returns from education can help to reduce the pressure of youth to migrate. Finally, by understanding the different reasons behind migration, stakeholders can develop effective strategies (targeted youth employment programs, skill-development initiatives, and public–private partnerships, student loans with low interest) that meet the diverse needs and goals of Nepali youth and make them stay here for continuation of education. In conclusion, the study shows that migration is influenced by many factors, and solving this issue requires a complete, well-planned, and multi-sectoral approachwith skills, opportunities, and incentives to pursue higher education and contribute to national development rather than seeking opportunities abroad.

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