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ABSTRACT
This work explores the reasons Nepalese emigrate for employment to Persian Gulf countries, despite potential risks of doing so. The authors obtained data from questionnaires administered to Nepalese who reside in rural areas. The data suggest that Nepalese realize the dangers associated with the Gulf. However, Nepalese emigrate because of limited opportunities in Nepal, an obligation to improve their families’ well-being, and the allure of Gulf nations. Although migrant deaths are a concern for the Nepali government, findings suggest that many Nepali accept risks associated with Gulf employment. Thus, Gulf migration is unenviable until the Nepali economy can support its population.

KEYWORDS
Central Asia; Middle East & North Africa; migration; Nepal; wages

Introduction

The literature on Nepalese migration authored by social scientists (Rapoport & Docquier, 2005; Williams, Thornton, & Young-DeMarco, 2014), governmental agencies (Ministry of Labor and Employment, 2013/2014), nongovernmental organizations (International Labor Organization, 2014), and the popular press (Gibson, 2014) is replete with stories about the profound migration of Nepalese 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, Pandey, Pathak, & Sijapati-Basnett, 2014). As a result, Nepal represents a major labor supplier to Persian Gulf countries (Gulf), which include Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) (Williams et al., 2014). Indeed, four of the top five labor destinations for Nepalese migrants are Gulf countries. The countries following Malaysia, with 40.9% of all male and female labor migrants, are Saudi Arabia with 22.9%, Qatar with 20.3%, UAE with 11.2%, and Kuwait with 2.1% (Ministry of Labor and Employment, 2013/2014).
At first glance, Nepalese migration may seem to be a win–win situation to the Gulf countries and Nepal. Foreign remittance that migrant laborers 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; Soltero, 2009).

Yet there is a dark side to Nepalese migration to the Gulf. Academic research (Joshi, Simkhada, & Prescott, 2011) and the popular press (Gattoni, 2015) have detailed the horrific working conditions that Nepalese migrants, primarily young men age 20 to 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 Nepalese migrants (Modarres, 2010; Stephenson, 2015).

Nepalese 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 et al., 2011). For instance, 185 Nepali construction workers died while building the World Cup infrastructure; at this rate, an estimated 4,000 migrant workers will die before the launch of Qatar’s World Cup in 2022 (Erfani, 2015). Although the Nepali government frequently raises concerns with Qatar over the number of Nepali migrants killed in construction, Nepal’s embassy in Qatar promotes the cost-savings benefit associated with Nepali workers (Bruslé, 2009/2010).

Although death rates among Nepalese 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). Although other research confirms that female Nepalese domestic workers in Qatar, UAE, and Kuwait often end up as victims of sex trafficking (Kaufman & Crawford, 2011).

Indeed, under the kafala (sponsorship) system, which functions as the legal mechanism for hosting foreign workers in Gulf countries, domestic workers’ visa and legal status are tied to the host sponsor. The sponsor has complete control over the mobility of a domestic worker, for a minimum of 2 years, as well as full economic and legal responsibility of his or her domestic worker (Bajracharya & Sijapati, 2012). Thus, the kafala system often supports a dire situation for Nepali female domestic workers of low salaries, long working hours; physical, verbal, sexual, and psychological abuse; and no means for seeking governmental assistance. Given the abuses that transpire overseas, the prevalence of suicide among migrant females upon their returning to
Nepal is not surprising, as the country lacks a mental health infrastructure to provide adequate medical and emotional support to women who are victimized (Puvar, 2015).

Given the life-threatening dangers associated with labor migration to the Gulf, an understanding as to why young adults in Nepal choose to migrate to the Gulf for employment, and to essentially put their lives at risk by doing so, is well warranted. The majority of research attempting to explain Nepalese labor migration has primarily taken a broad approach to understanding the phenomenon, rather than exploring why Nepalese target specific countries for employment opportunities.

The goal of this article is to offer an expanded theoretical explanation, which draws solely upon empirical data, to explore why Nepalese working-age men and women seek work in the Gulf. We achieve this goal by obtaining quantitative survey data from Nepalese men and women respondents residing in rural areas. We uncover new reasons that explain Nepalese migration to the Gulf and, for the first time in the Nepalese migration literature, a clearer understanding as to why some Nepalese are likely to migrate to the Gulf for employment, why others are unlikely to do so, and finally, why others remain indecisive regarding Gulf migration. Although this research does not solve the problems associated with Nepalese migration to Gulf countries, it offers social scientists, governmental agencies, and nongovernment organizations new information on why Nepalese are willing to put their lives at risk to work in the Gulf.

