Assessing the Relationships among Job Security, Working Conditions, Economic Conditions, Quality of Life, Political Conditions, and Migration Aspirations in Sri Lanka: A Structural Equation Molding Approach

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Abstract

Sri Lanka, one of the least developed countries, requires its talents to continue contributing to its development. However, labor migration is often viewed as providing economic stability to potential migrants, especially in developing nations. Most highly skilled immigrants do not return after completing their studies or training and start living abroad. Thus, the suffering in various sectors, including health, education, science, and technology, is significantly higher. This paper highlights the issue of leaving the country of professional workers, highlighting the factors contributing to the migration aspirations of academics, doctors, nurses, and engineers from Sri Lanka to developed nations. This study investigates the factors that affect the migration aspirations of Sri Lankan professionals, with special reference to the Matale urban area. It primarily focuses on the loss of professional workers, the push factors affecting their aspirations for migration to Sri Lanka, and strategies to mitigate this issue. This research incorporates primary data gathered from a survey of 100 respondents, including doctors, nurses, principals, and engineers in the Matale urban area. The hypothesis was meticulously examined and assessed using a structural equation model using the Smart PLS. The study findings suggest that push factors (economic condition, political condition, and quality of life) have a significant positive relationship with the migration aspirations of professionals in Sri Lanka; adverse economic situations compel professionals to leave their country; poor political institutions and government inefficiencies have a positive relationship for professionals migration; and there is a positive relationship between poor quality of life and the tendency for professional migration. Further, this study finds that economic conditions are the key push factor affecting the migration aspirations of Sri Lankan professionals. Policy measures are recommended to mitigate this problem of the increasing trend of migration aspirations of Sri Lankan professionals.

Keywords: *Migration, Aspiration, Professionals, Sri Lanka*

1. Introduction

Migration is a well-known human phenomenon that refers to the temporary or permanent movement of people or groups for various reasons, such as job opportunities or persecution People fleeing the harsh conditions of their home countries in search of better living conditions are the driving force behind this significant trend of migration (Casteli, 2018). South Asian countries, such as Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, are major

suppliers of migrant workers worldwide, with their remittances playing a crucial role in promoting economic development in their home countries (Suddiyono & Bhatti., 2012). Sri Lankan emigrants are diverse, comprising nearly three million migrants from various backgrounds, including refugees, domestic workers, skilled migrants, and students (Jayawardana, 2022). In contemporary times, the concept of migration has become a hot topic with the increasing emigration trend in Sri Lanka. According to the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment, the departure of migrant workers for foreign employment can be grouped under seven categories: professional level, middle level, critical and related, skilled, semi-skilled, unskilled, and housemaid. The past few years have shown a growing trend in migrating Sri Lankan professionals. On the other hand, despite a declining acceptance rate for semi-skilled or less-skilled migrants, the United Nations Population Fund reports that border barriers are being lifted for professional, skilled, and technical immigrants in wealthy nations. Moreover, Sri Lanka was ranked third in the world for expatriation of doctors and nurses, with the highest rates observed in the 37 OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development Countries, Arunatilake, 2015).

The trend of professionals departing to Middle Eastern and European countries has increased recently. The statistics of the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment report that in the first half of 2023, the majority of departures of migrant workers recorded to the Middle East region was 76.5%, and the second highest departures to the Asian countries except South Asia and the Middle East was 8.4%. Moreover, 7.8% of the migrant workers have departed to European countries.

An article posted on "News Decoder" further pointed out that the current departures of professionals, mainly to the Middle East, Europe, and the United States, is the third migration wave in Sri Lanka. The first wave was recorded in late 1950 when many Burghers migrated to Australia after introducing the 'Sinhala Language Act'. The second wave was recorded in 1983, during the country's ethnic conflict (Guyatt, 2023). The World Bank report in 2023 signifies that Sri Lanka's economic crisis led to over half a million job losses and 2.7 million people falling into poverty between 2021 and 2022.

