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Examining the influence of demographic, social factors, and socio-economic prospects of home country on the migration attitudes of undergraduates: A study of the new entrants to the University of Peradeniya

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the factors influencing the migration attitudes of new university entrants in Sri Lanka, focusing on their demographic, social factors, and the socioeconomic prospects of the home country. Considering the recent accelerated brain drain following the severe economic crisis in 2022, a comprehensive survey was conducted among new entrants at the Faculty of Agriculture, University of Peradeniya in 2023. The data collection utilized a structured questionnaire incorporating standardized instruments to measure key variables. Findings indicate that undergraduates' perceptions of their country's socioeconomic prospects negatively influence their migration attitudes; many foresee economic instability and consider migration as a viable option. Additionally, the attitudes of family and friends significantly shape these perspectives, with supportive social networks fostering more positive views toward migration. The insights gained from this research can be utilized by policymakers and educational institutions in developing targeted strategies to address the aspirations and concerns of undergraduates intending migration. Such strategies will aid in aligning the future expectations of Sri Lankan undergraduates with both local and international opportunities.

Keywords: Migration Attitudes, Demographic Factors, Socioeconomic Prospects, Social Factors, University New Entrants.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Migration has emerged as a prominent and multidimensional topic in the current society, shaped by a complex interaction between individual decisions and external influences (Castelli, Francesco, 2018). As globalization continues to influence the dynamics of higher education, understanding these influences is essential for comprehending how young individuals perceive migration. The movement of young talent across borders is driven by a variety of factors, including career prospects, educational opportunities, and the pursuit of an enhanced quality of life (Beine, Noël, & Ragot, 2014). For undergraduate students, the decision to migrate becomes intricately linked with their developing sense of identity, societal awareness, and global perspective.

The study is situated against the backdrop of Sri Lanka's current economic landscape, which is characterized by a severe crisis marked by soaring inflation rates and a significant outflow of workers seeking employment abroad. In 2022, a significant number of Sri Lankan youth migrated for various employment opportunities abroad. According to the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE), 80,958 individuals under the age of 29 left the country for work. In formulating migration decisions, students must navigate the intersection of their educational qualifications and skill sets with these challenging economic realities. The country's education system and the availability of skilled labor further complicate the factors driving labor migration demand (Lansakara, 2022).

Researches indicates that demographic factors such as age, gender, education level, and socio-economic status significantly impact migration attitudes. For instance, younger individuals tend to exhibit more liberal views on migration compared

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to older generations, often due to their exposure to diverse cultures and ideas within university settings (Hainmueller & Hopkins, 2014). Social factors also play a crucial role in shaping migration attitudes among undergraduates. The networks and communities that individuals belong to significantly influence their perspectives on migration. Students raised in environments that promote multiculturalism are likely to adopt similar views as they enter higher education (Carlson & Widaman, 1988).

Socio-economic prospects also significantly influence migration attitudes among undergraduates. The perception of economic opportunities available in host countries can affect how students view migration. Many students consider the potential for better job prospects and quality of life when contemplating migration for education or employment (Bozheva, 2020).

Various theories exist to explain migration phenomena at different scales, ranging from state and national levels to individual and household dimensions (Hammar et al., 1997). The study utilizes the theory of push and pull factors as its foundational framework. According to this theory, push factors are conditions that drive individuals away from their current location, such as economic hardship or lack of opportunities, while pull factors attract them to a new location, including better job prospects or improved living conditions (Lee, 1966). Friends and family network has also been a pull factor in the recent times. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for comprehensively analyzing the migration attitudes of undergraduates.

While previous studies provide valuable insights into individual factors, our study contributes by simultaneously examining the collective impact of these variables. This holistic understanding is essential not only for policymakers and educators but also for potential migrants themselves. The insights derived from this research hold the potential to inform the development of targeted interventions and support systems, addressing the concerns and aspirations of undergraduate students considering migration.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW (HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT)

2.1 Migration Attitudes

Migration attitudes among undergraduates have gained significant attention in recent literature due to their implications for societal and individual decision-making. Migration attitudes refer to the opinions, beliefs, and attitudes of individuals towards migration, which is a multidimensional phenomenon influenced by various factors. These attitudes can encompass a wide range of emotions and perceptions, including support for or opposition to migration, concerns about its impact on society, and views on the rights and well-being of migrants (Ugarte Gurrutxaga et al., 2020).

2.2Social Factors

Family members' attitude towards migration & family attachment.

