

International Migration of Filipino Healthcare Professionals

Perspectives and Experiences of Former Employees in a Government Hospital in the Philippines

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ABSTRACT

The continuous migration of highly skilled Filipino healthcare professionals to work overseas is an occurrence that has indeed resulted in a significant loss of talent and expertise in the country's healthcare system. The departure of these healthcare professionals often leaves their previous positions vacant, which leads to an increased workload for the remaining staff and eventually results in work overload, inefficiency, and shortage of personnel, which disrupts the seamless operation of the healthcare system, ultimately affecting the service delivery and the quality of patient care. Thus, further investigation of this perennial concern of Filipino healthcare professionals' global mobility is imperative to understand its current context fully. Through semi-structured interviews and follow-up interviews, this qualitative study explores how a group of 14 former healthcare professionals in a government hospital in Leyte perceive international migration for work, their perceived factors for migration, and the everyday challenges they have encountered as migrant healthcare workers. The thematic analysis of interview responses revealed the following specific perspectives about former healthcare professionals' view on international migration for work: further advance professional and career growth, establish a better work environment, aiming for competitive compensation, the problematic healthcare system in the Philippines, and safeguard employees' mental wellbeing. Further, it was found that the healthcare professional participants considered the factors influencing their decision to work abroad: toxic work culture and work overload, non-

competitive compensation and benefits, work inequality and abuse of power, and career development and progression. Three major themes emerged regarding challenges: overcoming culture shock, language barriers, communication gaps, and homesickness.

Keywords

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Introduction

The Philippine government has been exerting considerable effort in investing in medical public schools in the country, building upon its well-established legacy of producing highly skilled healthcare professionals in high international demand for their English proficiency, clinical competence, and compassionate patient care [1]. Healthcare professionals, as defined by the World Health Organization (WHO), are individuals involved in activities primarily aimed at improving health.

Given the current situation of the country's medical facilities, medical services, and health workforce, which have been considered to be poor and have been widely perceived and observed to decline from bad to worse, this program of actively investing in nurturing and producing highly skilled healthcare professionals provides impetus in developing the welfare of every Filipino. However, as highlighted in a study by Ref. [2], the country is currently facing significant healthcare workforce challenges, specifically the heavy nurse-to-patient ratio [3]; another one is workforce shortages, which hinder the effective delivery of healthcare services. This issue has sparked concerns within the country, one example being the situation in the Eastern Visayas. In this region, more advanced hospitals and additional workforce are needed to supplement the glaring gap in the health sector. According to the Philippine Information Agency [4], the Department of Health (DOH) is pushing to complete 14 more super health centers in Eastern Visayas this year. This would help boost the government's universal healthcare program and decongest regional hospitals.

However, despite the vast development made by the government, it can be observed that a considerable number of medical personnel migrate to other countries in search of better opportunities. International migration in health services has been a concern of the Philippine government for years [5], and the Philippines has consistently supplied skilled health workers to various countries in the Global North. According to Ref. [6], the Philippines is one of the

world's major exporters of healthcare professionals. The migration of healthcare personnel has become an intricate and multifaceted phenomenon carrying profound implications for the Philippines and globally. This migration of healthcare professionals, although advantageous on an individual level, has led to a significant loss of trained professionals from healthcare systems in the Philippines [7]. This loss, often called "brain drain," is generally seen as an economic drawback, as emigrants typically take a portion of the value of their training sponsored by the government. This problem is happening in a government hospital in Palo, Leyte, where some medical employees opt to pursue better employment opportunities overseas, significantly impacting the hospital's performance.

The departure of this highly skilled healthcare personnel has resulted in a significant loss of talent and expertise within the hospital, becoming a recurring problem in the country. In the Philippines, migration is institutionalized and becomes cumulative within the family through investment in education [8]. When these workers seek better opportunities abroad, their positions are often left vacant without immediate replacements. This creates a situation where the workload and responsibilities they once managed effectively are transferred to the remaining staff members, causing work overload. The increased workload, coupled with the added pressure of fulfilling additional duties, can lead to work inefficiency and a shortage of personnel, which further exacerbates the challenges faced by the institution. In essence, the departure of these professionals not only depletes the hospital of essential skills but also disrupts the seamless operation of the healthcare system, ultimately affecting the quality and efficiency of patient care.

