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Youth and Migration Aspiration in Kerala

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Abstract

The emergence of oil production in Gulf countries and the subsequent oil boom in the 1970s led to massive migration from Kerala to Middle East Gulf countries as part of the post-industrial migratory order. The Gulf countries and their opportunities became an integral part of Kerala's youth life while developing future goals and aspirations. This paper provides insight into the migration aspiration of the youth from Kerala and their awareness of migration. A questionnaire survey was conducted in the second half of 2019 in Calicut, Kerala. The sample consisted of 491 students (from arts, science, and professional backgrounds) pursuing the second or last year of graduation. The majority of the youth are aware of Middle East countries, the typical migration destination of Keralites. Most youths are aware of gulf migration through their family, friends and media. Two out of three youths aspire to migrate abroad in future for a job and related activities. Surprisingly, in Kerala, youth with migrant fathers don't aspire to migrate than youth with non-migrant fathers. While having a migrant friend shows a higher likelihood of aspiration to migrate among youth. In the case of Kerala, in the coming 10 to 20 years, migration will continue as a potential life choice for achieving life goals for youth in Kerala. Policies should promote awareness about migration and facilitate a secure and safe migration for youths.

Keywords: Migration; Aspiration; Awareness; Middle-East; Youth; Kerala

Introduction

The emergence of oil production in Gulf countries and the subsequent oil boom in the 1970s led to massive migration from Kerala to Middle East Gulf countries as part of the post-industrial migratory order. Kerala is a state in South India on the Malabar Coast. Kerala has more than three crore inhabitants as per the 2011 Census. From the beginning, Gulf countries kept stringent regulations on migrant workers to keep them temporary (Dib 1988). Despite the strict regulative nature of policies, the immigrants from Kerala became a permanent feature of economic and social life in the region. The 'Gulf migration' provided a new way of life for Kerala's otherwise poor labour situation. As a result of this, Kerala has witnessed a series of diverse socio-economic changes, including, among other things, the development of a money order economy. Kerala is the largest supplier of migrant workers to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, accounting for nearly 2.28 million (Kerala Migration Survey 2018). The Gulf countries and their opportunities became an integral part of Kerala's youth life while developing future goals and aspirations.

Pre-migration aspirations are a central part of the migration decision-making process (Timmerman, Heyse, & Van Mol, 2011). Timmerman, Hemmerechts, and De Clerck (2014) argue migration aspirations are not equal within or across societies and over time. They sturdily depend on the information, perceptions, and values of individuals. These perceptions

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become increasingly vital today, as more and more individuals are exposed to migration-related images through mass media, social media, and low-cost travel opportunities. There is a concrete example available in the literature, how perceptions of the international labour market have also woven their way into the work and education aspirations of potential migrants. The wage differential became narrow; still, potential migrants don't look to work in their native place, but they are ready to migrate and be part of the destination labour market. Most immigrants begin as target earners, and he has a low-status job abroad; he doesn't see him as part of the receiving community. Instead, he sees himself as part of his home community which foreign labour and hard currency remittances carry considerable prestige and honour (Massey et al., 1987).

In a social setting where migration is widespread, the majority of the youth believe that they will only have a successful life if they migrate and develop their future by considering migration as an option. The youth will enrol himself in a course that will allow him to have productive work and have a better migration opportunity if they want to migrate. The person who aspires to migrate to the Gulf considers education investment and expects a job that justifies their education. The paper explores the importance of migration among youth and their migration aspiration in Kerala.

Materials and Methods

Sample

The study is based on primary data collected from youths from Calicut, Kerala. The selected study area (Calicut Kerala) had more than 50 small and big arts and science colleges and professional colleges in private and public undertakings. Out of that, three professional and three arts and science colleges were selected randomly. The sample consisted of 491 students (from arts, science, and professional backgrounds) pursuing the second or last year of graduation. The respondents were selected purposefully from selected six colleges in Calicut, Kerala. They declared that they were born and brought up in Kerala and didn't have any earlier personal international migration experience.

