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**Despite the Risks**

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**Understanding Nepali Labour Migration to the Persian Gulf**

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**Kusom**  
*Ahead in Management*

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### **Understanding Nepali Labour Migration to the Persian Gulf**

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## ABSTRACT

*This work explores the reasons working-age Nepali and those in rural, lower-income areas emigrate to Persian Gulf countries. Given that government, non-government organisations, and the popular press report the risks found in these countries, a thorough investigation of why Nepali overlook these warnings and seek employment in Gulf countries is warranted. To explore this phenomenon, we obtained data from questionnaires administered to working-age Nepali who reside in rural areas. The data suggest that Nepali realise the dangers associated with working in the Gulf but believe that they must emigrate because of limited opportunities in their country and the obligation to improve their families' well-being by earning remittance. In addition, the data suggest that many Nepali find employment in the Gulf alluring because of perceptions of rich, cosmopolitan Gulf cities. The findings show that many Nepali accept the consequences associated with labour migration to the Gulf to improve their own, their families', and even Nepal's well-being.*

*Keywords:* Nepal labour migration, Gulf labour, Persian Gulf

The literature on migration of Nepali labour authored by social scientists (Docquier, 2005; Williams, Thornton, & Young-DeMarco, 2014), governmental agencies (Ministry of Labour and Employment 2014), non-governmental organizations (International Labour Organization, 2014), and the popular press (Gibson, 2014) is replete with stories about the profound migration of Nepali workers seeking employment to other countries. At any given time, more than 10% of Nepal's populace, primarily young men, are working abroad, though the unofficial percentage is estimated to be higher (Sharma et al., 2014). As a result, Nepal represents a major labour supplier to Persian Gulf countries (Gulf), which include Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (Williams, Thornton, & Young-DeMarco, 2014). Indeed, four of the top five labour destinations for Nepali migrants are Gulf countries. The countries following Malaysia, with 40.9% of all male and female labour migrants, are Saudi Arabia, with 22.9%, United Arab Emirates (UAE), with 11.2%, and Kuwait, with 2.1% (Ministry of Labour and Employment, 2013/2014).

At first glance, migration of Nepali may seem to be a win-win situation to both the Gulf countries and Nepal. Foreign remittance that migrant labourers send to Nepal currently represents 26.4% of Nepal's gross domestic product (Nepal Rastra Bank, 2014). Furthermore, migration helps the country's poorest citizens derive a valuable source of income for their families, thereby stimulating the country's economy through enhanced consumption (Central Bureau of Statistics, Government of Nepal, 2011; Dhungel, 2014).

Yet there is a dark side to the migration of Nepali to the Gulf. Both academic research (Joshi, Simkhada & Prescott, 2011) and the popular press (Gattoni, 2015) have detailed the horrific working conditions that Nepali migrants, primarily young men aged 20–35 years, confront in Gulf countries, most notably, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE. The bitter reality is that migration to the Gulf often leads to countless deaths, sexual violence, and chronic illness among young Nepali migrants (Modarres, 2010; Stephenson, 2015). Nepali men, primarily working in construction jobs in the Gulf, confront elevated risks of death by heat exhaustion and dehydration, as well as chronic problems associated with kidney failure, from working outside in adverse environmental conditions, especially in Qatar (Joshi, Simkhada, & Prescott, 2011).

Although death rates among Nepali women in the Gulf countries are lower than those of their male counterparts, those taking housekeeping jobs in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait are frequently victims of physical violence, including rape (Schliebs, 2009). While other research confirms that female Nepali domestic workers in Qatar, UAE, and Kuwait often end up as victims of sex trafficking (Kaufman & Crawford, 2011). Therefore, understanding why young adults in Nepal choose to migrate to the Gulf for employment opportunities, despite putting their lives at risk, is warranted.

The majority of research attempting to explain Nepali labour migration has primarily taken a broad approach to understanding the phenomenon, rather than exploring why Nepali target specific countries for employment opportunities. A review of extant literature indicates that most studies on Nepali labour migration focus on explaining the phenomenon (see Table 1) via descriptive and qualitative methodologies.

Research shows that financial concerns are the primary reason that Nepali migrate for employment, as many migrants view employment abroad as a means to escape low wages and dismal job opportunities that currently plague Nepal (Ephraim, Junginger & Müller-Böker, 2011; Gartaula, 2009). In addition to financial concerns, researchers have discussed four other reasons for seeking employment abroad: (1) to obtain social status within Nepali society (Sharma, 2008), (2) to serve in foreign militaries (Graner & Gurung, 2003; Seddon, Adhikari, & Gurung, 2002), (3) to gain stability and perceived safety in a foreign country (Mishra, 2011), and (4) to obtain higher education (Valentin, 2012).

Although this body of research on Nepali is valid, there are other reasons for Nepali migration not addressed in the Nepali migration literature. The goal of this paper is to fill this void by offering an expanded theoretical explanation, which draws upon empirical data, to explore why Nepali working-age men and women specifically seek work in the Gulf. We achieve this goal by obtaining data from Nepali men and women respondents residing in rural areas. In doing so, we uncover new reasons that explain Nepali migration to the Gulf and, for the first time in the Nepali migration literature, a clearer understanding as to why some Nepali are likely to migrate to the Gulf for employment, why others are unlikely to do so, and finally, why others remain indecisive regarding Gulf labour migration. Although this research does not solve the problems associated with Nepali migration to Gulf countries, it offers social scientists, governmental agencies, and non-government organizations new information on why Nepali are willing to put their lives at risk to work in the Gulf.