The article proceeds as follows: first, we discuss the extant literature that explicates why Nepalese migrate abroad for employment. Second, we expand on this literature by providing additional reasons, and related hypotheses, that specifically explain Nepalese 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 Nepalese Labor Migration**

A review of extant literature indicates that most studies on Nepalese labor migration focus on explaining the phenomenon from a microeconomic model of individual choice (Massey et al., 1993) by employing descriptive and qualitative methodologies (see Table 1). In this model, individual rational actors decide to migrate because of cost-benefit calculations that lead them to expect a positive net return, usually financial, from movement abroad (Massey et al., 1993).

Indeed, research shows that financial concerns are the primary reason that Nepalese 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 encouraging individual Nepali to seek employment abroad: (1) to obtain social status within Nepalese 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 Nepalese is valid, there are other reasons for Nepalese migration not addressed in the literature. However, to understand human capital characteristics that increase the likelihood of Nepali seeking employment in Gulf countries, we must turn attention to discussing the historical role that migration has assumed in Nepal’s history.

Research suggests that Nepalese began migrating to foreign countries for employment opportunities as early as the 1700s, and it was a well-established

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Review of Literature Explaining Nepalese Labor Migration.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Source</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhandari (2004)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mishra (2011)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seddon et al. (2002)</td>
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<td>Sharma (2008)</td>
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<td>Shrestha and Bhandari (2007)</td>
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<td>Subedi (1991)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thieme &amp; Wyss (2005)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Valentin (2012)</td>
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<td>Williams and Pradhan (2009)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
activity by the 19th century (Seddon et al., 2002). Nepalese men migrated to India to serve under the Sikh ruler, Ranjit Singh, a practice that was later adopted by the British and Indian armies and that continues today (Sharma, 2008). Nepalese 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 Nepalese may migrate abroad to earn wages, multiple reasons, beyond merely financial concerns, help explain working-age Nepalese’s motivation to seek employment abroad. As Table 1 reveals, extant literature suggests that five drivers influence Nepalese to work abroad: financial, social status, military, stability and safety, and education. It is worth nothing here that many of the drivers are not mutually exclusive, but rather, many work in tandem with each other to encourage Nepalese 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 Nepalese migration identifies financial needs as the primary motivation that fuels Nepal’s migration and thus supports a microeconomic model of individual choice (Massey et al., 1993) in explaining Nepali labor 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 et al., 2002).

Thus, despite the known hardships of working abroad, Nepalese 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 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 2,100 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) discover that Nepalese 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 Nepalese migrants want to work abroad to send remittance home and to increase the socioeconomic 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, Nepalese men immediately promote their family’s social status, albeit within their local communities.

Military as a Migration Driver

As previously discussed, Following the Anglo–Gurkha war (1814–1816) and the signing of the Treaty of Sugauli, the British enlisted nearly 5,000 Nepalese men, referred to as Gurkhas, for military service in the British Indian army (Rathaur, 2001). By 1892, nearly 8,000 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, whereas 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, Tejilingen, & Simkhada, 2014; Seddon et al., 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 (Nepalese Army, 2015).

Research shows that though many Nepalese men, especially those originating from disadvantaged ethnic groups residing rural regions, are motivated to join foreign armies; such motivation is linked to the outcomes of wealth and enhanced social status (Chene, 1992; Kumar, 2004). Indeed, Chene (1992) suggests that most Nepalese 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 Nepalese men as Ghurkhas 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 et al., 2002; Singh, Sharma, Mills, Poudel, & Jimba, 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 villages in the regions controlled by the Maoists, motivated many Nepalese to migrate abroad (Gardner, 2012; Kern & Müller-Böker, 2015; Williams & Pradhan, 2009; Williams, Thornton, Ghimire, Young-DeMarco, & Moaddel, 2010).

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 macroenvironmental conditions encourage civil unrest, but they also stifle foreign investment and, thus, the expansion of Nepal’s industrial sector and job market. The political instability and safety concerns propel Nepalese youth to seek employment abroad (International Labor Organization, 2014).

