

# Analysis of Push and Pull Factors Influencing the Migration of Ugandan Domestic Workers to Saudi Arabia

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## EDITORIAL INFORMATION

Received: 09 December 2023

Revised: 10 February 2024

Accepted: 15 February 2024

Published: 21 February 2024

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**Abstract:** The study explored the push and pull factors driving Ugandan domestic workers to migrate to Saudi Arabia. The research paradigm employed was social constructivism, where individuals seek to understand their world and develop meanings based on their experiences. A qualitative approach using a phenomenological research design was utilised. Data was collected from a sample of eighteen (18) respondents through unstructured interviews to identify the factors contributing to the migration of Ugandan domestic workers to Saudi Arabia. Thematic analysis was conducted during data analysis. The migration factors were presented in concept maps created using Nvivo 10.0. The study uncovered that push factors varied from person to person, but major ones included poverty, unemployment, school dropout, family obligations, marital neglect, domestic violence, personal development goals, poor working conditions, work-related challenges, peer influence, and single parenting. Pull factors include the influence of Arabian family culture that promotes the demand for maids, bilateral labour agreements, adventure, attractive job prospects, free travel documents, cost-effective job processes, and an easy migration process. The study concluded that without effectively addressing push factors to provide long-term solutions, the migration of Ugandan domestic workers to Saudi Arabia will persist. It is recommended that the Government of Uganda take steps to create a conducive

environment with satisfying employment opportunities for these young individuals to reduce the number of people seeking jobs outside Uganda. This involves generating employment opportunities to regulate internal domestic work and make it highly profitable, thereby encouraging young people to remain in Uganda.

**Keywords:** Migration, migrant domestic workers, push factors, pull factors, unemployment, youths.

## 1. Introduction

The factors contributing to the migration of Ugandan domestic workers to Saudi Arabia are compared to the African adage "Swallow fire and spit sweetness" (referring to the hyena, unable to spit a hot stone covered in fat because of its craving for meat, thus swallowing it, resulting in its death). That is, Ugandan domestic workers are sometimes aware of the difficulties of working as maids in Saudi Arabia. However, due to poverty, they choose to work under such severe conditions to earn money. Since 2015, there has been an increase in the influx of Ugandan youths migrating to Saudi Arabia in pursuit of domestic work (Nampewo, 2021). Reports indicate that Ugandan domestic migrant workers in Saudi Arabia are employed using the Kafala Sponsorship System. Under the Kafala system, a migrant worker may be labelled as a 'guest worker' but is often treated as a disposable economic commodity at the mercy of their sponsor (employer). Central to the Kafala system is the imbalance in power relations between the Kafeel (employer) and the kafir (Migrant worker) (Kelly et al., 2022). The Kafeel has the authority to modify the terms and conditions of the employment contract and coerce the migrant worker into accepting unfair working conditions (Parreñas, 2021a). This system subjects workers to significant exploitation (Akpomera, 2022). Millions of women who travel to Asia and the Middle East to work as domestic workers face significant gaps in labour legislation (Fernandez & Fernandez, 2020).

### How to cite this article:

Asimwe, F. M., & Musinguzi, D. (2024). Analysis of push and pull factors influencing the migration of Ugandan domestic workers to Saudi Arabia. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Sociality Studies*, 4, 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.38140/ijss-2024.vol4.01>

Migrant domestic workers encounter restrictive immigration policies and socially accepted discrimination such as working excessively long hours with no days off, unpaid wages/salary, being confined in the workplace, physical abuse, prejudice, and sexual harassment, leading to alarming human rights violations (Yeoh et al., 2020). Complaints include salary withholding, wage denial, travel document confiscation, and deportation threats (Nampewo, 2021). Negative incidents involving Ugandan migrant domestic workers in Saudi Arabia have been reported on social media and in other media sources such as newspapers, radio, and television, much to the concern of many stakeholders. For instance, on January 30th, 2022, the national newspaper, the New Vision, reported that a Ugandan migrant domestic worker lost a kidney in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Despite the widespread exploitation and suffering that Ugandan migrant domestic workers endure, many continue to migrate to Saudi Arabia.

Push factors are conditions that motivate individuals to relocate and are associated with the country from which they migrate (Simpson, 2022). These are migration-inducing factors and circumstances that compel people to leave their homeland in search of greener pastures (Czaika & Reinprecht, 2022). Studies (Parkins, 2010; Thet, 2014; Mohamed & Abdul-Talib, 2020; Della et al., 2021; Urbanski, 2022) indicate that push factors include challenges such as unemployment, poverty, and low-paying jobs. On the other hand, pull factors of migration are the opposite of push factors and encompass all the factors that attract people to specific places (Urbanski, 2022). According to Urbanski (2022), pull factors motivating migrants include the desire for better work, better housing, more food and income, and higher living standards. However, there is a paucity of empirical studies on these factors in the context of Uganda. Therefore, it was crucial to conduct a study on the push and pull factors responsible for Ugandan migrant domestic workers in Saudi Arabia facing exploitation obstacles.