The paper proceeds as follows: first, we discuss the extant literature that explicates why Nepali migrate abroad for employment. Second, we expand on this literature by providing additional reasons, and related hypotheses, that specifically explain Nepali employment migration to Gulf countries. Third, we engage in survey methodology by collecting data from working-age migrants in Nepal's rural Southern area, which represents one of the key regions experiencing migration to the Gulf. We conclude with a discussion of the results, theoretical and societal implications, and research limitations.

## A REVIEW OF NEPALI LABOUR MIGRATION

From a historical perspective, Nepali labour migration is far from being a contemporary topic. Research suggests that Nepali began migrating to foreign countries for employment opportunities as early as the

1700s, and it was a well-established activity by the nineteenth century (Seddon, Adhikari, & Gurung, 2002). For example, Nepali men migrated to India to serve under the Sikh ruler, Ranjit Singh, a practice that was later adopted by both the British and Indian armies and which continues today (Sharma, 2008). Indeed, Nepali men who served in the British armies have become part of the cultural lore as Gurkhas, who not only realize wages through military employment but also obtain a foreign education and increased social value on returning home to Nepal after service (Gurung, 2011).

The Gurkha example suggests that though Nepali may migrate abroad to earn wages, multiple reasons, beyond merely financial concerns, help explain motivation of working-age Nepali to seek employment abroad. As Table 1 reveals, extant literature suggests that five drivers influence Nepali to work abroad: financial, social status, military, stability and safety, and education. It is worth noting here that many of the drivers are not mutually exclusive, but rather, many work in tandem with each other to encourage Nepali to seek out employment opportunities abroad. In the following section, we turn attention to discussing each of these migration drivers in more detail.

#### *Financial Motivation as a Migrant Driver*

The literature on Nepali migration identifies financial needs as the primary motivation that fuels Nepal's migration. Undoubtedly, this reasoning is valid, as slow economic growth, especially in rural parts of Nepal, encourages young adults to seek work abroad (Shrestha & Bhandari, 2007). Research reveals that Nepal's rural poor, who lack land ownership, are prime candidates for migration (Bhandari, 2004). Therefore, among Nepal's rural poor, remittance sent by family members working abroad often serves as the primary source of income for these families and constitutes one of the prime means for Nepal's rural poor to escape the poverty that dominates the country (Seddon, Adhikari, & Gurung, 2002). Thus, despite the known hardships of working abroad, Nepali men, especially those who are poor and reside in the country's rural areas, may ignore the potential health risks associated with migration and actively seek out construction jobs in Gulf countries (Gardner, 2012), agricultural jobs in India (Subedi, 1991), or low-skilled positions in foreign service sectors, including security guards, housekeepers, and geriatric care workers, in locales such as Malaysia, South Korea, Japan, and Israel (Yamanaka 2000).

#### *Social Status as a Migration Driver*

Humanistic data on migrants who reside in Sainik Basti, a rural town of about 2100 inhabitants situated in Pokhara, Nepal, reveal that some migrants are motivated to work abroad not only to earn wages but also to increase their perceived social status and prestige at home within their own reference groups (Thieme & Wyss, 2005). Thieme and Wyss (2005, 73) discover that Nepali men are willing to work in 'dirty,

dangerous and degrading' jobs abroad because doing so is 'a sort of rite of passage' and a means to earn enhanced social capital through prestige and community belongingness.

Similarly, in his ethnographic field work at multiple sites in Nepal, Sharma (2008) concludes that Nepali migrants want to work abroad to send remittance home and to increase the socio-economic mobility of their families through the attainment of tangible assets, such as homes, electronics, appliances, or motorbikes. Furthermore, Sharma notes that by serving in foreign militaries, Nepali men immediately promote their family's social status, albeit within their local communities.

#### *Military as a Migration Driver*

Following the Anglo–Gurkha war (1814–1816) and the signing of the Treaty of Sugauli, the British enlisted nearly 5000 Nepali men, referred to as Gurkhas or Gorkhas, for military service in the British Indian army (Rathaur, 2001). By 1892, nearly 8000 Gurkhas were enlisted in the British army; this number rose to 26,000 during World War I and to 65,000 during World War II (Rathaur, 2001). Large-scale recruitment continued in the 1950s, as the British employed Gurkhas to quell communist insurrection in Malaysia, while the Indian Army used Gurkhas to assist in the Indo-Pakistani wars in 1965 and 1971 (Kansakar, 1974). Today, approximately 3500 Gurkhas remain employed in the British army and 50,000 in the Indian army (Sapkota, van Teijlingen, & Simkhada, 2014; Seddon, Adhikari, & Gurung, 2002), and thousands are employed by the United Nations as essential peacekeeping forces around the globe, including in some of the most dangerous and hostile foreign locales, such as Israel, Syria, Timor, South Sudan, Iraq, Mali, the Central African Republic, Kosovo, and Haiti (Nepali Army, 2015).

Research shows that though many Nepali men, especially those originating from disadvantaged ethnic groups residing in the mid-to-hilly rural regions, are highly motivated to join foreign armies; such motivation is inextricably linked to the outcomes of wealth and enhanced social status (Chene, 1992; Kumar, 2004). Indeed, Chene (1992) suggests that most Nepali men enter foreign military services in the attempt to better their personal situation and family life circumstances.