Family plays a crucial role in shaping migration attitudes and intentions, as individuals often consider the perspectives and preferences of their loved ones when making decisions about moving or staying (Haas & Fokkema, 2011). A study by Balaz et al. (2004) has found that family support, both emotional and financial, was a key factor in facilitating migration among Slovak students. Similarly, research by Timmerman et al. (2014) highlighted the importance of family networks in providing information, resources, and encouragement for potential migrants.

The consequences of international migration endure over an extended period and significantly impact both individuals and families (Fuller, 2017). As migrants undergo shifts in their interpersonal connections due to the physical relocation, family members who stay behind also undergo alterations in their familial bonds. (Bryceson and Vuorela, 2002). Parents within transnational parent-child relationships are also impacted by and may struggle to cope with the geographic separation from their children (Carling et al., 2012).

2.3 Friends' attitude towards migration

The attitudes of an individual's friends towards migration can exert a substantial impact on the individual's own attitude. Research has demonstrated that engaging in meaningful interactions with foreign students, including nurturing friendships with them, is associated with a prominent positive attitude towards immigration (Bentsen, 2022). This underscores the significance of social connections and exposure in influencing one's perspective on migration.

A study in Canada found that peer networks play a crucial role in facilitating migration, as friends often provide information, resources, and emotional support for youth considering migration. Shared experiences, aspirations, and the desire to explore new horizons together can shape positive attitudes towards migration within social circles (Timmermans, 2014).

2.4 Socio-economic Prospects

The socio-economic prospects of undergraduates can affect their attitudes toward migration. According to Borgonovi & Pokropek (2019) there is evidence of a significant relationship between students' economic future expectations and economic stability playing a role in shaping migration attitudes. Therefore, it is

clear that the socio-economic status and prospects of undergraduates play a crucial role in shaping their attitudes toward migration.

Moreover, students who perceive limited job opportunities in their home countries may view migration as a necessary step to enhance their career prospects and achieve financial independence. This mindset can lead to a greater willingness to relocate for education or employment, as they seek environments that offer better economic stability and growth potential. Conversely, those who anticipate favorable economic conditions at home may prioritize staying close to family and community, reflecting a more cautious approach to migration (Dancygier & Donnelly, 2013).

2.5 Demographic factors

Demographic factors can influence migration attitudes among individuals. Research has shown that education plays a crucial role in shaping perceptions of economic threat, cultural threat, and influence, which in turn affect attitudes towards migration (Borgonovi & Pokropek, 2019). Past research on factors affecting attitudes toward migration often provides conflicting findings from individual studies, indicating the complexity of the relationship between demographic factors and migration attitudes (Dražanová et al., 2023).

2.6 Gender

Grieco and Boyd (1998) state that gender is a fundamental factor in determining the roles, statuses, and life phases of men and women. These influence people's social standing and, consequently, the opportunities that men and women must weigh when entering the pre-migration stage. The drivers of migration impact men and women differently, leading to distinctive circulation patterns between rural and urban areas. (Christou et al., 2022, Stecklov et al., 2010). The importance of incorporating gender into international migration has been emphasized by a number of studies highlighting gender specific differences in migration (Anastasiadou et al., 2023).

2.7 Ethnicity

Ethnic boundaries create categorical distinctions based on perceived ethnic belonging, and intergroup distinctions might also relate to worldview differences (Havermans and Verkuyten, 2021). They might become more relevant in relation to young migrants that are considered as belonging to a distinct ethnicity and originating from economically disadvantaged nations (Schahbasi et al., 2021). Individuals from marginalized ethnic groups may seek to escape discrimination and limited opportunities, prompting them to consider migration (Dustmann & Preston, 2007). Conversely, established ethnic networks in host countries can facilitate migration by providing social support and information about job opportunities (Massey et al., 1987).

2.8 Financial status

Research studies have highlighted the impact of financial status on attitudes toward migration, with the long-term effects of economic downturn. Financial status, often measured through income and employment stability, significantly influences individual attitudes toward migration. Individuals with higher economic standing tend to exhibit more positive attitudes toward immigrants (Dustmann & Preston, 2007). Economic performance of a person has been found to correlate with changes in attitudes, with more positive attitudes observed when it is stable or growing, compared to when it is declining (Vogt Isaksen, 2019).

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

To identify factors affecting undergraduates (new entrants)' attitude towards migration

To examine the effect of socio-economic prospects of the home country on undergraduates' attitude towards migration

To analyse the effect of social factors on undergraduates' attitude towards migration

To analyse the effect of demographic factors on undergraduates' attitude towards migration

Hypothesis of the Study

H_1; Socio-economic prospects of the home country do not have a significant effect on undergraduates' (new entrants)' attitudes towards migration.

