

To Remain, Migrate Abroad or Resettle: An Exploratory Study of Pakistani Physicians' Career Decisions

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Abstract

The recruitment, retention and migration of highly skilled health professionals is of growing global concern because of its impact on health systems in both developing and developed countries. These global changes in the health workforce include physicians moving from rural to urban areas within a country or from one country to another. Pakistan has the leading number of physicians working in the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia even though it faces a shortage of physicians. The reasons have not been identified and evaluated in-depth within the Pakistani context. To date much of the available health workforce research in South Asia is based on quantitative techniques, with far fewer studies using qualitative methodologies to explore the health workforce. This is one of the first studies in South Asia, and especially in Pakistan, to use a qualitative research design to study the physician workforce. The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions of Pakistani physicians regarding their career decision to remain in their country, migrate abroad or resettle back into their country after working abroad for some time.

This qualitative study employed phenomenology as the research design. Thirteen Pakistani physicians characterised as '*stayers*', '*leavers*' and '*resettlers*' were interviewed via telephone to explore the perceptions of Pakistani physicians regarding their career decision to remain in their country, migrate abroad or resettle back into their country after working abroad for some time.

The results of this study show a dynamic nature of the physicians' career decision-making depending on their constant weighing of complex personal, family, professional and societal factors. Furthermore, the study also revealed that the majority of the Pakistani

physicians would rather stay or resettle back into their country because of their perceived better quality of life in Pakistan compared to overseas and the overall satisfaction and fulfilment that they receive in their country. However, they also identified certain systemic factors that compel them to go abroad and discourage those physicians who wanted to come back from resettling into their country. These factors are a perceived lack of government commitment to health and the lack of a viable human resource policy and strategy in the health care industry, a lack of quality postgraduate training and career structure, lower salaries and the recent surge of personal insecurity related to gradual societal degradation with its negative reflections of corruption and professional misconduct in medicine.

To develop a sustainable health care system, Pakistan needs to invest in health and other social sectors as a priority. Furthermore, there is an urgent need for the development of an effective health human resource strategy that provides for the right opportunities and support for its medical workforce, especially in rural areas and for those doctors wishing to return back to their country.

Candidate Certification

I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree or qualification.

I certify that any help received in preparing this thesis and all sources used have been acknowledged in this thesis.



Muhammad Arif

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Abbreviations

AKU	Aga Khan University
APDOQ	Association of Pakistani Doctors of Queensland
BOD	Burden of Disease
BHU	Basic Health Unit
BU	Baqai University
CPSP	College of Physicians and Surgeons Pakistan
DALYs	Disability-adjusted life years
DFID	Department for International Development
DHQ	District Headquarter
EDO	Executive District Officer
EU	European Union
FBS	Federal Bureau of Statistics
FCPS	Fellow College of Physicians and Surgeons
FY	Financial Year
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GHWA	Global Health Workforce Alliance
GNP	Gross National Product
GOP	Government of Pakistan
GP	General Practitioner
HDI	Human Development Index
HEC	Higher Education Commission
HRCP	Human Rights Commission of Pakistan
HRH	Human Resources for Health
IMGs	International Medical Graduates
JLI	Joint Learning Initiative
LHV	Lady Health Visitor
LHW	Lady Health Worker
MBBS	Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery
MD	Doctor of Medicine
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MOH	Ministry of Health
MS	Master of Surgery

NGO	Non-Government Organisation
NHMRC	National Health and Medical Research Council
OECD	Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development
OTDs	Overseas Trained Doctors
PAHO	Pan American Health Organization
PGME	Post Graduate Medical Education
PMA	Pakistan Medical Association
PMDC	Pakistan Medical and Dental Council
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
RHC	Rural Health Centre
SBP	State Bank of Pakistan
THQ	Tehsil/Taluka Headquarter
UK	United Kingdom
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
US	United States
WB	World Bank
WHO	World Health Organization