According to Ref. [9], the global migration of healthcare workers is considered a crisis in the health sector's human resources in home countries. Indeed, it is unfortunate that most healthcare workers are forced to work abroad in the Philippines for various reasons. Migrants are motivated by push factors in their home countries and pull factors in receiving countries [9]. In the Philippines, the most significant number of healthcare professionals who tend to migrate for work to other countries are nurses [10],[11]. The 'culture of migration' perspective would consider other countries as a source of ontological security with their capacity to minimize social risks that they might encounter. Hence, most healthcare workers would see working abroad as an opportunity for greener pastures. However, though this can be an opportunity for them, the home country of these professionals, for instance, the Philippines, would experience a negative impact in the human resource aspect. Thus, further investigation of Filipino healthcare professionals' global mobility is imperative to understand its current context fully.

Specifically, this study investigated former healthcare professionals' perspectives of a government hospital in Leyte regarding international migration, including the perceived

factors influencing the employees' decision to work abroad and their everyday challenges. Specifically, this study answered the following questions:

1. What do the former healthcare professionals in a government hospital in Leyte think about international migration for work?
2. What perceived factors influence the employees' decision to work abroad?
3. What challenges do they face as migrant healthcare professionals who work abroad?

Literature Review

The Philippines is popularly named a model country for health worker migration [12] worldwide. However, the country faces the challenge of having insufficient job opportunities for its vast population. Furthermore, working conditions in the country are challenging even for those fortunate enough to secure employment. Approximately one out of every five employed workers experiences underemployment, inadequately compensated, or working below one's full potential. Consequently, the number of Filipinos seeking employment overseas has steadily increased, leading to a rise in worker deployment [5].

Many Filipinos, comprising some of the country's most well-educated individuals, are driven to seek job opportunities abroad. The Philippines is the second-largest exporter of human labor globally, with healthcare professionals being the largest group of migrant laborers, as stated in the study of Ref. [7]. In 2013, it was reported by the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration or the POEA, in charge of the country's outmigration, that approximately 1.8 million Filipinos departed the country looking for employment opportunities overseas. Hence, this significantly leads to massive migration among Filipino healthcare professionals.

Ref. [13] defines it as the "ubiquitous process of movement of an individual or a group of people from one spatial unit or place of residence (known as an original place) to another (called as destination place) defined by any kind of commonly agreed geographical or political or administrative boundary in space and time." The United Nations, as cited in Ref. [13], recommended an intended duration of stay of more than one year with the purpose of job for permanent migration and one year or less than one year for temporary migrants, provided they receive pay from sources within the country they enter. In the healthcare sector, the migration of workers and professionals is an inevitable decision and a nature of human need [14], mainly if a specific crisis would prompt this decision. For instance, the emigration of skilled nurses from the Philippines is an ongoing phenomenon that has impacted the quality and quantity of the nursing workforce while strengthening the domestic economy through remittances [15].

The migration of healthcare workers was significantly motivated during the COVID-19 pandemic. Over 80,000 doctors and a million nurses from 80 groups sent a collective note to Philippine President Rodrigo Roa Duterte lamenting that the country was on the brink of defeat in its battle against COVID-19 [16]. At the height of the health crisis, it can be noted that the government tried to dissuade most of these healthcare professionals from leaving the country to work overseas [17], especially since their expertise is in dire need. Most of them were burnt out with the work overload they encountered even before the pandemic, and the onslaught of the health crisis has triggered their decision to leave the country for better opportunities and work environment. Further, it can be gleaned from Ref. [18] study that the COVID-19 pandemic has either positively or negatively influenced the decision of healthcare workers for work migration. Also, some healthcare workers, such as Filipino nurses who have aspired to work abroad, “set limits to the time they devote to local service” [19] as they aim to further their career pathway beyond the national borders.

Despite the benefit that increasing migrant workers provides to the country’s economy, these migrations have resulted in a loss of the country’s investments in educating and training healthcare workers [7]. Similarly, Ref. [20] noted that policymakers express concerns that as the receiving countries actively hire workers from overseas, the origin countries lose the talent that their education systems have invested in developing and training. Fundamentally, the knowledge, skills, and expertise that the country has nurtured in these individuals are not being fully utilized for the betterment of their origin or home country, for they have chosen to work overseas. This situation can lead to social and economic implications for the home country, as it loses the potential contributions of these skilled individuals.