#### *Stability and Safety as Migration Drivers*

Beyond the emigration of Nepali men as Gurkhas to Britain and India in significant numbers, large-scale migration did not commence until political issues and consequent concerns about general security arose in an aftermath of the People's War led by the Maoists in 1996 (Seddon, Adhikari, & Gurung, 2002; Singh et al., 2007). As Nepal entered the New Millennium, concerns about governmental stability and personal safety, along with tapering job opportunities in Nepal, especially among youth residing in small villages in the regions controlled by the Maoists, motivated many Nepali to migrate abroad (Gardner, 2012; Kern & Müller-Böker, 2015; Williams et al., 2010; Williams & Pradhan, 2009).

In addition, internal armed conflict between the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoists) and the government, which lasted for a decade until 2006, was followed by turmoil associated with Nepal's writing of a new constitution, which has continued to result in societal uncertainty and political instability (Williams et al., 2010). Not only do the negative macro-environmental conditions encourage civil unrest, but they also stifle foreign investment and, thus, the expansion of Nepal's industrial sector and job market. Consequently, the political instability and safety concerns propel Nepali youth to seek employment outside the country (International Labour Organization, 2014).

Furthermore, many Nepali who migrate abroad because of stability and safety concerns are highly educated, and therefore, few opt to return to Nepal. For example, data obtained from Nepali health care workers employed in the United Kingdom reveal that all were motivated to leave Nepal because of concerns with the impact of political issues and the political power in the country's health care system (Sapkota, van Teijlingen, & Simkhada, 2014). Sapkota, van Teijlingen, and Simkhada (2014) also report that Nepali health care workers abroad were all concerned about workplace security in Nepal; all had experienced verbal and physical assaults from patients or their family members during their employment in Nepal. Other Nepali migrants expressed concerns about the lack of security in Nepali hospitals as well as the road conditions when travelling to remote areas in Nepal. The prevalence of violence, including verbal harassment, emotional abuse, and physical violence, against women and girls in Nepali society (Joshi & Kharel, 2008), clearly explains why educated women employed in health care seek employment abroad.

#### *Education as Migration Driver*

Sapkota, van Teijlingen, and Simkhada (2014) also suggest that Nepali health care workers who migrate to the United Kingdom do so out of concerns about the lack of personal skill development opportunities in Nepal and about the quality of educational opportunities for their children in Nepal. Nepali who migrate abroad with their families tend to represent highly skilled professionals who possess skills sought by industrialized countries, such as medicine and related health care fields. Thus, Nepali who emigrate abroad to secure their children's educational opportunities not only represent 'brain drain' but also are unlikely to return to Nepal until they retire (Thieme & Wyss, 2005).

Nepali young adults, primarily those from higher-income families that reside in Kathmandu, are likely to engage in foreign migration to pursue higher education opportunities in North America, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand (Valentin, 2012) because of the lack of quality educational outlets in Nepal (Valentin, 2012). Furthermore, some Nepali seek educational opportunities especially in Australia and New Zealand to more easily obtain permanent residency or extended-stay work permits (Mishra, 2011). Finally, we surmise that many Nepali college students are disenfranchised with Nepal's instability, as

constant political unrest in Kathmandu results in frequent labour strikes, causing universities to cancel classes and reduce student–professor contact hours.

## UNDERSTANDING NEPALI LABOUR MIGRATION TO THE GULF

Although the discussion regarding Nepali migration abroad is insightful, it may not fully elucidate the reasons young Nepali migrant workers specifically target the Gulf countries for employment opportunities. For example, of the five primary reasons for Nepali migration, military service and education are not applicable for explaining Nepali migration to the Gulf. Further, other migration drivers, such as perceived stability and safety to the Gulf, have unique insights specific to the Gulf, while other drivers have not been discussed in detail in the literature.

In the following section, we draw from extant literature to put forth seven drivers and related hypotheses that encourage prime working-age Nepali, defined as individuals aged of 20–35 years, to seek employment opportunities in Gulf countries. These seven drivers are (1) financial gratification, (2) perceived stability and safety, (3) stability and financial trade-off, (4) sense of professionalism, (5) responsibility to family, (6) limited career opportunities, and (7) a desire to move to the Gulf.

### *Financial Gratification Associated with Working in the Gulf*

As previously discussed, many studies confirm that Nepali seek employment opportunities due to the need for financial gratification (see Table 1). In line with this research, we also posit that financial needs encourage many Nepali labour migrants to seek employment opportunities in Gulf countries. Thus:

*Hypothesis 1.* Working-age Nepali who plan to migrate to the Gulf for employment are likely to view the financial remuneration of working in the Gulf more favourably than Nepali who do not plan to migrate.

### *Stability and Safety of Gulf Countries*

Investigating why Nepali migrate to the Gulf is a challenging task, as popular press is replete with articles on the inferior state of Nepali migrants in the Gulf and the dangers they confront in these countries (e.g. Himalayan Times, 2015). However, research reveals that rural villagers overlook the reality of dangers associated with labour migration to the Gulf and continue to seek employment there. That is, despite the warnings, the general perception among Nepali people from the country's rural regions is that foreign countries are normally safe for work and that these countries' working conditions are better than those in either Nepal or India (Kern & Müller-Böker, 2015).