Many Nepalese who migrate abroad because of stability and safety concerns are highly educated, and therefore, few opt to return to Nepal. Data obtained from Nepalese 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 et al., 2014). Sapkota et al. (2014) also report that Nepalese 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 migrants expressed concerns about the lack of security in Nepalese 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 Nepalese society (Joshi & Kharel, 2008), clearly explains why women who are educated and employed in health care seek employment abroad.

**Education as Migration Driver**

Sapkota et al. (2014) also suggest that Nepalese 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. Nepalese 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, Nepalese 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).

Nepalese 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 Nepalese 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 Nepalese college students are disenfranchised with Nepal’s instability, as constant political unrest in Kathmandu results in frequent labor strikes, causing universities to cancel classes and reduce student–professor contact hours.

Understanding Nepalese Labor Migration to the Gulf

Although the discussion regarding Nepalese migration abroad is insightful, it may not fully elucidate the reasons young Nepalese migrant workers specifically target the Gulf countries for employment opportunities relative to remaining in Nepal. For example, of the five primary reasons for Nepalese migration, military service and education are not applicable for explaining Nepalese migration to the Gulf. Further, other migration drivers, such as perceived stability and safety to the Gulf, have unique insights specific to the Gulf, whereas other drivers that may motivate individual Nepali 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 Nepalese, defined as individuals age 20 to 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. From a microeconomic model of individual choice, these seven drivers can be viewed as individual characteristics and social conditions that lower migration costs and risks, and, hence, raise the probability that Nepali youth will migrate to Gulf countries.
Financial Gratification Associated with Working in the Gulf

As previously discussed, many studies confirm that Nepalese 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 Nepalese labor migrants to seek employment opportunities in Gulf countries. Thus:

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

Stability and Safety of Gulf Countries

Investigating why Nepalese migrate to the Gulf is a challenging task, as popular press is replete with articles on the inferior state of Nepalese migrants in the Gulf and the dangers they confront in these countries (*Himalayan Times*, 2015). However, research reveals that rural villagers overlook the reality of dangers associated with labor migration to the Gulf and continue to seek employment there. That is, despite the warnings, the general perception among Nepalese 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 Nepalese, 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. Research reveals that Nepalese 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 judgment (Gardner, 2012). As Gardner (2012) emphasizes, Nepalese 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 Nepalese 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 Nepalese working abroad, we propose that local employment agents, who are responsible for Nepalese recruitment and labor supply to foreign countries, are incentivised to under-estimate the potential risks associated with working in Gulf countries. Thus, many Nepalese labor migrants receive incorrect information about working conditions in the Gulf. This discussion permits us to put for the following hypothesis:

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

**Stability and Financial Trade-Off**

Nguyen et al. (2008) argue that migrants who seek labor opportunities abroad consider a trade-off between stability and financial gratification. Labor 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 labor 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 Nepalese who plan to migrate to the Gulf for employment are likely to consider the trade-off between financial remuneration and the stability of Nepal and Gulf countries more than Nepalese who do not plan to migrate.

**Sense of Professionalism**

Researchers have stressed that labor 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). We posit that many migrants view foreign employment with enthusiasm and believe that their hard work will help their families. Thus:

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

In line with a sense of professionalism, Nepalese labor 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 Nepalese who plan to migrate to the Gulf for employment are likely to perceive their employment as helping their families’ well-being more than Nepalese who do not plan to migrate.

Limited Career Opportunities

Working-age Nepalese 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 Nepalese 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 Nepalese 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 Nepalese who do not plan to migrate.

Personal Desire to Move to the Gulf

Finally, younger-age Nepalese may migrate to the Gulf because of its allure. Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Qatar are ultramodern, rich, glamorous cities and thus are in stark contrast to the state of Nepalese 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 Nepalese to seek employment specifically in the Gulf. Thus:

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

Context

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 second author, a native Nepalese and English speaker, translated the English questionnaire into Nepali. The Nepalese questionnaire was then back-translated to English by another English–Nepalese speaker to ensure a thorough translation (Douglas & Craig, 2007). Each respondent received a complimentary package of noodles for participating in the study.

