

# Pushed or Pulled into Greener Pastures or Sinkhole Odyssey: The West Africa Migrant Nurses Accounts

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## ABSTRACT

*This study explores the determining factors that influence West African Migrant Nurses to seek sojourn in the United Kingdom sequel to their expectations at work. The study is a qualitative research, utilising semi-structured interviews and questionnaires as primary data collection tools including the review of relevant migration literature for secondary data. Purposive sample of Nurses (N=10) recruited through the snowballing techniques and (N=15) questionnaires distributed amongst migrants Nurses of West African origin working in the South East of England including Outer London. Data was analysed through coding and conceptualisation of themes. The findings suggest that even as economic issues form part of the motivating factor, other issues such as career development and work well-being were pivotal. Migration to the United Kingdom was mainly seen as a process to an end rather than an end in itself. While expectations from the economics viewpoints seem to be met and structures and standards for upward career mobility seen to be existing at workplace, pre-migration expectations were far from being met. This is as result of some prevailing human and institutional processes at work. The study therefore makes a case for a much more engagement and articulation of the well-being at work of these migrants nurses. This is an exploratory study and with prospects of further wider issues of research and with such a minimal number of participants, caution is therefore advocated in terms of generalisations of results.*

**Keywords:** International Migration, West Africa Migrant Nurses, United Kingdom, Social and Health Care, Motivation, Exploratory study.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 West Africa Migrant Nurses in the United Kingdom

This study investigates the driving factors for West Africa migrant nurses move to the UK. There is not much literature on the West Africa Migrant Nurses working in the United Kingdom (Likupe 2006) and this is a consequent of obvious lack of data and research generally on Africa migration (Hein de Hass and Bakewell 2007). However, most studies carried out in the past have grouped them within overseas or international migrant nurses in the United Kingdom. Most of the previous studies have also focused on issues on work experiences relating to discrimination. For instance, Alexis et la (2007) studied on the experiences of overseas minority ethnic nurses in the NHS which revealed systematic issues of devaluation, lack of equal opportunities, experiences of invisibility, experiences of fear and diminished trust threshold with colleagues at

work. Hardill and Macdonald (2000) further looked at similar experiences of international migrant nurses in the UK. Allan & Larsen (2003) looked on the need for respect for internationally recruited nurses in the United Kingdom while Hunt (2007) evaluated issues of managing diversity equality and diversity in the health workforce. West Africa migrant nurses specifically have not attracted much attention even as their numbers continue to increase within the UK nursing and care homes sub sector. It is against the background of this gap that the present study aims to add to both literature and organisational management intervention framework.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 International Migrations: Theories and Concepts**

International migration as a concept and human activity dates back to history. According to the United Nations Population Division ,there are nearly one hundred and ninety-one million (191m) migrants (persons living outside their country of birth ) in the world and Wickramasekara (2008), contends that these are combinations of people who move to get jobs in other regions and are later joined by their families, refugees and possible asylum seekers . The study of the concept of migration is multidimensional and can be undertaken according to Li et al (1995) from variable sources and angles. However, there has been empirical studies to suggest their mutual exclusiveness (Massey et al 1993). These interpretations are suggestive of common agenda in the theories of migration which are underlined by the fact that they share similar sentiments of intentions however one is bound to accept the fact that varying motives do occur within intentions to migrate. De Hass (2010) argues that the plethora of scholastic differences does not suggest that regularity or patterns could not be inferred in migration theories.

The earliest and basic theory which seems to draw inferences from the Ravenstein's laws on international migration has been the push and pull and neoclassical assumptions which according to ( Kritz et al 1992, Massey et al 1993, Meyers 2000) outline the consequences of wage differentials, economic deprivation and dependency as the driving factors of migration. This contention implies that as a common logical decision, individuals will usually make available their skills and knowledge to organisations and or countries that offer the highest bidding in terms better conditions of employments and real wages bearing in mind its comparison in the home country. Van Dalen et al (2005) who demonstrates that high wage expectations in relation to skills input as well as the considerations of low levels of risks (risk aversion ) involved in the process of migration serve as high level pull to migrate. The case of economic considerations in the urge to migrate as recorded in literature suggests that the consideration of foreign wages as offered by the receiving countries relative to the wages offered by the source or home country do impact on migration decisions. This argument is further advanced with the articulation of other factors such as the direct cost of such migration plans as well as other compensating differentials summed as non –wage variables (Ibid 2002) existing within the sending or home country representing the possible compensating differentials existing within the source country. There is a further line of argument in the same literature which argues that a possible consideration of utility which indicates there is the consideration of the working conditions of non –wage function job characteristics which are taken into consideration by

