

## Psychosocial Factors Influencing Decision of Young Adults to Study Abroad

### ABSTRACT

#### Objectives

The purpose of the study is to identify and describe the most persistent psychosocial factors that influence young adults of Karachi to take up the decision of studying abroad.

#### Study Design

It was a cross sectional study. Respondents of the study were young adults currently abroad or planning to go abroad for higher studies from Karachi, ages ranging between 18 to 30 years. In this regard, a closed ended questionnaire was made on Likert scale. Non probability convenience sampling technique was used to collect the data with the sampling size of 170 students.

#### Results

Out of 170 participants, the majority were male which counted to 117, whereas female participants were only 53. From the mean of all the independent variables, it was found that factors affecting quality of life is the most persistent, having  $M=3.36$  with  $\pm 0.718$  SD among all that encourage young adults to take decision to study abroad. For future research, comparative analysis can be done to find the reasoning behind young adults those who are applying and those who are not for higher education abroad.

#### Conclusion

The three highlighted issues, which became focus of this study includes quality of education, social & personal factors, and quality of life. In this study it is also concluded that quality of life is the focal point for most of the young adults of Karachi.

#### Keywords

Psychosocial, Young Adult, Abroad, Brain Drain, Migration, Education.

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## INTRODUCTION

Students around the world begin to make important decisions about future immediately after the result arrives. Some wants to continue studying while other wishes to start looking for job or to get married. Study plans are really tough to decide for students of developing countries due to the fact that there are limited career opportunities available to them within their country, and to avoid job-seeking pressure, they prefer moving abroad. Therefore, these young adults start looking for universities and colleges in developed countries because these countries spend more on the research and education sector when compared to their home country<sup>1</sup>. It also guarantees higher standards of knowledge and practical usage of skills, and provides a career-boosting platform for further studies. Scholarship programmes for international students become subsidized form of human capitals loss when a great number of students do not return to the sender (developing) country, especially Master or PhD students who settle down in the receiving (developed) country permanently<sup>2</sup>. In the developing countries like Pakistan, migration of talented people is much higher in numbers to the developed world. According to the estimation, around 36,000 professionals including doctors, engineers and teachers have migrated to other countries during the period of last three decades. The purpose of migration contains employment search, education, security and political freedom.<sup>3, 4</sup> United States is always the top most favorable place for Pakistani citizens, particularly students, as it provides advanced technology, research facilities and career advancement in their renowned institutes of the world. However, according to the Institute of International Education, 6,296 students went to US universities and colleges in 2005 whereas in the year of 2010, 5,222 enrolled in US<sup>5</sup>. According to the Australian Education International from the year 2005 to 2010, the number of Pakistani students in Australia has increased each year. In 2005, almost 2,294 Pakistanis went for education purpose in Australia. When looked into the recent data available, it shows an increase of four times that is up to 8,458 Pakistanis by the end of 2010.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore; Canada is also one of the most desired places of studies for Pakistani Students. The recent stats suggest that total 786 students from Pakistan entered in Canada until the end of 2010<sup>7</sup>. Research shows that Pakistan is one of those countries with biggest number of applicants who wants to establish them in Britain. People from all professions, either it is an IT professional or it's a common laborer, all are enlisting themselves in the line to get an approval to move abroad for a better life. Previous study found the causes of brain drain among many Taiwanese students who went to United States for "better teaching, research facilities, promising career advancement, professional opportunities and its recognition, and job satisfaction in the United States", which is influencing them to stay<sup>9, 10</sup>. A number of studies found the causes of brain drain, many of them finish up with the reason like 'wage differentials' as major encouragement of migrating when making their education decisions<sup>11</sup>. The reflection of Dass on brain drain in India is also quite rightly set here that Brain goes for money where healthy competitions are assured because it gives recognition which primarily needed for healthy brains<sup>12</sup>. Concern of safety and security is also prevalent in South Africa. In the research by Peter Thompson, 66% of the family. They also mentioned that it would improve their quality of life<sup>13</sup>. Corruption has been a substantial obstacle in development of societies in Pakistan, Tout and bribery is prevalent in law enforcement. In such circumstances where all institutes are influenced with risk, individuals search for safer and productive life outside motherland<sup>14</sup>. However, citizens are aware that crime exists in the developed countries as well but it would be less endangering life than in their own country<sup>15</sup>. Aside from the safety and education influences for going abroad, some young adults make their decision on idealization, fantasy and romanticized image for foreign countries. As according to research in South Africa these young adults fantasize regarding the foreign world<sup>16</sup>. Students often view studying abroad as an opportunity for personal growth to gain more insight into themselves, others and what they want from life. They broaden their space of exploration and try out new experiences to know their strengths and weaknesses better. They discover their wishes and understand their