H_2; Social factors do not have a significant effect on undergraduates' attitudes towards migration.

H_3; Demographic factors do not have a significant impact on undergraduates' attitudes towards migration.

4. METHODOLOGY

Conceptual Framework

A comprehensive data collection was conducted to examine the effect of demographic factors, social factors and socio-economic prospects of the home country affecting the undergraduates' attitude or their likelihood to migration. The study focused on the undergraduates who have newly enrolled to the university in 2023.

A questionnaire, titled "Undergraduate Attitudes Toward Migration: Perceptions, Preferences, and Impact," was designed to incorporate the key factors under study. The questionnaire comprised 13 items and incorporated a number of standardized instruments to measure the key variables. Systematic random sampling method was used in data collection. This approach ensured an unbiased sample of undergraduates

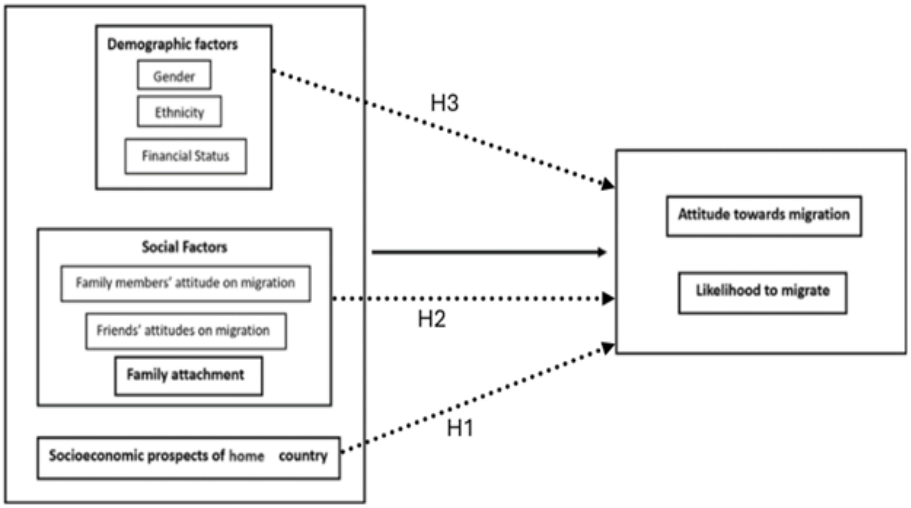


Fig. 1 Conceptual framework

representing the population. Throughout the data collection process, ethical guidelines were followed. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, emphasizing the voluntary nature of their participation and ensuring the confidentiality of the responses. The research team maintained the anonymity of the respondents, and the data were securely stored to protect the participants' privacy.

The study variables were operationalized and measured. Perceived financial stability of the new entrants was assessed through a five point Likert scale ranging from "Struggling (1)" to "Stable (5)". Attitudes of family members' and friends' towards migration were evaluated using a five point Likert scale. Respondents indicated their attitudes towards migration-related statements, ranging from "Highly Encouraged to Stay (1)" to "Highly Encouraged to Move (5)". Family attachment of the new entrants was measured on a five point Likert scale containing three statements related to family in need, family's interest and family's importance, capturing the emotional bond respondents feel towards their families. The socio-economic prospects of undergraduates were gauged based on their perceptions of future economic opportunities in Sri Lanka compared to those available after migration, using a five point Likert scale with five statements. The likelihood of undergraduates to migrate within next five years was measured as a percentage (%) from "Not at all" (0) to "Certain to migrate" (100%). Aforementioned measurement approach allows for nuanced insights into the factors influencing migration decisions among students.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Factors affecting the Migration Attitudes of Undergraduates

The primary objective was to discover the factors affecting university new entrants' attitude on migration. To identify factors affecting undergraduates' attitude towards migration, an extensive literature review was undertaken on the topics attitude towards migration focused on youth and specifically on undergraduates.

Accordingly, in the study Socio-economic prospects of the home country, Social factors; family's attitude and friends' attitude on migration and demographic factors; age, gender, ethnicity and financial status of the undergraduates were selected as the factors affecting the Migration Attitudes of new entrants.

Table 1

Result of Multiple linear regression

Model Summary[b]								
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	F Change	df1	df2	Sig F Change
1	.599a	.359	.247	3.87358	3.204	26	149	.000

Table 2

Result of Multiple linear regression

ANOVA[a]						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1250.111	26	48.081	3.204	.000b
	Residual	2235.684	149	15.005		
	Total	3485.795	175			

A multiple regression analysis was utilized to test the hypotheses H1, H2, and H3. The test revealed that the dependent variables selected in the study explained 35.9% of the variance in the undergraduates' attitude towards migration ($R2 = .359$, $F(26,149)=3.204$, $p<0.1$). Table 1 and 2 displays the results of this analysis.