potential migrants . These, argued by Clarke et al (2002) include safety, potential and perception of absence of stressors career development potentials ,advancement of prestige and statuses an indeed the financial cost of migration which are expressed in utilitarian considerations. The issues therefore on the above analysis, include the question of whether these hold with different circumstances and situations. Hein de Haas (2010) introduction of the development migration process however opens different dimension to the mainstream migration motivation arguments. In which case the interpretation of the human capability concept highlights individuals aspirational drives to aim at across borders and distances. This suggests that migration processes are possible direct consequences of spatial opportunities rather than of mere economic differentials.

This perhaps informs the argument that a possible adjustment of wages may not alter or inform decision to migrate (Vujicic et al 2004). On the basis of the above issues , the idea that material considerations play substantial role in the determination of the motives to migrate has also been attracting very much debate especially as it relates also to employee satisfaction at work. There has been a strong assumption that health workers including Nurses from developing countries are predominantly motivated and satisfied with extrinsic job characteristics such as salary and may not bother much with intrinsic job characteristics such as recognition, autonomy and or challenging roles at work. This is yet to be established.

States political and economic decisions in what is considered external economic and employments pull factors of migration play major roles in driving migration ( Coelho 1988, Thomas –Hope 1992) especially where there are labour shortages and attractive strategies are put in place to attract the needed labour force from outside. This lays emphasis on the disparities on the nature and directions of migration as in countries that emphasis immigrant skill and those that stress on family unification or refugee regimes Chiswick in Brettell and Hollifield (2007). Skeldon (1990) claims through his reinforcement of the spatial dimension transition theory that nation states play significant roles in determining the pattern and directions of international migration through political actions and interconnectivities. This explains the relative inflow of migrant from former colonial areas because of the forged relationships in areas of culture and its derivatives such as linguistics.

## **2.2 Implicit Drivers of Migration**

Motivation as construct can be used to infer understanding of any course of action. Millward (2005) argues that inferences on both distal and proximal forms of behaviour are influenced by such constructs as need basic needs, expectations, outcome evaluations and eventually determine choices. It therefore suggest that motivation is goal directed driven by human violation or freewill which eventually determines the actions of such individuals (Locke 1997). Mainstream motivation theories, even though designed to appraised workplace situation expresses issues of choices made or efforts being put to be related to the expectations, instrumentality and valence of the outcomes. This meaning that the potential migrant would rather consider the dispositional issues in terms of the possible utility derivable from a particular course of action or inaction in the migration decision processes. Therefore migration intentions, choices and decisions resonate with expectancy which is contingent on experiences, communication and possible

attractiveness of the envisaged outcomes (Bratton et al 2010). The translation of intentions into actions has been argued to be functions of levels of risk aversion and fear of failure (Van Eerde 2000) which the migrants are ready to tolerate. (Papapanagos and Sanfey 2001, Liebig and Sousa-Posa 2004, Drinkwater 2002) suggest that such economic expectations sometimes play minimal roles as with structural characteristics of the potential immigrants which rather suggest the instinct to fulfil a natural desire. This hinges on the assumptions of Li et al (1995) that such behaviour traits are all functions of perceptions, intentions and goal setting of the individual. Accordingly, De Haas (2010) raises criticisms of the trivialisation of the individual's personal motives of migration in the researches on the economic and demographic drivers of migration. This lends to the critiquing of the continuous assumption of the primacy of the exogenous elements of wage differentials and other economic factors in the drive for migration and highlighted other variables such as access to relevant information and the existence of networking groups.

These variables also tend to explain why in some circumstances there have been low migration rates from low income countries to high income countries in spite of the high wage differentials. This position implies that individual migrants can be influenced by varied pull and push factors during the course of planning and deciding on migration options.

### **2.3 Sub-Sahara Africa Migration: The Driving Forces Argument**

There has been indications above of lack of adequate data on international migration dynamics from the Sub-Saharan African region much as there has been studies on internal migration trends within the region, more so with Nurses migration (Dovlo 2007, Wuliji et al 2009) However, the most articulated issues on Africa international especially towards Europe has been preceded by incidents of wars and economics. Increasing adverse economic conditions has been argued to induce motivation from most African countries to much more advance economies of the West (Adepoju 1998), especially low skilled migrants. The Africa cultural orientation of collectivism where everyone is responsible for each other tend to support this argument as households come under pressure with economic uncertainties and would rather rely on mobility strategies including migration to survive.