Furthermore, given the low literacy rate among rural Nepali, people likely form these positive perceptions of stability and comfort from family members and friends who are also working abroad, as

well as from employment agents. More specifically, research reveals that Nepali migrants to the Gulf often falsely portray their work as decent and safe, rather than divulge the truth about working conditions in desert climates and risk the humiliation associated with making an error in judgement (Gardner, 2012). As Gardner (2012) emphasizes, Nepali who work abroad want to protect their personal reputations, to assuage their worried families, and to shape their social identities in the villages to which they hope to eventually return; thus, they often do not divulge the actual details about employment conditions to others. Consequently, Gardner notes that information provided by Nepali working abroad is largely falsified, as migrants tend to glorify the image of foreign countries; as a result, many potential migrants believe that working conditions in foreign countries are safer and more secure than those in Nepal.

In addition to the grandiose bravado of Nepali working abroad, we propose that local employment agents, who are responsible for Nepali recruitment and labour supply to foreign countries, are incentivized to under-estimate the potential risks associated with working in Gulf countries. Thus, many Nepali labour migrants receive incorrect information about working conditions in the Gulf. This discussion permits us to put forth the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 2.* Working-age Nepali who plan to migrate to the Gulf for employment are likely to view its stability and safety more favourably than Nepali who do not plan to migrate.

#### *Stability and financial trade-off*

Nguyen et al. (2008) argue that migrants who seek labour opportunities abroad consider a trade-off between stability and financial gratification. Labour migrants are often willing to relocate abroad to obtain higher wages than those available in their home countries, despite a focal country being less stable than their home country. We assume that labour migrants will also seek out countries that are more stable than their home countries, despite the possibility of earning lower wages abroad. We draw on the stability–financial trade-off by putting forth the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 3.* Working-age Nepali who plan to migrate to the Gulf for employment are likely to consider the trade-off between financial remuneration and the stability of both Nepal and Gulf countries more than Nepali who do not plan to migrate.

#### *Sense of Professionalism*

Several researchers have stressed that labour migrants often relocate because of a sense of professionalism associated with working abroad; that is, migrants believe that they serve as role models to others and that they improve conditions in their home countries by sending remittance (Graner & Gurung, 2003; Nguyen et al., 2008). Thus, we posit that many labour migrants view foreign employment with enthusiasm and believe that their hard work will help their families in Nepal. Thus:

*Hypothesis 4.* Working-age Nepali who plan to migrate to the Gulf for employment are likely to perceive higher professionalism associated with Gulf employment than Nepali who do not plan to migrate.

#### *Responsibility to Family*

In line with a sense of professionalism, Nepali labour migrants often view sending remittance home as part of their personal responsibility to their families (Graner & Gurung, 2003). Given the lack of economic opportunities in Nepal's rural regions, foreign remittance is often the primary means by which Nepal's poor and lower-income citizens survive poverty. Thus:

*Hypothesis 5.* Working-age Nepali who plan to migrate to the Gulf for employment are likely to perceive their employment as helping their families' well-being more than Nepali who do not plan to migrate.

#### *Limited Career Opportunities*

Working-age Nepali may also seek employment in the Gulf because local employment conditions are extremely dire; the unemployment rate hovers around the 50 % mark (Central Intelligence Agency, 2015). Thus, many Nepali who seek employment opportunities in the Gulf may simply consider local employment conditions an insurmountable challenge, especially following the April 2015 earthquake.

*Hypothesis 6.* Working-age Nepali who plan to migrate to the Gulf for employment are likely to report being more encouraged to seek work abroad because of limited opportunities in Nepal than Nepali who do not plan to migrate.

#### *Personal Desire to Move to the Gulf*

Finally, younger-aged Nepali may migrate to the Gulf because of its allure. Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Qatar are ultra-modern, rich, glamorous cities and thus are in stark contrast to the state of Nepali villages and even the decaying capital city of Kathmandu. Many scholars have discussed the global success of the 'brand Dubai' (Govers, 2012), a factor that likely encourages many Nepali to seek employment specifically in the Gulf. Thus:

*Hypothesis 7.* Working-age Nepali who plan to migrate to the Gulf for employment are likely to report a stronger desire to move there for employment than Nepali who do not plan to migrate.

## METHODOLOGY

### *Context*

In total, 624 respondents voluntarily participated in this study. Of the respondents, 61.9% were men and 38.1% were women. Nearly all the survey respondents were residents of Biratnagar, which is located in the Morang district of Nepal (N = 595, 95.4%). The remaining respondents were residents of small villages located in the Sunsari district of Nepal (N = 29, 4.6%). We purposefully selected respondents who were in their prime working years (i.e. 18–35 years of age); the average respondent was approximately 22 years of age (M = 22.16, SD = 4.64).

We engaged in convenience sampling by setting up survey booths in Biratnagar's city center and in front of the primary public hospital. In addition, we administered questionnaires to college students who attended three different colleges in the Morang district and one college in the Sunsari district. The questionnaires were available to respondents in the Nepali language. The first author being, a native Nepali and English speaker, translated the English questionnaire into Nepali. The Nepali questionnaire was then back-translated to English by another English–Nepali speaker to ensure a thorough translation (Douglas & Craig, 2007). Each respondent received a complimentary package of noodles for participating in the study.