The classical migration literature suggests that such an unfavorable economic situation would make people more likely to migrate, with the unemployment ratio positively influencing migration (Koczan et al., 2021). Increased migration will assist in decreasing the unemployment rate within the country and further improve foreign remittance. According to the Central Bank Report 2023, Sri Lankan migrant workers' foreign remittance also reached USD 844.9 million in the first two months of 2023, an 82% increase from the 464.1 million recorded in January and February 2022. However, the numerous challenges that need to be overcome during an economic crisis, such as inflation, higher cost of living, and uncertain situations, prompt the unemployed and other skilled workers and professionals to suggest moving abroad. The Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment data from the first six months (January to June) in 2023 disclosed the total departures for foreign employment under the professional level category as 4.8%, the skilled level category as 3.8%, and the semi-skilled category as 28.6%. Consequently, in addition to unemployed individuals, skilled workers and professionals currently employed hope to work abroad. Hence, this increasing trend of professionals and high-skilled laborers leads to a loss in high-skilled human capital, creating an ineffective situation within the country. This will create adverse conditions within the country, increasing the suffering in various sectors, i.e., health,

education, science, and technology, which is significantly higher. Such information indicates that other factors besides the unemployment rate influence the decision to move abroad since people already employed in the country also intend to migrate for foreign jobs.

Migration has significant impacts on the countries of origin. It provides a flow of remittance, reduces unemployment, and improves human development and living standards (Koczan et al., 2021; Ekanayake & Amirthalingam, 2021; Srikandaraja, 2022). Remittances are the primary benefit of the migration. The migrant workers' remittance and economic growth have a positive relationship (Khan & Kyndman, 2015). Recent studies on migration argue that developing countries can acquire skills, knowledge, technology, and experience from developed countries, especially from professional migrants, when they return to their home countries (Ekanayake & Amirthalingam, 2022). Despite such favorable conditions, unfortunately, the problem occurs when the professionals do not return to their home countries during their productive years (Ekanayake & Amirthalingam, 2022; Abdullah & Hossain, 2014).

In the Sri Lankan context, highly skilled tertiary-educated workers have a higher emigration rate but a lower return rate. Most of those returning professionals are heading to Sri Lanka for their retirement purposes (Ekanayake & Amirthalingam, 2020). Professionals permanently migrating from Sri Lanka do not contribute to the country's foreign currency earnings (Abdullah & Hossain, 2014). On average, although the migration of the professional category provides primary benefits to the country of origin, it will create unfavorable conditions for the country. This situation will lead to a loss of highly skilled human capital from Sri Lanka and create an ineffective situation within the country (Abdullah & Hossain, 2014), adversely affecting the entire economy. Hence, identifying the determinants that affect the migration of Sri Lankan professionals is vital. This paper highlights the issue of professional workers leaving the country, highlighting the factors contributing to the migration aspiration of academics, doctors, nurses, and engineers from Sri Lanka to developed nations. The study focuses on finding the factors that affect the migration aspiration of Sri Lankan professionals. The relevant authorities can use this knowledge to provide remedial actions to retain the professionals within the country.

2. Literature Review

In every domain, various factors draw someone to relocate or influence them to settle down somewhere. Some factors affect an individual differently, but several factors have the same effect (Anggoro, 2019). Individuals are motivated to migrate for different reasons, usually because of disparities in working conditions that force them to either push themselves out of their countries or attract them to recruit countries (Khan, 2015). Attitudes of migrants and prospective migrants differed due to both positive and negative factors affecting their place of origin or destination.

There are diverse push factors and pull factors that influence migration. The push factor refers to the labor migration from one country to another due to factors in the country of origin. The pull factor refers to the migration of labor to another country due to a specific interest in the country of destination (Anggoro, 2019; Khan, 2015).

Khan (2015) offered some significant evidence for the importance of remittances from migrant workers as a driver of economic growth and highlighted some factors that affected

people's migration: lack of employment, nepotism in the workplace, low wages, an unfavorable work environment, poverty, civil unrest, social unrest, poor economic conditions, and political and religious harassment.

Van Mol (2016) identified micro- and macro-level characteristics that influence the migration aspirations of young people across the member states of Europe (age, gender, education level, employment level, previous international experience abroad, urbanization level, and satisfaction with the situation in their home country are the individual characteristics were considered and as the macro level characteristics they have investigated employment situation of the country, general unemployment rate, gross domestic product, per capita, and the actual individual consumption). Doerschler (2006) suggests that the lack of educational opportunities and religious tolerance under social and political push conditions promote leaving the origins.