### **1.1 Statement of the problem**

Migrant domestic workers are among the most vulnerable populations in society, as they have the least secured labour rights (Henderson, 2020). They are often placed in locations without nationals, exposing them to hazardous conditions leading to violations of their rights (Anderson, 2015). Ugandan domestic migrant workers in Saudi Arabia complain of severe exploitation, such as restricted movement and socially accepted discrimination. This includes rights violations like working excessively long hours with no days off, lack of payment, confinement in the workplace, physical abuse, prejudice, and sexual harassment (Nampewo, 2021). Complaints also include salary withholding, denial of wages, retention of travel documents, and threats of deportation (Fernandez, 2019). Domestic workers face prejudice and hunger, are overworked, sexually assaulted, and lead harsh lives, with many returning to Uganda feeling empty (Malit & Naufal, 2016). These experiences raise questions about the decision to seek employment overseas given the unfavourable circumstances, highlighting the need for a detailed examination of the factors driving Ugandan domestic workers to Saudi Arabia. Consequently, it was essential for the researchers to conduct a study on the motivating factors for Ugandan domestic workers to migrate to Saudi Arabia.

### **1.2 Research questions**

- What are the push factors that drive Ugandan domestic workers to migrate to Saudi Arabia for employment?
- What are the pull factors that attract Ugandan workers to migrate to Saudi Arabia for employment opportunities?

## **2. Theoretical Review**

The study is underpinned by the neoclassical Push and Pull Theory of Migration. The Ravenstein's (1885) description of internal migration inspired the neoclassical push-pull theory of migration. According to Ravenstein, differential economic opportunities are key pull-and-push factors that

influence migratory dynamics. The fundamental factors that drive migrants to leave their countries of origin include their desire for a job that is more remunerative or appealing than what their own country can offer. Scholars such as Everett Lee built on Ravenstein's views to develop the theory further. Lee (1966) noted that most proponents of the push and pull theory posited that migration is selective and influenced by both push and pull factors. According to Blazhevskva (2017), factors affecting the countries of origin and destination, as well as any obstacles in between, may contribute to migration. As a result, migration could be regarded as a beneficial approach for those seeking opportunities both domestically and internationally. Consequently, this article examined the factors contributing to the migration of Ugandan migrant domestic workers to Saudi Arabia. The push factors responsible for Ugandan domestic workers migrating to Saudi Arabia include poverty, unemployment, dropping out of school, family obligations, marital neglect, domestic violence, personal development goals, poor working conditions, work-related challenges, peer influence, and single parenting. The pull factors are the influence of the Arabian family culture that encourages demand for maids, the presence of bilateral labour agreements, attractive job prospects, free travel documents, a cost-effective job procedure, and an easy migration process. Hence, the theory is congruent with the study, which explores the factors driving Ugandan domestic workers to Saudi Arabia.

## **2.1 Push factors**

Migration is a global phenomenon influenced by various factors, including social, political, cultural, environmental, health, and education (Tsegay, 2023). It typically involves movement from regions with limited economic prospects and slower social development to developed and rapidly developing areas (Kainth, 2010). Push factors are those that compel individuals to leave their current location and seek opportunities elsewhere for a variety of reasons (Jiang, 2020). Factors such as low productivity, unemployment, underdevelopment, poor economic conditions, lack of progress opportunities, natural resource depletion, and natural disasters can drive people to seek better economic prospects outside their place of origin (Chahal et al., 2023).

Rapid population growth in many developing countries has led to a decrease in the land-to-man ratio, resulting in a significant rise in unemployment and underemployment. Utilisation of capital-intensive agricultural production techniques and mechanisation of certain processes have reduced the demand for workers in rural areas (Chen, 2020). Limited alternative sources of income (non-agricultural activities) in rural areas also contribute to migration (Hoffmann et al., 2022). Moreover, the presence of joint family systems and inheritance laws that prevent property partitioning may drive many young men to migrate to urban areas in search of employment (Yeboah et al., 2019). Even fragmented properties can.

