

Research Paper

## Post Migration Stress among Young Adults in Kerala: The Role of Migration Motives and Perceived Social Support

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### ABSTRACT

The present study aims to analyse migration-related stress among young adults from Kerala, India, concerning migration goals and perceived social support. Hence, within the background of globalisation and migration, this work fills an important research gap in terms of investigating post-migration stress related to this group of people. The present study involved a sample of 201 young adults between the ages of 18 and 25 years who have migrated to European countries for work/study. The tools used for the study include the Post Migration Stress Questionnaire, the Reasons for Migration Scale (both developed by the researchers), and the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support. The result findings indicated that Socio-Political and Financial reasons for migration are found to be the significant predictors of Post-Migration Stress. The study also revealed that Socio-political reasons have a significant relationship with post-migration stress among the young adults of Kerala. In addition, perceived social support from friends had a significant relationship with post-migration stress. The study's implications indicate that the intervention should address the given socio-political motives that make people migrate and enhance peer support to reduce stress after migration.

**Keywords:** *Migration, Post-Migration Stress, Migration Motives, Perceived Social Support*

Migration is one of the central processes in globalisation intertwining people of different origin and turning populations into multicultural ones (International Organisation for Migration, 2017). Conversely, migration has some benefits such as economic benefits for the migrants and the receiving countries, but it has risks such as political insecurity, and prejudice (United Nations, 2016). Over the past two years, discussions with migrants, their families, political leaders, researchers, policymakers, and advocacy groups have revealed that migration is an intrinsic part of daily life in Kerala, marked by highs and lows, joy and pain, pride and regret. Migration has been an inherent facet of existence in Kerala since the Gulf oil boom of the 1970s. By 2004, 2.4 million Keralites had migrated, with their remittances contributing to over 35% of the state's total domestic product (Nikhil, 2018). However, recent trends show a 10% decline in migration due to nationalisation policies in Gulf countries and a shift towards more skilled professions among Malayalis. Additionally, the East African Community aimed to establish a

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development corridor for the socio-economic reintegration of returnees, targeting four million return migrants by 2016, with the number of return migrants rising to 1.4 million by that year (Nikhil, 2018).

Nevertheless, the volume of emigration has been reduced, while the interstate migration towards Kerala has increased mainly because of high wages and scarcity of workforce. The state has been advised to cut its dependence on remittances realising the domestic economy and absorption of return migrants (Nikhil, 2018). New migration trends are developing and Keralites are no longer confined to the gulf countries alone but are revealing the horizons of other developed countries such as the USA, Canada and Europe especially as professional nursing (Dinesh, 2023). In 2018, the Kerala Migration Survey estimated that there were around 2.1 million Keralites living abroad, with the majority residing in the Gulf countries. The remittances from these Non-Resident Keralites (NRKs) have been instrumental in supporting household consumption and have contributed significantly to the state's economic growth. The total remittances to Kerala were estimated at Rs. 85,000 crores in recent years, accounting for nearly 35% of the state's GDP. These remittances have fuelled growth across various sectors such as education, healthcare, retail trade, and tourism. Additionally, the presence of Keralites abroad has led to an increase in exports of goods and services from Kerala to international markets, further integrating the state into the global economy. It is not an exaggeration to state that the migration of people from Kerala has played a pivotal role in the globalisation of the state's economy (Kerala Migration Survey)

### **Post-Migration Stress**

This is a stressful period or critical phase that defines several emotions and incidences experienced by individuals after moving to a new environment. Research findings indicate that first and second-generation asylum seekers and migrants suffer from a significantly higher prevalence of mental disorders than the host population mainly caused by the effect of post-migration stress and discrimination. Education and employment may moderate these risks, perhaps employment will alleviate these risks, but restricted freedoms and increased discrimination from mounting global anti-migrant sentiments may further deteriorate their mental health (Sohali, 2023). Other challenges such as trauma, social isolation, and inequitable access to health services are the driving factors which increase the prevalence of PTSD, depression, and anxiety among immigrants and refugees, yet mental healthcare services remain underfunded, and culturally sensitive (Schouler-Ocak et al., 2020).