Further, unfairness in legal systems, war situations, terrorism, and negative government contributions prompt individuals to search for better conditions in other countries. Abdullah and Hossain (2014) report that insecurity, better standards, and a lack of opportunity are the main factors their study focused on contributing to individuals migrating to developed nations. Siriwardhana et al. (2015 show that pre-migration socioeconomic circumstances, economic difficulties, and the possibility of earning more money abroad were thought to be the main push and pull causes driving labor migration. Ekanayake and Amirthalingam (2021) further identified income-related, career-related, and quality-of-life-related factors as the main drivers of individuals' migration.

Simplice (2015) highlighted that the countries with limited job opportunities and potential for higher income abroad fueled their strong motivation to continue migration, and individuals or groups often migrate due to economic factors such as unemployment and poverty whose purpose is to encourage individuals who are unable to work to seek employment abroad, seeking new opportunities and a higher income. Moreover, his study disclosed that savings and price stability, or the absence of inflation, are crucial tools in reducing professional migration levels. Price stability protects purchasing power and reduces the likelihood of an economic downturn and uncertainty in professional living standards (Anggoro, 2019).

Migrants often migrate for a better quality of life and a higher income. The decision to migrate was influenced by unique and heterogeneous factors, highlighting the importance of emigration in personal decision-making and declining economic conditions, as well as a lack of peace, stability, and effective governance, which are the primary factors driving migration from many developing countries. Nejad and Young (2016) revealed that economic freedoms significantly influence potential migrants' self-selection based on institutional quality, highlighting political and economic differences. On the other hand, it highlights poor economic conditions as a significant push factor. The study of Zanabazar et al. (2021) revealed that economic factors, particularly low income, economic downturn, and poverty, are the main driving forces for migration.

Zanabazar et al. (2021) emphasize that most researchers consider the economic condition a key migration factor. Most researchers highlight that the significant challenges of developing countries, such as unemployment, low wages, limited job opportunities, and poverty, are the primary driving factors for migrants to developed countries seeking

economic benefits. Also, the lack of political freedom and persecution often prompt people to migrate as a survival strategy. In most studies, Taylor (1986), Stark and Taylor (1991), and Adams (1993) reveal a negative correlation between age and migration, with individuals aged 25-30 showing the highest likelihood of emigration. They found an inverted U-shaped age migration pattern, suggesting that controlling for age and general job skills is crucial for effective migration planning. Dai (1998) suggests that migrants from developing countries often migrate to developed countries due to social push factors like poverty, lack of employment, lack of education facilities, and housing facilities.

International migration is a complex subject influenced by various disciplines, including law, political science, demography, economics, sociology, geography, commerce, management, and psychology, which are also influenced by multiple factors, including pushing, pulling, and individual worker rationality (Anggoro, 2019). There is no comprehensible theory related to this complex topic. Nevertheless, because these theories offer a comprehensive understanding of the subject, they are essential for examining relationships between correlated variables concerning international migration (Massey et al., 1993).

Migration theories are mainly categorized into micro, macro, and meso-level theories. Micro-level theories focus on individual migration, while macro-level theories examine aggregate migration trends. Meso-level theories examine the persistence of migration within households or communities, overlapping the macro and micro levels (Haden & Zanker, 2008). Under the micro theories category, Lee's Push-Pull Factors Theory, Neoclassical Micro Migration Theory, Behavioral Models Theory, and Theory of Social Systems were identified. The Social Capital Theory, Institutional Theory, Network Theory, Cumulative Causation Theory, and New Economics of Labor Migration Theory are under the meso category, and Neoclassical Macro Migration Theory, Migration as a system Theory, World Systems Theory, and Mobility Transition Theory are under the macro category (Faist, 2000; Haden & Zanker, 2008). Sociologists often use the "push-pull" model to explain individual migration, which involves both push and pull factors that have a positive relationship with migration aspiration.

