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Impact of COVID 19 pandemic on the Nepalese Migrant Workers, Coping Mechanisms and Motivation for Migration Decision in the Gulf Countries

Master's thesis in Globalization and Sustainable Development
Supervisor: Marko Valenta

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Acknowledgments

I Would like to express my sincere gratitude to my Supervisor Marko Valenta for guiding me to complete this study. His continuous encouragement and knowledge on the topic helped me with my research in depth.

I would like to dedicate this study to my family and friends who helped me in different ways through my research. The help from them in finding the participants was appreciative.

Lastly, I express my genuine gratitude towards all the participants for the interview. I am beyond grateful for them to manage their time and share their experiences that helped me obtain desired results for my study.

Abbreviations

COR	Conservation Resource Theory
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IOM	International Organization for Migration
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
MOLESS	Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security
NRN	Non-Resident Nepali
NSD	Norwegian Center for Research Data
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UN	United Nations
UNDESA	United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs
WB	World Bank
WHO	World Health Organization

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Abstract

The COVID 19 pandemic that began in the end of 2019 shattered the world economy. Big and small businesses suffered huge loss and some even collapsed., impacted every individual all over the world in one way or another and the migrant workers in Gulf are not an exception to this.

Every year millions of migrant workers from all over the world migrate to oil rich Gulf countries. Prospect of job employment accelerated by high economic growth attracted Gulf to be the main hub for migrant workers. However, with COVID 19, the job market in Gulf also suffered a huge impact and the migrant workers were fired or been laid off by the employers amid the pandemic. This created a huge economic, social, health and psychological impact on the workers.

Hence, in this study, I tried to analyze the impact the Nepalese labor migrants had to face with COVID 19. This study has focused on identifying the impact and coping mechanism against COVID 19 for Nepalese migrant workers in Gulf. I also looked upon the motivational factors for migrant workers to incur migration decision either staying at destination, re-migrate during the COVID 19 crisis or return back home amid the pandemic. Finally, I analyzed how the migrant workers minimized the net loss of resources, managed stress during the COVID 19 crisis at GCC and its role in inducing migration decision.

Following qualitative research method, I categorized the participants for interview into three different categories. I analyzed the impact on the migrants who decided to stay in Gulf even after losing their job. I also explored the impact on migrants who decided to return back to Nepal and looked upon the situation for migrants who decided to re locate to some other countries.

Migration theory was identified as the first theoretical domain that established the background and analytical context of this study. I incorporated Migration Network Theory as a guide to understand the role of migration network to overcome emotional, social and moral support during crisis along with the coping mechanisms. In addition, I also referred to theories of transnationalism to explore the role of the cross-boundary networks and social relations in migrants' decisions. In addition, this study is also focused on Motivational theory of Migration and Conservation Resource Theory.

Impacts of COVID 19 is similar for all categories of migrants. Almost all the migrant workers had the same motive of moving to Gulf which was in search of better job opportunities and stable

income. Similarly, all the migrant workers faced similar impact with COVID 19 as some of them were furloughed from their duties while several of them were fired. Some faced lower and delayed payments. This study has identified several coping mechanisms. However, the support from migrant networks and transnational practice helped them to cope up with the impact of the pandemic. Various motivational factors including their status of savings, travel restrictions during the COVID 19 pandemic, compulsion to earn, social ties to home country and uncertainty about the time frame of COVID restriction are identified as the most pressing issues to induce migration decision either to stay at the destination, remigrate to another destination or return back home during the hardship period of COVID 19.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The latest COVID 19 pandemic has wreaked havoc on the global labor market, and the GCC countries are no exception. Millions of people from south Asian countries including Nepal, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka seek jobs in the Gulf. Most of the workers from these countries are unskilled people who work on minimum wages and a bad working environment. Moreover, as a result of the pandemic's economic downturn, thousands of Nepalese workers in GCC countries have lost their jobs. In certain situations, they are faced with shortened working hours, long-term payment delays, or a change in their payment scale (Settersten et al., 2020).

Nepal is one of the least developed countries in Asia with employment opportunities short of working age population. Hence, the people in Nepal want to migrate to different countries around the globe to improve their life circumstances. The educated, skilled population aim to migrate to the western developed countries for skilled jobs or higher education whereas, the unskilled population migrate to Gulf countries finding jobs as construction and factories workers, security guards and domestic workers.

It has been estimated that more than 10% of Nepal's population are working abroad. Nepal is one of the major source countries for labor supply in the Gulf. This has helped increase the remittance of the country as remittance is the major source of income for Nepal. As per the data, 28% of the total GDP is contributed by remittance (K Bhattarai, 2020).

Meanwhile, the lives of Nepalese migrant workers in the Gulf have been impacted because of COVID 19 pandemic to a great extent. This has not only affected the economic status of the migrant workers but also their social, health and psychological status. Hence, this thesis aims to explore the impact of COVID-19 on Nepalese migrant workers at the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, their coping mechanisms and the factors or motivations that induce migration decision among the migrant workers to remigrate to another destination, return home or stay at the destination.

The thesis will address the following research questions:

1. What are the impacts of COVID 19 and coping mechanisms of migrant workers at GCC?
2. What are the motivational factors for migrant workers to incur migration decision either staying at destination, re-migrate during the COVID-19 crisis or return back home amid the pandemic?
3. How do the migrant workers minimize the net loss of resources, manage stress during the COVID-19 crisis at GCC and its role in inducing migration decision?

The thesis will mostly be based on primary data collected through interviews. In- depth interviews through Semi-structured questionnaire are taken to gather the needed information to answer the research questions. This thesis is also based on secondary data which brushes on the relevant literature regarding the impact of COVID-19 from desk research. I have also gone through several research articles, reports, journals for relevant information on my thesis topic. I also came across several research papers on challenges faced by migrant workers in the Gulf that helped me with my research.

This thesis is divided into eight chapters. The second chapter is the review of relevant literatures. Third chapter focuses on the theoretical framework for the research. Following chapter is the research methodology where the type of data collection methods and tools are presented along with the sample selection process. I have presented the results for the first research question which is impact of COVID 19 pandemic and coping mechanism of in the fifth chapter. Chapter six highlights the role of migration network and transnational activities during the pandemic and motivations for migration decision and conservation of resource during COVID 19 is discussed in chapter seven. Conclusion is presented in the last chapter of this study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I provide an overview of relevant previous research. In the first part I have reviewed the South - North migration trend. Thereafter, I have showcased the relation between migration and development. I also have researched about the status of migration in Gulf. The push and pull factor of Gulf migration is discussed in the following part. The working conditions in the GCC has been reviewed. Following to this, false portray and glorification of employment in GCC is also discussed. Since the study area focuses on the impact of COVID 19, this chapter ends with reviewing COVID 19 challenges faced by the migrant workers.

2.1   South-North Migration

Oil rich economy of the Middle East that has given rise to major infrastructure development in the area which in turn has made the Middle East one of the world's most significant migrant-receiving areas. Because of the oil boom in the early 1970s, millions of Asians migrated to the Middle East (Adhikary, 2018). Moreover, with the inflow of migrant workers from all over the world, the Persian Gulf nations are able to carry out development works at peak. Mostly the workers from South Asia have occupied the greatest number of labor migrant workers with India holding the major position among the countries sending migrant workers to gulf from South Asia. Following are other countries like Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Philippines and others. Migrant workers hold the maximum number of populations in the GCC. UN has estimated that there are over 13 million Indian workers in Gulf nations. However, this figure is just an estimation and real numbers can be much more (Valenta & Jakobsen, 2016)

The sudden recent growth of international migration has most probably been South-South migration. As per the data produced by the UN, there were around 100 million migrants in the world in the year 1980, among which, 47.7% were in developed countries and the remaining in developing countries (UNDESA, 2004) However, by 2006, the global migrant population was

estimated to be 190 million. Among them, 61 million was South to South migration, 53 million North to North migration, 14 million North to South Migration and 62 million South to North migration (UNDESA, 2006).

In both the South and the North, migration is seen as the product of strong economic and demographic forces, which are unavoidable consequences of globalization. On the other hand, , migrants from the south are considered as a threat to security and stability and disruption of social cohesion in the North as well as a topic that becomes a sensitive political agenda time and again . However, with time, the policy makers are trying their best to recognize the benefits of international migrant workers in the country of destination (Wise et al., 2008).

2.2   Migration and Development

Migration is a process that is both an integral part of the larger transformation processes embodied in the term "growth" and has its own internal, self-sustaining, and self-undermining dynamics, as well as impacts on such transformation processes. The developmental factors that influence migration decisions are likely to influence the development outcomes in sending countries and communities as well (Taylor, 1999).

In the recent years, migration and development has been a concern for many governments and policy makers. The international migration is now viewed as the major driver for national development and increasing remittance has helped in reducing poverty and has played a role in economic growth of many developing nations. In recent years, remittance has been identified to be contributing to economic growth more than development aid and big development projects (Kapur, 2003; Ratha, 2003; Jones, 1998).

Sriskandarjah (2005) argues that the movement of migrant workers from one country to another can help enhance economic condition of both the sending and receiving countries .According to one estimate, if industrialized countries increased the number of migrant workers in the labor force by 3%, global welfare would improve by more than $150 billion per year (Winters, 2002).

Migrant workers are more likely to fill positions that are described as dirty, dangerous, and tough. In the medium term, companies in wealthy countries that are experiencing significant labor shortages can benefit from tapping into the surplus labor supply in developing countries (Sriskandarajah, 2005).

Moreover, migration benefits the country of origin to a very high extent. The remittance sent back home by the migrant workers helps in uplifting the socio-economic condition of them and their families back home. Furthermore, when the migrants return home permanently or on a vacation, they can transfer the skills generated at the Gulf to their community. Also, even when the migrants don't return themselves, members of the diaspora can contribute through trade, investment, networking and skill transfer.

2.3   Status of Migration to Gulf

Even though the GCC states only host 10% of the world's migrant population, migrants account for a considerable amount of their population due to their small size. In fact, according to the ILO data, migrants account for the majority of the population in Bahrain and Kuwait, while they account for about 90% of the population in Qatar and the UAE (ASI, 2020).

The workers who migrate to Gulf for employment opportunities mainly travel through a sponsorship system. This is known as Kafala system whereby the employer gets the full presence over workers life and living condition in Gulf. As per the system, the worker needs to have an official sponsor for visa in the destination country (Gardner , 2010; Malit Jr & Naufal, 2016). The employer controls the camps where the migrants are kept. Under this sponsorship system, the workers are bound to work for 2 years and there is a 3 months' probation period after (Malit Jr & Naufal, 2016).

More than 10% of the young population of Nepal are working abroad, however, the official percentage may be higher (Sharma, Pandey, Pathak, & Sijapati-Basnett, 2014). Nepal is one of the major labor suppliers to the Gulf nations. Similarly, Gulf is also one of the major destinations for unskilled labor migrants in Nepal. As result, 4 of the top five major destinations for the Nepalese labor migrants are Gulf nations. Out of total out-labor migrants, Saudi Arabia, with 22.9 percent, Qatar, with 20.3 percent, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), with 11.2 percent, and Kuwait, with

2.1 percent, follow Malaysia with 40.9 percent as destination of both male and female labor migrants (MOLESS, 2013/2014).

Massey et al., (1998) explains that there are four drivers of international migration. The drivers being the forces that encourages the workers to migrate from developing countries, fascinates the migrant workers towards developed countries, the migration motivation for migrating and the socio- economic connects that help in the process of migration from one country to another.

Financial motive is the major reason for Nepalese young population to migrate abroad. Moreover, Gulf labor migration has a win-win situation to both Nepal and Gulf nations. The unemployed population are getting job opportunities in the Gulf to sustain the lives of their families back home by having a stable income. On the other hand, the Gulf nations also have enough manpower to carry out the development.

Other factors driving Nepalese labor migrants towards Gulf can be an aspiration of better life for them and their families back home. Apparently, in most rural households and villages in Nepal, the social status or prestige is gained through the amount of assets one possesses. Hence, migrant workers in Gulf work hard for them to have a prestigious life in their society back home. For the unskilled labor works, they want to work hard to send the remittance to their family back home to increase their socio-economic status in the society. Assets such as house, land, furniture are classified as valuable things only people with good income can possess. Hence, the migrant workers work hard to be able to possess these items (Malla & Rosenbaum, 2016).

Nepalese job market has been unstable since the very beginning. The unstable political situation in the country leading to uncertainty in the job prospects has encouraged the youths to seek for foreign employment. The internal conflict among the communist party in Nepal (Maoist) and the Government that lasted for a decade caused political instability and created security threat among the citizens. The youths being forced to join the Maoist movement restricting them from gaining education, has now played a huge role in generating a maximum number of uneducated and unskilled population. Hence, these population, after the conflict was resolved, were left with no job or compensation. The only option for them to have a proper stable income was foreign labor migration (Malla & Rosenbaum, 2016). In line with this, we can argue that the migrants preferred

to stay in Gulf even during the pandemic to have a social identity back home for them and their family.

2.4   Pull and Push factors for Gulf Migration

The oil crisis in 1973 led to the escalation in the rate of oil. This commenced economic resources to start construction and infrastructure development in the GCC countries (Castles et al.,2019). With this, the spending on the development of the states increased massively causing the shortage of labor force. The Arab population who had moved within the other Arab and Gulf countries started migrating back to their respective countries as there was a lot of job prospects in their own country. Hence, the demand for labor force increased massively in Gulf. This is when many unskilled workers mainly from Indian sub-continent were seen as probable labor migrant force in Gulf (Birks & Sinclair, 1979).