Based upon an estimated population of approximately 10,000,000 Nepalese between age 20 and 35 years (Central Intelligence Agency, 2015), a 99% confidence level, and a 5% confidence interval, our targeted ideal sample size was 666 respondents; however, at a 95% confidence level, the target sample size was 384 respondents (Creative Research Systems, 2016).

Our final sample size consisted of 624 respondents, who 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., age 18–35 years); the average respondent was approximately age 22 years (M = 22.16, SD = 4.64).

Measures

We employed a 17-item questionnaire that probed the reasons Nepalese 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-type scale, which ranged from 1 (strongly disagree or very unlikely) to 5 (strongly agree or very likely). Table 2 reports all the items.
### Table 2. Cluster Analysis (Means and Standard Deviations) of Potential Migrant Workers to the Persian Gulf.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons for migration questionnaire items Scale</th>
<th>Unlikely to migrate $M$ (SD)</th>
<th>Indecisive $M$ (SD)</th>
<th>Likely to migrate $M$ (SD)</th>
<th>Linear trend $(p)$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Financial gratification from working in the Gulf:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe working in Nepal could be financially satisfying.</td>
<td>2.67$^a$ (1.24)</td>
<td>3.01$^a$ (1.14)</td>
<td>2.73$^a$ (1.21)</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe working in the Gulf could be financially satisfying.</td>
<td>2.19$^b$ (.97)</td>
<td>2.79$^b$ (1.07)</td>
<td>3.17$^b$ (1.09)**</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would move from Nepal to a Gulf country if the financial offer is better in the Gulf than in Nepal.</td>
<td>2.10$^a$ (1.17)</td>
<td>2.94$^b$ (1.32)</td>
<td>3.64$^c$ (1.20)**</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stability and safety in the Gulf:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would move to a Gulf country for employment because these countries are more stable than Nepal.</td>
<td>1.96$^a$ (1.16)</td>
<td>2.13 $^a$ (1.23)</td>
<td>3.60 $^b$ (1.27)**</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe I will be safe working in the Gulf countries.</td>
<td>1.69$^a$ (.88)</td>
<td>1.65$^a$ (.82)</td>
<td>2.63$^b$ (1.19)**</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe Gulf countries will be more stable than Nepal over the next 5 years.</td>
<td>1.94$^a$ (1.06)</td>
<td>2.18$^b$ (.96)</td>
<td>2.74$^b$ (1.09)**</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe the Gulf countries have been more stable than Nepal for the last 5 years.</td>
<td>2.20$^a$ (1.09)</td>
<td>2.18$^b$ (.88)</td>
<td>2.82$^b$ (1.04)**</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe it is safe for unskilled labor to work in the Gulf countries.</td>
<td>1.79$^a$ (.99)</td>
<td>2.08$^a$ (1.11)</td>
<td>2.52$^b$ (1.18)**</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stability–finances trade-off:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would move from Nepal to a Gulf country even if the country is less stable than Nepal but the financial offer is better.</td>
<td>2.07$^a$ (1.07)</td>
<td>2.25$^a$ (1.06)</td>
<td>3.42$^b$ (1.10)**</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would move from Nepal to a Gulf country even if the financial offer is worse in the Gulf but the country is more stable than Nepal.</td>
<td>1.81$^a$ (.93)</td>
<td>2.04$^a$ (95)</td>
<td>3.14$^b$ (1.17)**</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of professionalism by working in the Gulf:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a foreign worker in the Gulf, I would be a role model for other people in Nepal.</td>
<td>2.12$^a$ (1.16)</td>
<td>3.67 $^b$ (1.11)</td>
<td>3.82$^b$ (1.11)</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a foreign worker in the Gulf, I can make a big difference in Nepal’s well-being.</td>
<td>1.90$^a$ (1.01)</td>
<td>3.57$^b$ (1.24)</td>
<td>3.99$^b$ (1.02)</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility to family: $^a$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a foreign worker in the Gulf, I make a big difference in my family’s well-being.</td>
<td>1.90$^a$ (1.01)</td>
<td>3.57$^b$ (1.24)</td>
<td>4.08$^c$ (1.00)**</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited career opportunities:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If Nepal provided a better work environment for workers, then I would not think about moving to the Gulf.</td>
<td>3.48$^b$ (1.47)</td>
<td>4.75$^b$ (.53)</td>
<td>4.46$^b$ (85)**</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If Nepalese students were provided good job opportunities in Nepal when they graduated, I would not consider moving to the Gulf.</td>
<td>3.67$^a$ (1.47)</td>
<td>4.82$^b$ (.47)</td>
<td>4.59 $^b$ (.68)**</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire to move to the Gulf</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moving to the Gulf for employment has been a desire of mine since I was young.</td>
<td>1.87$^a$ (1.26)</td>
<td>1.58$^a$ (86)</td>
<td>3.61$^b$ (1.37)**</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moving to the Gulf for employment has been a desire of mine since I heard about job opportunities in Gulf countries.</td>
<td>1.86$^a$ (1.17)</td>
<td>1.58$^a$ (83)</td>
<td>3.05$^b$ (1.46)**</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All scale items come from Nguyen et al. (2008).