Ref. [21] revealed in their study that pull factors among migrant workers in the medical field would include the obverse— higher wages, better working conditions, and more opportunities. Also, increasing levels of skilled migration from less developed to developed countries have been driven by various factors, usually identified in the literature as ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors. In Ref. [11], the researcher found that overseas recruitment has become a common strategy in filling nurse shortages within U.S. health institutions, sparking the proliferation of nursing programs in the Philippines. This result shows the negative implications of migration to the healthcare system in the country.

Additionally, as the developed countries address workforce shortages by recruiting medical professionals from less developed countries, there’s a widespread view that this action adversely impacts the less developed countries. This practice results in a scarcity of medical professionals, which leads to poor health outcomes in these less-developed countries [20]. As stated in a study by Ref. [5] regarding massive nurse migration, reports from the Philippine Hospital Association (PHA) revealed that two hundred hospitals have had to close due to

critical shortages of nurses and physicians. Furthermore, eight hundred hospitals have partially closed for a similar reason, ending services in one or two wards. These shortages have not only resulted in the failure to meet accreditation standards but have also disrupted the reimbursement processes and eventually brought about a financial crisis.

According to Ref. [22], the resignation and migration of Filipino healthcare professionals, particularly nurses, have accelerated more during the pandemic. This has led to a shortage and unequal distribution of nurses in the country. It was also reported that amid the pandemic, Filipino healthcare professionals, specifically nurses, were resigning, leaving their work in the Philippines and seeking employment opportunities abroad. Consequently, hospitals in the Philippines faced understaffing issues [22]. Numerous healthcare professionals have emphasized that they were forced to endure prolonged working hours with an inconsistent supply of personal protective equipment (PPE).

The departure of Filipino healthcare professionals from the Philippines' healthcare institutions has significantly impacted the local COVID-19 response, as stated in Ref. [22]. With relevance to the above, hospitals in the country started to scale down their operations; this was not due to the unavailability of facilities and medical equipment but rather because of the shortage of healthcare professionals.

Further, Ref. [23] study on the decision-making process of Filipino nurses to work abroad found some significant factors that motivate them to migrate overseas for their work. Factors can have similar and different influences on multiple thresholds, such as mental thresholds, locational thresholds, and trajectory thresholds, and the factors can have different strengths. For most nurses, finance, family, working and living conditions, future visions, and working conditions strongly influence their decision-making process. In contrast, factors such as traveling have a less strong influence. Additionally, many factors are related to their influence on the thresholds, such as finance, family, and future visions.

Ref. [12] explored the migration of Filipino Health workers and its corresponding influence on themselves as migrant workers, their families, and their profession as health care workers. A total of 305 respondents from various towns and cities in the country were considered in their study. It was revealed in their findings that the respondents in the case studies considered migration as specifically beneficial as it improved the quality of life and secured the future of healthcare migrants and their families. It was recommended by the researchers to further embark on a systematic HRH master plan that will "harmonize workforce planning and establish other health human resources management strategies covering such areas as improved recruitment and retention; career planning; better compensation packages, etc." [12].

In addition, Ref. [24] explored the health workforce migration in the Philippines and argued the positive and negative consequences that this phenomenon could provide. Indeed, migration offers a massive opportunity for Filipino healthcare workers in terms of economic, professional, lifestyle, and social benefits that some hospitals in the home country could hardly provide. For example, the battle cry of most healthcare workers in the country is the non-competitive compensation and benefits they receive from their employers, either in public or private hospitals. However, despite the contribution of the increasing number of migrant workers in the country, this could also result in “maldistribution of health workers, particularly affecting rural health outcomes.”

The impact of job migration on the home country and the medical field can be gleaned from the findings of various studies. It can also be observed that there is a need to conduct more studies investigating the medical personnel in provinces, as opposed to the studies cited above that only consider sample respondents and participants from metropolitan cities such as Metro Manila, Davao, and Cebu. The present study will address this gap by investigating the medical personnel in a government hospital in Leyte and will shed light on the specific reasons for their migration abroad. Thus, this quantitative study's results would provide a clear picture of how this personnel is at risk of getting caught in a migration trap and the specific factors it has caused as useful for policymakers and administrators of provincial hospitals in the Philippines.