5.2 Socio-Economic Prospects of the home country on undergraduates' migration attitudes

The results of the multiple regression analysis indicate that socio-economic prospects significantly influences attitudes towards migration among undergraduates ($p<0.1$). The socio-economic prospects of the home country are having a negative relationship with the undergraduates' attitude towards migration ($\beta=-.245$). In the questionnaire survey, the questions such as "Sri Lanka will continue to be economically prosperous over the next 10 years., There will be sufficient jobs and opportunities for many Sri Lankans in the next 10 years, Sri Lanka can continue to attract foreign investment to the country for the next 10 years, I prefer to improve my socioeconomic well-being in Sri Lanka (e.g., by studying and working hard) rather than to migrate for a better life, I can achieve the things that I want even without leaving Sri Lanka" were used to get the new entrants' Socio-economic prospects of the home country.

Research indicates that individuals living in weaker economic states, characterized by lower trust in institutions and higher levels of perceived corruption, tend to exhibit more positive attitudes towards migration. According to Verkuyten in 2021, the relationship between perceived economic conditions and migration attitudes is significant; individuals who believe their country will prosper economically and provide sufficient job opportunities are not likely to have positive attitudes towards migration, while those who perceive economic instability may develop negative views. This was explained by the results of the study where the majority (68%) of students not agreeing with the statements on positive socio-economic prospects and a 60.79% showing likelihood to migrate with in next 5 years.

5.3 Social factors on undergraduates' migration attitudes

Family members' attitude towards migration and Family attachment

According to the study, family attitude towards migration had a significant effect on undergraduates' attitude to migration($p<0.1$). This is supported by Haas & Fokkema in 2011; families may encourage migration as a means of securing a better future for their children, or they may discourage it to maintain family cohesion and support.

In our study the findings indicate that a substantial portion of respondents (50%) reported being encouraged to migrate, while 16% encouraged to stay in the home country. This suggests a notable division in family attitudes, where some family members actively support migration as a means of pursuing better opportunities, while others support for remaining within Sri Lanka. Additionally, 3.4% reported being highly encouraged to stay, reflecting a sentiment that values familial ties and local stability.

Dreby (2010) observed that family members often have conflicting views on migration, with some supporting the idea of moving abroad for better opportunities, while others prioritize family unity and stability. This division is reflected in the findings of our study, where a significant portion of respondents reported being encouraged to move by their families, while others felt encouraged to stay.

5.4 Friends' attitude towards migration

There was a significant relationship between the friends' attitude on undergraduates' attitude to migration($p<0.1$). According to Timmerman (2014), the encouragement from friends to move abroad reflects the perceived benefits of migration, such as better educational and career opportunities, exposure to new cultures, and personal growth.

The findings indicate that a significant majority of respondents (84.8%) reported feeling encouraged by their friends to move, from which 39.9% feeling highly encouraged to move. This suggests that peer influence plays a crucial role in shaping migration aspirations,

as friends often provide information, resources, and emotional support for potential migrants (Balaz et al., 2004).

However, a small portion of participants (6.7%) felt that their friends encouraged them to stay, with 4.5% feeling highly encouraged to stay. This minority view highlights the diversity of attitudes within social circles, where some friends may prioritize local stability and community ties over migration (Haas & Fokkema, 2011).

5.5 Demographic Factors on undergraduates' migration attitudes

Demographic factors considered under the study were, Age, Gender and the ethnicity of the new entrants of the faculty of Agriculture.

The age distribution of the dataset revealed that among the 81 students, age 22 had the largest frequency, with 50 students in the age group of 21 and, 39 in the age group of 23. Six students fell into the age group of 20, while age 24 had the lowest representation, with only one undergraduate. These findings suggest a concentration of respondents in the early twenties, which reflect the typical age range of new entrants to the University of Peradeniya.

In terms of gender distribution, the dataset comprised 98 females (55%) and 79 males (45%), indicating a higher representation of females within the surveyed population. Studies indicate that female enrollment has surpassed male enrollment in universities in Sri Lanka reflecting broader trends in educational attainment among women (Ahamedlebbe, 2011).

The ethnic composition of the sample was predominantly Sinhalese, accounting for 88% (157 students) of the respondents. Tamil respondents represented 8% (15 students), while Muslims and those who did not disclose their ethnicity constituted 2% each (3 and 4 students, respectively).