Data collection

A questionnaire survey in the first author's presence was conducted in the second half of 2019 in Calicut, Kerala. The questionnaire had two sections, with the first section for fundamental questions regarding the social and demographic characteristics of each member of the respondent's family (age, education, occupation, job location, marital status, and household membership). The other part will ask about the student's educational history; the approximate amounts of time they spent studying, doing unpaid domestic chores, and engaging in paid labour. The Schedule also ascertained whether the student's father had been to the gulf countries. During the prior year, the extent of Gulf migratory experience within the respondent's nuclear and extended families and their educational, occupational, and migratory aspirations and how they perceive the cost and benefit of moving abroad. The data is entry was done using CPro 7.4 software.

Data management

Descriptive statistics are used to describe the basic features of this study. Further binary logistic regression analysis was performed to understand the determinants. Outcome variables



used for analysis are aspirations to migrate in future both for work and in search of work (0 'No' 1 'Yes'). The results were presented in an adjusted odds ratio (AOR) with a 95 per cent confidence interval (CI). The model equation is

$$\text{Logit } [P(Y=1)] = \beta_0 + \beta * X$$

β_0 estimates the log odds of the dependent variable for the reference group. β estimates the maximum likelihood, the differential log odds of the dependent variable associated with the set of predictors X, compared to the reference group.

The independent variable of social participation is created from youth participation in the social, cultural, religious and political activities; the response varies from never participated to always (5 levels) computed into three levels as rare, occasional and usual participation. The youth were divided into two age groups below 20 (those aged 20 included here) and above 20 (21 and above). The course enrolled, migrants in the family (Father, other than father, no migrants), having migrant friends, gender, religion and below poverty line household are the other major independent variables. Analysis was done by using the Stata.16 software package.

Background characteristics

Table 1 represents the background characteristics of the respondents or youth covered in this study. 52% of the youth are enrolled in professional courses, including law, medical and engineering courses. Nearly 30% of the respondents reported that they have a migrant father, and 34% of youth don't have any migrants in their family (both nuclear and joint). About 32% of youth have at least one migrant friend. Almost 67% of youth covered in this study are aged below 20. The table reveals that nearly 52% of youth covered here are females and 59% are from Islam. Almost 33% reported their religion as Hindu. Only 12% of youth belongs to Below Poverty Line (BPL) households. Nearly 20% of youth said they had worked at least once in the last year in any paid work. 16% of youth have rare involvement in social participation, and 42% have occasional participation. Another 42% of youth reported usual social participation.

Table 1. Percentage distribution of youth by background characteristics

Background characteristics	Percent	Sample (n=491)
Course enrolled		
Professional	52.3	257
Non-Professional	47.7	234
Migrants in the family		
Migrant father	29.5	145
Migrants other than father	36.9	181
No migrants	33.6	165
Migrant friends		
No	66.6	327
Yes	32.4	159
Age		
Below 20	66.6	327
Above 20	33.4	164
Gender		
Male	48.3	237
Female	51.7	254
Religion		

Hindu	32.6	160
Christian	8.6	42
Muslim	58.9	289
Household Economic status		
Above Poverty Line (APL)	87.6	430
Below Poverty Line (BPL)	12.2	60
Worked in last one year		
No	79.9	388
Yes	20	98
Social Participation		
Rare	16.3	80
Occasional	41.5	204
Usual	42.2	207

The sample may differ due to missing cases in some cases

Awareness about the migration

Young people will make a strategic decision about migration based on their awareness about migration and their thought about migration in society more than the particular personal circumstances. Particularly for those in college, migration is a suitable future choice. Table 2 shows the awareness of youth about migration. It was not surprising that 96% of the youth are aware that the Middle East countries are typical destinations of migration for people from their community, and 66% are aware of the process related to Gulf migration. Only 28% know the process of migrating to other countries than the Middle East, and 70% reported that they know about internal migration opportunities in India.

