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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<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AKU</td>
<td>Aga Khan University</td>
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<tr>
<td>APDOQ</td>
<td>Association of Pakistani Doctors of Queensland</td>
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<tr>
<td>BOD</td>
<td>Burden of Disease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BHU</td>
<td>Basic Health Unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BU</td>
<td>Baqai University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPSP</td>
<td>College of Physicians and Surgeons Pakistan</td>
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<tr>
<td>DALYs</td>
<td>Disability-adjusted life years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DFID</td>
<td>Department for International Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>DHQ</td>
<td>District Headquarter</td>
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<tr>
<td>EDO</td>
<td>Executive District Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>FBS</td>
<td>Federal Bureau of Statistics</td>
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<tr>
<td>FCPS</td>
<td>Fellow College of Physicians and Surgeons</td>
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<tr>
<td>FY</td>
<td>Financial Year</td>
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<tr>
<td>GDP</td>
<td>Gross Domestic Product</td>
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<tr>
<td>GHWA</td>
<td>Global Health Workforce Alliance</td>
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<tr>
<td>GNP</td>
<td>Gross National Product</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GOP</td>
<td>Government of Pakistan</td>
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<tr>
<td>GP</td>
<td>General Practitioner</td>
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<tr>
<td>HDI</td>
<td>Human Development Index</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEC</td>
<td>Higher Education Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>HRCP</td>
<td>Human Rights Commission of Pakistan</td>
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<td>HRH</td>
<td>Human Resources for Health</td>
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<tr>
<td>IMGs</td>
<td>International Medical Graduates</td>
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<td>JLI</td>
<td>Joint Learning Initiative</td>
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<tr>
<td>LHV</td>
<td>Lady Health Visitor</td>
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<tr>
<td>LHW</td>
<td>Lady Health Worker</td>
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<tr>
<td>MBBS</td>
<td>Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery</td>
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<tr>
<td>MD</td>
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<tr>
<td>MDGs</td>
<td>Millennium Development Goals</td>
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<tr>
<td>MOH</td>
<td>Ministry of Health</td>
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<tr>
<td>MS</td>
<td>Master of Surgery</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Government Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>NHMRC</td>
<td>National Health and Medical Research Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>OTDs</td>
<td>Overseas Trained Doctors</td>
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<tr>
<td>PAHO</td>
<td>Pan American Health Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>PGME</td>
<td>Post Graduate Medical Education</td>
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<td>PMA</td>
<td>Pakistan Medical Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>PMDC</td>
<td>Pakistan Medical and Dental Council</td>
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<td>PRSP</td>
<td>Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper</td>
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<tr>
<td>RHC</td>
<td>Rural Health Centre</td>
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<td>SBP</td>
<td>State Bank of Pakistan</td>
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<tr>
<td>THQ</td>
<td>Tehsil/Taluka Headquarter</td>
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<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
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<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
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<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations Children’s Fund</td>
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<td>US</td>
<td>United States</td>
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<tr>
<td>WB</td>
<td>World Bank</td>
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<tr>
<td>WHO</td>
<td>World Health Organization</td>
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