Mainly, Lee's push-pull theory explains that the decision to migrate, as well as the process of migration, is influenced by four main factors: Factors related to the country of origin, Factors related to the country of destination, Intervening obstacles, and Personal factors (Lee, 1996). Push factors are the conditions that force individuals to leave their home countries, which include negative aspects of the country of origin. The factors that drive migration are categorized into economic, social, and political factors, which include job scarcity, nepotism, low wages, and unfavorable working environments.

On the other hand, pull factors, such as job opportunities, labor demand, improved education, health facilities, and political and religious freedom, can tempt people to migrate. Pull factors can be identified as the opposite side of push factors. They refer to factors that attract people to a specific location, influencing their decision to move to a new country. Like push factors, migration drivers can be classified into economic, social, and political factors. Thus, there are numerous factors in every area that either attract or hold people or repel them. This means a move elsewhere would be considered if an individual's needs are not satisfied in his present location (Lee, 1996).

2.1. Proposed Model

The study's primary objective was to analyze key factors influencing the intention of Sri Lankan professionals to migrate. Five push factors were identified as independent variables: political condition, economic condition and quality of life, working condition and job security, and age of the professionals, chosen as control variables.

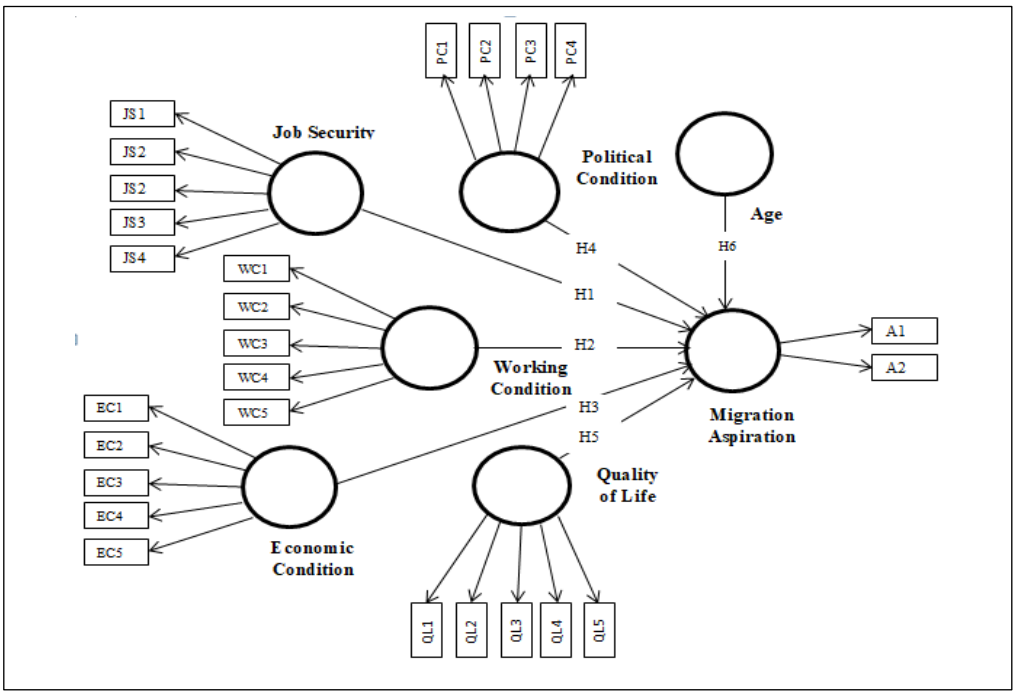

Figure 1: Theoretical study model for migration aspiration
Source: Developed for research purposes

The following six hypotheses were developed to achieve the study objectives:

H1: Lack of job security has a positive relationship for professionals to migrate.

H2: Unfavourable working conditions have a positive relationship for professionals to migrate.

H3: Adverse economic situations have a positive relationship for professionals to leave their country.

H4: Poor political institutions and government inefficiencies have a positive relationship with professional migration.

H5: Poor quality of life has a positive relationship with emigration.

H6: A significant relationship exists between age and the tendency for professionals to migrate.