Belloc (2011) however, argues that migration from Sub- Sahara Africa has not indeed being consistent with the economic push factors as traditionally held assumptions. For instance '...Cape Verde and Seychelles with high emigration rates show relatively high values of Human Development Index (HDI) of 0.73 and 0.84 respectively whereas Niger and Burkina Faso with low value HDI of 0.37 present low emigration rates' (Belloc 2011 :5).

Additionally Vogler and Rotte (2000) contend that cost considerations which are not only valued in materials but also in psychological terms play pivotal roles in the intentions to migrate. The psychological costs they argue are linked to the fundamental differences between societies and also occasioned by the possible structural and institutional barriers in the receiving countries. According to (Ibid 2000, Healy and Oikelome 2007) the combination of the various variables such as wage gaps, population growth, societal changes and politics as well as improved communication and networking systems sustain international migration motives.

## **2.4 United Kingdom: The Drive for Migrant Health Care Nurses**

The study aims to understand the underlying motives for West African migrant Nurses to decide to pitch their trade in the United Kingdom. The United Kingdom as with most western countries has relied on international migrant nurses to argument shortages within its health and social care sectors. This has been as a result of ever increasing demand for skilled Nurses and the decreasing new entrants from the local labour force (Bucham 1999). The has been the identification of chronic challenges in meeting the health and social care manpower needs specifically in the nursing and residential homes as a result of both socio demographic and institutional factors (Wanless 20 Department of Health 2010 ,Beishon et al 1995 , Yeates 2010) . Most developed countries including the United Kingdom has had new improvements in new medical technologies , increased specialisation of health services but there has not been a corresponding increase in the manpower (Simoens et al 2005). Statistics indicate that population estimations of people aged between 65 and over in England will increase by 65% from 8.2million to 13.4 million over time (Wittenberg et al 2010). Senior elderly citizens in the United Kingdom of 80 years and above increased by over 70% between 1981 and 2006 and according the UK Government Actuaries Report (2007) , further increases are projected from 2.7 million to 5.4 million between 2006 and 2031 .The trends in care involving family members who are usually not paid declined between 1997 and 2006 according to the Care Quality Commission (CQC) (Formally Commission for Social Care Inspection) and the trend of decreasing care by family members and friends which stood at 2million (Malley et al 2005) is projected to lead to excess demand for care of the elderly over supply of manpower (Pickard 2008) over time .These scenarios hence doubled the need for external manpower needs within the care sector in the United Kingdom as a result of the shortages (Warner 1999, Ball & Pike 2004). The overall need for foreign (migrant health and social care workers including nurses increased to an extent that between 2001 and 2002, the number of qualified overseas nurses admitted into the Nurses and Midwifery Council (NMC) register exceeded the UK trained nurses (Buchan et al 2005) and this has increased to over 100,000 since 1997 with further increases to about 634,000 by 2002 (NMC 2002). The issues above did represent the picture of the need for foreign or migrant health care staff, including nurses by both the public and private health sectors in the United Kingdom.

The need for foreign born nurses in the United Kingdom has been explained further as been a consequence of high dropout rates amongst UK born that it has been estimated that about 27% of those that entered to train as nurses never complete their courses to become nurses ( Munro 1999). The cost of training an indigenous nurse has become much more rising from between 5 % and 10 % compared to the cost of ‘fixing’ the shortage gap with migrant nurses (Padarath et al 2003) and further issues of considered low pay has been attributed to the low attractions of natives to train and practice as nurses (Hardill & Macdonald 2000, Meadows et al 2000), hence the further attractions for migrant nurses and other health care workers. It is vital to understand that only about 5% of UK trained white Nurses work within the long term health and social care setting in the United Kingdom (Nursing and Care Homes) as against 14% of foreign trained Nurses ( Royal College of Nursing ,UK 2002). The is statistical higher number of migrant nurses in the nursing and care homes in the United Kingdom ( Ball & Pike 2007)