### **Reasons for Migration**

Migration Motives are therefore the actual reasons for migration, which may be categorised as push and/or pull factors. Such motives include security, business, chance and alike, natural factors, and social factors. Such reasons as persecution and discrimination make people migrate to safer areas while economic migration on the other hand involves migration from more impoverished and poorly remunerated areas to richer and better-paid areas. The other reason that prompts people to move is environmental factors, for instance, disasters such as calamities which make people improve their standard of living by moving from the disaster-prone areas. Social mobility includes looking for higher education, better-paying jobs, and services and products that are vital (Kwilinski et al., 2022). Thus migration, that is movement from one spatial unit to another on a permanent or semi-permanent basis depends on socio-economic, demographic, cultural, political and environmental factors. In India, rural-urban migration results from poor employment opportunities and social factors whereas the urban sector attracts migrants with promises of a better standard. But this put

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pressure on aspects like the provision of housing including creating squatter camps. There are plans, especially by the government, to lubricate the lives of the rural inhabitants, the issues highlighted above are a result of such circumstances (Anju, 2017). In conclusion, migration is influenced by people's needs, and socio-economic and political systems in home and host countries (Samson, 2023).

### *Perceived Support Systems*

Perceived Social Support is the notion of support and the extent to which an individual believes he or she can count on friends, colleagues and members of his or her family during times of trouble. This perception is central to how people appraise their capacity to look for support from other people in their emotional, social and practical needs during difficult phases such as migration. Perceived support is a highly correlated factor with low stress, improved psychological well-being, and a high capacity to adjust when a person is in a new environment. Ageing-in-place, cultural expectations, interactions with friends and other people, previous experiences or access to professional assistance either enhances or alters this perception significantly to foster a sense of being at home, build health and well-being and assist in the transition successfully (Zhang et al., 2023).

The need for this study arises from the critical challenges faced by young adult migrants from Kerala, who form a significant portion of the migrant population. Understanding the stress they encounter post-migration, particularly about their motives for migrating and the perceived social support they receive, is essential for addressing their psychological and emotional well-being. The significance of this study lies in its potential to inform policymakers, mental health professionals, and social workers about the specific needs of these young migrants. By exploring the influence of migration motives and the role of social support, the research provides valuable insights that can guide the development of targeted interventions. These findings are crucial for creating comprehensive support frameworks that enhance the resilience and successful integration of young migrants, ultimately promoting their overall well-being in their host countries.

### *Objectives*

1. To study the relationship between post-migration stress, migration motives and perceived social support among young adults in Kerala
2. To study the predictors of post-migration stress based on migration motives and perceived social support among young adults in Kerala

### *Hypotheses*

- H<sub>01</sub>: There will be no significant relationship between Post Migration Stress, Migration Motives and Perceived Social Support
- H<sub>02</sub>: Migration Motives and Perceived Social Support will not predict Post Migration Stress among young adults in Kerala

## **METHOD**

### *Design*

The research design used in this study is correlational.

### *Sample*

For this research study, the researchers were able to gather responses from 201 Keralites who moved to European countries to work or study.

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### *Sampling Technique*

The purposive sampling method was used for sample selection. This was done as per the inclusion and exclusion criteria as per the objectives of the study, which are mentioned above.

### *Sample Selection Criteria*

Inclusion Criteria: Participants must be young adults aged between 18 to 25 years who have migrated to any European country for work or study purposes.

Exclusion Criteria: Individuals who are not native Keralites are excluded from the study.