Moreover, Asian labor force was comparatively cheaper than the rest for the GCC nations. Also, With the political instability and poor economic resources, the unskilled Asian labor force were in desperate need of a stable job. That is when migrating to Gulf came in highlight for the Indian subcontinent including in Nepal.

As Nepal due to its poor economic development cannot provide good work opportunities to its population, the Nepalese migrants view working abroad as a major means to escape low wage in Nepal. Nepalese started migrating to different countries since the start of 1700's. However, migration for employment started as a well-established activity in the 19th century (Seddon et al., 2002). The craze of foreign migration increased at the time of civil war in Nepal that lasted from 1996-2006. The political instability and fear of safety encouraged people to see the better life in foreign countries.

However, the ratio of people migrating to Gulf did not decrease after the end of civil war. The major reason behind being people were already attracted to the good wage in Gulf compared to Nepal which that helped their family to escape poverty and enhance their social status among the community.

Mostly, the rural population who do not possess any land ownership go for foreign employment to the Gulf. For them, the remittance sent back to the family is the primary source of income. They

aim to increase social status of their family by possessing some economic assets such as home, land, furniture and electronics.

Poverty among the people from the rural areas in Nepal can be considered as the major driver for migration towards GCC. The low educated rural population tend to work in domestic and construction sector in Gulf. Moreover, other drivers are income disparities, family disputes, networks, marriage, education, better job opportunities and natural disasters (Hear et al.,2012). Moreover, good income that can help the migrant workers with the opportunity to provide a standard life to their family back home can also be considered as the major driver for migration to GCC. Also, the opportunity to access proper health service and facilities also add up to this.

Proper stable income to sustain the family back home kept them from moving back to the home country even amid the pandemic. Moreover, the availability of proper health care services in the Gulf made them feel more secure than returning back home. Health care is prioritized a lot in the Gulf nations. The workers from South Asia, Southeast Asia and Africa must go to a medical test to enter gulf as migrant workers. Moreover, the workers also need to undergo another test in the respective gulf nations after their arrival. When a migrant worker enters Gulf, the employer itself is responsible of the health care of the workers. In Oman, it is a mandatory labor law for the employer to provide the workers with health care facilities. Situation is similar in other Gulf nations (Rahman, 2021).

2.5 Working Condition in the GCC

With limited job opportunities for the college graduates in the home country and inability to afford migration cost to western countries, The young population of Nepal are increasingly migrating to labor GCC countries for employment. They pursue a belief that their ability to send remittance back to the family will make a huge difference in the livelihood and social status of the family where they willingly sacrifice their personal safety and desire for the well-being of their family.

Most of the Nepalese migrants even if they are working in a terrible working environment at the GCC countries, tend to lie about their job to their family members. The reason behind is to save themselves from the humiliation and gain respect in the society. However, this false or negative glorifying f the work in Gulf has been attracting many youths to pursue work in Gulf.

As per the data, more than 70% of total international migrants belong to developing countries (UNDESA, 2017). With poor economic development and less work opportunity, the young population are highly unemployed and as per the statistics, over 16,000 Nepalese migrants head to Gulf countries every month in search of job opportunities. The young people aged 15 to 24 are disproportionately affected by that unemployment (Nepal Labour Force Survey, 2008). The manpower companies or brokers agencies are believed to be the major driving factor for the youth of the developing/underdeveloped countries wanting to migrate to the GCC countries as they establish a network between the host companies and the labor workforce looking for opportunities to migrate. It is said that at least one person from more than half of households of total population in Nepal are working as labor migrants in GCC.

Nepalese workers are working in different position in Gulf nations from executive level to mere laborers. The working situation is better for the people in executive level as they are respected and are paid well. However, the low skilled migrants are compelled to face a terrible working environment. Sometimes, even the high-level workers are discriminated based on nationality.

2.6 False portray and glorification of employment at GCC countries

The false portray of Gulf employment is one of the major factors that has been attracting the youths in Nepal to migrate. Many migrant workers arriving in Gulf for employment usually do not take time to realize that the life as a migrant in GCC countries is different from what was mentioned to them in their home country. They are misinformed in terms of salary, working hours along with the type of work. This in turn leads them to falsely portray the situation to present a story of a successful earning life in Gulf and want to protect their social status in their home country. They also want to safeguard the emotional state of their family with the false version of the life in Gulf and save their family from knowing the truth of the harsh life of migrant workers face in Gulf. Also, since the manpower companies and the sponsors benefit from bringing the workers to Gulf, they do not explain the real scenario as that might affect their profit.

With huge number of Nepalese young population moving for employment in Gulf, there are some positive and negative sides of this migration. Some labor migrants work in a decent work environment and are paid well while on the other side, the situation is dire for many of these

workers. The skilled manpower relatively does not come across many challenges during the employment period. However, Gulf can be a difficult and significantly challenging place for unskilled or low skilled labor migrants with them being paid less than promised wage, employers holding onto their passports and not letting them travel, etc. Adding to their misery, the living conditions and accommodation provided for the unskilled labor migrant workers is overcrowded and terrible. It is difficult for the migrant workers to assert their basic rights in the Gulf (Gardner, 2012).

Despite all the terrible situation in the Gulf, the labor migrants still want to stay and work there and the driving force being the hope to uplift the socio-economic status of their family. Economic concern plays a key role in this process of migration (Gardner, 2012). They render themselves to exploitation to secure the financial opportunities provided in terms of work in Gulf. However, the wages in Gulf, if received timely and as promised overshadows the negatives factor of migrating to Gulf for these unskilled migrant workers. The contractually promised wages in Gulf is competitive for the people in Nepal and surpasses the average salary level at home. With corruption and unstable political situation, the employment market in Nepal is not reliable, and the workers notoriously are under paid. Also, there are many families where only one member earns to provide for the rest of the family. With low income, the salary is not enough to fulfill daily basic needs. Hence, most of the people find migrating to Gulf as an easy alternative to fulfill the family needs (Gardner, 2012).

2.7   COVID 19 challenges to Migrant Workers in GCC

The COVID 19 outbreak that triggered in December 2019 in Wuhan city of China was formally announced by the WHO on 11 March 2020 as a pandemic due to the global spread and seriousness of the disease. In general, the declaration of a pandemic is considered a historical occurrence because it is not only a health crisis, but it also has economic, political and social impact at a global stage (ÖMER AÇIKGÖZ, 2020). Since then, the world economy collapsed and as a result, of the millions of people and businesses that were affected, the migrant workers are no exception.

The COVID 19 crisis has impact on various spheres of socio and economic life. Hospitality and travel industries are some of the major hit areas with most of them struggling to stay in business. Stock prices tend to go wild after the onset of the crisis and the reaction of financial markets poses serious concerns as the world has suffered from the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression.

In the early days, the general public mindset was to disregard the pandemic. As the conspiracy theories started to die down and the severity of the disease started to show up in numbers from all over the world, people started growing more concerned and it took a more serious form as Europe became its epicenter. Moreover, the job market has been harshly affected with mass layoffs and furloughs all over the world leaving the workforce in disarray and the unemployment rates have been the highest the world has ever seen.

Out of a total population of 54 million, the GCC member states host almost 35 million international migrants (Babar, 2020). In most GCC nations, the migrants work on vulnerable working conditions. During the peak time of the pandemic, migrants were not able to work remotely as most of them are engaged in work such as agriculture, deliveries, construction and cleaning. Less accessibility of private transportation and vulnerable working condition exposed them to COVID 19 much more as compared to other people. This brought into spotlight the health risk associated with no skill job is high for the migrant workers in Gulf.

On the other hand, the service-oriented industries like food service, hotel industry was hard hit by COVID 19 where majority of the workforce employed in the positions as, chefs, waiters, house keepers and cleaners are dominant with migrant population. With the pandemic, the unemployment rates in these sectors have been high (Guadagno, 2020). The COVID19 situation has also exacerbated problems in sectors that rely on migrant workers in destination nations in areas like retail and wholesale, tourist and transportation, and manufacturing (World Bank, 2020).

With the COVID 19 crisis, not just the migrant workers but also the natives have lost their jobs which has been seen as a threat to the residents in the GCC nations. One of the examples being the Government of Oman restricting private companies from laying off the natives but urging in laying off the migrant workers. Similarly, in Kuwait, the companies have been informed to not renew the

contract for migrant workers but prioritize on giving job opportunities to the natives (Weeraratne, 2020). Hence, this is a challenge to migrant workers who are working or aspire to work in Gulf.

Also, since the employer has the responsibility of providing health care to the workers in all the GCC nations, the regulations do not protect domestic household workers or irregular employees, who do not fall within the larger definition of labor. As a result, most of these people are frequently overlooked (Rahman, 2021). With limited opportunities in the GCC nations with the COVID 19 crisis, there is a need for a large number of migrant workers to return back to their home countries leaving Gulf (Weeraratne, 2020).

CHAPTER 3

THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter, I present the theoretical backgrounds and related literary concepts to shape my research enquiry. Impact of global pandemic on socio-economic status, health status and coping mechanisms of the migrant workers amid the hardships of pandemic is relatively a new dimension of migration research. To analyze my research questions from holistic dynamics, I blend the theoretical concepts from theories on migration and transnationalism with concepts from individual psychology. This opens the opportunity not only to understand the impact of COVID 19 on migrants from market and employment epoch but also to analyze my findings from perspective of individual psychology and resource conservation.

Based on my research questions and overall objective of my research enquiry, through the extensive literature search, I was able to identify the theoretical frameworks from various multidisciplinary perspective to shape and contextualize my study. The first theoretical domain that establishes the background and analytical context of my study is migration theory. On this domain, I have included Migration Networks Theory as a guide to understand how the migration network at home and overseas offer an emotional, moral and social support to survive during the crisis and cope up with the associated situations. To complement this theory, I have referred to theories of transnationalism to explore how the cross-boundary networks and social relations play a role in migrants' decisions.

The second group of theories that I have used to contextualize and situate my study falls within the domains of motivational and psychological aspects of hardships brought by the COVID 19 pandemic. First, I attempt to use Motivational Theory of Migration Decisions as devised by Sell and Dejong (1978). Furthermore, I also align my analysis with– 'Conservation of Resource (COR)' theory. It is my attempt to apply this theory in the context of migration decision and motivation of ensuring coping mechanisms in context of pandemic among migrant workers. COR theory assumes that individuals are directed towards conservation of current resources and acquiring of further resources and that resource loss are tentatively harmful (Hobfoll, 1978). I tend to apply this

perspective to analyze how COVID 19 pandemic impacts the resources of the migrant workers and how it hampers their motivation of staying and development of coping mechanisms.

3.1   Migration Networks Theory

It has been well established in migration research that the network of migrants abroad plays a vital role in making the international migration decisions. They are a source of information and act as a support system upon their arrival in host countries (Massey et al., 1993; Hugo, 1995; Ellis, 2003). Various factors such as friendship, kinship and shared origin interrelates migrants, non-migrants and former migrants within interpersonal ties. These interpersonal network acts as a form of social capital while making migration decisions or upon arrival and stay at the host countries (Massey et al., 1993) play an important role in host countries by extending assistance in the adjustment process, mainly in the case of housing and employment search. This creates the atmosphere of certainty and reduces risk associated with the uncertainties induced as a migrant worker in the destination country (Hugo, 1995)

One of the significant features of migration networks is that it operates beyond the influence area of policy and policy makers (Hugo, 1995). These networks at the host countries often remains resilient to external policy and circumstantial influence. Massey et al (1993) also notes that these social networks at the destination countries are the important aspects of risk reduction and risk diversification for the migrants. And this is more prominent in the countries with larger and old diaspora communities. These networks become the emotional, moral, social, or financial support system in case of any emergency or crises. It is pointed out that these networks are of relevance for long-term adaptation of migrants in the destination countries (Gurak & Caces, 1992)

Through the lens of the theory of migration networks, this study intends to analyze how these networks at the host countries has played a role to reduce the insecurities and difficulties induced by the COVID 19 crises. As mentioned by (Hugo, 1995), while these networks are still prominent when policy is less influential, especially in the case of pandemic situation like COVID 19, these social networks are still intact as a proximate support system. This study also aims to investigate how these support systems influence the migrants either to stay at the destination countries despite the cut-off on working hours, pay-off leaves, and job dismissal; or to make decision to return to the home country. Moreover, this theory is also applicable to understand what sort of moral,

emotional, social or financial support mechanisms are in practice through the migrant networks to mitigate the crisis.