Items that do share a common superscript significantly differ at $p < .001$. All means that have different superscripts significantly differ at $p < .001$.

$^a$ New scale item.

$*** p < .001$. 
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). It is worth noting here that we did not collect any qualitative data regarding individual characteristics for Gulf migration.

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 characterise traditional cluster analysis procedures, such as k-means (SPSS, 2015). 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. Cluster membership and gender were not significantly related, Pearson $\chi^2(2, N = 421) = 3.01$, ns. We conducted a second contingency table analysis to explore potential educational differences among the three migration clusters. The dependent variable, education, had four levels. The results reveal that cluster membership and education were not significantly related, Pearson $\chi^2(6, N = 407) = 8.60$, ns.

We also conducted a one-way ANOVA to evaluate the relationship between cluster membership and age. The independent variable, desire to migrate, included the three levels: unlikely to migrate, indecisive, and likely to migrate. The dependent variable was respondents’ ages. The ANOVA was not significant, $F(2, 421) = 1.57$, $p = .21$. 
**Mean Analysis**

We conducted a one-way multivariate ANOVA (MANOVA) to determine the effect of the three migration clusters on the 17 dependent variables, which represented the reasons Nepalese labor workers might migrate. We found significant differences among the three migration clusters on the dependent measures, Wilks’s Λ = .14, $F(34, 804) = 39.09$, $p < .000$. The multivariate eta-squared based on Wilks’s lambda was strong at .62. Table 2 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 labor 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 ($p \leq .003$; see Table 2).

**Linear Trend Analysis**

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 ($p \leq .001$; see Table 2). Thus, in nearly all the cases, the mean of each scale item, which reflected possible reasons driving Nepalese labor 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 Nepalese labor workers migrated. We tested each pairwise 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 Nepalese labor 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 though 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 Nepalese 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, Nepalese, whom are likely to migrate, show a stronger agreement \((M = 3.64)\) toward migrating for a better offer than they would receive in Nepal, compared to Nepalese whom are unlikely to migrate \((M = 2.10)\) or to those whom 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 Nepalese who plan to migrate to the Gulf for employment are likely to view the financial remuneration of working in the Gulf more favorably than Nepalese who do not plan to migrate. However, on the other hand, Nepalese 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 Nepalese are not enamoured 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, Nepalese who are likely to migrate \((M = 3.60)\) view Gulf countries as being, at the present time, more stable than Nepalese whom are unlikely to migrate \((M = 1.96)\) or those whom 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 whom 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 Nepalese who plan to migrate to the Gulf for employment are likely to view its stability and safety more favorably than Nepalese 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 Nepalese who plan to migrate do not necessarily view the Gulf countries as being more stable than Nepal for next 5 years; thus, the stability and safety of the Gulf is not necessarily a straightforward driver of Nepalese labor migration.
**Stability and Financial Trade-Off**

The data reveal that Nepalese whom plan to migrate consider a stability and financial trade-off when formulating their decision to leave the country. That is, Nepalese whom are likely to migrate \( (M = 3.42) \) are significantly more likely than those whom are unlikely to migrate \( (M = 2.07) \) or those whom 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 whom 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 Nepalese who plan to migrate to the Gulf for employment are likely to consider the trade-off between financial remuneration and the stability of Nepal and Gulf countries more than Nepalese 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 labor migration from Nepal is somewhat muted.

**Sense of Professionalism**

The data reveal that Nepalese whom 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 Nepalese whom 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 \( (M = 3.99) \). Nepalese who are unlikely to migrate expressed a vastly different opinion toward 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 Nepalese who plan to migrate to the Gulf for employment are likely to perceive higher professionalism associated with Gulf employment than Nepalese who do not plan to migrate.