3. Methodology

This study focuses only on four types of professionals who have worked in the Matale urban area: doctors, nurses, principals, and engineers, since these are among the most outsourced professions in Sri Lanka. Data collected by "Sampath Pathikada" in Divisional Secretariat Matale included 139 doctors, 343 nurses, 30 principals, and 107 engineers. The study population comprised professionals (doctors, nurses, principals, and engineers) in the Matale urban area. The population size of the study is 619. One hundred (100) professionals were selected for this study as the sample via the simple random sampling method. Accordingly, the sample consisted of 24 doctors, 43 nurses, 10 principals, and 23 engineers.

Data based on the factors identified in the conceptual framework were collected using the questionnaire survey method. Five-point Likert-type questions are implemented to reflect the personal judgments of respondents. All dependent and independent variables are measured using items adapted from previous studies. A five-point Likert scale was employed in this study, incorporating questions addressing five key hypotheses: (1) lack of job security, (2) unfavorable working conditions, (3) adverse economic situations, (4) poor political institutions, and (5) poor quality of life relationship on the migration aspiration as push factors. The questionnaire comprised structured queries aimed at capturing nuanced insights into these hypotheses.

4. Data Analysis and Discussion

4.1. Demographic Information of Professionals

Seven demographics of respondents were evaluated, i.e., occupation, age, gender, marital status, number of children, highest academic qualification, and years of service in Sri Lanka. Regarding 'occupation' in this sample, 24% were doctors, 43% were nurses, 10% were principals, and 23% were engineers. The 'highest academic qualifications' of professionals reported that over 50% held a degree, 38% held a diploma or higher diploma, 6% had a master's degree, and only 1% held a PhD. Based on the 'personal information' gathered from the sample, most surveyed professionals were females, constituting 66%, while males comprised 34%. Regarding 'age distribution', the majority (46%) were within the 31-40 age group, with 29% in the below 25 and 25-30 age category, 10% in the 36-40 age category, and 15% in the age category above 40. In terms of 'marital status', 62% were married, while 36% were unmarried. Most have worked in Sri Lanka for over five years (61% of the sample), 20% of the professionals for 1-2 years, and 16% of professionals have worked in Sri Lanka for less than one year.

4.2. Relationship between economic conditions, working conditions, political conditions, job security, quality of life, and migration aspiration

The proposed relationship between economic conditions, working conditions, political conditions, job security, quality of life, and migration aspiration was analyzed with the structural equation model (SEM) using the Smart PLS software. PLS-SEM corroborates the hypothesized relationship between latent variables and the dependent variable. The procedure illustrated in Figure 2 helped to investigate these relationships.