3.2   Migration transnationalism and transnational practice

Over the last few decades, scholars have studied the transnational aspect of migration as a broad domain of migration studies. Transnationalism is the array of relations and attributes within the periphery of multistranded social relations, by which the societies of origin and the current settlement are linked together (Basch, Schiller, & Blanc, 1994). Transnationalism has been fostered by a variety of ties within the family, economic, social, and cultural domains across the international borders, thereby raising the new form of social platform for various social actions (Foner, 1997). Transnational migrants as opposed to other migrants who permanently settle at the destination, create a new social field of cross border interaction. Transnational migrants become the fabrics of daily life in the home country which includes involvement in various economic and political activities, contributing as a member of local or neighborhood organizations, and even entering the politics of the new locality (Portes, Guarnizo & Landolt, 1999). Within the periphery of transnational social fields, transmigrants may involve in various non-governmental organizations and their activities along with other broader philanthropic and civic activities (Fouron & Schiller, 2001)

These cross-border relations and practices within the periphery of newly constructed social field links the migrants and the people back home in a variety of dimensions. These multifaceted relationships with the non-migrants at both individual and institutional level plays a crucial role in shaping the living conditions of the migrants abroad (Kalir, 2005). However, rather than static, these transnational dynamics are constantly evolving among the migrants' resources and their positions in terms of socio-cultural aspects. Moving further, the idea of 'transnational livelihoods' implies migrants' livelihood is the outcome of their structured transnational engagement, both intended and unintended, in economic as well as non-economic multifarious dimensions involving migrant and non-migrant actors thereby generating the sequence of transnational actions (Olwig & Sorensen, 2002).

The conventional studies on transnationalism have significantly focused on the economic impacts of the transnational actions. This typology has special focus on transnational ties of solidarity, obligation and solidarity developed by channelization of monetary remittances among the kins and

friends of the migrants (Guarnizo, 2003) However, these concerns of transnationalism have been focusing on how the migrants extend their activities to the place of origin and what impact they hold at their home country. However, what transnational impacts do the non-migrants assert upon the migrants is not well focused on contemporary studies. On this sphere, this study tries to analyze what sort of transnational supports are exerted by the non-migrants to the migrants abroad during the time of crisis, especially in the case of COVID 19. This is to examine the role of non-migrants within the transnational migrant network for survival or in taking decisions where to stay abroad or return to the country of origin in the context of hardship brought by the COVID 19 crisis. This study also inquires, what type of interplay develops or exists in transnational social space to strengthen the coping mechanisms among the migrants in the overall setting of multidimensional ties among migrants and the non-migrants. This is to the reverse flow of moral-emotional-social and monetary assistance from the non-migrants to the migrants within the individual or institutional migrant networks.

3.3   Motivational theory of migration decision

Although motivation approach to migration decision is not entirely new epoch in migration research, available literature focuses mostly on various ways how individual's motivation is induced to migrate from the origin to destination. Sell and Dejong (1978) define migration decision in motivational approach as multiplicative interaction of four different attributes – availability, motive, expectancy, and incentive. These four attributes represent personal dispositions, environmental factors, and person environmental interactions whose interlinkage results in rational change in instrumental behavior, which is migration decision in this case (Sell and Dejong, 1978, p. 322).

The first component in this model, availability signifies that the option of migration decision should be cognitively or physically possible to an individual to adopt. First factor that hinders the availability of migration option, is either that people may not have seriously ever evaluated the benefits or demerits of migration decision or simply that migration is physically not possible. Second factor automatically devices for migrant decision in case when staying in current location is not even an option for an individual, for instance in case of forced migration (Sell and Dejong, 1978).

Regarding the second component, Sell and Dejong (1978) note that the intention of achieving certain goal remains prime to induce migration decision. Even though people never migrated, they might have noted their cognitive motive to do so at some time. This factor signifies the 'goal attainment' factor in migration decision making. Sell and Dejong (1978) include expectancy of goal attainment in their model, although the migration decision may not guarantee or automatically generate goal attainment conditions. Although anticipation of goal attainment, for instance better job, increased wages may not definitely be automatically generated by migration decision, but expectancy of achieving goals is significant to generate migration behavior.

The final component in Sell and Dejong's model of motivational theory of migration decision is incentive. Individuals tend to evaluate the additional benefits of migration decision. The incentives could be economic (Sphere, 1974), sociological incentives representing diaspora community ties (Ulenberg, 1973). As this model of Sell and Dejong (1978) exhibits multiplicative interaction among these four factors, migration decision may not take place if one factor has minimal magnitude even though other factors are compelling.

It should be noted that this motivational theory of migration focuses on individual's decision to migrate from its native place. However, this study applies the components of this theory to explore the migrants' decisions made at receiving countries in the context of the COVID 19 pandemic. This study examines how components of Sell and DeJong's theory are applicable to analyze migrants' decisions. Here, we may distinguish between three core decisions: (i) to stay in current destination countries; (ii) to migrate onwards to other destination countries; (iii) to return home. Meanwhile the migration theories align itself in determining the migration decision from origin to destination, literature merely deal with reciprocal migration decision from destination to origin or other alternative new destinations and with factors which are inducing such migration decisions.

3.4   Conservation of Resources (COR) theory

Stress can be a significant factor for migration during crisis. In this case the stress is related to threats posed by the COVID 19. However, role of stress in migration studies is seldom prioritized. Hobfoll (1989) initial model of conservation of resources states that during the time of stress, individuals tend to minimize the net loss of resources. It also stresses when individual is not confronted with stress, they tend to develop resources surplus in order to minimize future loss of resources. Hobfoll (1989) identifies four sorts of resources – *object resources* which are described

as the acquisition of material or motivational stuffs that resists stresses. Other resources in his theory are conditions. They are defined as the values and standards gained, for instance – marriage, seniority, position, tenure or other positions gained. Hobfoll argues that it should be defined how these factors determine stress resistance potential. Third resource is *Personal characteristics*. This resource acts as an aid for stress resistance, and it reflects person's interpretation of the world events and whether they are in line with his or her own interests. This is again based on personal skills and aid mechanisms. This also incorporates one's potential to value or take situation in positive sense in stressful situations. Fourth category of resources, *energies*, are generated by the time, money and knowledge. According to Hobfoll, they play a role in acquisition of other kinds of resources and strengthens individual's stress handling capacity (Hobfall, 1989).

This study tends to analyze how the net loss in these resources tend to generate migration decision. My ambition is to investigate how the acquired resources or the resource pool, based on these four aforementioned resource categories determine the migration decision. At top, the aim of this research is to extend these dimensions into the stressful situation generated by the COVID 19 and how these components of conservation of resource theory are applicable to induce migration decisions. To sum up, this is to analyze how psychological factors analyzed through resource conservation aspects in categories of resources discussed by Hobfall (1989) tend to generate migration decision whether to stay at destination or get back to place of origin or migrate to the third country during the time of COVID 19 crisis among the Nepalese migrant workers at GCC.

Table 1 Summary of theories, major analytical framework their relevance and mode of analysis

Theories	Major concepts Used	Relevance	Mode of Analysis
Migration Networks Theory	Concept of migrant network for support system and interpersonal migration network. Role of the migrant network for the long-term adaptation through emotional, social, financial support during crisis.	To connect and support the migrants in the destination. To help the newcomers in forming social relations with kith, kins, friends, associations. -	Analyze the support extended to migrants in four domains: - Economic - Social - Health - Psychological Role of migrant in coping mechanism the coping mechanisms.
Migration Transnationalism and Transnational Practice	The ties among migrants and non-migrants in the origin This linkage among the migrants and non-migrants creates the transnational social field through the involvement of migrants in	Focuses on the influence and various pathways to understand migrants role in various economic, social and political spheres at the origin This interplay between the migrants and origin shapes	Identification of the reverse flow of support from the friends, relatives, society or associations at the origin and their role to enhance the coping mechanism. Analysis on the role of non-migrants and other social

	various economic, social and political spheres. The relationship with non-migrants at both individual and institutional level helps in shaping the living conditions abroad.	the livelihood of both the migrants and dependents back home.	institutions at the origin to the migrants in destination within the transnational migrant network in taking decisions where to stay abroad or return to the country of origin in the context of hardship brought by the COVID 19 crisis
Motivational Theory of Migration Decision	Sell and Dejong (1978) motivational theory of migration decision. Use the four different attributes that induce migration decision in an individual in motivational epoch – *availability, motive, expectancy and incentive.*	Various motivational factors and the interlinking among those factors are the key drivers to induce the rational change in instrumental behavior in an individual. The migration decision among the migrant workers in the GCC is multiplicative interaction between various factors to increase or deduce motivation in an individual to induce migration decision whether to stay at destination, return back home or remigrate to another destination during the time of COVID 19 crisis.	Using the theoretical background of Sell and Dejong (1978) Motivational Theory of Migration Decision for analyzing, the interaction of four different attributes – availability, motive, expectancy and incentive plays a role in inducing migration decision among the migrant workers at the GCC countries.
Conservation of Resource Theory	Hobfoll (1989) theory of Conservation of Resource and how net loss in resource generates the stress in an individual. used the four kinds of resources as the object of analysis as mentioned by Hobfoll – *object resources, conditions, personal characteristics,* and *energies.*	Interplay between resource loss, stress and migration decision among the migrant workers in the GCC countries. serves as an analytical framework to analyze how the level of resources individuals have acquired and its role to level of stress among migrants and its consequent role in inducing migration decisions.	Pattern analysis how workers in the GCC countries tend to minimize the net loss of resources and how the interplay between the loss of resources, stress and its role on inducing migration decision develops during the hardship of COVID 19 pandemic.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

4.1   Qualitative mode of enquiry

I tend to apply quantitative mode of enquiry as the research objectives are not to measure the preciseness of predetermined hypothesis but to investigate and understand the complex realties and processes in a holistic matter (Berg, 2001). Qualitative mode of investigation is justified for this study as it paves the pathway to enquire into social phenomenon subjectively as questions and hypotheses emerge cumulatively as the process of investigation advances (Berg, 2001). The aim of this study is to understand the socio, economic, heath and other associated impacts within the confines of altered realities emerged due to the COVID 19 crisis. This study locates itself in new type of ground realities induced by COVID 19, so impacts could not be hypothized objectively beforehand. It needs a detailed investigation without prior hypotheses. I let the concrete direction of inquiry to be determined during investigation itself. Same is the case of another research question, investing the motivation of migration decision either – i) staying at destination during COVID 19 crisis, ii) decide to migrate back to the origin, or iii) re-migrate to another destination.

The personal nature of qualitative enquiry also adds value to the objectives of this study. Qualitative enquiry locates the researcher as a mere instrument of the investigation process and opens the opportunity to understand the personal life of research object. To understand the impacts posed by COVID 19 and understand the migrant's motivation for migration decision; the experience, training, skills, interpersonal competence, capacity for empathy, cross-cultural sensitivity (Patton, 2014) all plays an important role. Hence this personal and interpersonal flexibility in the investigation and analysis in the qualitative mode of enquiry is suitable for this undertaken study to understand and analyze the objectives of the study in a holistic manner.

Social phenomenon and human motivations can only be fully understood when the investigation considers the eternity of situation. The role of qualitative enquiry is to analyze the human choices and behavior that is directed by individual perception, feeling, attitude and cognition (Kumar, 2011). To study the impacts of COVID-19 and factors that induce their migration decision due to

the crisis and differ from individual to individual. This requires the detailed qualitative investigation rather than generalization based on numeric data.

Qualitative research method is appropriate to generate findings regarding perception, feeling or meanings from the standpoint of participant. This extends the understandings in detail rather than counting and measuring the variables (Hammerberg, Kirkman, & Lacey, Qualitative research methods: when to use them and how to judge them, 2016) Furthermore, qualitative method in research is appropriate when questions of enquiry are about subjective phenomenon of human experiences answered in 'why' 'how' 'what' questions. Hence, qualitative method is best suited for this study to understand the perception and experiences of impact of COVID-19 on GCC migrant workers. It is also appropriate to explore the factors and motivations for the migration decision during the time of crisis based on participant's individual reality.

4.2   Situating study within the philosophical paradigm

The choice of philosophical research paradigm remains vital to shape the research and choose the appropriate tools for the data collection and interpretation. It also enhances the scientific standard in the research activity. Given the nature of research questions, this study is broadly positioned within the interpretive constructionist paradigm of naturalist research philosophy.

The interpretive constructivist approach asserts that reality can only be perceived by people through the lens of his or her prior knowledge, expectations, or experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The imperative to this approach is reality cannot be measured directly and is subjective, differing from person to person. The focus of naturalistic research is understanding certain phenomenon or circumstances, rather than generalization or future prediction (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Given, the objective of this study is to understand the impacts of COVID-19 on migrant workers at GCC and factors that influence their migration decision to return to origin, stay at destination or migrate to a new destination; decision is influenced by various factors ranging from their position at the workplace, financial stability back home, cohesiveness among diaspora community or the use of certain coping mechanisms among various others. This indicates the differing reality rather than single universal truth to explain the circumstances.

Constructionists also believe that certain biases cannot be eliminated in the research, as peoples' understanding of the external world is individually built and their interpretation is based on their

individual status or prior experiences (Chen, Shek, & Bu, 2011). Same is on the part of researcher to analyze or interpret the findings as the researcher biases or expectation during the data collection or interpretation cannot be completely removed from the research process (Chen, Shek, & Bu, 2011). The applied approach makes sense to this research, as the aim of research is neither to develop single theoretical explanation or devise a universal principle but to understand the situation of migrant workers during COVID-19 circumstances.

4.3 Research Design

The study is broadly positioned within the interpretive constructionist paradigm of naturalist research philosophy. The nature of the study is to understand the individual experiences of impacts of COVID-19 and motivations of the migrant workers at GCC for migration decisions. Therefore, the research design follows quiet flexible characteristics to examine and understand the various aspects of subjective understanding of the individual respondents. The study targets the migrant workers from Nepal at GCC countries. The study follows the mix of convenience, judgmental and typical case sampling techniques of purposive sampling method to select the respondents. The details of data needs, respondents, sampling criteria and data collection methods are explained in the upcoming sections.