### *Measures*

We employed a 17-item questionnaire that probed the reasons Nepali may migrate to Gulf countries for employment. Sixteen of these items came from Nguyen et al. (2008), who probed the likelihood of nursing students in Uganda to migrate to other countries for employment. Five items evaluated a respondent's perceived stability and safety, three items assessed financial gratification, two items evaluated the stability–financial trade-off, two items evaluated a sense of professionalism, two items assessed local employment conditions, and two items assessed a respondent's desire to move to the Gulf. The last questionnaire item, which reflected a respondent's desire to migrate to enhance family well-being, was a new item. We measured all questionnaire items on a 5-point Likert scale, which ranged from 1 (strongly disagree or very unlikely) to 5 (strongly agree or very likely). Table 3 reports all the items. The respondents also indicated demographic information, including gender, age, and education level (less than high school, high school, some undergraduate education or a bachelor's degree, or graduate degree).

We performed a two-step cluster analysis using SPSS 21.0 to categorize the respondents into different groups based on their desire to migrate from Nepal for employment. The two-step cluster analysis overcomes many obstacles that characterize traditional cluster analysis procedures, such as k-means (SPSS, 2015). Most notably, the two-step cluster analysis eliminates uncertainties about the

optimal number of clusters in a continuous or categorical data set by employing the lowest Bayesian information criterion value as a criterion statistic (SPSS 2015).

## RESULTS

### *Cluster analysis*

Using the lowest Bayesian information criterion value, the two-step cluster analysis classified the respondents into three groups based on their responses to the 17-item questionnaire. Of the respondents, 102 (16.3%) were entered into the first cluster, 165 (26.4%) were entered into the second cluster, and 154 (24.7%) were entered into in third cluster; 203 (32.5%) were unclassified because of missing values. From a review of the cluster means, we labeled Cluster 1 as ‘unlikely to migrate,’ Cluster 2 as ‘indecisive’, and Cluster 3 as ‘likely to migrate’.

To explore demographic differences among the clusters, we performed a series of statistical tests. First, we conducted a two-way contingency table analysis to evaluate whether respondents in the three migration clusters differed by gender (see Table 2). Cluster membership and gender were not significantly related (Pearson  $\chi^2$  (2, N= 421) = 3.01, n.s.). We conducted a second contingency table analysis to explore potential educational differences among the three migration clusters. The education had four levels. The results reveal that cluster membership and education were not significantly related (Pearson  $\chi^2$  (6, N= 407) = 8.60, n.s.).

We also conducted a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to evaluate the relationship between cluster membership and age. The desire to migrate, included the three levels: unlikely to migrate, indecisive, and likely to migrate. The ANOVA was not significant (F (2, 421) = 1.57, p = .21).

### *Mean analysis*

We conducted a one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) to determine the effect of the three migration clusters on the 17 dependent variables, which represented the reasons Nepali labour workers might migrate. We found significant differences among the three migration clusters on the dependent measures (Wilks’s  $\Lambda$  = .14, F (34, 804) = 39.09, p < .000). The multivariate eta-squared based on Wilks’s lambda was strong at .62. Table 3 contains the means and standard deviations of the dependent variables for the three groups.

We conducted another ANOVA on the dependent measures (i.e. reasons for labour migration) as follow-up tests to the MANOVA. Using the Bonferroni method, we tested each ANOVA at the .003 level (.05/17). With the exception of one test, each ANOVA test was significant (p < .003; see Table 3).

Next, we performed a series of linear trend analyses in the ANOVA procedure. Again, in each test the independent variable was the migration cluster and the dependent variable was each item in the migration scale. Using the Bonferroni method, we tested each ANOVA at the .003 level (.05/17). With the exception of one test, each linear trend ANOVA was significant ( $p < .001$ ; see Table 3). Thus, in nearly all the cases, the mean of each scale item, which reflected possible reasons driving Nepali labour migration, significantly increased in a linear manner among the three clusters. Finally, in post hoc analyses to the univariate ANOVA for the 16 dependent measures, we conducted pairwise comparisons to further explore the reasons Nepali labour workers migrated. We tested each pair wise comparison at the .000 level (.003/16). In the following section, we turn attention to discussing the mean analysis in more detail and to exploring how the data results support, or fail to support, the proposed hypotheses.

### *Financial Gratification*

As previously discussed, the extant research concerning Nepali labour migration to date has emphasized the importance of financial gratification as a primary driver of migration, which led to us putting forth Hypothesis 1. Interestingly, our findings reveal that although respondents in the likely to migrate from Nepal cluster ( $M = 3.17$ ) significantly are more likely to consider working in the Gulf more financially gratifying than respondents in the unlikely to migrate cluster ( $M = 2.19$ ), the mean score suggests that by-and-large those Nepali who are likely to migrate do not agree that working in the Gulf will be financially gratifying.

The data results clarify that it is only when respondents are asked to consider moving to the Gulf if the financial offer is better than one that they would realize in Nepal that the data begin to highlight the importance of financial gratification as a migration driver. That is, Nepali, who are likely to migrate, show a stronger agreement ( $M = 3.64$ ) towards migrating for a better offer than they would receive in Nepal, compared to Nepali who are unlikely to migrate ( $M = 2.10$ ) or to those who are indecisive about migration ( $M = 2.94$ ). This finding suggests support Hypothesis 1, with some clarification. On the one hand, the data results suggest that working-age Nepali who plan to migrate to the Gulf for employment are likely to view the financial remuneration of working in the Gulf more favorably than Nepali who do not plan to migrate. However, on the other hand, Nepali migrants to the Gulf do not necessarily view working in the Gulf, per se, as financially rewarding, but rather, they do so when they have to compare comparable job offers in Nepal versus the Gulf. Perhaps, the Nepali are not enamored with wages in the Gulf; but rather, they are disappointed with wages in Nepal.