life from all unique dimensions. This type of topic has always been viewed from the economic dimensions but has been less highlighted from the discipline of psychology. Psychology is a discipline with limitless boundaries, which cover almost any field of study where human beings are in question<sup>17</sup>. Through observing everyday life of individuals and their experiences, the reasoning behind certain behaviors' can be understood in detail through psychology discipline<sup>18</sup>. One would find many of these young adults searching programs for studies in foreign universities with viable outcomes in future; their cost of living, job market related to their field and some has even look for immigration laws of foreign country and planning to emigrate if able to meet the minimum requirement<sup>19</sup>. This study would also highlight the psychosocial factors behind the decision to study abroad with the aim to achieve the current mind-set of young adults studying or planning to go abroad. Also, to determine the five top most happening factors that young adults consider in selecting any host country for higher studies and to distinguish the rationale between young adults going for Masters/PhD and for undergraduate degree.

## **METHOD**

It is a basic, cross sectional research, which reflects upon the existing ideas and applies it to the situation of Pakistan. Close-ended questionnaire was used for gathering data. The questionnaire was divided into three sections. Furthermore, quantitative research process was used to describe the relationship between independent and dependent variables. The duration of this study was about 1 year. The data collection was done in 2011.

## **Participants**

The study is based on the responses of young adults of both genders with ages ranging from 18 to 30 years and has gone for higher education abroad from Karachi in last 5 years, counting from the year 2007 to 2011. The study is also targeting those young adults who were at that time planning to go abroad in 2012 to 2014 on personal expense. The rationale behind it is that they are not bound by any governmental or organizational policy to return to their home country, and it will be completely their choice whether they want to return or not. Only those participants were selected for the study that are planning or studying in Australia, Britain, Canada and U.S.

## **Procedure**

The consulates of US, Australia, Canada and UK in Karachi were contact via postal mail as well as electronic mail to gather statistical information about the number of students who went abroad in last five years. Online questionnaire was made to serve the purpose. The questionnaire was then posted on different social networking groups on social sites which includes, Pakistani students in Melbourne and Sydney, and Pakistani Student in UK on Facebook, LinkedIn, and Google plus. Moreover, the link of the questionnaire was also shared via email to the Euro Educational Consultants and MacnKro Travel Consultants, to forward it their current and previous clients. Non-probability convenience sampling technique was used to collect the data with the sampling size of at least 200, including both the groups who are planning or currently studying abroad equally. Questionnaire was distributed among 207 students. Only 170 filled the questionnaire properly whereas 37 did not and hence were discarded for this reason. Out of 170, 83 have gone or were planning to go for undergraduate program whereas, 87 participants were pursuing master's degree at that time. From these 117 were males and 53 were females. Analysis was performed by means of Social Package of Social Sciences (SPSS) software, version 16.0.

## RESULTS

Analyses focus on the psychosocial reasoning that influences young adults to think about the option of studying abroad. The Table 1 shows the mean of all the items of the first independent variable, which is quality of professional grooming opportunities in internship ( $M=3.69$ ,  $\pm 1.132$  SD), lower educational standards ( $M=3.69$ ,  $\pm 1.217$  SD) and limited field of study ( $M=3.65$ ,  $\pm 1.252$  SD) are having higher means among all other items in quality of education. While the overall mean of all the items is  $M=3.09$ ,  $\pm 0.728$  SD. The Table 2 shows the mean of all the items of social & personal reasons. It indicates that the items like, gaining knowledge about other cultures and places ( $M=3.62$ ,  $\pm 1.077$ SD), urge to live by self ( $M=3.79$ ,  $\pm 1.039$  SD), and personal growth ( $M=4.46$ ,  $\pm 0.747$  SD) are having higher means from the rest of the items. Whereas, the overall mean of personal & social reasons is  $M=2.94$ ,  $\pm 0.458$  SD.