4.3.1 Choice of Informants and Sampling Design

This study tends to understand various impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the Nepali migrant workers at GGC countries. Among various impacts of COVID-19, crisis on global economic structure impacts the migrant workers in various ways. They are one of the prime sufferers of the crisis. Hence, my respondents are primarily the migrant workers in the GCC countries. GCC countries are also the top migrant destination especially for unskilled and semi-skilled labor force from South Asia. To understand the motivation for migration decision, I categorize my respondents within three groups. The first group are those who decide to stay at the migrant destination. The second group of respondents represents those who decided to return to the country of origin due to impact of crisis. And the group of respondents are the ones who decided to re-migrate to another destination. This provides a holistic picture to understand the differing impacts of the pandemic and different motivations to undertake migration decision.

I primarily chose my respondents from my personal contacts that I have among the migrant workers at GCC countries. I tend to contact the potential respondents through social media groups

of the diaspora community in the GCC countries. My goal was to gather information from respondents with diverse backgrounds relating their origin back home from both rural and urban areas, the recent migrants or the ones that have been staying in the GCC countries for many years.

This study uses the various forms of purposive sampling technique to select the respondents. Purposive sampling method allows the personal judgement of the researcher to select the respondents who can provide required information to meet the objectives of the study (Kumar, 2011). Among the various purposive sampling techniques, this study combines convenience, judgmental and criterion sampling methods. Convenience sampling is simply selecting the respondents who are readily and easily available (Kumar, 2011). This significantly reduces time and effort on searching the participants and allows the personal network of researcher to include the respondent in the research. For this, I select the respondents among my personal connection among the migrant workers in the GCC countries. Judgmental sampling method allows the researcher to choose the respondent who could provide maximum information on the research topic and is ideal for understanding some typical phenomenon (Kumar, 2011). Criterion sampling ensures the samples selected meet the minimum criteria set. In this study, this sampling technique is applied to ensure that the respondents represent all three categories i.e., those who decided to stay at destination, those who decided to return to the country of origin and those who decided to re-migrate to another destination due to COVID-19 crisis.

4.3.2   Respondents

I interviewed 15 respondents in total. I categorized 15 respondents into three groups where 7 of them stayed at the destination country at GCC during the COVID 19 crisis, 4 of them remigrated to another destination and 4 of them returned to Nepal during the COVID 19 crisis. The characteristics of the respondents are presented in following table –

Table 1 Interviewees who decided to stay in GCC countries during COVID 19 crisis

Interviewee	Destination country	Average Stay	Gender	Profession
1	Qatar	2 years	Male	Store Keeper
2	Qatar	8 years	Male	Store Keeper

3	Saudi Arabia	1 year	Male	Construction worker
4	UAE	8 months	Male	Construction Worker
5	Bahrain	4 years	Male	Accountant
6	UAE	4 years	Male	Store Supervisor
7	UAE	1 year	Male	Kitchen staff

My respondents who stayed in the destination during the COVID 19 crisis were from various GCC countries; Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE and Bahrain. Initially, I approached my respondents through my personal contacts and agreed for a time for the interview. Most of the interviewees easily agreed for the interview and share their experiences in the GCC countries regarding the hardships and coping mechanism during the COVID 19 crisis. I tried to select the respondents in this category representing various time period they stayed in the GCC countries. The minimum time spent at the GCC was 8 months and maximum time of stay at the GCC was 8 years. This provided me opportunity to understand the hardships and coping mechanism among the migrants who have been staying there for a long period of time and who has recently migrated. Furthermore, I tried to diversify my respondent representing various skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled migrant as the impact of COVID 19, coping mechanisms and motivations for migration decision can be different for each category. I was also careful selecting the respondents from various age group to understand the diverse perception regarding the study topic

Table 2 Interviewees who remigrated to another destination during COVID 19 crisis

Interviewee	Original Destination	Average Stay at original Destination	Remigrated Destination	Gender	Profession
1	Qatar	7 years	Kuwait	Male	Accountant
2	Qatar	5 years	Saudi Arabia	Male	Driver
3	UAE	5 years	Saudi Arabia	Male	Engineer
4	Saudi Arabia	3 years	Cyprus	Male	Supervisor

My respondents who remigrated from the initial destination to another destination were mostly the migrants who had been staying at GCC countries from at least 3 years to 7 years period. This

characterizes them as migrants who had been staying at the GCC for a long period of time and had been able to network with people at the destination or in other countries. The original destination of these migrants were Qatar, UAE and Saudi Arabia. Comparatively, it was harder to reach this category of respondents. I used the personal contact to identify this category of migrants from my network back in Nepal. The initial respondent helped me to reach other respondents. The destination of remigration is mostly within the GCC country. But one respondent has migrated to Europe. This has helped me understand the role of networks and motivations either to remigrate within GCC and outside GCC. Most of the respondents of this category were the skilled and semi-skilled labor force representing – engineer, accountant, driver and supervisor.

Table 3 Interviewees who returned home during COVID 19 crisis

Interviewee	Destination	Average Stay	Gender	Profession
1	Qatar	7 months	Male	Store Keeper
2	UAE	1 year	Male	Kitchen helper
3	UAE	3 years	Male	Construction Worker
4	Saudi Arabia	9 months	Male	Waiter

In the category of respondents who decided to return home during the COVID 19 crisis, the respondents had migrated to Qatar, UAE and Saudi Arabia, from where they returned back. With my personal contact and network in Nepal, it was convenient to identify these respondents and approach for an interview. These respondents were readily available and responded my questions in depth. Most of the migrants who returned back were the recent migrants who stayed in the GCC for less than a year. This shows those who had recently migrated to the GCC countries, were the migrants who mostly decided to return back. These respondents represented both unskilled and semi-skilled labor force including waiter, kitchen helper, construction worker and store keeper. These migrants are now either unemployed or involved in agriculture or small-scale entrepreneurship activity back home.

4.3.4   Data collection: Semi-structured interviews

I employ both primary and secondary modes of data collection to gather holistic information on the researched topic. To understand the background information on the topic as well as to support my findings I refer to various books and published articles. This follows the desk study mode of

data gathering. This mode of data collection is particularly important to review the literature regarding the researched topic (Kumar, 2011). Furthermore, this also helps to support the rationale of the study and situate the study within larger literary landscape.

Selecting primary data collection tools largely depend on the background characteristics of the respondents including educational level, socio-economic status, origin and ethnicity among others. The choice of data collection tool should also consider the attitude of targeted respondents towards certain data collection tool (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Considering my respondents are primarily unskilled and semi-skilled migrant laborers, with varying educational background, I used oral method of data collection. I applied interviews as a method of data collection which allowed me to understand the research questions through direct enquiry with the targeted respondents.

Maccoby & Maccoby (1954) defined the interview as "a face-to-face verbal exchange, in which one person, the interviewer, attempts to elicit information or expressions of opinion or belief from another person or persons" (p. 449). Interview allows the researcher to understand attitude, experiences, expectations through person-to-person interaction within a certain purposeful topic (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Various forms of interview are in practice within qualitative research, mainly structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews.

For this study, I used semi-structured interview technique. Semi-structured interviews are widely used in human and social sciences research. Semi-structured interviews provided leverage on the part of researcher to frame the questions upon the convenience to under the researched topic in depth during research (Kumar, 2011). This allows to investigate in detail and interrogate the new themes that arises during interview in depth. I tend to use semi-structured interview method of data collection to be flexible on investing the new themes arising in the interview process and avoid the rigidity of the questions within the confines of researcher's knowledge. I conducted interviews through direct telephone call or using other social media platforms like Facebook, Viber, WhatsApp and Imo. I contacted the prospective respondents, agreed on the time and date and conducted the interview with due consent of the respondent.

To proceed with data collection, I first reached out the person in GCC with whom I had personal contact. And with this person, I inquired about potential respondents those who are staying in the GCC, remigrated to the destination or returned back. As people had free time and ready to share

the impact, it was easier to find the respondents. However, it was a bit hard to find the respondents who returned back Nepal and find a way to contact the. For this, I used my connections in Nepal among friends and family to identify them. With this approach, I was able to find four returnee migrants with whom I mostly talked through Facebook Messenger.

4.4   Data analysis

Creswell & Poth (2018) define data analysis as the process "that involves organizing the data, conducting a preliminary read-through of the database, *coding* and organizing *themes*, representing the data, and forming an *interpretation* of them." (p. 248). All these steps are interconnected and are a part of spiral activities that lead to presenting findings and its interpretations. Basically, data analysis roughly follows a systemic pattern. It starts with preparation of organizing data i.e., transcribing the interview or systematically organizing photographs. The most important step is coding and condensing the codes in order to reduce the data into themes that answers the research question or explain the phenomenon being studied. And finally, the synthesized data is represented in the forms of charts, figures or textual discussion (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

This study intents to explore the various impact of COVID-19 on the migrant Nepali workers at GCC countries and their motivations to make migration decision during the crisis. This study-initiated data analysis step coherently since the initiation of the research. Prior to data collection, I noted down certain themes on the impacts as well as motivations for migration decision after completing the literature review prior to the primary data collection through interviews. This led towards identification of certain themes for the analysis on the later stage. Furthermore, during the interviews, prior to transcribing the conversation, I noted down the recurring themes and unique information that were obtained during the course of the interview.

After all the interviews were completed, I started transcribing the individual interview into text for further analysis. This computer typed raw data went into the rigorous coding process based on the specific research questions. I tried to code the interview answers into certain representative themes. Further, I started categorizing the coded data into similar themes, contrasting themes and unique themes. Now, these identified themes represents the answers obtained through the entire research process for the particular research questions. The actual presentation of analysis followed generalization of themes, presentation of unique and contrasting cases as well as use of texts from the secondary sources and theories used in theoretical framework either to support or contrast my

findings. My presentation of analysis followed generalized themes from the interview transcription as well as using the direct quotes of the respondent from the interview to ensure my interpretation is not deviated and are in line with the original responses and wording of the respondents.

Table 4 Categories of themes generated

Broad thematic category	Categories of themes
Impact of COVID 19	Health impact and virus infection
	Economic impact, job lay off and reduced income
	Social impact and isolation and no gathering
	Psychological impact, anxiety and depression
Coping mechanisms	Reduction in expenses
	Borrowings and Loans
	Return back home and remigrate
	Use of social media
	Safety equipment and social distancing
	Repatriation flights
Motivations for migration decision	Loss in saving, unemployment
	Travel restrictions
	Compulsion to earn
	Social ties to home country
	Uncertainty about timeframe of COVID 19 crisis
Stress and Resource Loss	Stress due to loss of savings and reduced/halted income
	Use of network to see other opportunities
	Personal capacity to handle stress
	Optimism and family support

4.5 Reflexivity, positionality and Ethical considerations

In qualitative research, it is necessary to define the contextual intersecting relationship between the researcher and participant to enhance the credibility of the research output and help audience understand the research work in deeper context (Dodgson, 2019). Research works are confined within the certain time and space and interaction among certain number of people. This makes the entire research process and research findings contextual (Dodgson, 2019). This research is based

on semi-structured interviews among the Nepali migrant workers at GCC countries. As a researcher, myself being of same nationality as respondents and as most of the respondents of the research are within my personal contact, this may have influenced my assumptions and expectations prior, during or after data collection process. However, I have tried to be actively neutral in the process and have tried to remain as a mere instrument of data collection. I have been careful to avoid the biases due to personal connections, prior assumptions and personal expectations.

It is also important to define the position of the researcher in the research process to enhance the credibility of the study (Berger, 2015) talks about the position of researcher either as insider or outsider regarding sharing experiences with the participants to define differences and similarities among researcher and participants. I am both insider and outsider to the research process. I am an insider in the sense, most of the respondents are selected among my personal connection and share same nationality, language, culture and other social domains. However, I also belong to outsider category as we have been residing in different parts of the world and differ regarding profession, way of life or income status. As an insider I can internalize the experiences of typical Nepali migrant workers in the GCC which has helped the interpretation of experiences in quiet holistic manner. However, as an outsider to the GCC countries, it helped me to reflect the experiences of participants during COVID 19 crisis without prior assumptions.

Social researcher has ample ethical obligations towards the study population and larger society. Among various ethical concerns, the voluntary participation of the research subjects and informed consent about the research topic, potential risks and use of the research findings, remains the prime issue (Berg, 2001). I have been very careful in informing the potential respondents the nature of research and use of the research findings. I also proceeded towards organizing the interview only after the potential respondents were ready to be the part of interview. Other ethical concerns in qualitative research include maintaining privacy, confidentiality and ensuring the anonymity of the research participants (Hay, 2000). The actual identity of the respondent is nowhere revealed in the entire research process. The interview transcriptions were numbered, and names of the respondents were completely erased. Furthermore, all the private and personal information obtained from the interview were treated and processed with maximum confidentiality. Added, I

have obtained permission from the concerned Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) to proceed with data collection and processing under the applicable Norwegian data laws.