Further, the abroad job-seeking process changed through the years; still, 49% of the youth believes that getting a job through relatives is the best way to find a job abroad, while 38% believe in recruiting agencies. 87% of the youth said they know the living conditions in the Gulf, while only 13 % said they have no idea about it. Finally, 44 % have marked the family as the source of knowledge about migration, and 42% know about migration through media.

Table 2. Awareness about migration among youth

	Percent
Typical destination for migrants from your community	
Middle East	96.1
Europe	1.8
North America	0.6
Other	1.4
Know how to migrate to other parts of the country	
Know the process related to Gulf migration	
Know how to migrate to other countries except for Gulf	27.9
Best way to find a job abroad	
Recruiting agency	37.5
Relatives	48.7
Friends	8.1
Welfare groups	2.2
Others	3.3
Knowledge about the living condition in Gulf	
Source of the Knowledge	
Family	44.1
Friends	13.2
Media	42.1



Migration Aspiration

Figure 1 shows the migration aspiration of the youth. Surprisingly, nearly 64 % of the youth want to migrate if they get a job, while 61 % reported that they are ready to migrate by looking for a job (it is common in Kerala for people to issue tourist visas to foreign countries to hunt for jobs). Almost 86% of the youth like to visit or travel abroad for recreational activities in future.

Figure 1. Migration aspiration of the youth

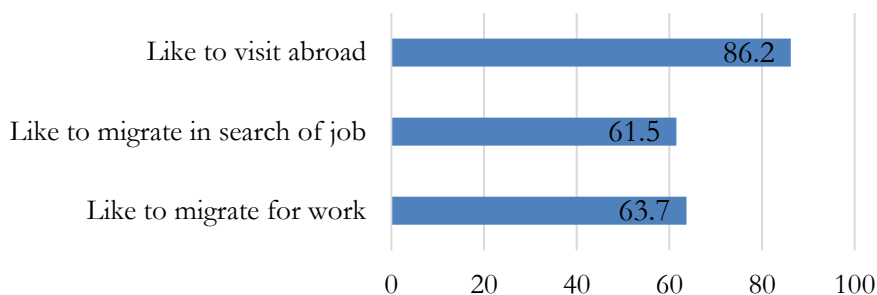


Table 3 represents the youth's future migration preference and potential reasons for their future migration or staying back. In case future migration destination 40% want to migrate to Gulf, 38% choose Europe, and 15% chose North America (Canada and USA).

Table 3. Youth's future migration preference and reasons

	Percent
Destination	
Middle East	39.7
Europe	37.9
North America	15.3
Other	3.9
Reason to choose the destination	
Presence of family and friends	16.3
Knowledge about the place	44.6
Assurance about the high income	27.5
Others	8.4
Reasons for migrating in future	
For work/job	42.2
Searching for job	13.8
Education	35.2
Business/family	3.9
Others	1.6
Reason for not to migrate in future	
Familial reasons	21.1
Job insecurity at destination	11.7
Concerned about life at destination	34.4
Others	32.8
The sample may differ due to missing cases.	

The knowledge about the destination was the main reason that youth pointed (45%) for selecting the particular destination; in comparison, 27% chose the destination based on the

assurance of the high income. Only 16% was considered the presence of the family and friends while deciding the future migration destination. As a reason for the migration in the future, 42% of youth said they would migrate for a job, while 14% will choose to migrate in search of a job. Another 35% of youth wants to migrate in the future for their further education, and only 4% like to migrate to reunite with family members or join in the family business. 35% of youth considered the concern about life at the destination as the main reason to stop them from migrating. 21% of youth believe that familial reasons can be the reason that can prevent future migration, and 12% are worried about the job insecurity at the destination.

Determinants of migration aspiration

Table 4 shows the result of binary logistic regression of the aspiration of youth to migrate for a job and search for a job. In migrating for a job, having friends abroad and being aware of the destination's life shows a higher likelihood. Same time having migrants in the family or migrant father decreases the youth's likelihood of migrating for work compared to those with no migrants in their family.