Material and Methods

Through a qualitative approach, the study employed interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to thoroughly investigate the research participants' lifeworld [8]. A qualitative study [25] through interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) [26] delves into a “detailed exploration of personal lived experience, examined on its terms and with a focus on participants' meaning-making.” As a participant-oriented approach, IPA allows participants to express and view themselves as experts on their own ‘lived experiences via interviews, journals or narratives, qualitative survey (QS) responses, or focus group discussions.’ This study used QS to collect the data through semi-structured and follow-up individual interviews.

Further, since the current research is a full qualitative paper, the researchers employed the trustworthiness criteria and techniques [27] to ensure credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability in conducting a qualitative study. Purposive-convenience sampling was employed through nonprobability sampling in a government hospital in Palo Leyte. The choice of research site was based on accessibility and practicality since one of the researchers is currently employed in the target government hospital. Also, the participants were chosen based on the following criteria: (1) they must have resigned as healthcare professionals in the target government hospital in Leyte, and (2) they have migrated and been

employed as healthcare workers in any country abroad. Since this is a qualitative paper, the researchers cannot claim that the findings of this paper are generalizable to all Filipino healthcare migrants. Specifically, the following were used as questions for the qualitative interviews: (1) what are your perceptions of the international migration for work among Filipino healthcare professionals? (2) how do you perceive their decision to resign from their previous workplace in the country to work abroad?; (3) what are the common factors or reasons influencing your decision to work abroad? Please cite some specific examples and explain further for clarity; (4) what common challenges do you identify as a Filipino healthcare professional who has migrated to work abroad?; (5) will you be willing to participate in the follow-up interview? (Yes, No, or Maybe). Probing questions were also asked to ensure a detailed response from the participants. During the interview with the target participants, they were informed of the research's focus, and a consent form was given to the participants to ensure ethical consideration. Also, the actual names of the participants were not mentioned in any part of this paper; instead, code names such as HP1, HP2, HP3, etc., were used to anonymize the real identities of the participants. The data gathered from them through the interviews will be destroyed after the publication of this paper in a reputable journal.

Moreover, the researchers reviewed all the data before deciding on saturation. For data analysis, Ref. [25] procedure of qualitative data analysis was employed such as (a) organization of the data; (b) reading and memoing; (c) describing, classifying, and interpreting data into codes and themes; (d) interpreting the data; and (e) representing and visualizing the data. The interview data were thoroughly transcribed and repeatedly read and examined, after which the transcripts, through a thematic-analysis approach, were condensed and categorized based on themes and subthemes. Also, Ref. [28], a specific manual coding for QDA (with two or more cycles/In Vivo, Eclectic, Axial Coding), was employed for the coding procedure. Further, member checking was also used to solicit participant feedback regarding the accuracy of the data gathered and the interpretation made by the researchers [29]. The researchers strictly followed these steps and processes to arrive at this study's most accurate results and findings.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the study's findings due to the qualitative analysis of the data gathered from fourteen healthcare professionals who are former employees in a government hospital in Leyte. The participants in this study are a mixed group of male and female Filipino nurses, medical laboratory scientists, and hospital engineers whose ages range from 25 to 38. The study delves into three specific research questions, which were answered in light of the findings that aimed to explore the perception of former healthcare professionals in the

Philippines on international migration for work, its perceived factors, and the challenges they encountered when working abroad.

A. Former healthcare professionals' perception of international migration for work (RQ1)

The interview responses revealed five specific perspectives about former healthcare professionals' perception of international migration for work: (1) further advance professional and career growth, (2) establish a better work environment, (3) aiming for competitive compensation, (4) problematic healthcare system in the Philippines, and (5) safeguard employees' mental wellbeing.