CHAPTER 5

IMPACT OF COVID 19 PANDEMIC AND COPING MECHANISMS OF NEPALESE MIGRANT WORKERS IN GCC

To explore the impacts of COVID 19 on labor migrants in Gulf, I interviewed the 3 different categories of migrant workers, (i) those who decided to stay at the destination during the COVID 19 crisis; (iii) those who returned to origin amid the crisis and (iii) those who re-migrated to another destination. Semi structured questionnaire was prepared targeting three different categories to conduct in-depth interviews. The interviews were conducted virtually using the online platforms including Zoom and social media platforms like Facebook messenger, WhatsApp, Viber and Imo. 15 interviews were conducted in total - 5 from each category to understand the situation of migrant workers in Gulf countries and understand the challenges they face during the pandemic and its impact.

The findings suggest that the impacts were similar for all three categories of migrant workers. However, the perception of the impact and ability to cope up with impacts differs among the categories which induce the migration decision among the migrants. In this chapter, first, I describe the various impacts of COVID 19 and coping mechanisms for the impact among the Nepalese migrant workers in the GCC.

5.1. Economic impact of COVID 19 pandemic on migrant workers and coping mechanisms

Regarding the migrant workers, the most severe impact was on the economic front. The wave of COVID 19 pandemic slowed down the global economy, in some cases halted the economic growth or even reversed the growth. This had impact on the creation of job opportunities or even loss of existing job opportunities. The major motive of Nepali migrant workers at the GCC countries is the better income prospect and employment opportunities. With the decrease in economic activities the migrant workers remained the prime sufferers of the pandemic.

The common impact among the migrant workers is getting laid off from the job, reduced working hours, reduction in payroll, delayed payment as well as increased expenses to meet the daily needs.

Most of the respondents experienced some sort of reduction in the income and increased expenses, thereby reduced savings. Some of the migrants were entirely laid off from the job due to the complete lockdown amid the pandemic. Almost all the respondents reported the reduced working hours than initially mentioned in the employment agreement. Further, the delay in payment was common and payment for the reduced working hours were disbursed in many small installments making it difficult to manage finances even for the survival. One significant phenomenon observed is that employer companies were ready to release them from the fixed duration of employment contracts and free them to find opportunities elsewhere, which rarely happens in the GCC countries.

Those who were laid off from the job had no other alternative than looking for the other opportunities or returning home. Finding other opportunities was rather scarce and with the reducing savings to meet the daily expenses, some decided to return home amid the uncertainty on how long the impact of COVID 19 prevails on the job market. Some sought the opportunities in another country, and those who were successful remigrated to another destination countries. Most of these migrant workers at GCC are the only earning members of the family. With the halt in their income, it had severe consequences in the family back home. These migrants generally take loans to cover the migration cost to the GCC. With the reduced or halted income, the family had to go through the burden of paying pack such loans in one hand and in the other hand, with reduced remittance inflow it made them hard to meet basic family expenses.

The first response in the economic front to this crisis among the migrant workers was the use of the whatever savings they had managed to collect. However, those who had migrated shortly before the crisis suffered the most. One of the respondents mentioned:

> "*I had managed to collect a few savings working over two years. However, with the first wave of COVID 19, the company shut down and we were laid off from the job. I had to use entire savings for survival as I could not go back home as international travel was restricted and could not access the government repatriation flight.*"

With the reduced or halted income, most of them had to stop sending money home. Furthermore, some of the migrant workers had to incur debts. They borrowed money mostly from colleagues and friends. In some instances, they even had to ask the family back home to send the money as

they had no option left. Those who decided to stay used the money for survival and some even used those borrowed money to return home permanently amid the uncertainties in the resumption of normal working environment.

This sudden but severe economic impact induced migration decision among the workers at the GCC countries. Those who were staying for a long period of time and had managed to make a decent savings and some connections, decided to stay and used their network to find a new opportunity. Some with networks in other countries explored opportunities and even remigrated to another destination. However, the respondents stated remigration to another destination was rather scarce. Those with moderate or low savings and growing uncertain environment, decided to return home using the government repatriation flights and even on their own expenses.

5.2 Health impact of COVID 19 pandemic on the migrant workers and coping mechanisms

Several of my informants mentioned that they were tested positive with COVID 19 at the migration destination. The severity of impact on those who were tested positive were mixed as some mentioned that they had a very painful experience while some stated that they only had mild symptoms and got over the infection without much health-related difficulties.

Most of the respondents mentioned the lack of health-related protocols and health safety measures in the initial days of COVID 19 wave at the workplace. However, with the geometric increase in infection cases and strict governmental regulations in place, safety measures were in place, and they were provided with safety equipment and proper distancing provisions were followed at the workplace. Furthermore, it was reported that regarding the resident camps, the employers did not pay ample attention on adopting safety measures and equipment to cope up with the virus. In some cases, the camps were overcrowded with multiple workers accommodating in the single room leaving no ground for social distancing. The main stated problem was during the home isolation of the infected workers. As dorms were occupied by multiple workers, the isolation of the infected workers was very difficult.

Among those who were tested positive reported severe health impact including weak immune system, loss of appetite, severe weakness, fever, body aches, cold and boredom during the isolation. One of the respondents who had to get hospitalized after the infection mentioned:

> *"I tested positive for COVID 19. I was still working despite having some symptoms because I have a family of five to look after in Nepal. Being sick was not an option for me. Gradually I started feeling weak and my health condition was worsening. The manager asked me to take the test and result came out positive. I was admitted to the hospital with full supervision from medical professionals. The chest pain was so severe sometimes I thought I would not survive. But after few weeks, I started to feel better and recovered."*

The intensity of health-related difficulties was different among the infected workers, some had to get hospitalized whereas some recovered without severe symptoms in home isolation and did not have to sought strict medical supervision. Few migrant workers who decided to return home stated that the physical severity they had to experience after the infection has some role to take decision to return home. One respondent mentioned:

> *"The physical symptoms were so bad; I constantly had thought of not being able to recover and the idea of dying in a foreign land away from the family always haunted me. Then I decided it is better to go back home and stay with my family, at least I will be with my family in emergencies although I will have to struggle to meet income for the family and family also supported my decision."*

As we may see, this informant experienced the fear of not being able to see his family ever in the future, this triggered his mental wellbeing, which led him to the decision of moving back to the home country no matter how hard the situation got in the future. He had the motivation to conquer difficult in the future but the fear of not being with family was worse.

However, few migrants among those who decided to stay at destination or remigrated to another destination stated that the health facilities at the GCC countries are far better than Nepal and were hopeful if they get infected, they will get high quality health service which is not available in the home country.

5.3 Psychological impact of the COVID 19 among migrant workers and coping mechanisms

Apart from physical health, the impact on mental health and wellbeing has been a common phenomenon among the migrant workers since the first wave of COVID 19. The issues of sadness, anxiety and depression was repeatedly mentioned by the respondents. Those who were infected

with the virus and had to undergo strict isolation mentioned it was a very bitter experience to live in isolation within confined four walls for two weeks or even more until they tested negative. One of the respondents mentioned:

"I got infected with the virus twice. The first infection was before I got vaccinated. Although I was asymptomatic, the quarantine stay was difficult. Fourteen days with no physical interaction with people and in isolation was the hardest time of my life. I had nothing to do and nowhere to go. The food provided in quarantine was not as per my taste. COVID 19 did not make me physically unhealthy, but loneliness and isolation did affect my mental health. After that I got vaccinated, but to my surprise, I got infected again. This time as well I did not feel any symptoms. But the quarantine time was difficult and would never want to go through that again in my life."

As per the experience shared by the workers through interview, we can clear see that it was not just economic and health issue they had to deal with. The psychological impact that came along was no less. The struggle of staying alone in a foreign land with no family members, with uncertainty of life for infected people if they would make it alive was fearful. Feeling of loneliness, fear for health and future of family created a huge impact on the migration decision for the migrant workers.

The major factors to impact mental health during quarantine and isolation was uncertainties about how severe the symptoms are going to be, and loneliness induced by staying alone during the entire period of infection. The experience of not being with someone during illness and no one being able to console them physically was very stressful.

The Nepalese migrant workers at GCC countries are on the compulsion of sending money back home to meet their family's ends meet, make some savings and return home. The sudden loss of employment reduced earning and uncertainties of finding another employment or returning home due to travel restrictions were the sources of anxiety. Those who were laid off from the job without any further notice of resumption of duty were severely impacted. One of the respondents who returned back after the travel restriction mentioned:

"It was only six months I migrated to Saudi Arabia. The work was good. I was paying back the loan I incurred at home to cover the migration month by month. I had no money for myself. And suddenly COVID 19 happened, and I was noticed I was laid off from the job and I was free to search for another employment or return home. This news devasted me. I tried to find other opportunities, but it was fruitless. After a month I did not even have a penny either to buy food or pay rent, however my Nepalese friends over there helped me. I was insomniac all those times and depressed as all my hope to make some income was ruined. I returned with the money my family sent me taking loan to cover travel costs. After coming back to Nepal, I am constantly haunted by the fact I have to pay back loan and I am clueless how I would do that."

COVID 19 induced various problems on the mental health of the migrants – anxiety, panic and depression being the major ones. Some respondents even reported the abuse of alcohol and increased cigarette smoking as the response to the mental tension induced by the COVID 19 and following consequences. This was seen as a temporary coping mechanism among the few respondents. Furthermore, to cope up with the sadness or loneliness during isolation or quarantine, respondents mentioned that connecting with the family or relatives back home helped to some extent. The console they received from family that COVID 19 pandemic impacted everyone everywhere and there was nothing any individual can do to overcome its impacts helped them morally and emotionally to some extent. Some respondents also mentioned occupying themselves on social media and online games helped them to relieve from stress and panic temporarily.

5.4 Social impact of COVID 19 among migrant workers and coping mechanisms

The COVID 19 and subsequent lockdown has reorganized the social life of migrant workers in the destination. As workers were confined to their residences during the lockdown and subsequent restrictions for gathering and assembly, they could not meet their fellow countrymen and were restricted from organizing any other social programs including the joint celebration of festivals and special occasions like birthdays or anniversaries. Although they occasionally used online platforms, the charm of such celebrations was negligible. It was also observed that the efficiency of formal migrants' organizations including diaspora association called Non-Resident Nepalese Association was largely reduced and it was barely successful to show its presence. The COVID 19 restrictions reduced the social interactions.

The migrant workers who were staying at the GCC countries for quite some time were restricted from visiting back home due to travel restrictions. This hindered from travelling back home and meeting their spouses, parents and children which impacted their personal relationships. Some migrants missed some major family events back one. One of the respondents said:

> *"I became grandfather few months ago and I had saved all my vacation days to go back home around the time my grandchild was supposed to be born. COVID 19 restrictions did not let me travel. With the new member in family comes greater responsibility as I am the only earning member. I could not just quit my job to go to see him. Till today, I have not seen his face in person. There have been several Hindu rituals for him after his birth. I missed all of those, and it breaks my heart."*

This is just an example how COVID 19 restriction has impacted the family dynamics. The travel restriction also impacted the spouse relations as it increased the separation time among the partners. It was reported some migrant workers had to miss important events within family members like weddings and funerals.

The prolonged stay at the destination also increased their detachment from the community back home. The migrant workers frequently visit back home not only for the familial ties but also due to the social ties which revives and renew their social relationships and ensure they are missed out from the circle. The COVID 19 hindered them to renew such relationships as they could not travel back in their holidays either due to the travel restrictions or due to the fear, they could not travel back to destination on time in case they get infected at home country. One of the respondents mentioned:

> *"I have been living in Qatar for eight years and in every two years I visit back home for two months not only to reunite with family but also meet relatives, celebrate festivals and reunite with the people of my society and get updated about everything. I was saving my sick and casual leaves for two years to increase my vacation days so I could enjoy time with family and attend society gatherings and meet my community people. However, I was not able to travel, and my vacation days got wasted here in residential camp. Everyone including my family and community people got disappointed when I mentioned I was not able to visit home."*

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This shows the crucial but indirect impact of COVID 19 pandemic on the social dynamics of migrant workers. Among those who decided to return home due to the COVID 19 complications, few returnees reported them there was a social notion widespread which portrayed them as losers, incapable of making income and blamed for increased debt burden of the family. This resulted in unhealthy social relations and even increased the inferiority complex among the returnees, especially those who were in debts and were unable to repay them back. However, in case cases, the family came as a moral support and helped them to cope up with such social humility.

5.5 Chapter Summary

COVID 19 pandemic has a severe impact on the Nepalese migrant workers in the GCC countries. I have identified four types of impacts – economic impact, health impact, psychological impact and social impact. I have also analyzed the coping mechanisms adopted by the migrant workers. With the halt in economic activities and mobility restrictions due to COVID 19 lockdown, the migrant workers remained the prime sufferers in economic front. The major economic impacts being mass lay-offs, reduced working hours, reduction in payroll, delayed payment as well as increased expenses to meet the daily needs. Loss of job opportunity hampered not only the migrants at GCC but also their family back home as the remittance inflow to family largely decreased.

Regarding the health impact, those who were tested positive, some had to undergo severe health consequences, although some infected workers had just mild symptoms. However, lack of safety measures at the residential camps was reported. The overcrowd in the residential setting made it hard to self-isolate during the virus infection and increased the chances of infection among the migrants. On the psychological front, the issues of sadness, loneliness, depression and anxiety was common among the migrant workers due to the reduction in income and restriction on mobility. The migrants were unable to send money back home, which in most of the cases, family in Nepal are dependent on remittances, induced sadness and depressive feeling among the migrants. The restrictions on mobility, subsequently restricting gatherings and assembly, reorganized the social life of migrants in GCC. It impacted the festival celebrations and occasional social gatherings among the fellow migrants in the GCC countries. Another significant social impact was the detachment from the family as they can't go back home during vacations.