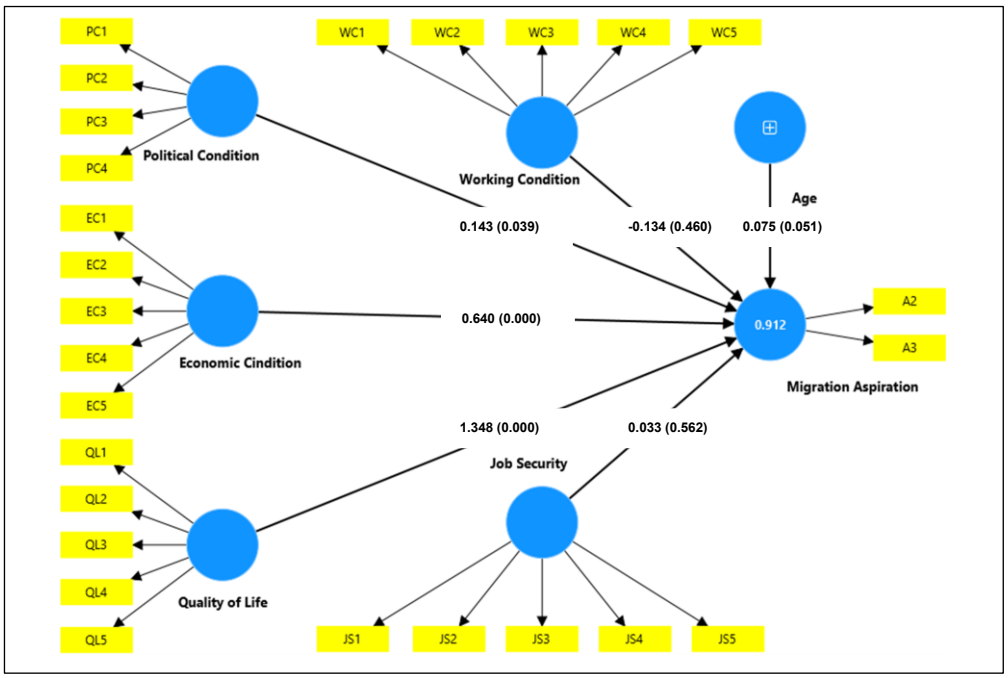

Figure 2: Structural Equation Model Output (SmartPLS)

Source: Authors' calculations using survey data from the professional workers in the Matale urban area

4.3. Results Summary for Reflective Outer Models

The core idea of validity and reliability is to guarantee the reliability and accuracy of research findings. Convergent Validity and Discriminant Validity are the main validation measurement models used in SEM. According to Scharschmidt et al. (2017), convergent validity can be assessed using individual standardized factor loadings, Cronbach's Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and composite reliability. Discriminant Validity compares AVE's with the squared correlation for each construct.

Table 1 provides Cronbach's alpha values according to the variables of this research. It displays the summary of results for reflective outer models.

Table 1: Results summary for reflective outer models

Indicators	Loadings	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Cronbach's alpha	AVE	VIF
A2	0.915	0.813	0.914	0.812	0.842	1.878
A3	0.92					1.878
EC1	0.771	0.835	0.879	0.827	0.594	1.735
EC2	0.809					1.997
EC3	0.858					2.42
EC4	0.692					1.676
EC5	0.71					1.461
JS1	0.868	0.835	0.879	0.809	0.636	3.05
JS2	0.872					3.426
JS3	0.886					2.902
JS4	0.834					2.289
JS5	0.783					1.901
PC1	0.895	0.904	0.928	0.903	0.722	2.56
PC2	0.764					1.579
PC3	0.797					2.025
PC4	0.726					1.501
QL1	0.907	0.932	0.947	0.93	0.782	4.898
QL2	0.896					4.667
QL3	0.916					4.032
QL4	0.892					3.444
QL5	0.805					2.185
WC1	0.865	0.884	0.912	0.879	0.676	3.191
WC2	0.867					3.13
WC3	0.811					1.938
WC4	0.744					1.733
WC5	0.818					2.146

Source: Authors' calculations using survey data from the professional workers in the Matale urban area

According to the above results, output composite reliability rho_c values and rho_a values are higher than 0.7, and all values of AVE are higher than 0.50, satisfying the requirement level. The individual standardized factor loadings should be greater than 0.70; this requirement is also satisfied and, thus, satisfies the convergent validity requirement. Moreover, the maximum Collinearity statistics (VIF) value was recorded as 4.89, lower than 5.0. This confirms the absence of a multicollinearity issue in the data set. The standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) value (0.063) is lower than 0.1, and the Normal Fit Index (0.765) is higher than 0.8, confirming the goodness-of-fit of the dataset.

4.4. Evaluation of research hypotheses

The optimal choice is the Structural Equation Model to analyze the independent variables (political condition, economic condition, quality of life, working condition, and job security) impact on the migration aspirations of professional workers in the Matale urban area as push factors (Urbański, 2022). The result indicated that the R-square value was 0.918 and the

adjusted R-square value was 0.912, denoting that 0.912 of the variation in migration aspiration of professionals in Sri Lanka was explained by the push factors and the age included in the model.

According to the values in the path coefficient table (Table 2) working condition (β=-0.134, p=0.46, p>0.05) factor, there was no significant relationship for the migration aspiration. Thus, we can reject hypothesis 2. The job security factor was taken as a negative beta coefficient, which was also not a significant relationship for the dependent variable of migration aspiration of professionals (β=-0.033, p=0.562, p>0.05). Thus, we can reject hypothesis 1. The age taken as a control variable was not significantly related to the migration aspiration of professionals (β=0.075, p=0.051, p>0.05); hence, we can reject hypothesis 6.