**Responsibility to Family**

The data provide support for Hypothesis 5, working-age Nepalese who plan to migrate to the Gulf for employment are likely to perceive their employment as helping their families’ well-being more so than Nepalese who do not plan to migrate. Indeed, respondents who are unlikely to migrate from Nepal
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 Nepalese, 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 Nepalese 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 labor migration to the Gulf. Nepalese 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 Nepalese who plan to migrate to the Gulf for employment are likely to report a stronger desire to move there for employment than Nepalese who do not plan to migrate. Although this hypothesis is supported, some clarification is warranted. The data reveal that none of the respondents agrees 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 toward the idea as opposed to respondents who are unlikely to migrate and to those whom are indecisive about migration for labor opportunities. Thus, a personal desire to move to the Gulf is not a driver of migration for working-age Nepalese 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 Nepalese specifically consider Gulf countries for employment. Although researchers have explored reasons for Nepalese
labor 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 drivers, as well as, to the interplay between and among working-age Nepalese who are opportune to seek employment abroad and those whom refrain from doing so.

The results of our empirical analysis contribute to the extant Nepalese migration literature and to the microeconomic model of individual choice in seeking labor opportunities in Gulf countries (Massey et al., 1993). To date, most researchers have emphasized that the need for financial gratification is the primary driver of labor migration from Nepal. Interestingly, our research adds to this understanding by revealing that Nepalese 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. As the microeconomic model of individual choice postulates, people choose to move where they can be most productive, given their skill set (Wood, 1982). 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 Nepalese may be receiving a false reality of working conditions in the Gulf from 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). Consequently, some pundits question the ability of Nepalese to be rational in their decision to migrate to the Gulf without their understanding all of the bodily costs involved.

The data reveal that none of the respondents perceive that they will be safe working in the Gulf countries, including Nepalese whom are likely to migrate to the Gulf for employment. Therefore, we put forth that potential Nepalese migrants contemplate personal safety in their cost-benefit calculation regarding Gulf migration; in addition to other costs, such as traveling, learning a new language and culture, and the psychological costs of temporarily cutting ties with Nepal. For many Nepalese, the benefits associated with Gulf labor outweigh the enormous risks.

Additionally, despite the government instability in Nepal, none of the respondents believes that the Gulf countries will be more stable than Nepal over the next 5 years. Thus, concerns that young Nepalese were being duped by Nepalese working in the Gulf or by Gulf recruiting agencies are unsubstantiated. The lachrymose finding is that potential Nepalese 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 Nepalese migrants to the Gulf seem to realize the dangers involved in their actions, the question that needs to 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 Nepalese labor 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, Nepalese labor 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 Nepalese labor migration to the Gulf. The fact remains that until Nepal can expand its economy and lower its unemployment rate, many young, working-age Nepalese will have no other choice but to emigrate to the Gulf for employment. Once in the Gulf, the kafala/sponsorship system of migration essentially absolves the Gulf nations from legally providing Nepalese, or any foreign laborer, any kind of labor protection. Thus, the state of migrant labor within Gulf nations will always remain precarious given the inherently exploitative nature of the kafala system (Pande, 2013). Without legal changes in the kafala/sponsorship system, across all Gulf countries, migrant workers will never be able to participate as full members in their host countries and will remain susceptible to physical, verbal, and mental abuse from their employers.

Although countries such as South Korea, Japan, and Israel have been absorbing larger numbers on Nepalese labor 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. 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 labor. Even if Gulf countries legal accepted some type of basic rights for migrants, the host government’s ability to develop quality control systems would be circumspect. The reality is that that the international community has failed to develop strong legal protections for the world’s labor migrants (Gallagher, 2015). Nepalese exploitation in Gulf nations is unacceptable, but inevitable, until the local economy can expand to sustain its population.

Despite the inability of this article to improve the Nepalese situation in the Gulf, this research breaks new ground in the Nepalese labor migration literature by investigating why some working-age Nepalese are likely to migrate to the Gulf, why others refrain from doing so, and finally, why others are indecisive about seeking employment outside Nepal.
ORCID

Mark Rosenbaum http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1883-4412

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