Table 1: Mean of all Quality of education items

Quality of education	Mean	SD
Lack of Scientific Research	3.35	1.193
Lack of modern equipments	3.45	1.182
Lesser integration of education & professional world	3.61	1.198
Lesser professional grooming opportunities in internships	3.69	1.132
Lower educational standards	3.69	1.217
Limited field of study	3.65	1.252
Poor teaching style	3.31	1.274
Rote learning	3.50	1.147
Poor course outline	3.36	1.199
Mean of all Educational factors	3.09	0.728

Table 2: Mean of all Social & Personal Reasons

Social & Personal Reasons	Mean	SD
Following social trend	3.02	1.060
Family & friends encouragement	3.49	1.105
To come back & create opportunities	3.33	1.140
Presence of strong connections abroad	3.15	1.180
Family & friends pressure	2.48	1.137
To get higher social status in Karachi	2.84	1.195
To gain knowledge about other cultures and place	3.62	1.077
Urge to live on my own	3.79	1.039
Personal Growth	4.46	0.747
Mean of all Personal & Social Factors	2.94	0.458

Table 3: Mean of all items of factors affecting quality of life

Factors affecting quality of life	Mean	SD
Lack of political stability	4.05	1.140
Rise in criminal & terrorist activities	4.12	1.147
Lack of humanity & justice	4.11	1.017
Lack of political freedom	3.82	1.175
Lower work/life balance	3.71	1.057
Lack of safety & security	4.14	1.088
Tout & bribery culture	3.94	1.126
Religious extremism	3.61	1.218
Media's negative depiction of Pakistan's future	3.61	1.279
Mean of all Quality of Life factors	3.36	0.718

The Table 3 represents the factors that affect the quality of life. From the list of items, rise in criminal and terrorist activities ( $M=4.12$ ,  $\pm 1.147$  SD), lack of humanity & justice ( $M=4.11$ ,  $\pm 1.017$  SD), and lack of safety & security ( $M=4.14$ ,  $\pm 1.088$  SD) are the highlighting factors motivating young adults to study abroad. Hence, the mean of overall ratings of factors affecting quality of life is  $M=3.36 \pm 0.718$  SD. From the mean of all the three independent variables, it was found that factors affecting quality of life is the most persistent, having  $M=3.36$ ,  $\pm 0.718$  SD among all that encourage young adults to take decision to study abroad.

## DISCUSSION

As outlined previously, the top three items were taken from the list of independent variables each. The first variable was quality of education in which, lesser grooming opportunities in internships, limited field of study, and lower education standards in home country were the most enduring items. When asked the participants about the professional grooming opportunities in home country, it was discovered that about 66% of 87 those participants who went abroad for Masters were dissatisfied with the opportunities available for internships in home country. These responses emphasize the poor governance in our educational institutes. Beside this, these opportunities allow employer to keep a record of performance of hired students and save further employment time and cost in future by hiring same student upon their graduation<sup>20</sup>. Another most important item in the quality of education was the lower educational standards. According to 60% of 87 participants who left for abroad for Master's Degree, educational standards are most of the time compromised in Karachi. Similar feelings were shared by another 64% of 83 participants that are planning to go for Bachelor's degree. The educational standards of developed countries are under strict government surveillance and are accountable for every action. For that purpose, 77% of the participants strongly agreed that they looked for university ranking while making the decision to study abroad. Out of 77%, 18% were from US, 14% were from Australia, 17% were from Britain and 28% were from Canada. The third most important point was the limited fields of study in home country. 59% of 87 participants who are planning to study abroad for Masters and 59% of 83 students for