### *Stability and Safety*

The data suggest that stability and safety are actually two separate concepts. That is, Nepali who are likely to migrate ( $M = 3.60$ ) view Gulf countries as being, at the present time, more stable than Nepali who are unlikely to migrate ( $M = 1.96$ ) or those who are indecisive ( $M = 2.13$ ). However, the findings reveal that none of the respondents show agreement towards feelings safe working in the Gulf countries; indeed, even those respondents who are likely to migrate ( $M = 2.63$ ) do not believe that they will safe working in Gulf countries.

The data suggests that Hypothesis 2 is partially supported. It is indeed true that working-age Nepali who plan to migrate to the Gulf for employment are likely to view its stability and safety more favorably than Nepali who do not plan to migrate; however, the data suggest that stability and safety are viewed differently. Respondents who are likely to migrate to the Gulf believe that these countries are more stable than Nepal; however, they do not perceive their working conditions in the Gulf as being safe. Furthermore, the data suggest that Nepali who plan to migrate do not necessarily view the Gulf countries as being more stable than Nepal for next five years; thus, the stability and safety of the Gulf is not necessarily a straightforward driver of Nepali labour migration.

### *Stability and financial trade-off*

The data reveal that Nepali who plan to migrate consider both a stability and financial trade-off when formulating their decision to leave the country. That is, Nepali who are likely to migrate ( $M = 3.42$ ) are significantly more likely than those who are unlikely to migrate ( $M = 2.07$ ) or those who are indecisive ( $M = 2.25$ ) to consider leaving Nepal for a better financial offer and less stability than Nepal. Similarly, this positive trend emerges, albeit with less enthusiasm, when those who are likely to migrate ( $M = 3.14$ ) consider doing so for a worse financial offer than they would receive in Nepal; but for more stability than Nepal.

Thus, Hypothesis 3 is supported, working-age Nepali who plan to migrate to the Gulf for employment are likely to consider the trade-off between financial remuneration and the stability of both Nepal and Gulf countries more than Nepali who do not plan to migrate. Yet, there is a reservation to this hypothesis. Given that the average means for these questions hovered among neutral among respondents whom are likely to migrate; the strength of this driver in influencing labour migration from Nepal is somewhat muted.

### *Sense of Professionalism*

The data reveal that Nepali who are likely to migrate to the Gulf are extremely driven by a profound sense of professionalism associated with working in the Gulf. Perhaps, given the rampant unemployment in

Nepal, the sense of professionalism is associated more so with simply obtaining a job as opposed to working in the Gulf per se. In any case, the data reveal that Nepali who are likely to migrate from Nepal ( $M = 3.82$ ) sense that they will serve as role models for others in Nepal and even make a difference in the Nepal's well-being ( $M = 3.99$ ). Nepali who are unlikely to migrate expressed a vastly different opinion towards these questions, as they strongly disagreed with the notion that Gulf employments results in them being a role model ( $M = 2.12$ ) or that employments benefits Nepal ( $M = 1.90$ ). Thus, the data support Hypothesis 4. Working-age Nepali who plan to migrate to the Gulf for employment are likely to perceive higher professionalism associated with Gulf employment than Nepali who do not plan to migrate.

#### *Responsibility to Family*

The data provide support for Hypothesis 5, working-age Nepali who plan to migrate to the Gulf for employment are likely to perceive their employment as helping their families' well-being more so than Nepali who do not plan to migrate. Indeed, respondents who are unlikely to migrate from Nepal ( $M = 1.90$ ) do not believe that they will improve their families' well-being by working in the Gulf; those who are indecisive are migration are neutral about improving family well-being ( $M = 3.57$ ), and those who are likely to migrate ( $M = 4.08$ ) agree that they may improve their families' well-being by working in the Gulf.

#### *Limited Career Opportunities*

The data reveal that working-age Nepali who plan to migrate to the Gulf for employment are likely to report being more encouraged to seek work abroad because of limited opportunities in Nepal than Nepali who do not plan to migrate. Thus, Hypothesis 6 is supported. Interestingly, respondents who are unlikely to migrate from Nepal do not disagree that limited career opportunities exist in Nepal. Rather, these respondents somewhat neutral in their beliefs that the poor working environment ( $M = 3.48$ ) or limited opportunities for students ( $M = 3.67$ ) in Nepal encourage labour migration to the Gulf. Nepali respondents, who are indecisive about migration, and those whom are likely to migrate, agree that had Nepal offered them a better work environment or had offered good opportunities for graduating students, they would reconsider their thoughts about seeking employment in the Gulf.