Migrant workers adopted a number of coping mechanisms against the impacts induced due to COVID 19. However, the coping mechanisms differed among individuals. Those who were laid off from their jobs started searching for alternative opportunities through their network either in GCC or beyond. With reduced savings and no income, some migrants decided to return back home. Those who stayed stopped sending remittance back home and reduced their expenses. To cope up with the health impacts, the migrants adopted the safety equipment and distancing rules. It was noted their expenses was increased due to increased expenditure in safety equipment. To cope up with the psychological impacts, they often talked with families back home virtually and get involved in online social platforms to interact with families and friends. Some also reported the increased use of alcohol or cigarettes for temporary relaxation from the depressive thoughts. Online virtual gatherings were the prime means to cope up with social impacts. Furthermore, they connected with each other through means of online games and social networking sites.

CHAPTER 6

ROLE OF MIGRATION NETWORK AND TRANSNATIONAL ACTIVITIES DURING COVID 19 PANDEMIC

The role of migration network is often discussed to induce the migration decision where people have personal ties and relationship among the immigrant population. Apart from socio, political, economic or cultural push and pull factors these networks have strong influence in migration decisions. Furthermore, these networks have strong role in creating transnational spaces and sustain various types of socio, economic, cultural and religious activities across national boundaries (Gariz & Asad, 2015; Blumenstock & Tan, 2016; Light, Bhachu, & Karageorgis, 1993). However, in this study I have tried to understand and analyze how the networks at the destination played a role to induce migration decision among already immigrant population in the time of hardships brought by pandemic either to return back to origin, stay at the destination or remigrate to another destination.

6.1 Role of Migration Network during COVID 19 pandemic

According to Gurak and Caces (1992), migrant networks act as a potent stimulus when deciding whether to migrate, who migrates, and when. Migrant networks are a set of interpersonal linkages that connect migrants, past migrants, and non-migrants in both the sending and receiving nodes of the migration system (Massey et al, 1993)

Nepalese people are noted to have intrinsically close social and communal bonding with strong emphasis to socio-cultural ties. With a large number of people having migrated to the GCC countries, the Nepalese communities are big in most of the GCC countries and migrants having ties with each other respective to common residence back home, family relationships, ethnic similarity, cultural or linguistic similarities among many other associating factors. All three categories of migrant workers interviewed for this study stated important role of migrant network at the destination to cope up with the hardships brought by COVID 19 pandemic and had impact to make migration decision at the destination.

Especially the new migrants and those with small income mentioned that the support they received from migrants at the destination helped deal with hardships brought by the pandemic. Those who

were staying at the GCC for longer period of time and have managed sizeable savings as well as good connections at the GCC countries helped the new migrants amid the pandemic. They were the primary source to lend money to other migrants at the time when income was halted due to the lay-offs, reduced working hours or reduction in payroll. This was most important coping mechanism among the migrants who decided to stay. One of the respondents mentioned:

> "*It was only a year I came to UAE and had almost no savings when I was laid off due to pandemic. At the company I work here, we are 10/15 people from the same or nearby villages in Nepal. I had aspirations of the whole family as I am the eldest son and have younger siblings, so there was no point of deciding to go back amid the hardships. I was able to survive for 5 months without job by lending the money from others here who has been working here since few years back.*"

The migrant network at destination had a prominent role to curb the economic hardships during the COVID 19 pandemic. As we can clearly identify by the experience shared by the respondent, the migration network played a huge role in helping the workers survive in Gulf even without any income. The strong community ties created an environment where one migrant could help other in need.

Furthermore, the Nepalese working in better positions in various companies in the GCC countries came as the source of information if there were any opportunities available during the hardship when many people were removed from the job. They helped their fellow countrymen either providing jobs at their company or referring them to the places they knew, and at least managed to provide jobs on part time basis or for few hours. However, many respondents stated that although some helped others in such manner, the lack of job opportunities and due to constant lay-offs everywhere, this kind of help was rather scarce.

The migrant circle at the destination remained as a strong social system for other fellow migrants in need. They were the source of moral, emotional and social support during the time of hardships. Respondents also reported in some instance they relocated in someone else's house when they were unable to afford for the housing rent. The migrant circle at destination provided with moral support during the time of stress and were there to console each other during the time of

uncertainties and hardships brought by the pandemic. One of the respondents who decided to stay at UAE stated:

> "I did not want to return back but it was hard to deal with stress and mental pressure. But Nepalese community were source of moral, financial and emotional support to cope up in such harsh times."

This social capital among the migrant workers and the availability of large diaspora community played important role to reduce the insecurities and difficulties induced by the COVID 19 pandemic and acted as a proximate support system.

The migration network at destination had an important role to incur the migration decision. Those who had good inter-personal relationship with other migrants and close to the diaspora organizations like Non-Resident Nepalese Association (NRN) and other home-based associations had comparatively higher tendency to stay at the destination as they received support to cope with the hardships. The home-based associations among the migrants in the GCC countries provided various sorts of support to the migrants in need, ranging from financial support, communication with the Nepalese embassy at the destination and act as a bridge between Nepalese authority, respective country's administration and the migrant workers at the destination countries.

Furthermore, the migrants with extended inter-personal network with Nepalese in other countries beyond their destination countries in GCC, helped them to explore opportunities in other countries too. One of the respondents reported:

> "My working hours were largely reduced due to COVID 19 restrictions. I started looking for opportunities in other countries within my friends and relative circle. Fortunately, I was informed about a job at my friend's company and applied for it. I got migrated to Cyprus from Qatar within 2 months."

Few of them were lucky enough to re-migrate to another destination from the original destination country. These inter-personal network in other countries helped them to gain information about the opportunities as well as practicalities in the migration process. Furthermore, it helped them to adopt to the new country with the help of their friends and relatives over there.

6.2 Migration transnationalism and transnational practices during COVID 19

The linkage between society of origin and destination through an array of relation and interpersonal ties within the family, social, economic and cultural domains across the international borders creates a new form of social platform for various social actions (Foner, 1997; Portes, Guarnizo, & Landolt, 1999). Furthermore, these linkages among the migrants and people back home at both individual and institutional level shapes the living condition of migrants abroad (Kalir, 2005). Generally, migration studies analyze how migrants influence the non-migrants within the transnational social sphere. However, I have tried to analyze what sort of transnational support are exerted by the non-migrants to the migrants abroad during the time of crisis, especially in the case of COVID 19.

The moral and emotional support from the non-migrants back home was significantly reported to cope with the psychological impact of the crisis. While being stranded in a foreign land at the time of pandemic and uncertainties of life and death, the family, relatives and friends back home came as a support system to reduce the stress and stop the depressive thoughts. One of the respondents mentioned:

> *"Things were very depressive during the lockdown at the first wave of COVID 19. Everyone was scared if they would get infected and having nothing to do whole day and night except being idle, different kinds of thoughts surrounded regarding uncertainties in income and virus infection. I constantly used to talk with family and friends back home. They provided motivation and helped to reduce depressive thoughts."*

Within the transnational social sphere, the migrant network as a factor to induce migration decision among the non-migrants and their role as an information and support provider during the initial phase of migration is often accounted. However, the pandemic signaled reverse flow of emotional and moral support to cope up with the crisis among the migrants.

Historically the flow of remittance from the migrants to the non-migrants at the destination has been an important domain of transnational activity that binds the two groups together. However, during the crisis brought by COVID 19, the reverse flow of money was reported. In cases where migrants were stranded in the GCC countries without money to return back, the families and

friends from Nepal sent them money so they could return back home safe. This signals the reverse form of transnational activities which surfaced during the time of COVID 19. Furthermore, those who returned back due to the crisis, the network back home, ranging from family members, kith and kins, relatives, friends, local community, local youth and cultural clubs helped them to cope up with inferiority feeling of returning back within income and helped them to rehabilitate them into the society again.

Apart from the enhancement of coping mechanism and psychological support, the network back home had role to induce migration decision among the already migrant workers. Some migrant workers used the network back home to look for opportunities in another destination and remigrate to another destination. One of the respondents mentioned:

> *"I told my family that I wanted to come back home as I was laid off from the job and there was uncertainty about resumption of job or possibility of finding another community. My maternal uncle introduced me to another person in Bahrain and helped me to find opportunity here and I decided to remigrate to Bahrain."*

Often the migrants attract the non-migrants to the destination. However, pandemic helped the migrants use their network back home to remigrate to another destination. However, in some cases the support and consolation from the family members back home strengthened them to stay at the destination amid the hardship and wait for the impact of crisis to reduce and get back to normal routine job. In the meantime, those who returned back stated that the family and relatives' pressure back home to return back and be close with family in the time of global crisis influenced them to return back home during the pandemic crisis.

The Nepal government organized some repatriation flights from the GCC countries to bring back stranded and migrants in need. This was also facilitated by the diaspora association, mainly NRN Association. This also influenced some migrants to make decision to return back, although they had no plans to return back in normal case. It was also reported some repatriation flights by Indian government also allowed to carry back Nepali migrants inducing migration decision among them and showing the role of neighboring government in transnational sphere.

6.3 Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have analyzed how the network of migrants at the GCC countries influence migration decision among the workers at GCC either to return back home, stay at the destination or remigrate to another destination during the time of COVID 19 crisis. With a large diaspora community in GCC countries, Nepalese migrants has comparatively larger immigrant network and association in the GCC countries.

Migrant networks at the destination came as a support system to cope up with the hardships brought by COVID 19 pandemic. Especially the new migrants received financial support from the migrants who has been staying at the GCC countries for a long period of time and managed to have some savings. This helped them to cope up with the economic hardships. Furthermore, the Nepalese people in higher level positions tried to find opportunities and refer fellow Nepalese who had lost the job opportunities. Migrant networks were also source of moral, emotional and social support during the time of hardships.

Migrant networks in the GCC also induced the migration and return decisions among the workers. Those who had strong connection within the Nepalese diaspora community in the GCC tend to stay at the destination or remigrate to another Gulf destination acquiring from the networks support and information about opportunities in other countries in the region. Those who did not have strong connection among the migrant circle in the GCC, tend to return back home during COVID 19 crisis.

In this chapter, I also tried to analyze the support exerted by non-migrants at the place of origin to the migrants at the GCC countries within the transnational social sphere, to understand the role of such support to cope up with the hardships brought by COVID 19 among the migrant workers. This is to understand the reverse flow of support from origin to destination. The moral and emotional support exerted by the family and friends back home was identified as the prominent psychological support system. One of the major transnational activities in normal times is the flow of remittance from GCC countries to the origin. However, during pandemic, when migrants were stranded at GCC without any savings or income, the family back home came as the financial support system, to send money to the migrants at GCC for fulfilling the daily needs or for the travel expenses to return home if they decide to do so. Furthermore, the non-migrants at the origin also had role to induce migration decision among the migrants. Some migrants used the network back

home, to connect with people and find another opportunity in GCC or beyond and remigrate to another destination amid the COVID 19 pandemic.

CHAPTER 7

MOTIVATIONS FOR MIGRATION DECISION AND CONSERVATION OF RESOURCE DURING COVID 19

The scholarly work on analysis on migration decision from origin to destination through motivational approach is not a new field of research in migration studies. Different theoretical approaches have been developed to understand this phenomenon. Sell & Dejong (1978) define migration decision as multiplicative interaction of four different attributes of motivation – availability, motive, expectancy and incentive. These attributes represent personal dispositions, environmental factors, and person-environmental interactions resulting in migration decision as a rational change in instrumental behavior (Sell & Dejong, 1978).

7.1 Motivational epoch to migration decision during COVID 19

In this section, I have tried to analyze to applicability of Sell & Dejong's theory in context of inducing migration decision to return back to the home country, remigrate to the third destination or stay at the destination i.e., the GCC countries, among the migrant workers at the GCC countries during the COVID 19 crisis.

The first component of Sell & Dejong's theory is the *availability* which signals the conditions under which migration choices or decisions are either physically or cognitively impossible for the decision maker (Sell & Dejong, 1978, p. 323). Regarding the migrant workers at GCC during the COVID 19 pandemic, a clear behavioral pattern of Sell & Dejong's theory is implicit. Sell & Dejong (1978) mentions two hypotheses for this component – first, the migration is not physically possible for some people, or they might have never analyzed the pros and cons related to the migration decision (Sell & Dejong, 1978). Both patterns are visible among the migrants at GCC, during the strict lock down phase of COVID 19 restrictions, returning back either to the home or re-migrating to another destination was physically restricted as international flights were cancelled and physical movement of people were largely controlled. Although, Nepal government launched repatriation flights from the Gulf countries, those who missed the scheduled flights remained stranded. However, most of the migrants have analyzed the pros and cons of taking decisions either returning back, staying at destination among the hardship or remigrating to another destination. Sell & Dejong's second hypothesis states for some people the availability of staying at current

location simply does not exist and migration decision is compulsion rather than a choice (Sell & Dejong, 1978). For most of those who returned back home or remigrated to another destination this hypothesis holds partly true. Those who returned back, they simply had no choice rather than returning as they could not find job opportunities or had no strong network to remigrate to another destination. Returning back on repatriation flights symbolizes a compulsion for them. However, among those who remigrated, they had choice of staying, returning back or remigrating to destination, showing partly applicability of Sell and Dejong's hypothesis.