The females are significantly less likely to aspire to migrate than male youth (OR: 0.576), Even though the result was insignificant. The youth from the BPL household is 1.165 times more likely to migrate for jobs than those from APL households. The increase in social participation decreases the likelihood of youth migration in the future for a job. The youth aware of living conditions abroad is significantly 1.761 times more likely to migrate if he gets a job offer than those unfamiliar with the destination's life. The results for youth aspiration to migrate in search of work show the same as those discussed above in case aspiration to migrate for work. Youths with friends' abroad are 1.633 times more likely to migrate searching for work, while females are less likely to migrate and search for jobs than males (OR: 0.598). The increasing social participation and the presence of migrants in the family significantly decreases the likelihood of future migration aspirations of youth searching for a job. Interestingly, the youth from the Hindu community are significantly more likely to migrate if they get a job or search for a career in the future than youth from other religions.

Discussion

The majority of migration literature focuses on adult economic migration, and the young people remain overshadowed (Crivello 2011). This paper provides insight into the migration aspiration of the youth from Kerala and their awareness of migration. The majority of the youth are aware of Middle East countries, the typical migration destination of Keralites. Most youths are aware of gulf migration through their family, friends and media. Two out of three youths want to migrate abroad for a job and related activities when it comes to aspiration. This finding supports the idea proposed in an earlier study that a higher level of development (Referring to education and wealth) may increase the aspiration to migrate (De Haas 2007). Various reasons determine the migration aspiration of the youth. Earlier studies highlight that the decision of youth related to their life choices is often made collectively by the household with the influence of the community (Punch 2001, 2002).



Table 4. Migration aspiration among youth: A logistics regression analysis

Background characteristics	Migrate for work	Migrate in search of work
	AOR (95% CI)	AOR (95% CI)
Course enrolled		
Professional	<i>Ref</i>	<i>Ref</i>
Non-Professional	1.041 (0.611-1.755)	0.954 (0.563-1.617)
Migrants in the family		
No migrants	<i>Ref</i>	<i>Ref</i>
Migrant father	0.454** (0.262-0.788)	0.506** (0.294-0.871)
Migrants other than father	0.434** (0.254-0.739)	0.391** (0.231-0.661)
Migrant friends		
No	<i>Ref</i>	<i>Ref</i>
Yes	1.764** (1.118-2.783)	1.663** (1.062-2.605)
Age		
Below 20	<i>Ref</i>	<i>Ref</i>
Above 20	0.763 (0.436-1.335)	0.835 (0.48-1.454)
Gender		
Male	<i>Ref</i>	<i>Ref</i>
Female	0.576** (0.374-0.887)	0.598** (0.391-0.916)
Religion		
Hindu	<i>Ref</i>	<i>Ref</i>
Christian	0.491* (0.233-1.038)	0.427** (0.202-0.901)
Muslim	0.745 (0.457-1.216)	0.624* (0.384-1.016)
Household economic status		
Above Poverty Line (APL)	<i>Ref</i>	<i>Ref</i>
Below Poverty Line (BPL)	1.165 (0.606-2.242)	1.172 (0.815-2.235)
Worked in last one year		
No	<i>Ref</i>	<i>Ref</i>
Yes	1.001 (0.58-1.728)	0.971 (0.566-1.664)
Social Participation		
Rare	<i>Ref</i>	<i>Ref</i>
Occasional	0.549* (0.287-1.048)	0.499** (0.265-0.941)
Usual	0.405** (0.213-0.774)	0.461** (0.229-0.811)
Aware of living conditions abroad		
No	<i>Ref</i>	<i>Ref</i>
Yes	1.761* (0.997-3.271)	1.524 (0.921-2.832)
Aware of the process of migration		
No	<i>Ref</i>	<i>Ref</i>
Yes	0.763 (0.477-1.223)	0.768 (0.483-1.112)

