

Brain Drain: A Psychosocial Perspective

Khawer Bilal Baig, PhD

Assistant Professor

COMSATS Institute of Information Technology, Lahore

Urooj Sadiq, PhD

Assistant Professor

University of Central Punjab, Lahore

Abstract

Since the advent of globalization and internationalization, there is a massive global immigration of skilled and semi-skilled persons from underdeveloped or developing countries to developed countries. Reasons could be financial benefits, professional growth, politico-social or psychosocial environment factors; brain drain is a consequence. The present article is an effort to discuss psychosocial factors causing brain drain in our country. For this authors selected few of the case studies (who were actually clients seeking psychotherapy for their psychological problems) and tried to identify causes which provoked them to settle permanently in foreign countries.

Keyword: Brain-Drain, Psychosocial, Socioeconomic, Globalization, Internationalization.

Introduction

Due to revolution in science and technology communities around the globe have come closure and workforce demand in one country is rapidly responded by the relevant segment of population across the globe. Perhaps this phenomenon provoked professionals around the planet to equip themselves with skills and knowledge essential to grab the prevailing opportunities. Under impact of internalization, developed countries have reviewed their policies to invite skilled persons from developing countries to educate themselves with the required skills and knowledge, work or even reside in their countries. As a result, most of our youngsters are interested to go abroad to study; or after completing their studies interested to work; or stay their permanently.

Brain drain has been defined as a permanent loss of skilled or professional graduates due to their immigration to a foreign country. The immigration of skilled individuals from Pakistan to technologically advanced countries (e.g., Europe, America, Canada, Australia etc.) as well as economically established countries of Middle East, has caused brain drain in the country. Recently, the political situation and job opportunities abroad have forced many Pakistanis to pursue careers out of the country. A constant flight of experts is considered as an obstacle in economic growth. Yearly, thousands of well qualified medical professional, engineers and researchers have moved abroad, the most visible effect being an overall loss of skilled human resources. Almost 3500 annual graduates of medical and engineering go abroad for their better future (Daily Times, 2009). In an interview to The Daily Times, Chairman Pak-Denmark Business Council Abid Ali expressed that "Pakistani government spent billions of rupees for education of the experts, but unfortunately these people are migrating abroad due to non-existence of the market according to their capabilities"(Daily Times, 2009).

Initially it seems charming to live and work in developed countries but later, as we have experienced clients and their families having adjustment problems in the resident country as well as the country of origin. Although, adjustment issues compelled them to come back to their native place, however it is difficult for them to come back and adjust with the country's political situation, economic conditions, law and order situation and the work environment. These are some of the major causes of brain drain in our country. In order to discuss psychosocial causes of brain drain, authors have selected some cases they experienced in their clinical practice.

1. Three Narratives

1.1. Case 1

A 13-years old girl was accompanied by her parents to a therapist with presenting complaints of adjustment problems, disturbed interpersonal relationships among peer group, and aggression towards parents.

Her father was 43 years old doctor, he moved to London from Pakistan almost 15 years back with his family after completing his FCPS. The girl was born in London, and studied there. Now the family wants to move back to Pakistan permanently because their daughter is growing up and they don't want her to grow up in western culture and to adopt western values. However, the daughter doesn't want stay in Pakistan. According to her she cannot relate among her peer group. Overall, she seemed unable to manage the stressor of culture shock. This transition was negatively affecting her psychological well-being. Although, they seek psychological help and stayed in Pakistan for almost 2 years, however, the girl's academic and social functioning was deteriorating. Hence they finally decided to go back to London.

1.2. Case 2

Mr. A came to a psychotherapist with presenting complaints of disturbed interpersonal relationships at work feeling of helplessness, inadequacy, withdrawal, and disturbed occupational functioning. Psychotherapist diagnosed him as having depressive symptoms.

Mr. A, graduated in Telecom engineering from Canada and worked there for two-years. Later upon the demand of parents he moved back to Pakistan and joined a highly reputable telecom company. Due to his expertise in modern technology he excelled within a very short period of three-years. His parents engaged him with one of his beautiful and educated cousin. All went well but an unexpected downfall of company's market and financial crisis sacked him out of job. Since then he switched over several companies but couldn't settle mainly because of least rewarding working environment and least recognition of his professional skills. His fiancé accompanied by his parents brought him for psychological help. According to client he is in intense stress and confusion; at one time he desperately wants to leave this country but on the other hand he doesn't want to leave his older parents and family. Although with psychotherapy and with family support his intense symptoms of depression reduced yet he was not completely relieved. Finally he got an opportunity in Canada and the family regretfully decided to send him abroad again for his financial and psychological wellbeing. Thus not only the family has lost its effective person but the country has also lost one of its highly skilled people. "Another Brain is Drained".