#### *Personal Desire to Move to the Gulf*

Lastly, the data support Hypothesis 7. Working-age Nepali who plan to migrate to the Gulf for employment are likely to report a stronger desire to move there for employment than Nepali who do not plan to migrate. Although this hypothesis is supported, some clarification is warranted. The data reveal that none of the respondents agree that they possess a personal desire to migrate to Gulf countries for employment. Rather, the data show that respondents who are likely to migrate to the Gulf exhibit lesser

discomfort towards the idea as opposed to respondents who are unlikely to migrate and to those who are indecisive about migration for labour opportunities. Thus, a personal desire to move to the Gulf is not a driver of migration for working-age Nepali per-se; however, it is less of an impediment to those who are likely to migrate compared to those who are unwilling or indecisive about migration.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Our article provides an empirical, quantitative analysis regarding an understanding as to why working-age Nepali specifically consider Gulf countries for employment. Although researchers have explored reasons for Nepali labour migration in general, as shown in Table 1, as well as migration to the Gulf (Gardner, 2012), the overwhelming majority of studies are conceptual in nature. Thus, researchers have lacked a thorough understanding as to the strength of various migration driver as well as to the interplay between and among working-age Nepali who are opportune to seek employment abroad and those whom refrain from doing so.

The results of our empirical analysis contribute to the extant Nepali migration literature. To date, most researchers have emphasized that the need for financial gratification is the primary driver of labour migration from Nepal. Interestingly, our research shows that Nepali do not necessarily believe that working in the Gulf is financially rewarding, but rather, their desire to seek employment in Gulf countries is a consequence of limited employment opportunities in Nepal for current workers and graduating students. The *bona fide* reality is that Nepal does not have sufficient employment opportunities for its denizens.

Given the risks associated with working in the Gulf, including death, bodily injury, and physical violence, researchers have suggested that Nepali may be receiving a false reality of working conditions in the Gulf from both friends and family whom are currently employed in the Gulf. (Gardner, 2012) and from brokerage and recruitment agencies that represent Gulf employers in Nepal (Kern & Müller-Böker, 2015). However, the data reveal that none of the respondents perceive that they will be safe working in the Gulf countries, including Nepali who are likely to migrate to the Gulf for employment.

Additionally, despite the government instability in Nepal, none of the respondents believe that the Gulf countries will be more stable than Nepal over the next five years. Thus, concerns that young Nepali were being duped by Nepali working in the Gulf or by Gulf recruiting agencies are unsubstantiated. The lachrymose finding is that potential Nepali migrants are aware of safety issues that may plague them in the Gulf and they are not escaping instability in Nepal by migrating to the Gulf.

Given that potential Nepali migrants to the Gulf seem to realize the dangers involved in their action, the question that needs to be explored is an understanding of why they leave. As previously discussed,

the findings suggest that limited job opportunities for college graduates, and poor working conditions in Nepal for workers, are primary drivers that encourage Nepali labour migration. However, the key driver that essentially thrusts migrants to the Gulf is a belief that their ability to send foreign remittance will make a substantial difference in their family's well-being. Therefore, Nepali labour migration to the Gulf assumes an altruistic motivation, as those whom are likely to migrate to Gulf countries realize that they may be sacrificing personal safety for enhanced family well-being.

This study does not solve the problems associated with Nepali labour migration to the Gulf. The fact remains that until Nepal can expand its economy and lower its unemployment rate, many young, working-age Nepali will have no other choice but to emigrate to the Gulf for employment. Although countries such as South Korea, Japan, and Israel have been absorbing larger numbers of Nepali labour migrants and offering them safe working conditions (Sedhai, 2014), these countries cannot possibly absorb the substantial numbers of migrants that are accepted by Gulf countries for employment. Indeed, perhaps, Nepal can continue to work with Gulf countries on improving working conditions for its citizens; however, the Gulf countries may easily turn to other countries, such as Bangladesh, Pakistan, Thailand, and the Philippines for a steady stream of migrant labour. Despite the inability of this article to improve the situation of Nepali in the Gulf, this research breaks new ground in the Nepali labour migration literature by empirically investigating why some working-age Nepali are likely to migrate to the Gulf, why others refrain from doing so, and finally, why others are indecisive about seeking employment outside Nepal.

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**Table 1.** Review of literature explaining Nepali labour migration

Source	Sample information	Investigated reasons for Nepali labour migration
Bhandari (2004)	None (conceptual article)	Financial. Individuals from households with little access to cultivated land are more likely to migrate in search of work than individuals with substantial land holdings.
Ephraim, Junginger, and Müller-Böker (2011)	35 Nepali migrant households	Financial. Lack of employment opportunities, low agricultural production, and food shortages.
Gartaula (2009)	None (conceptual article)	Financial. Rural Nepali men send remittance home.
Graner and Gurung (2003)	None (conceptual article)	Financial. Nepali migrate to send remittance home.
Kumar (2004)	None (conceptual article)	Financial and military. Migrate to escape poverty at home. Many join the British and Indian armies for financial reasons.
Mishra (2011)	Nepali students studying in the United States	Education and stability and safety. Migrate because of political instability and the lack of educational and career opportunities.
Seddon, Adhikari, and Gurung (2002)	None (conceptual article)	Financial and military. Nepali migrate for employment in British or Indian armies to earn remittance.
Sharma (2008)	Nepali working in India	Social status and financial. Migration to India permits Nepali men to increase socio-economic and family status. Men acquire a higher status by working in India. Earn and remit money home to fulfil familial obligations.
Shrestha and Bhandari (2007)	None (conceptual article)	Financial. Decreased job opportunities in Nepal due to conservation measures eliminating forestry jobs.
Subedi (1991)	None (conceptual article)	Financial. Nepali farmers migrate to India to obtain temporary agricultural, labour-intensive jobs for wages.
Thieme and Wyss (2002)	229 Nepali migrant workers	Financial, military, education, and social-status reasons all encourage Nepali labour migration.
Valentin (2012)	30 Nepali students	Education. Lack of quality higher education outlets in Nepal.
Williams and Pradhan (2009)	None (conceptual article)	Stability and safety. Nepali migrate to avoid violence caused by the political conflict.