Ethnicity is also a significant factor, with people often having more positive attitudes towards migrants of the same ethnic background compared to those of different ethnicities. Research indicates that shared ethnic identity can foster positive attitudes, as individuals tend to feel a sense of affiliation and unity with those who share their cultural background. Ethnic minorities may have more positive views of migration when it involves individuals from similar ethnic groups, as these connections can mitigate perceived threats and enhance social cohesion (Andriessen et al., 2023).

However, in our study gender and ethnicity did not play a significant role ($p>0.1$) in shaping the undergraduates' attitude towards migration.

The financial status among participants varied significantly, reflecting a diverse range of economic situations. A substantial majority, 93 individuals, classified their financial status as "Manageable." This was followed by 29 participants who reported feeling "Stressed," 27 who felt "Secure," 14 who experienced "Struggles," and 13 who described their situation as "Stable." This financial breakdown, illustrated in Figure 2.

According to the responses of the undergraduates expressing their financial status, the students facing a higher financial stress showed a positive relationship to their attitude to migration.

5.6 Likelihood to migrate

The responses regarding the likelihood of new university entrants considering migration within the

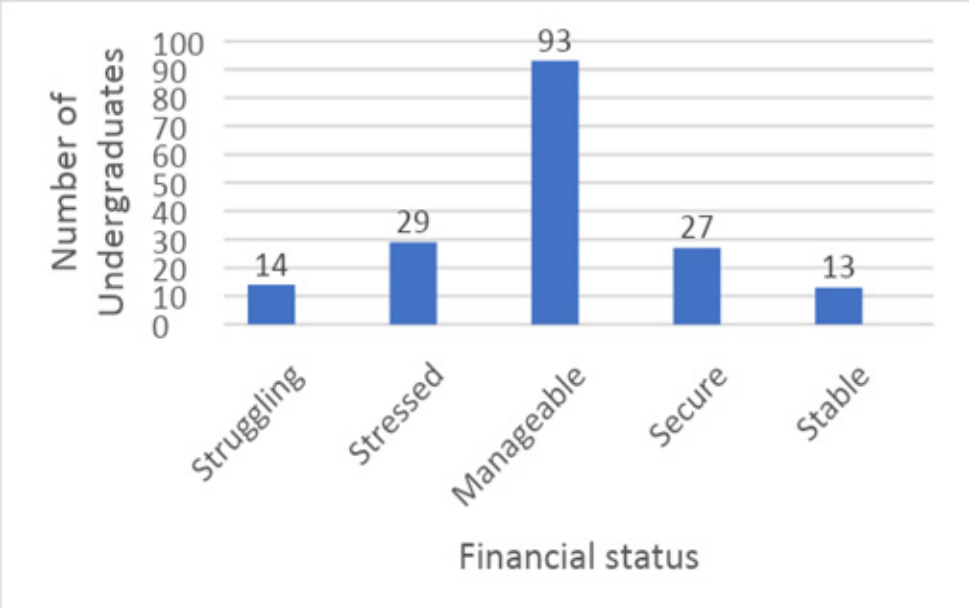


Fig 2: The Financial Status perceived by Undergraduates

next five years indicated that a significant percentage of students having a strong inclination to migrate. Mean likelihood of 60.79% (SD = 25.778) showed that most students are considering migration within the next five years. In the population studied, 25% of respondents indicated a 50% likelihood, while 56% reported a likelihood of 50% or higher. Notably, 8% expressed a 100% likelihood of migrating, contrasting with only 4% reporting no likelihood. These findings suggest a general openness to migration among new university students, which could have important implications for retention strategies and regional workforce planning.

6. CONCLUSION

The study revealed that migration attitudes among new university entrants are significantly affected by demographic, social, and socio-economic factors. Positive influences from family and friends raise favorable migration perspectives, while economic stability in the home country with positive socio-economic prospects tends to affect undergraduates' migrational attitudes. Moreover, the students facing a higher financial stress showed a positive relationship to their attitude to migration. According to the study, inclination towards migration of new entrants is evident, with a substantial portion of respondents considering migration within the next five years, highlighting the need for educational institutions and policymakers to address the concerns of students regarding local opportunities and economic conditions.

7. LIMITATIONS

While the study provides valuable insights, certain limitations should be acknowledged. The study focused on undergraduate students within a specific academic setting, and the findings may not be universally applicable. This highlights the potential for further research to enhance the generalizability of the results.

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Conflicts of Interest:

No conflict of interest.

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