### *Variables*

- Post Migration Stress
- Perceived Social Support
- Migration Motives

### *Tools Used*

- **Post Migration Stress Questionnaire (Robert, R. & Babu, S., 2024):** The Post Migration Stress Questionnaire is a self-report tool assessing stressors faced by migrants in new environments. It includes 20 items addressing cultural adaptation, loneliness, community integration, language barriers, employment and financial challenges, relationship maintenance, bureaucratic navigation, healthcare access, safety concerns, discrimination, and cultural identity. Respondents rate each item on a Likert scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), with higher scores indicating greater stress. The scale has a Cronbach Alpha of 0.912.
- **Reasons for Migration Scale (Robert, R. & Babu, S., 2024):** The Reasons for Migration Scale evaluates the migration motives of young adults. It consists of 22 items measured on a five-point Likert scale. The total scale demonstrates high reliability, with a Cronbach Alpha of 0.938.
- **Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (Zimet et al., 1998):** The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), developed by Zimet et al. in 1988, is a widely used self-report tool for assessing perceived social support from family, friends, and significant others. This 12-item scale employs a 7-point Likert scale, from "Very Strongly Disagree" to "Very Strongly Agree," to measure emotional, practical, and overall support. Its three-factor structure helps identify specific support areas. The MSPSS shows strong reliability with a coefficient of 0.88 and correlates well with depression and anxiety subscales of the HSCL, supporting its construct validity.

### *Procedure*

The study gathered data from 201 respondents through closed-ended questionnaires. The data collection comprised three types of questionnaires: The Reasons for Migration Scale; Post Migration Stress Questionnaire and the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support along with a socio-demographic datasheet. Initially, participants received a briefing about the topic under study before the explanation of its purpose. After that, Kerala residents who had left for European countries either to work or study were given a set of questionnaires. All responses were collected once the questionnaires had been completed. All participants' answers were rated according to the respective manuals' guidelines for

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scoring. An Excel spreadsheet was made with all these scores to analyse it accurately as well as comprehensively thus ensuring accuracy and thoroughness in the data collection process.

### *Ethical Consideration*

The research “Post Migration Stress among Young Adults in Kerala: The Role of Migration Motives and Perceived Social Support” maintained ethical standards such as the idea that people should be treated well, doing good and fairness. The study participants were duly informed about the purpose of the research, its procedures as well as their privileges including the right to take part voluntarily or withdraw at any time without any negative consequences. It was ensured that participants had given their consent after being fully informed on what it means and agreed to it. In order to protect the rights and welfare of these respondents, all data were then coded so as not to reveal their identities.

### *Statistical Analysis*

The statistical tests used in this study included the Shapiro-Wilk test, Spearman’s rank correlation, and stepwise regression analysis. The Shapiro-Wilk test was employed to assess the normality of the dataset, with a null hypothesis indicating normal distribution. Spearman’s rank correlation was used to evaluate the association between paired observations of two ranked variables, providing insights into their monotonic relationships. Additionally, stepwise regression analysis was conducted to identify the most influential predictor variables within the regression model, optimising the model by including only significant variables

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### **Relationship between Migration Motives, Perceived Social Support and Post Migration Stress among Young Adults in Kerala**

*Table 1: Relationship between Psychological Reasons, Professional Reasons, Socio-Political Reasons, Financial reasons, Perceived Social Support - Family, Perceived Social Support - Friends, Perceived Social Support - Significant others and Post Migration Stress*

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std Deviation</b>	<b>Post Migration Stress</b>
Psychological Reasons	18.50	3.31	-.087
Professional Reasons	23.61	4.04	-.101
Socio-Political Reasons	17.29	3.18	.249**
Financial Reasons	22.33	4.33	-.056
Perceived Social Support - Family	20.10	5.33	-.057
Perceived Social Support - Friends	21.17	5.25	-.163*
Perceived Social Support - Significant others	20.49	5.10	-.079

The results of Spearman’s rank correlation analysis reveal important insights into the dynamics of post-migration stress among young adults. The negative correlation between post-migration stress and perceived social support from friends ( $r = -0.163^*$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) suggests that individuals who experience higher levels of support from friends tend to have lower levels of post-migration stress. This may be attributed to the emotional and practical assistance that friends provide, which can help mitigate feelings of isolation and anxiety

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commonly faced by migrants in new environments. Strong social support networks can foster a sense of belonging and security, reducing the challenges associated with adapting to a different culture. A study by Bender et al. (2019) on their study on social support and psychological adjustment of international students found that various types of social support positively influence the psychological adjustment of international students. The study also showed that mixed or unspecified sources of support were beneficial for psychological adjustment.