Table 2: Path Coefficients Table

Hypothesis	Variable	Path Coefficient	Sample means (M)	Standard deviation	T statistics	P values	Decision
H6	**Age**	0.075	0.073	0.038	1.955	0.051	Reject
H3	**Economic Condition**	0.640	0.639	0.075	8.515	0.000	Accept
H1	**Job Security**	0.033	0.035	0.057	0.579	0.562	Reject
H4	**Political Condition**	0.143	0.146	0.069	2.070	0.039	Accept
H5	**Quality of Life**	0.348	0.342	0.088	3.952	0.000	Accept
H2	**Working Condition**	-0.134	-0.134	0.067	1.995	0.460	Reject

Source: Authors' calculations using survey data from the professional workers in the Matale urban area

However, concerning the migration aspiration of professionals, three main push factors predict a significant relationship. Migration aspiration of professionals was positively and statistically related by the economic condition push factor (β=0.64, p=0.000, p<0.05), supporting the acceptance of hypothesis 3. Migration aspiration of professionals was also positively and statistically related by the political condition push factor (β=0.143, p=0.039, p<0.05), which supports the acceptance of hypothesis 4. Migration aspiration of professionals is also statistically and positively related to the quality of life push factor (β=0.348, p=0.000, p<0.05), supporting the acceptance of hypothesis 5.

5. Discussion

The primary purpose of this research study is to identify the factors affecting the migration aspirations of Sri Lankan professionals with special reference to the Matale urban area. A multiple linear regression model was applied to find which factors among the push factors had a significant and positive effect on the migration aspiration of Sri Lankan professionals. According to the summary of the results from the data analysis section above, only three push factors significantly and positively affected the dependent variable of migration aspirations of professionals: Economic condition, Political condition, and Quality of life.

The other factors, i.e., job security, working conditions, and age (as a demographic factor), were not significant for the acceptance relationship with the migration aspiration of professionals. Most previous research studies on migration also highlight these factors: poor economic conditions, political and negative government contribution, unfairness in legal systems, and poor quality of life significantly and positively affected the migration of people from developing countries (Urbański, 2022; Zanabazar et al., 2021).

Most researchers considered economic conditions a key push factor and found a significant positive push factor of migration aspiration. Many researchers emphasize that the significant challenges faced by developing countries, such as unemployment, low wages, higher taxes, limited job opportunities, and poverty, often drive migrants to developed countries seeking economic benefits (Khan, 2015; Zanabazar et al., 2021; Doerschler, 2006; Anggoro, 2019; Siriwardhana et al., 2015; Simplice, 2015; Van Mol, 2016; Asad et al., 2019). Lack of political freedom and government inefficiencies often prompt people to migrate as a survival strategy, and most researchers detected a positive significant relationship between this political condition push factor and migration aspiration (Khan, 2015; Asad et al., 2018; De Silva et al., 2014; Van Mol, 2016). Previous researchers have identified the quality-of-life-related factors as the main drivers of the push factor for individual migration aspiration and a positive significant relationship with migration (De Silva et al., 2014; Ekanayake & Amirthalingam, 2019; Doerschler, 2006; Abdullah & Hossain, 2014; Van Mol, 2016; De Silva et al., 2013).

6. Conclusion

This study attempts to investigate the factors affecting the migration aspirations of Sri Lankan professionals with special reference to the Matale urban area. The primary objective was to advance the present understanding of migration by explaining why professionals aspire to migrate to another country. Most research works in this field have focused on migration determinants that affect individuals who have already migrated. Nevertheless, the aspirations are an essential first step toward migration behavior. Thus, this research exposes the professionals aspiring to move to different countries.

By formulating six hypotheses, the study found a robust, significant positive relationship between the push factors and migration aspiration of Sri Lankan professionals: economic condition, political condition, and quality of life. Among them, the country's economic situation has the most significant influence on the aspiration of Sri Lankan professionals for migration. The rest of the factors, such as job security, working conditions, and age (as a demographic factor), did not provide any significance for the acceptance relationship with the migration aspiration of professionals.

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