Next component on Sell and Dejong's motivational theory to induce migration decision is the *motive*. It is suggested that migration decision is induced by the goals individuals carry from one place to another (Atkinson, 1964; Sell & Dejong, 1978). This factor of goal attainment induces the migration behavior. The motives of the goal attainment among the migrant workers in the GCC can be analyzed as an important factor to induce migration decision amid the hardships brought by the pandemic. Those who decided to stay at the original GCC destination or remigrated to another destination, a common pattern is their economic motive. The goal of earning money rather than returning back played a significant role to induce such migration decision. However, those who decided to return back, they pursued motives of family ties or the community ties. For them, economic factor played a major role to induce decision of returning back as it was more important for them to be with the family and living among the people of own society and being in their own country while the whole world was in the state of panic and uncertainties. One of the respondents mentioned:

> "*Life was uncertain. Although I was there at GCC to earn money, in such a historic crisis and uncertainties about life, I did not want to stay in foreign land but to be with my family, on my own country. So, I returned back.*"

The third factor in the Sell and Dejong's motivational theory is the *expectation*. They state the anticipation of certain goal attainment induces the migration behavior although the degree of anticipation differs among the individual. They argue the anticipation of better job prospect may induce migration behavior among individuals, but in particular situations individuals may have lower anticipation that migration actually leads to the better job (Sell & Dejong, 1978). Through this lens, among the GCC workers, expectation of better earnings prospect which was ruined due

to the lay off or reduced working hour in the original destination, induced decision among the migrant workers in GCC to remigrate to another destination. In another context, the expectation of plunge in COVID 19 crisis and resumption of economic activities, so they could go back to the previous jobs compelled some to decide to stay at the initial destination among the hardships. The anticipation of income prospects after the COVID 19 crisis decreases was one of the factors that lead to the decision of not returning back. However, among the returnee migrants, the unfulfillment of initial expectation of better income prospect at the GCC due to the COVID 19 crisis induced the decision of returning back. Here it can be claimed that both expectations and failure to meet expectations can lead to migration decision. However, it is also observed what an individual anticipates in a particular situation entirely differs from individual to individual.

The final component in Sell and Dejong's motivational theory of migration decision is *incentive*. In their model, it is argued the conceived outcome of a certain decision is fundamental to induce a particular behavior. The perception of certain outcome related to migration either encourages or discourages migration decision (Sell & Dejong, 1978). From this angle, the perception of certain outcomes related to migration decision either encouraged or discouraged the migrant workers to take or not take migration decisions at the destination GCC countries. It is often argued that in case of labor migration, economic incentives are prime factors for migration decision (Sphere, 1974; Rutman, 1970). Those who decided to remigrate to another destination, economic incentive accelerated by prospect of job availability at another destination played a role. However, the cost of migration for some came as a disincentive. Sociological factors are cited as another group of incentives or disincentives (Uhlenberg, 1973; Johnston, , 1971). Those who returned back their migration decision were influenced by socio-cultural ties back home and their anticipation of utility of being with the family and community during the time of global crisis. In another front, the disincentive of anticipation of no immediate opening of job markets and resumption of earning opportunity compelled them to decide to return back home during the COVID 19 crisis.

However, these factors were not stand alone to induce the migration decision or stay at destination during the COVID 19 crisis. As Sell and Dejong mentions there is multiplicative interaction to induce migration behavior. This study also observed that all four factors are overlapping and interaction among these factors induce migration behavior. For instance, those who decided to remigrate to another destination had expectation of job availability at another destination, incentive

of better income prospect, motive of earning at any cost rather than returning back and it was physically possible to remigrate to another destination. In another case, those who returned back, the unavailability of jobs, disincentive of reduced or halted income, motive of being with family back home during the time of global crisis rather than staying at destination and other associated factors combinedly induced migration decision to return back. This suggests the components in Sell and Dejong's model is not mutually exclusive but interrelated to induce motivation for migration behavior.

COVID 19 induced the remigration of some migrant worker to another destination within the GCC or beyond. This pattern is not new regarding the Nepalese migrant workers at GCC. Paul (2011) and Valenta (2020) also concludes serial migrations and country changes are not so uncommon among migrants in the GCC. However, pandemic seems to exaggerate remigration as a coping mechanism among the migrant workers at the GCC.

Valenta (2020) states recurrent migration as a strategy to search for better working conditions. However, during COVID 19 pandemic, when workers were laid off, emigration to another country is one of the coping mechanisms against the loss of job opportunity and reduced savings. Further, Valenta (2020) argues resources the migrant had acquired directs the remigration pathway. In line with his findings, during COVID 19 hardships, those who stayed longer, who had a good network pool and had some savings to cover remigration cost were able to seek opportunities in another destination and remigrate. Valenta (2020) also states situation back in home country including war demotivates them to get back to home country. However, during COVID 19 it has been found that feeling of humiliation if they return back without income, burden to look after their family and compulsion to payback debt they have incurred for migration cost compelled they either to stay or remigrate during COVID 19 hardships, even though they wanted to return back.

7.2 Stress, Resource Conservation and Migration Decision

In the initial psychological theory of conservation of resources, Hobfoll (1989) models the interplay between stress and resource conservation. He states during the time of crisis, individuals tend to minimize the net loss of resources. However, when individual is not confronted with stress, they tend to develop resources surplus in order to reduce future loss of resources. He tends to theorize how stress is directly proportional to status of resource acquisition. His major argument

lies in the fact that in long course individual tend to conserve the resources and create resource surplus for future use. The status of resource, the loss of resources or acquisition of surplus resources result in stress or eustress in an individual. However, in the area of migration research, the stress as a driving factor for migration decision is rarely prioritized. Here, I have tried to analyze how the net loss of resources during the COVID 19 pandemic and following crisis situation induce stress among the migrant workers at GCC resulted and how it influenced the migration decision among the migrant workers either to remigrate to another destination, stay at initial destination or return back home. This is the extension of Hobfoll's initial model to analyze the interplay between net loss of resources, stress and migration decision among the migrant workers at GCC countries at the time of COVID 19 pandemic.

In original model of resource conservation, Hobfoll identifies four types of resources, whose gain or loss may result in stress or eustress. The first kind is *object* resources, whose acquisition may lead to stress resistance (Hobfoll, 1989, p. 517). Object resources in this case are the physical resources and has materialistic value and are linked to individual's socioeconomic status. Those migrant workers who were staying at GCC countries for a long period of time and managed to send back home a decent amount of savings, or had managed to buy or built house back, or buy a plot of land back home and had some savings to survive at the destination GCC countries experienced the stress at a lower level then newly immigrated individual. And this influenced their migration behavior. Those who had acquired considerable amount of object resources with lower level of stress, tend to either stay at destination until situation gets normal or remigrate to another destination incurring the migration cost from their savings. However, the newcomers or those who had not been able to acquire the object resources and had no savings either to sustain at destination or incur the migration cost to another destination, the stress level was considerably higher which induced the decision to get back during the time of COVID 19 crisis. One of the respondents mentioned:

> "*I have been living in Qatar for 8 years now. With the pandemic, like everyone else, I faced severe impacts. However, my long stay in Qatar has gained me with good exposure and experience and I have managed to make decent saving and possess some property back home. So, I would say I have been less impacted by the pandemic compared to the ones who just arrived here.*"

The second category of resource in Hobfall's model is the *conditions*. Conditions represent the values or standards gained and he argues this is related to the stress resistance potential of an individual. These resources include anything from marriage, seniority, position, network, income level. However, it depends how an individual values this sort of resources which induces different stress level among individual with similar level of resource. This pattern was visible among the migrant workers at the GCC. The stress was gradually lower among individuals who was staying at the GCC for a longer period of time, were working in senior level positions and had managed to establish a good network in the GCC countries. These workers tried to capitalize these resources to find another job or remigrate to another country in senior level positions. The migrants with higher level of these resources had higher stress resistance capacity and lower tendency to return back to home country. However, those with lower level of these resources had higher stress induced and lower resistance capacity which compelled them to return back to the home country. While mentioning about the stress and conditions, one of the respondents mentioned:

> *"I had been working as the kitchen helper for a year in the UAE. I was making decent income until the pandemic took my job away. This happened while I was still trying to adjust in the UAE and my network over here had not widened enough. I had no savings and no strong connection with the networks to help me to find a new job. The situation was too stressful for me, hence, I decided to return back to Nepal."*

Another category of resources in Hobfoll's model is the *Personal Characteristics*. This resource includes the individual's traits towards the stress handling. This means how a person sees the world and incident and how he perceives about it determine the stress he inherits from the particular situation. Based on his personal attitude and aid mechanisms, the interpretation of the world events at the personal level, acts as an aid for stress resistance or induces higher stress level. This is the capacity of an individual to situate oneself in the positive sense of self and tendency to master stressful circumstances (Cohen & Wills, 1985). The migrant workers' perception of COVID 19 situation was detrimental to determine the stress level on an individual and its impact on migration decision. However, this individual tendency was determined by several other attributes like income level, level of savings, economic condition back home, their social position either in destination or back home among others. Those who decided to stay perceived the COVID 19 crisis as a temporary one and had confidence things would turn out to be normal after certain time period.

However, those who returned back, perceived the situation more severe than others and had lower stress resistance capacity based on their personal characteristics and it played a role to induce decision to return back. One of the respondents mentioned:

> *"I moved to Saudi Arabia 9 months back to work as a Waiter. But immediately after I moved, the cases of COVID 19 cases started rising, I lost my job. I had the option to stay there and wait till the crisis gets over and start the job again but the uncertainty about the magnitude of crisis induced severe fear on me. My family also were scared for my survival in Saudi Arabia with no savings. Hence, I made the decision to return back."*

The final category of resources in Hobfoll's resource conservation model is the *energies*. Primarily this resource is generated by individual's time, money and knowledge. This resource plays an important role in acquisition of other kind of resources and strengthens individual's stress handling capacity (Hobfoll, 1989). Wellman (1981) notes that large social network becomes important when information is required from diverse sources, for instance, information and contacts for availing employment opportunities. Those who were staying at the GCC countries for a longer period of time had savings, means they had money to acquire the object resources, for instances paying rents for the unemployed period, being able to afford the food items and other basic necessity items. And at the same time the common pattern among migrants is that those who have been staying at the longer period of time has larger networks either at the destination or in other GCC countries. And backed up by these resources, their personal perception towards severity of the COVID 19 comparatively lesser, illustrating their higher stress resistance capacity. This group was identified to make comparatively fewer migration decision to return home. One of the respondents mentioned:

> *"I worked in Qatar for 5 years as a driver. When I was laid off from the job during COVID 19, I used my connections and networks to find another job. I consulted friends in Qatar and other Gulf countries and one of my friends recommended me as an experienced driver in Saudi Arabia. I got the job and moved to Saudi Arabia."*

However, the newcomers and those who were not able to make decent saving or networks had lower stress handling capacity and had higher instances of making migration decision to return back home. The stress induced by net loss of resources was much higher in the latter group.

The analysis based on Hobfall's resource conservation model signifies that the net loss in resources and the stress among the migrant workers were detrimental in inducing migration decision either returning back home, staying at the destination or remigrating to another destination. The capacity to minimize the net loss of resources depended on the resource pool they possess in aspect of object resources, values or standards gained, personal characteristics or the time, money or knowledge to avail other resources. The migrants during crisis adopted a number of strategies to reduce net loss of aforementioned resources. The common strategies were shifting to the places with lower rent, or renting an apartment with higher number of people, reducing or cutting off expenses in food or skipping the meal, complete reduction in recreational expenses and not sending the remittances back home, to reduce net loss in object resources. They also tend to use their network to gain the information about other employment opportunity either in GCC or other countries. Other strategies included staying positive distracting oneself from the COVID 19 news related to casualties, watching movies, talking family back home frequently and remain occupied in online games among others. However, these strategies, for the people who returned back, was only helpful for a certain extent and was not enough to enhance the stress handling capacity, finally inducing the decision to return back.

7.3 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I used the theoretical heritage of Sell and Dejong (1978) motivational theory of migration decision to analyze the factors that induce migration decision among the migrant workers at GCC either to stay at destination, remigrate to another destination or return back home during COVID 19 pandemic. Although Sell and Dejong have theorized motivations for migrating from origin to destination, I have extended analysis based on this theory to understand motivations among the already migrant workers at GCC to incur migration decision. Migration decisions are induced by the multiplicative interaction of four attributes – *availability, motive, expectancy and incentive.*

Regarding *availability* component, the restrictions on travel during the pandemic hindered some migrants to take migration decision although they wanted to return back home. Furthermore, it was compulsion for some migrants to return home or remigrate to another destination, as it was not possible to sustain at destination due to financial, social or psychological impact. Second component to induce migration decision is the *motive* or goal attainment. Those who decided to

stay at the original GCC destination or remigrated to another destination, a common pattern is their economic motive. The goal of earning money rather than returning back played a significant role to induce such migration decision. However, those who decided to return back, they pursued motives of family ties or the community ties. For them, rather than economic factor, being close to the family and living among the people of own society and being at their own country while the whole world was in the state of panic and uncertainties, played a major role to induce decision of returning back. The third component in Sell and Dejong's model is *expectation*. The ruin in the expectation of better earning prospect induced migration decision among the migrants who chose option to return back or remigrate. The expectation of plunge in COVID 19 crisis and resumption of economic activities, so they could go back to the previous jobs compelled some to decide to stay at the initial destination among the hardships. The final motivational factor is the incentive. Those who decided to remigrate to another destination, economic incentive accelerated by prospect of job availability at another destination played a role. However, the cost of migration for some came as a disincentive. However, the individual components were not stand alone, and the multiplicative interaction of all these factors induced the migration among the Nepalese migrant workers at GCC.