Conversely, the positive correlation between post-migration stress and socio-political reasons for migration ( $r = 0.249^{**}$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) indicates that individuals who migrate due to socio-political issues are likely to experience higher levels of post-migration stress. This relationship may arise from unresolved political conflicts or instability in the host country, which can exacerbate feelings of vulnerability and uncertainty. Migrants motivated by socio-political factors may face additional stressors, such as discrimination or hostility, further complicating their adjustment process. A study conducted by Bozdağ and Bilge (2019) found that migration significantly impacts individuals' lives, particularly immigrants, who often face various mental health issues.

### *Predictors of Post-Migration Stress among Young Adults in Kerala*

The second objective was to study the predictors of post-migration stress based on migration motives and perceived social support among young adults in Kerala a stepwise regression analysis model in general was found appropriate for this objective of the study. Table 2 shows the stepwise regression analysis of post-migration stress.

**Table 2: Stepwise regression results for Post Migration Stress**

Variable	B	LB	UB	SE B	$\beta$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
<b>Step 1</b>						.071	.071
Constant	46.475	37.636	55.313	4.482			
Socio - Political	.977	.494	1.499	.255	.267		
<b>Step 2</b>						.123	.052
Constant	54.189	44.493	63.886	4.917			
Socio- Political	1.475	.913	2.037	.285	.395		
Financial	-.716	-1.129	-.302	.210	-.261		

The stepwise regression analysis offers crucial insights into the relationship between migration motives and post-migration stress among young adults. The first step of the analysis identifies socio-political motives as a significant predictor of post-migration stress ( $\beta = 0.267$ ,  $p < .05$ ). This suggests that individuals who migrate due to socio-political factors, such as political conflict, instability in the host country, or fears of discrimination, are more likely to experience heightened levels of stress compared to those who migrate for other reasons. The model predicts that these stress levels may stem from the trauma

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associated with political conflicts and the challenges of adapting to unstable or unwelcoming environments in the host country. Consequently, migrants driven by socio-political motives may find it particularly difficult to adjust, leading to higher overall levels of tension and stress. Additionally, the first step of the regression model explains 7.1% of the variance in post-migration stress ( $R^2 = 0.071$ ), highlighting that while socio-political motives are a significant factor, other variables also contribute to the overall stress experienced by migrants. A study conducted by Schouler-Ocak et al. (2020) found that elevated rates of PTSD, depression, and psychosis are linked to pre- and post-migration stressors such as trauma and social exclusion.

When financial motives were introduced in the second step, both socio-political motives ( $\beta = 0.395$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and financial motives ( $\beta = -0.261$ ,  $p < .05$ ) remained significant predictors of post-migration stress. The increase in explained variance to 12.3% demonstrates that adding financial motives provides a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing post-migration stress. The negative coefficient for financial motives suggests that young adults who migrate for economic reasons may experience lower levels of stress. This could be attributed to the sense of financial security and stability that employment or educational opportunities in the host country provide. Economic stability may alleviate some of the pressures associated with adjusting to a new environment, thereby reducing stress levels. A study conducted by Cummings et al. (2022) found that irregular migration patterns, particularly from Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, and North Africa, are influenced by factors such as personal and economic security, smuggling networks, and social networks.

### CONCLUSION

In this study, we have extensively examined the effects of motivations for migration and perceived social support on post-migration stress among young adults from Kerala. Results demonstrate that increased stress levels are associated with socio-political causes of movement while economic factors may moderate the same suggesting that financial stability eases adaptation difficulties. Also, friends perceived social support is pivotal in reducing post-migration stress indicating how important social networks are in fostering assimilation. Consequently, these findings necessitate specific programs to address socio-political matters as well as bolstering peer support mechanisms among young migrants which will enhance mental health outcomes.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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