1. Further Advance Professional and Career Growth

The healthcare professional participants disclosed that international migration for work indicates that these former employees who have resigned intend to develop their professional advancement in their specialization. They likewise viewed that most would want to be employed in a country where the employees highly feel career growth. The following statements indicate these perspectives:

"...a better way of life is waiting on the other side of the world. Believing that this huge sacrifice will eventually create a positive impact, professionally for themselves..." [HP13]

"I perceive it as bravery and decisiveness of an individual in pursuing a more rewarding yet competitive nursing career." [HP1]

From their responses, it can be seen that healthcare professionals need to further their careers and professions in the medical field. This finding correlates to Ref. [11],[30] study that migrant professionals, such as Filipino nurses, would want overseas work right after graduation for professional advancement. Hence, this is also evident in the perception and experiences of healthcare professionals interviewed in this study. Also, HP4 and HP8 further conveyed their responses:

"I perceive their decision to resign from their previous workplace in the country to work abroad as being motivated by the pursuit of a better work environment, opportunities for career advancement, and professional development." [HP4]

"I think Filipinos choose to resign from their previous workplace in the Philippines and migrate to work abroad; I think it's for career growth..." (HP8)

Moreover, "career growth" and "professional development" were the participants' dominant concepts. This reflects how healthcare professionals in the Philippines would thirst for this aspect of development in their field. Unfortunately, as gleaned from HP4's and HP8's responses, they could experience this when they work abroad, transforming to become migrant workers. This phenomenon can also be noted in the study of Ref. [7], which shows that highly trained healthcare professionals see migration as an "opportunity

for professional growth and enhancement.” Thus, most would consider working abroad an opportunity despite its effect on their country’s healthcare system.

2. Establish a Better Work Environment

The participants viewed that some Filipino healthcare professionals who always want to work abroad aim to establish a good working environment. Ref. [31] found that a “favorable work environment” in hospitals significantly improves professional work outcomes. The participants in the present study have also noted the same findings that highlight the importance of a comfortable working environment. These insights were culled from these interview excerpts:

“When it comes to the international migration of Filipino healthcare professionals, it's commonly seen as a quest for a better working environment...” [HP4]

“I believe that the international migration for work among Filipino healthcare professionals is greatly affected by multiple factors including but not limited to...more ideal work conditions.” [HP11]

“I perceive their decision to resign from their previous workplace in the country to work abroad as being motivated by the pursuit of a better work environment...” [HP4]

It is a salient factor for healthcare professionals to consider the quality of the hospital’s environment. For them, when Filipino healthcare professionals are migrating to work abroad, one possible reason is the depletion of the quality of their previous work environment.

3. Aiming for Competitive Compensation

The healthcare professional participants believed migration also indicates a low salary for healthcare professionals in the country. Most of them would perceive international migration as an opportunity for competitive compensation, as revealed in these extracts:

“I perceive the greater opportunity for nursing career growth and development while securing the socioeconomic welfare of my family.” (HP1)

“When it comes to the international migration of Filipino healthcare professionals, it's commonly seen as a quest for a better working environment and being able to provide enough for their financial needs.” (HP4)

Significantly, HP2 added that international migration among healthcare workers is primarily motivated by bigger financial opportunities, as expressed in the following excerpts:

“My perception of international migration for work among Filipino healthcare professionals is that there is proper compensation for professionals based on their skill sets and competencies/experiences.” (HP2)

This finding is also revealed in the study of Ref. [1] that in 2019 alone, at least 17,000 Filipino nurses signed overseas contracts. They highlighted the impact of out-migration as more evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, with mass nurse resignations and consequent migration due to unjust compensation, unreceived benefits and hazard pay, and delays in insurance reimbursements. Hence, these reasons would prompt local healthcare professionals to migrate abroad.

4. Problematic Healthcare System in the Philippines

It was also evident that the participants expressed their perception of international migration among healthcare professionals as caused by the problematic healthcare system in the country. According to them, the Philippine healthcare system is getting worse, especially those hospital facilities in provinces. One participant [HP3] shared this view:

“In my perspective, the decision of Filipino healthcare professionals to work abroad is a sign of an inadequate healthcare system on the verge of collapse.” [HP3]

Further, some participants have also highlighted the depleting quality of the country's healthcare system as one reason for international migration. These can be viewed in the following excerpts:

“It's because the Philippines' health care system is inferior. The government doesn't give importance to health care that much, especially to the HCWs, so they tend to leave where they are appreciated and taken care of...” [HP8]

“My perception of the international migration for work among Filipino healthcare professionals? For me, it is a reflection of the worsening condition of the system in the country.” [HP9]

It can be gleaned from most of the studies' findings, such as Ref. [32],[33], which described the significant factor of the poor healthcare system in a country that triggers its employees to work abroad. Hence, this is also evident in some government hospitals in different provinces in the Philippines.