Bachelors program, claims that there are limited fields of study available in Pakistan. There is very less variety present in subjects of specialization and the advanced level education is limited. According to ISESCO, unavailability of funds for education sectors in Pakistan is the major cause for lower standard of educational system<sup>1</sup>. The reason behind having bereft of modern equipment's in Pakistan is similar. Almost 53% of the participants agreed with lack of modern equipment's and that is why students look forward to go abroad. Out of 53%, 17% were from Engineering and 21% were from Business and Management. A study by Atta ur Rehman reports that Pakistan lack the equipment, latest scientific literature, and information system and intellectual work force which had led to poor infrastructure in Pakistan<sup>21</sup>. Apart from quality of education factors, top three social and personal factors were also highlighted which independently and personal growth. From the groups of participants, 65% of 83 participants that are going for undergraduate degree gave higher importance to knowledge about new place and its people while studying abroad as compared to those who are focused on Master's Degree, which counted to 56% of 87. The second most important factor is the urge to live by self. From the analysis, it was discovered that almost 64% of the total participants highly rated this item on agree. These young adults with their abilities and capabilities want to prove themselves to their society, and want some independence to do things their way without any restriction from society. From the Dwyer research, it is being reasoned that being completely on your own makes a person more mature, as he would be the only one to take decisions of his life and manage his resources<sup>22</sup>. The last most important factor that was highly rated by both groups based on program of study was personal growth. 90% of 87 students from Masters Group and 90% from Bachelors group strongly agreed to the reason of going abroad for personal growth. According to earlier research, living abroad increases self-confidence, give strength to tolerate vagueness in their lives and allow them to think from many other perspectives, which they never did while being dependent<sup>22</sup>. In this regard, parental role is considered as much more important in eastern part of the world. From the previous study, it was found that parents with higher level of education tends to encourage their children more to study abroad, and it further strengthen this encouragement when parents themselves carry foreign education experience<sup>23</sup>. However, in this study, it was uncovered that parents having professional degree like undergraduate or higher was also keen of sending their kids abroad for better education. 61% of 59 participants are encouraged by parents to study abroad. At the same time, parents that are having less education than high school were found a bit in favor of the decision too. 56% out of 111 participant's parents were encouraged to study abroad. This shows that parents of students in Karachi realize the importance of education in this fast-paced world. Aside from reasons for individuals in society to move abroad, it has become a proper culture in east to migrate to the west. A study by Crush J, the culture of migration having high existence in the migrating community and having large migrating network abroad<sup>19</sup>. Money is not always the incentive for migration. In the context of India, migration has affected the marriage system of India. According to the research by Ali S and Xiang B, Hindu male IT professionals who are working in Australia shared their work and having foreign nationality has increased the amount of dowry from the family of bride in India<sup>24,25</sup>. The last independent variable was the factors affecting quality of life, which is also the most persistent factors among all the psychosocial factors that motivate young adults to make decision of studying abroad. The top three most important matters in this list were rise of criminal activities, lack of humanity and lack of safety. While selecting the host country when deciding where to study, safety and security is the most important factor from the rest of items with  $M=4.32$  and  $\pm 0.908$  SD. When participants were asked to rate the safety and security in their home country such as Pakistan, it was uncovered that 78% of 87 participants from Masters Group strongly agreed with the fact that there is a lack of safety in Pakistan. Similarly, 73% out of 83 participants from Bachelors group rated high to the lack of safety making it a unanimous feeling among students of Karachi. Safety and security issue is due to the rise in criminal activities and injustices done to common

people. ISESCO research emphasize that Young adults are most likely to go where there is existence of peace, justice, and respect of humanity<sup>1</sup>. When asked participants to rate the criminal and terrorist activities in Karachi, 81% out of 87 of Masters group and 72% out of 83 of undergraduate group strongly agreed on the occurrence of this issue. At the same time, lack of humanity is also highly rated by both groups of young adults, which counts 77% out of 87 participants of Masters/PhD group and 73% out of 83 participants' undergraduate group.

## CONCLUSION

This study has noted the process of decision that affects the mind set of young adults. Considering only psychosocial factors for the decision to studying abroad is never done in Pakistan. Therefore, it would add to the discipline of social and behavioral psychology. This study has attempted to answer the questions of psychosocial reasoning that motivate young adults to study abroad, and has focused more on factors that are closely related to their life. This study had tried to unleash the thought process behind such belief systems that are active in Karachi due to prevailing uncertainty situations. The three highlighted factors, which became focus of this study includes quality of education, social & personal factors and quality of life.

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