### **2.4.1 Registration of Migrant Nurses in the United Kingdom**

Most migrant Nurses in the United Kingdom are voluntary migrants unlike most other economic migrants (Winkelman-Gleed 2006). This means that they are usually documented and do follow a process of registration that qualifies them to practice their trade either with the National Health Service (NHS ) or the Independent Health Sector (Nursing and Care Homes). This processes of registration and regulation has been fraught with very high stake hurdles which could deter some would be migrant nurses to drop the ideas and intentions of migrating but these have not deterred them (Winkkelmann-Glead 2006) . The Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) is both the registration and regulatory body responsible for the processes of engaging non-European Union Nurses through certifications, training and other credentialing processes. The initial process will involve the potential migrant Nurse's provision of the evidence of a pass of the International English Language Testing System (ILTS) as well the payment of the application processing fee of one hundred and seventeen pounds. The originals of the applicant Nurse's certificates are further verified and upon the successful processing of the application, the Nurse is then advised to apply for a supervised practice placement which involved practical exposure further of clinical and health care culture of the United Kingdom for a period between 6 to 12 months. The necessary competences expected to be met by every potential Nurse practitioner in the UK include understanding professional values , achieving the desired communication and interpersonal relations skills , nursing practice and decision making skills, as well as leadership, management and team working competences.

Additionally, as required by the Nursing and Midwifery Order (2001), the NMC maintains the register of Nurses and Midwives in the United Kingdom, sets and maintains standards of education ,training and standards, ensures that Nurses and Midwives keep their skills and knowledge up to date and upholds the standards of their professional code amongst others (www.nmc.org) Accessed 09/07/2013.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Approach /Design**

The study aims to understand the migration motives of West Africa migrant nurses working in nursing and residential homes in the South East of England. The choice of South East of England, including Outer London is in view of the fact that majority of (30%) of the total number migrant Nurses working within the social and health care sectors in the United Kingdom are domiciled within this geographical area (ESRC Research Centre 2006). It draws therefore from a phenomenological qualitative research approach using case study research design which elicits responses thorough semi-structured interviews and administration of some additional open ended questionnaires to capture thoughts and views from respondents who were not able to hold face to face interviews because of logistic reasons. This approach was adopted because of its ability to generate high currency data with contextual relevance across, measures, methods, paradigm settings and time (Hussey and Hussey 1997). It is considered to be an ideal approach especially the use of fewer participants (Van Maanen et al 1982). The process involved in the recruitment of the participants was through direct contacts and further snowballing techniques.

The study population was based on purposive sampling techniques as the respondents were expected to fit into some expected features and with a purpose in mind (Silverman 2013,

Trochim & Donnelly in Bernard & Ryan 2010) .This is in line with understanding the core motives of migration of West African Nurses to the United Kingdom, hence the determination of some exclusion and inclusion criteria. A total number of (N-25) migrant nurses were therefore recruited through direct contacts and snowballing methods (Miller & Chandler 2002). The sample size may be small but the identification of pre-selection criteria and the understanding that participants could generate unique themes remain the positive side of the method (Patton 1990 in Saunders et al 2000). These met the following criteria :: (1) Born and Trained in West Africa countries (2) Minimum of 2 year post qualification work experience at home (West Africa) ,(3) Applied for and obtained registration to work in the United Kingdom through the Nurses and Midwifery Council (NMC) of the United Kingdom with the appropriate Work/ Residency Permit. The interviews were conducted on individual case study basis as part of the exploratory research data collection method in order to generate data to explain the phenomenon from existing theories ( Scapens 1990, Otley & Berry 1994)).This is therefore appropriate to determine the motive of and decision processes of these migrant nurses relative to existing migration theories. This is also supports the use of both interview and questionnaire methods (Yin 1994, Eisenhardt 1989).

### **3.1.2 Demographic Data**

A total of (N-10) Nurses were interviewed and (N-20) questionnaires posted out with prepaid envelopes of which (N-15) were returned completed having obtained their consents and informed of their rights to voluntary participate in the study on anonymous basis. Access to the participants was much easier than expected as direct contacts were made and building on trust, the Nurses were very willing to participate and introduce others through snowballing after being informed of the purposes and implications of the study (Saunders et al 2000). Permissions were also obtained to tape record the interview responses. The interviews were pre –arranged and were conducted at participants’ residents to suit their work schedules as some of them work nights and during weekends The questionnaires were posted to the rest of the participants after initial telephone communications following introduction by earlier contacts who provided their telephone numbers with their permissions The interview and questionnaire schedules were based on the following issues: (a) *Gender and Marital demographics* (b) *Post work experience at home country* (c) *The initial intentions to migrate* (d) *Players in the migration decision processes* (e) *Issues encountered during the migration processes* (f) *Expectations and Experiences at current workplace.*

### **3.1.3 Data Analysis/Findings**

The interviews were transcribed while responses from the questionnaires which were designed as open ended were also collated through the coding and thematic analysis processes. The respondents were designated with dummy initials such as (MN 1-25) to protect their identities.