5. Safeguard Employees' Mental Well-being

Most participants have also perceived the migration of healthcare workers as they want to secure their mental well-being. Recent studies such as Ref. [34],[35] highlight the mental health problems suffered by most Filipino healthcare professionals in the country. Hence, during COVID-19, it has disrupted the mental well-being of healthcare workers in the Philippines. Ref. [22] argued the significant threat to an understaffed healthcare system in the country, “leading to resignations, change of profession, and migration to other countries.” These insights can be inferred from these statements:

“...they prefer to migrate because our healthcare system falls short in caring for its professionals and doesn't fully recognize their value.” [HP6]

“As per my encounters, the International Migration of Filipino Healthcare Workers is a product of inadequate support for said sector's safety and well-being, and the eagerness for a better life for themselves and their family.” [HP13]

“In my perception, their decision to resign from their previous workplace in the country just to work abroad is driven by the pursuit of a better work-life balance.” [HP2]

Unfortunately, healthcare employees in provincial hospitals are not exempted from this recurring problem. Thus, most would think of working abroad as a coping strategy.

B. Perceived factors that influence the employees' decision to work abroad (RQ2)

The healthcare professional participants shared insights regarding the factors influencing their decision to work abroad. The interview findings were categorized into four themes, reflecting: (1) toxic work culture and work overload, (2) non-competitive compensation and benefits, (3) work inequality and abuse of power, and (4) career development and progression.

1. Toxic Work Culture and Work Overload

An unhealthy work environment and an overwhelming workload are consistently emphasized in most responses as significant factors influencing the participants' decision to seek employment opportunities abroad. Personal experiences shared by some participants include enduring excessive workloads and strains in the work environment, as revealed in the following excerpts:

“Also, feeling burnt out—always tired and not as motivated as I used to be—pushes me to look for opportunities abroad. I want to break free from this burnout cycle and rediscover what gives my work meaning. That's what's driving me to explore international job opportunities.” [HP2]

“For me, some of the common factors or reasons that influence their decision to work abroad are fewer opportunities for a permanent job in the Philippines, Political Inequality at work, Toxic work environment, No Professional growth, Overworked and Underpaid.” [HP13]

“The main factors influencing my decision to work abroad include poverty, as I need a higher income and the desire for fewer working hours. In my previous employment in the Philippines, duties require longer hours and more responsibilities.” [HP6]

Relevantly, HP3 emphasized that a toxic and stressful workplace environment is a factor that compelled the participant to seek employment opportunities abroad, as expressed in the following statement:

“Additionally, the workplace environment is often toxic and stressful, prompting a search for more conducive work settings.” [HP3]

This finding is evident in the study by Ref. [15], highlighting that poor working conditions are among the key factors pushing and motivating Filipino healthcare

professionals to leave the country and work abroad. Further, Ref. [36] study revealed that heavy workloads also serve as one of the significant reasons behind healthcare professionals' migration, which continually feeds their desire to pursue better working conditions beyond their national boundaries.

Therefore, most Filipino healthcare professionals hope to liberate themselves from toxic work cultures and the burden of overwhelming workloads. Consequently, they seek work abroad to find a healthy work environment and more reasonable working hours.

2. Non-Competitive Compensation and Benefits

The participant's shared experiences regarding insufficient compensation and benefits significantly influenced their decision to work abroad. Most of the participants in this study expressed that despite facing financial challenges while working in the Philippines, they were also inadequately compensated and lacked overtime fees. These insights are reflected in the following statements:

"The primary factor influencing my decision to work abroad is inadequate compensation. Health workers are often not paid sufficiently by their employers, even when they exceed their actual shift hours. This financial challenge becomes a significant motivator for seeking employment opportunities abroad." [HP4]

"The main factor influencing my decision to work abroad is unreasonable pay. Experiencing delays in salary payments for several months hampers our daily activities and becomes a significant factor in seeking employment opportunities abroad." [HP5]

"The main factors influencing my decision to work abroad include poverty, as I need a higher income and the desire for fewer working hours. In my previous employment in the Philippines, duties require longer hours and more responsibilities." [HP6]