**Table 2.** Result for two-way contingency table analysis to evaluate migration clusters by gender and education

Comparison	Pearson chi-square	P
Cluster membership vs. gender	3.01*	.23
Cluster membership vs. education	8.60**	.20

\* N = 421, df = 2 \*\* N= 407, df = 6

**Table 3.** Cluster analysis (means and standard deviations) of potential migrant workers to the Persian Gulf

Reasons for migration questionnaire items Scale (1 = <i>strongly disagree/very unlikely</i> ; 5 = <i>strongly agree/very likely</i> )	Unlikely to migrate M (SD)	Indecisive M (SD)	Likely to migrate M (SD)	Line ar tren d (p)
<b>Financial gratification from working in the Gulf:</b>				
I believe working in Nepal could be financially satisfying.	2.67 <sup>a</sup> (1.24)	3.01 <sup>a</sup> (1.14)	2.73 <sup>a</sup> (1.21)	<i>n.s.</i>
I believe working in the Gulf could be financially satisfying.	2.19 <sup>a</sup> (.97)	2.79 <sup>b</sup> (1.07)	3.17 <sup>b</sup> (1.09)***	.000
I would move from Nepal to a Gulf country if the financial offer is better in the Gulf than in Nepal.	2.10 <sup>a</sup> (1.17)	2.94 <sup>b</sup> (1.32)	3.64 <sup>c</sup> (1.20)***	.000
<b>Stability and safety in the Gulf:</b>				
I would move to a Gulf country for employment because these countries are more stable than Nepal.	1.96 <sup>a</sup> (1.16)	2.13 <sup>a</sup> (1.23)	3.60 <sup>b</sup> (1.27)***	.000
I believe I will be safe working in the Gulf countries.	1.69 <sup>a</sup> (.88)	1.65 <sup>a</sup> (.82)	2.63 <sup>b</sup> (1.19)***	.000
I believe Gulf countries will be more stable than Nepal over the next 5 years.	1.94 <sup>a</sup> (1.06)	2.18 <sup>a</sup> (.96)	2.74 <sup>b</sup> (1.09)***	.000
I believe the Gulf countries have been more stable than Nepal for the last 5 years.	2.20 <sup>a</sup> (1.09)	2.18 <sup>a</sup> (.88)	2.82 <sup>b</sup> (1.04)***	.000
I believe it is safe for unskilled labour to work in the Gulf countries.	1.79 <sup>a</sup> (.99)	2.08 <sup>a</sup> (1.11)	2.52 <sup>b</sup> (1.18)***	.000
<b>Stability–finances trade-off:</b>				
I would move from Nepal to a Gulf country even if the country is less stable than Nepal but the financial offer is better.	2.07 <sup>a</sup> (1.07)	2.25 <sup>a</sup> (1.06)	3.42 <sup>b</sup> (1.10)***	.000
I would move from Nepal to a Gulf country even if the	1.81 <sup>a</sup>	2.04 <sup>a</sup>	3.14 <sup>b</sup>	.000

financial offer is worse in the Gulf but the country is more stable than Nepal.	(.93)	(.95)	(1.17)***	
<b>Sense of professionalism by working in the Gulf:</b>				
As a foreign worker in the Gulf, I would be a role model for other people in Nepal.	2.12 <sup>a</sup> (1.16)	3.67 <sup>b</sup> (1.11)	3.82 <sup>b</sup> (1.11)	.000
As a foreign worker in the Gulf, I can make a big difference in Nepal's well-being.	1.90 <sup>a</sup> (1.01)	3.57 <sup>b</sup> (1.24)	3.99 <sup>b</sup> (1.02)	.000
Responsibility to family: <sup>a</sup>				
As a foreign worker in the Gulf, I make a big difference in my family's well-being.	1.90 <sup>a</sup> (1.01)	3.57 <sup>b</sup> (1.24)	4.08 <sup>c</sup> (1.00)***	.000
<b>Limited career opportunities:</b>				
If Nepal provided a better work environment for workers, then I would not think about moving to the Gulf.	3.48 <sup>a</sup> (1.47)	4.75 <sup>b</sup> (.53)	4.46 <sup>b</sup> (.85)***	.000
If Nepali students were provided good job opportunities in Nepal when they graduated, I would not consider moving to the Gulf.	3.67 <sup>a</sup> (1.47)	4.82 <sup>b</sup> (.47)	4.59 <sup>b</sup> (.68)***	.000
<b>Desire to move to the Gulf</b>				
Moving to the Gulf for employment has been a desire of mine since I was young.	1.87 <sup>a</sup> (1.26)	1.58 <sup>a</sup> (.86)	3.61 <sup>b</sup> (1.37)***	.000
Moving to the Gulf for employment has been a desire of mine since I heard about job opportunities in Gulf countries.	1.86 <sup>a</sup> (1.17)	1.58 <sup>a</sup> (.83)	3.05 <sup>b</sup> (1.46)***	.000

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All scale items come from Nguyen et al. (2008). <sup>a</sup>New scale item.\*\*\*  $p < .001$ . Items that do share a common superscript significantly differ at  $p < .001$ . All means that have different superscripts significantly differ at  $p < .001$ .

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