In the second part of this chapter, I analyzed how the interplay among resource conservation and stress induced migration among the migrant workers at the GCC. I used the theoretical heritage of Hobfoll's Conservation of Resources theory for the analysis. In this model, Hobfall (1989) states the four kinds of resources whose gain or loss may result in stress – *object resources, conditions, personal characteristics and energies*. Regarding the *object resources*, among the migrant workers who have been living in the GCC countries for a considerable period of time and acquired object resources like decent saving, good flat or apartment among others induced less stress due to COVID 19 hardship and had lower intention of taking migration decisions. However, those with fewer object resources and higher level of stress decided either to return back home or remigrate to another destination.

Regarding another resource category – *conditions*, the stress was gradually lower among individuals who was staying at the GCC for a longer period of time, were working in senior level positions and had managed to establish a good network in the GCC countries. The migrants with higher level of these resources had higher stress resistance capacity and lower tendency to return

back to home country. Another category of resource in Hobfoll's model is *personal characteristics*, this is related to the personal perception of certain incidents that devise stress level in an individual. Those who perceived COVID 19 crisis as a temporary one and believed things will get back to normal, decided to stay at the destination. However, who returned back perceived the situation more severe than others and had lower stress resistance capacity. The final component in Hobfoll's theory is *energies*. The common pattern among migrants is that those who have been staying for longer period of time has larger networks either at the destination or in other GCC countries. And backed up by these resources, their personal perception towards severity of the COVID 19 was comparatively lesser, illustrating their higher stress resistance capacity. However, the stress induced by net loss of resources was much higher among newcomers and those without good savings, thereby lower stress handling capacity and had higher instances of making migration decision to return back home. This analysis signifies that the net loss in resources and the stress among the migrant workers were detrimental in inducing migration decision either returning back home, staying at the destination or remigrating to another receiving country.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

This research was conducted with the motive of understanding the challenges migrant workers had to face and their coping mechanisms amid the COVID 19 pandemic. This study also intended to understand the role of migrant workers network and transnational activities during the period of COVID 19 crisis. Furthermore, the study analyzed the motivational factors to induce the migration decision at the destination among the Nepalese migrant workers to remigrate to another destination, return home or stay at destination amid the crisis. The pandemic that started towards the end of 2019 changed the world dynamics- disrupting world economy and affecting the people from all over. Stocks, finance, industries went into huge losses with even the giant corporations around the world facing a challenge to stay in business. Overall, all the business sectors suffered huge crisis leading to negative impact on opportunities in fronts.

Millions of migrant workers from the Indian subcontinent reside in the oil rich Gulf countries, their number has increases over the years as millions of new faces migrate every year for job opportunities and better life prospects. Mostly, it's the unskilled and semi-skilled workers who migrate to Gulf. The poor economic condition of their country and low job opportunities for unskilled people leaves the workers with no choice than to migrate to Gulf. In the same story, every year thousands of Nepalese migrate to the GCC countries. These unskilled and semi-skilled workers are found working mostly in construction sectors with majority of them being male members who take upon the difficult journey as they have the responsibility to take care of their family back home. In most cases, they also are the sole bread winner of the family.

As the world suffered the ripple effects of the pandemic, the migrant workers were no exception to it as had to face a lot of challenges and hardships in the Gulf. Previous studies and literatures were reviewed to understand the basic concept and identify the challenges that were to be presented in the form of research questions. The impact of COVID 19 and the coping mechanism by the migrant workers were identified in the beginning. I also tried to understand the motivational factors for the migrant workers that helped them to incur the migration decision of staying to Gulf, returning back to the home country or even re migrating to some other countries amid COVID 19.

With this study, I also looked upon how the migrant workers minimize the net loss of resources and also manage stress during the pandemic. The emphasis was also on its role in inducing migration decisions.

Qualitative method of research was used in this research. Firstly, the primary data collection was collected where I interviewed 15 respondents. The participants were first identified through personal contacts using purposive sampling method. Under the purposive sampling, I further identified the samples using convenience and judgmental sampling. I had divided the respondents into 3 different categories i.e., people who stayed in Gulf, who returned back and those who re migrated to other countries. Hence, Furthermore, for the identification of proper respondents who could meet the objectives of my research, I used criterion sampling method.

All the primary data were collected through interview. The semi structured questionnaire was prepared, and the interviews were conducted on the basis of the categories the respondents were identified. Moreover, along with the primary data, this study has also been dependent on the secondary data collection method. The news articles, journals, research papers, government reports were collected and reviewed in depth. Secondary data helped in understanding the challenges and impact of COVID 19 on labor migrants in addition to the interview details. Furthermore, secondary data collection method also created a base to set up of questionnaire for interview.

Furthermore, migration theory was identified as the first theoretical domain that established the background and analytical context of this study. I incorporated Migration Network Theory as a guide to understand the role of migration network to overcome emotional, social and moral support to during crisis along with the coping mechanisms. In addition, I also referred to the theories of transnationalism to explore the role of the cross-boundary networks and social relations in migrants' decisions.

Since my study focuses on the motivational and psychological hardship faced by the COVID 19 pandemic, I attempted to use Motivational Theory of Migration Decisions as devised by Sell and Dejong. The migration decision in motivational approach is classified in four attributes i.e., availability, motive, expectancy, and incentive. Availability refers to a person's ability to adopt a migratory decision, either mentally or physically. Motive classifies as the intention of achieving certain goal. Motive signifies the 'goal attainment' factor in migration decision making.

Expectancy of achieving certain goal creates a roadmap for migration decision. Migration decision may not guarantee goal attainment. However, the expectancy of goal attainment implicates in making migration decision. Finally, Incentive signifies the additional benefits to migration decisions. The benefit can be economical, social, or psychological.

In addition to the Motivational Theory of migration, I also analyzed my study with Conservation of Resource Theory. This theory helped in identifying that the individuals conserve current resource with a goal of acquiring further resources. This theory was used to investigate how the COVID 19 pandemic affected the migrant workers' resources, as well as how it hinders their incentive to stay and the development of coping mechanisms.

Using the framework and following set research methodology created a roadmap for general findings and discussion based on the findings. Some challenges faced by all the participants were similar in many cases. All the respondents faced similar economic hardship with the pandemic. Some of the common impact mentioned are lay-off from the job, reduced working hours, reduction in payroll, delayed payment as well as increased expenses to meet the daily needs. Many lost their jobs, and some were laid off. Some people decided to return back home after being laid off or fired, however some decided to stay and look for new job opportunities. Some people with good network also had the opportunity to re migrate to other countries for better opportunities. Since most of the migrant workers are the sole bread winners for their family, the economic hardship came with the cost of a compromising life not only for them but for their family members as well. No saving and lack of job opportunities back home seemed to be fearful for them and their family's future.

Migrant workers suffered health impacts as well. The lack of health protocol being followed in the initial days of the pandemic lead to high rate of infection among migrant workers. But with government regulation and proper policy, it was controlled. Several respondents tested positive for COVID 19. Some had severe health impact with the virus and were hospitalized. Whereas some had mild symptoms and recovered on their own. The severely infected respondents faced weak immune system, loss of appetite, severe weakness, fever, body aches, cold. But they believe, the proper health care system in Gulf helped them recover. However, lack of social distancing in the resident camps with no proper management by the employers made the situation scary for the

workers. Hence, the fear for the health and not being with the family during hard times made few of the respondents decide on moving back home to their family.

Migrant workers not only suffered health impact, but they went through psychological impact as well. The impact on migrants' mental health and well being amid the pandemic lead them go through depression, anxiety and feeling of loneliness. The ones who were infected were compelled to go through strict isolation that made them even more depressed. The fear of being sick in a foreign land and the thought of not getting to see the family members was itself scary for them. The major factors to impact mental health during quarantine and isolation was uncertainties about how severe the symptoms are going to be, and loneliness induced by staying alone during the entire period of infection.

Moreover, the stress of not being able to send money home to family created anxiety in them and those who were laid off from the job without any further notice of resumption of duty were severely impacted. The responsibility to fulfill the basic need of family members during the pandemic with no job and income in a foreign land was very stressful for the workers. This lead for some respondents to take the help of alcohol and cigarette to deal with the stress. However, the family members were supportive enough to understand the situation the whole world was facing as they consoled the workers and motivated to deal with the situation. Some respondents distracted their mind off the crisis of pandemic through internet, social media and online games.

The social life of migrant workers in Gulf was also hindered by the COVID 19 pandemic. In a foreign land, where people depend on the fellow Nepalese for moral support, the restriction in mini gatherings and events made them feel lonely. For some migrant workers, the social life back home was equally affected. They save their vacation to go back and bond with their friends and families. However, with COVID 19 and travel restrictions, the saved vacation was spent in a resident camp and leading to disappointment among the workers. These findings are summarized in table 6. 4

Table 6. Impacts of COVID 19 on migrant workers

Economic Impact	Health Impact	Social Impact	Psychological Impact
Unemployment	Weakness	Reduced social gathering leading to boredom	Unstable mental health condition/ Depressed state of mind

Reduced Working Hours	Loss of Appetite	Social isolation and a sense of loneliness	Disturbed communication and anxiety
Declined Earning	Compromised Immune System	Disturbed Communication	Distraction and restlessness
Late/delated pay checks	Risk of recurring infection	Increased Consumption of alcohol and tobacco	Yearning for home and family members

With these impacts caused by the pandemic, the role of migrant networks was of some comfort to the migrant workers as their social ties helped them recover from the impacts of the pandemic. The migrants mostly have ties with each other on the basis of family relations, ethnic similarity, cultural and linguistic similarities. This creates a strong bond among them at the destination nation. The networks helped them land a new job or even relocate to some other countries. The basic day to day help during the pandemic was provided through the network. In addition, job recommendations and financial support on the basis of loans had a huge positive impact on the unskilled and semi-skilled workers in the Gulf. The network also helped them communicate to the government and manage flights for the stranded workers who wanted to return back home amid the pandemic.

The transnational practices also contributed to coping up with the pandemic. The study identified the reverse transnational activities from the origin to destination countries. The extended support by the friends and family and the diaspora organizations was beyond grateful for the migrant workers. While normally the trend is one way flow of remittance from the host country to home country, the pandemics showed the reverse flow of money. The stranded workers received money from their families back home to support themselves in Gulf or get a return ticket. Moreover, the help in terms of finding a job after returning back was remarkable and helped deal with the pandemic for the migrant workers.

The migration decision amid pandemic for all three categories of respondents were different. Some stayed in the Gulf hoping to find a better or a sustainable opportunity after being laid off. Some decided to move back and be with the family during hard times. Whereas, some looked for better opportunities and re located to some other countries. All the respondents had a different story and a different hardship the pandemic has brought on them. Nevertheless, with the support of the

migration and transnational network, they have the courage to deal with them. Furthermore, behind the decisions of three groups of respondents had their own individual reason or motivation. Availability of migration choice, good motive for a decision, expectancy on the basis of migration decision and a proper incentive incorporated their motivation in one way or another.

Hofball mentions that people tend to minimize net loss of resources during the time of crisis. However, when the individual is not confined with stress, they tend to develop resource surplus to reduce future resource loss. The workers who had lived in Gulf for a long time and managed to gain materialistic goods like house back home, land, furniture, and some savings for the future had less impact compared to the migrants who had just moved to Gulf. Similarly, the conditions of stress tend to be different for different individuals. For workers who have lived in Gulf for a long period of time, has a good social network and are promoted and working in a higher-level position have lower stress impact compared to others. The personal characteristics of the migrant workers also determines the amount of stress one went through during the pandemic. The stress handling capacity and a positive tendency among migrants made them stay in Gulf. However, for migrants with no saving and job, returning back was an only option they could think of. Energies also determines the stress handling. For workers who have stayed longer have more time money and knowledge in compared to some new migrant workers. The capacity to pay the rent in Gulf while they look for new jobs through their built-up social contacts from years is a positive point for them for not returning back home. Overall, the common strategies followed were shifting to the places with lower rent, or renting an apartment with higher number of people, reducing or cutting off expenses in food or skipping the meal, complete reduction in recreational expenses and not sending the remittances back home, to reduce net loss in object resources.

I conclude this study acknowledging some limitations that I have encountered while gathering my data. Contacting the respondents during COVID 19 pandemic would have been rather challenging if I had no personal contacts with the migrant workers at the GCC countries. Furthermore, lack of historical data and scarcity of studies in similar thematic area also limited data collection and analysis. Therefore, I suggest that future studies should be designed for longer time period aiming to collect data from a wide range of respondents. As coping mechanism against COVID 19 varies from individual to individual, future studies should be based on varied methodologies including in

person interviews, ethnographic studies in the GCC and longitudinal studies conducted among various categories of movers and stayers in the region.

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