"Unfair compensation, overworked pay, and not being appreciated are the common reasons that influenced my decision to work abroad." [HP8]

The recent study of Ref. [22] highlighted that the low salaries of Filipino healthcare professionals and the high cost of living in the Philippines can elevate the risk of frustration, discouraging their dedication to their profession and commitment to serving their origin country. One Filipino nurse echoed this sentiment in an interview, expressing dissatisfaction with the scenario of studying for a four-year nursing course, putting in hard work to obtain a license, only to receive a salary that can no longer be deemed a living wage [37]. One participant in this study [HP12] shared a similar view:

"Honestly, my family in the Philippines paid a lot for my schooling, and the wages here for nurses simply cannot return the investment. The stress we get from working is triple, but we earn less. I can say that it's just not worth it." [HP12]

They receive low wages, which drives Filipino healthcare professionals to leave their country of origin and work abroad [24]. Hence, given the existing cost of living in the

Philippines and the comparatively low salaries, Filipino healthcare professionals are compelled to explore more financially rewarding jobs overseas.

3. Work Inequality and Abuse of Power

One of the emerging themes in the participants' responses is work inequality and abuse of power. According to their responses, individuals with political connections receive preferential treatment, making it challenging for those without such connections to advance in their profession. Likewise, abuse of power is prevalent in their previous workplaces in the Philippines, as indicated by the following excerpts:

"Moreover, career development faces challenges in a structure that favors the privileged and those with connections, making it difficult to progress in my profession." [HP3]

"For me, some of the common factors or reasons that influence their decision to work abroad are fewer opportunities for a permanent job in the Philippines, Political Inequality at work..." [HP13]

"Next is to find a not politically influenced workplace - having a work environment that is not influenced by the abuse of power of people in authority or officials." [HP11]

"Lack of meritorious leadership and management - Some are clingy to hold positions and entitlement but ineffective enough to contribute to the vitality of the nursing workforce. Always preoccupied with punitive thinking and power control instead of nurturing potentials towards satisfaction guaranteed health services." [HP2]

Also, Ref. [38] observed that the hiring process primarily depended on socio-political connections rather than possessing the right skills and knowledge to deliver health services. They emphasized that while skills and professional qualifications are valuable, they are mainly secondary to personal connections. Therefore, this factor considerably discourages local healthcare workers and plays a role in influencing their decision to pursue employment opportunities abroad.

4. Career Development and Progression

Professional growth is highlighted as one of the significant factors that influenced the participants in this study to work abroad. The participants perceived that they were unable to fulfill their career aspirations within the healthcare workplace setting in the Philippines, as evidenced by these excerpts:

"Another is personal and professional growth – I want to enhance my practice in an ideal setting with a safe patient-to-staff ratio and develop skills appropriate for my profession." [HP11]

"Lack of Impactful Health Agenda for Filipino Nurses working in the Philippines- Many professional nurses are not given equal opportunity for good compensation and career development yet are compelled to comply with so-called qualifications before being considered for regular positions. Meanwhile, when you advance for an overseas career, the same level of qualifications yet competitive and reassuring offers can be achieved." [HP1]

“...No Professional growth, Overworked and Underpaid.” [HP13]

This is also evident in the findings of the study conducted by Ref. [7], wherein limited career opportunities and inadequate opportunities for specialty training, among other factors, were mentioned as influencing migration decisions. Thus, this factor would undoubtedly motivate Filipino healthcare professionals to seek a workplace setting that would aid them in achieving their career aspirations.

C. Challenges faced as migrant healthcare professionals who work abroad (RQ3)

The interview responses disclosed three specific challenges that migrant healthcare professionals experienced while working abroad: (1) overcoming culture shock, (2) language barrier and communication gaps, and (3) dealing with homesickness.