The initial coding phasing was made through the reading and re-reading of the transcribed data and making notes of common clues and patterns of responses on the issues posed in the interviews. This stage was very vital as the notes made were used to determine the preliminary interpretation which will be used to conceptualise the concepts (Glaser 1992). Some extracts from the interviews are also used in the data presentation as is adaptable with phenomenological

case study research (Hussey & Hussey 1997) The Nurses noted an initial drive to add value to both their social and career lives in mooted the idea to migrate outside their countries.

*'In my country, we are proud of our achievements, even inside our families, we give respect to people who have achieved a lot mmm...and we look up on them as people that we can follow their footsteps'. This is why everybody want to move up every time. People that study abroad or live abroad, especially England or America are respected at home. So we all want to go be in England'. (MN-05 Aged 56).*

This is an indication that the existence of both social and economic hierarchy within the West Africa society in which achievements are measured in terms of the level of individuals' educational and material accumulation. The value attributions of such social and economic classes can also be seen to be dependent on where and how these were acquired. There is the understanding that in order to claim proficiency in one's professional field, keeping pace with the use of modern and advanced facilities improves one's chances of being respected and recognised. *'.....most of our present leaders and successful professionals studied abroad. We have a system that sometimes does not encourage quality training and practice, so the best option is to go abroad...why do you think our politicians and rich people send their children to America and UK to study....Ah it's because of the quality ooo(!). I want to improve myself. (MN-10 Aged 46).*

*I have reached the post of Matron ...(paused), I mean I was already a hospital Matron (A higher position) before I decided to come over to England to improve myself 'I wanted further skills. We are not poor by any standard in my country. My husband is a Medical Doctor practicing in back in my country (MN-15 Aged 58).*

There is also the filial prestige in a member of the family being abroad either working or studying. The participants alluded to the fact that the initial decision to migrate abroad is usually a family affair. This is why even the material resources needed to fund the trip are sometimes of family contributions. Most times, some family assets are sold out to raise additional money to process the migration applications.

*'Ah...it's a family matter ooo...my parents but especially my husband joined in deciding for me to come over to England. We are women, we cannot take such decision on our own. You know that now, we are owned by somebody especially if you are married' (MN-01 Aged 52)*

The respondents noted the much more economic opportunities that abound in the United Kingdom but still maintained that favourable work conditions as read and expected informed decision to move to work as there were initial choices such as moving to either to the USA or the Middle East. Some believe that better skills and further education are pre-requisites for realising their career dreams and aspirations even as they looked upon to provide for their families back home. *'I was convinced by my friend, who was already here in the United Kingdom to try to come over because Nurses are paid well ...but my dear...yes paid well but you have to work like a donkey to get that paid well ooo. I feel frustrated now at work. I cannot even study here because I cannot afford it because of my immigration status and my Nursing home cannot sponsor me' (MN-08 Aged 34).*

*I take care of my immediate family in my country ... but I am still young and not married yet. I only wanted to work, get more money and further improve myself in England through studies and better skills and then go back, get married and start a family. Am I on track .....? I would say capital No' (MN-20 Aged 36).*

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The study was aimed at understanding the core issues of motivation and current experiences at work for West Africa migrant Nurses working in Nursing and Care homes in the South East of

England, including outer London. This is with a view to further understand their expectations at the workplace. The Phenomenological research approach was used, with semi structured interview techniques and questionnaires as primary data collection tools. The findings reveal that the dominant issues adduced as motivators to include the following in the order below: Enhancing Career opportunities, Experiencing of improved working conditions, Exposure to use of modern medical facilities and technologies, Gaining more social status for self and families at home, Improved economic status .The decision to migrate were of collective responsibilities of the families concerned, though the migrant Nurses did the initial conceptualisation of the ideas .This highlights the primacy of family organisations in West Africa. There emerged common themes on the fact that most of the migrant nurses feel that some aspects of their expectations are not being met at work creates some sense of despondency. Most of their interpersonal relationships at work with both their Managers and colleagues are all but cordial to enjoy positive work - being. These have affected also their skills and career aspirations. This study therefore argues for a much more attention to both interpersonal and organisational processes and values by employers of these Nurses. This will not only improve service delivery and care but also help retain the much need migrant healthcare talents across the United Kingdom.

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