1.3. Case 3

Professor Z is PhD in management and has been working in a university in England for the last 15 years. He left Karachi, almost 18-years back for PhD in Management for a university in London. He got job in the same university during his PhD and later married to a British-born Pakistani colleague. Although he was well settled in England with his family yet there was a strong desire to go back to native place and spend time with siblings. He was offered by higher Education Commission Pakistan to serve his country which he opted and joined a government university in Karachi.

After almost-six-months he started realizing that he has been feeling difficulty in adjusting with working style at university, favoritism, unreasonable assignments and expectations; conservative administration style and several others likewise. Over a period of time he became more stressful with every day issues like ill discipline of traffic, argument with people on road and people's deceitful attitudes. Besides these issues still he used to feel great with his siblings and some university colleagues. He tried adjusting with things but worst started when university didn't further his contract due to university's extreme financial crisis. Meanwhile his family also started demanding him to come back to England. For these stressors he started visiting to one of the authors for counseling. He repeatedly said that "I don't want to leave this country rather I want my family to settle in Pakistan but how can I convince them? There is so much uncertainty in job, disturbed law and order situation, life insecurity.....etc., despite of my intense desire, now, even I don't find it would be logical to stay in this country anymore....not until almost another 5-10 years". Since that session within one month he left country permanently.

2. Discussion and Conclusion

The above mentioned cases project some of the psychosocial factors leading to brain drain. Although the individual's family, who are staying in their country, may suffer absence of the father or husband.

However, in some situations extended family's (siblings and parents) obligations and financial matters compelled them to stay overseas. In some cases such individuals leave their country with their family (children and wife). And later whenever they want to come back their children don't want to permanently stay in developing country due to issues like energy crisis, limited recreational places, unsafe environment and difference in cultural values etc. Consequently it's not only the present but also the future generations prefer to stay abroad. Returning graduates must accommodate the culture shock of changing roles and expectations. These changes create stress and often inhibit them from making as great a contribution to their community as they might or being expected. Subsequently, the process of coming back results in the decay of their skills, placement in unsuitable positions, and general dissatisfaction.

Likewise their job placement is another problem; this is not only a matter of community expectations; however the reentry also develops expectations; as it is difficult for them to work in different systems. As in developing countries there is lack of available facilities, weak infrastructure and the major difference is the difference in organizational culture. Reentry finds it difficult to accommodate with environmental demands. While trying to adjust with organizational culture he needs to develop healthy interpersonal relationships with co-workers and employers. Interpersonal relationship is an important component of working conditions. Individuals working in foreign countries often bring very different sets of assumptions about appropriate ways to coordinate and communicate in professional relationships. These assumptions hardly relates with ways of people working locally. Consequently, they develop conflicts with each other, whereas interpersonal harmony may be regarded as essential to task success; and conflicts decrease the task performance which may develop feeling of inadequacy causing decay in skills. Ultimately the reentry may consider to leave the organization and the native place and plan to go back to work in more favorable environment.

Moreover, individuals worked in developed countries report that majority of organizations have their set criteria for promotions, incentives and bonuses which are exclusively based on merit rather than any political or familial affiliations; which leads to frustration and dissatisfaction at work. According to one such study, Job satisfaction is an outcome of different factors like pay, promotion, the work itself, supervision, relationships with co-workers and opportunities for promotions (Opkara, 2002). Overall we have to evaluate this push and pull factor and reasons behind it. The push factors comprise of communal unrest, radical conflicts, job dissatisfaction, and discontentment with living conditions, whereas pulling aspects mainly involve job autonomy, autonomy for utilization of intellectual capacity and to work; and sufficient grants for research, which as a result increase job satisfaction and where ever individuals are satisfied and contented they stay permanently.

According to one of the study conducted upon candidates visiting consultants for immigration it was found that, majority of the respondents (71%) declared general job dissatisfaction, professional isolation, and poor economic returns along with lack of proper planning for manpower as a push factor for their intention to take immigration. 48 % immigrants considered less opportunity for further studies, development and research serves as a driving factor to move; 33 % claimed that continuous political instability and threats to their life as a main factor for their emigration; and 23% regard family consideration and for good living standards they decide to leave the country of origin (Sajjad, 2011).

Last but not least many views that immigration is not always negative for sending country. Immigration of professionals may develop motivation in others to achieve higher education and qualifications which subsequently intensify human capital. Although, immigrants, as discussed earlier cannot return due many reasons however can contribute financially by investing into business and industry.

References

Daily Times (2009, July05) Pakistan the worst-hit country by brain drain. Retrieved from, <http://archives.dailytimes.com.pk/business/05-Jul-2009/pakistan-the-worst-hit-country-by-brain-drain>.

Opkarajo (2002). The impact of salary differential on managerial job satisfaction. A study of the gender gap and its implications for management education and practice in a developing economy. *Journal of Business Development. Nation*, 65-92.

Sajjad, N. (2011) Causes and Solutions to Intellectual Brain Drain in Pakistan. *The Dialogue* . Vol. 6 (1)