1. Overcoming Culture Shock

One of the foremost challenges the participants faced while working overseas involved adapting to a new culture and environment. Most of the participants' responses revealed that they struggled with adjusting to the new culture and environment, as indicated in the following statements:

“Culture and Ethnicity - there are beliefs and practices to consider, adapt, or adopt.” [HP1]

“I identify several common challenges, including loneliness, cultural barriers, racism, and xenophobia.” [HP3]

“Homesickness, challenges in making friends abroad, and cultural adjustment are common difficulties faced by Filipino healthcare professionals working overseas.” [HP6]

“The culture here abroad is different, and as someone from a "poor" country, I did face some discrimination.” [HP12]

“As a Filipino healthcare professional working abroad, one common challenge I've identified is coping with the new environment and culture.” [HP2]

These experiences align with the findings of Ref. [39] study that culture shock is one of the characteristics of the first adjustment phase. It was highlighted that shortly after experiencing clinical work, the migrant Filipino healthcare professionals encountered culture shock. This finding also relates to Ref. [40] study that healthcare professionals such as Filipino nurses experience work-related discrimination. The shared insights of the participants shed light on the cultural adaptation challenges faced by migrant Filipino healthcare professionals in a foreign setting.

2. Language Barrier and Communication Gaps

The participants viewed language barriers and communication gaps as challenges they identified while working abroad. The participants' responses indicated that they had a hard time with language differences and faced difficulties in effective communication, as expressed in the following extracts:

"Communication barrier - different nationalities, different languages, prone to ineffective communication." [HP1]

"As a Filipino healthcare professional who has migrated abroad, I identify several common challenges, including the need for independence, communication barriers, financial considerations, and adjustments to the new work environment." [HP4]

"In light of my perspective, it's the cultural differences, language barrier and unfamiliar and different state laws. Yes, for me, those are the challenges that Filipino healthcare professionals face when they migrate abroad for work." [HP11]

In the studies of Ref. [41], the participants' insights were also highlighted, in which international nurses faced scrutiny from colleagues and patients due to language differences. These differences contributed to feelings of belittled. It was also reported that these communication obstacles acted as stressors for international nurses as they endeavored to work efficiently in their host or receiving countries.

3. Dealing with Homesickness

Dealing with homesickness is consistently emphasized in most responses of the participants as one of the challenges that migrant healthcare professionals encounter while working abroad. In the study of Ref. [42], one of the findings highlighted that one of the immigration and resettlement challenges is loneliness, which is noted as one of the specific stressors. This can be viewed in the following statements:

"For me, the common challenge faced as a Filipino healthcare professional working abroad is loneliness, particularly missing your family, especially your spouse." [HP7]

"As a Filipino healthcare professional who has migrated to work abroad, one common challenge I identify is not being able to see our loved ones." [HP5]

"Homesickness, challenges in making friends abroad, and cultural adjustment are common difficulties faced by Filipino healthcare professionals working overseas." [HP6]

"Based on my experience, the common challenge as a Filipino healthcare professional working abroad is homesickness. I miss my family, and honestly, I miss my countrymen, but I have to do this; I have to work abroad to support our family financially." [HP9]

"It's not so bad because I have many fellow Filipino coworkers where I work. but I miss my family, and that's what's hard for me, missing them and not being able to go home that fast or easily." [HP10]

Further, as Ref. [42] indicated, the migrants felt lonely and isolated in the host country. Apart from being separated from many of their family members and friends, they also longed for a sense of community in their new environment.

Conclusion

It can be deduced from the findings that the current healthcare system in the Philippines still needs significant improvement, especially in human resources. The participants have expressed disappointment that healthcare employees' welfare is poorly treated despite the country's massive economic development. These employees who have resigned from a government hospital in the Philippines perceived healthcare professionals' migration for work because of poor healthcare administration, professional development, and compensation benefits. Also, the perceived factors influencing the employees' decision to work abroad are primarily motivated by competitive salaries and benefits. It can be noted that they have expressed the toxic work culture and work overload, poor compensation benefits, and work inequality as contributory factors that impact their mental health. Thus, this gives them the motivation to work abroad. Further, it can be gleaned from the findings on the specific challenges they encounter as migrant workers that both language and cultural barriers are common factors that significantly affect their work. Aside from these, homesickness from their loved ones was challenging to cope with. However, they remained motivated since their prime purpose of working abroad was to support their family and further develop themselves professionally.

Limitation and Suggestions

Since the present study only investigated the views and experiences of Filipino healthcare professionals in migrating to work overseas, research on healthcare professionals who decided to stay in the Philippines may be conducted. Studies that delve into the policies and practices of health facilities abroad in response to gender mainstreaming, including cultural differences, could also be undertaken. Likewise, coping strategies of healthcare professionals on the challenges they encounter as migrant workers may be carried out.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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