Adjusted Odds Ratio (AOR), Confidence Interval(CI)**if $p < 0.05$ and * if $p < 0.1$, *Ref*: Reference

The economic growth and the expansion of education in this century in Kerala paved for higher aspirations among the youth related to migration. Studying professional courses is considered a way to make a successful future migration. The presented analysis doesn't provide concrete evidence about the difference in the migration aspiration of youth based on the course they are enrolled in. The multivariate analysis in the present study also showed that the economically weaker youth are significantly more likely to aspire to migrate for jobs than those from financially stable households. Some studies discussed the potential reason for the less likely aspire to migrate among the wealthy families that those with high income are more content and more location-based economic ties or advantage (Fisher et al. 1998) and may have the capability to achieve their life goals in their homeland itself (Schewel 2015). We also found that the youth's participation in economic activities in the last year doesn't increase the likelihood of aspiring to migrate in the future.

Studies pointed out that family circumstances mediate the individual aspiration; the decision to stay or migrate may be taken at a household rather than the individual (Stark 1991). The present study finds that having a migrant in the family or migrant father decreases the youth's likelihood of migrating for work compared to those with no migrants in their family. This contradicts the earlier research in this field that found that the youth from the families involved in migration are more likely to migrate than other youths (Stark 1991, Massey 2002). The analysis reveals that having friends abroad shows a higher likelihood of aspiration to migrate among youth. The study by Lyra (2005) showed that friends and people from the same community were relevant in youth's migration decision making; friends can act as the first line of support once they reach the destination.

The male youth significantly more liked to aspire to migrate in future compared to females. In Kerala, males are considered the chief income earner. Previous research shows that men are more likely to migrate for work in such a society, and females are more likely to migrate to join their spouses than work (Mckezie 2007; Brown 2017). Furthermore, this study found that increased social participation reduces the likelihood of migration aspiration among the youth in Kerala. A study among the youth in Iceland's fishing and farming community found that youth who identify strongly with the local society and are more proud of their native community are less likely to migrate (Bjarson and Thorlindson 2006). The study further pointed out that the late modernist or post-modernist youths may prefer to develop their future and career in their homeland. Finally, the present study reveals that the awareness about the living conditions at the destinations increases the youth's migration aspiration. In contrast, the awareness of the migration process has the opposite impact. De Haas (2021) argued that higher education (University Degree) is likely to increase the knowledge about opportunities abroad and develop self-confidence and belief that it is thinkable to find a job and travel to a new place and live and secure a visa.

Finally, some limitations of this study should be mentioned. Firstly, the data collected for this study doesn't allow for any generalization, as the data is collected from only university enrolled youth. Future studies can concentrate on household-based surveys, which will allow data to understand the transnational ties and migration aspirations among youth. Secondly, the independent variables used in the study are limited; there are maybe other factors not captured in this study. The prevalence of migration in the community and the youth's involvement with migrants and migration-related activities are significant factors deciding the migration aspiration of the youth (Cohen 2004). Third, the data on which this study is based was collected before the Covid-19 pandemic. It is possible that the migration aspiration among the youth significantly changed. Importantly the main reasons for the future migration are possibly changed due to the pandemic's economic burden imposed on individuals and families. Besides all this, in the coming 10 to 20 years, migration will continue as a potential life choice for achieving life goals for youth in Kerala. Policies should promote awareness about migration and facilitate a secure and safe migration for youths.

Conclusion

The aspirations have more importance in a cultural setting where most individuals wish to be migrants. This is the fundamental concept of the culture of migration that affects life and development. In the case of Kerala, youths' aspirations are influenced by the migration values that society and the family hold. Surprisingly, in Kerala, youth with migrant fathers don't show



higher aspirations to migrate than others. Future research should focus on the relationship between the youth's attitude towards migrating in future and its impact on their education and decision to work in their native land. Familial and social factors should be taken into account in understanding this impact.

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