## **2.2 Pull factors**

Pull factors are characteristics that attract migrants to a place, such as better employment prospects, higher wages, facilities, working conditions, and amenities (Khalid & Urbański 2021). These elements that encourage people to move to specific locations are known as migration pull factors and are the opposite of migration push factors (Khalid & Urbanski, 2021). Better healthcare and religious tolerance are two social aspects that attract migrants to industrialised countries like the United States and other European countries (Castelli, 2018). In destination countries, these pull factors are connected to an ageing population, ongoing economic progress, the need for more employees to undertake 3D occupations (demeaning, dangerous, and dirty), and a significant decline in birth rates (Porru & Baldo, 2022). When there is rapid expansion in industry, commerce, and business, city-ward migration often occurs (Kainth, 2010).

Migration from rural areas or countries of origin to urban areas or the chosen destination country is closely linked to processes of industrialisation, technological advancement, and other cultural changes that define the emergence of contemporary society in nearly every part of the world

(Greenfield, 2016). Under the capitalist development model, a significant amount of investment tends to concentrate in urban areas, motivating people to move to cities in pursuit of higher-paying jobs (Skeldon, 2012). In recent years, the high rate of migration from African and Asian countries to other developing nations like the United Kingdom, United States, Canada, and the Middle East has been attributed to better employment opportunities, higher incomes, and the prospect of achieving a higher quality of life (Segal, 2019).

People are sometimes drawn to cities or developed nations in search of better cultural and entertainment opportunities. Thus, pull factors influence not only rural-urban migration but also other types of domestic and foreign migration. Several studies have revealed that when comparing push factors (factors that make you want to leave) and pull factors (factors that make you want to stay), pull factors had a greater influence on migration in the two countries (Urbanski, 2022). The dilemma is whether push or pull factors are more essential. On this subject, several scholars differ. According to Mohamed and Abdul-Talib (2020), Van Hear et al. (2020), Bakewell and Long (2020), Garelli and Tazzioli (2021), Zanabazar et al. (2021), and Urbanski (2022), the push factor is stronger than the pull factor because rural or country of origin challenges, rather than metropolitan or country of destination attractions, play a significant role in population migration. Those who value the pull factors, on the other hand, emphasise high rates of investment in urban regions and countries of origin, which leads to more job and commercial opportunities as well as a greater appeal to the metropolitan way of life. Whatever the situation may be, there must be some factor at work when migration transpires.

### **3. Methodology**

The study employed social constructivism, an interpretive paradigm in which individuals seek to understand their world and develop their own meanings that correspond to their experiences (Phillips, 2023). Social constructivists believe that individuals seek an understanding of the world in which they live and work (Boyland, 2019). This study used a phenomenological research design to explore the factors of migration among Ugandan Domestic Workers to Saudi Arabia. This design allowed for an in-depth exploration of the study problem. The data collected were qualitative, aiming for a profound understanding using a small sample (Boddy, 2016). The choice of a qualitative research approach focused on understanding how individuals interpret their social reality, recognising that participants' experiences and perspectives shape the meaning-making process (Phillips, 2023). This study utilised a phenomenological research design to investigate the factors that led Ugandan domestic workers to migrate to Saudi Arabia. This design facilitated a thorough examination of the research problem. The qualitative data collected provided a deep understanding through a small sample size (Boddy, 2016).

#### **3.1 Population and sample**

The study sample was purposively selected, and the actual sample size was determined after data saturation and consisted of eighteen (18) respondents. The migrant domestic workers were females drawn from the Central, Eastern, and Western regions of Uganda. The key informants, mostly male, were selected from the Ministry of Gender, Labour, and Social Development (MoGLSD, Uganda Association Employment Recruitment Agency (UAERA), and the next of kin. This ministry is mandated to regulate the labour export sector in the country. The Uganda Association Employment Recruitment Agency (UAERA) is responsible for monitoring and evaluating the activities of recruitment companies, directors, and employees involved in hiring domestic workers for Saudi Arabia, as well as the next of kin of one of the Ugandan domestic workers. The migrant domestic workers were selected using snowball sampling, while the key informants were chosen through purposive sampling. The key informants were selected specifically to provide data because of their knowledge about the factors that contribute to the migration of Ugandan domestic workers to Saudi Arabia.

### **3.2 Data collection instrument**

Data was collected using an unstructured interview guide. The study participants were asked a standard set of open-ended questions to gather data. The flexibility in questioning aided in obtaining detailed information. Participants were questioned about the factors motivating domestic workers to search for employment in Saudi Arabia. Each interview lasted 50–60 minutes. The collected data underwent quality control using the truth value approach (Guba & Lincoln, 1981) to confirm that the results accurately reflected valid information provided by the participants, focusing on the push-pull factors influencing the participants in their specific circumstances. Furthermore, the analysis ensured that the interpretations were well-founded on the data obtained from the respondents.

### **3.3 Data analysis**

The collected data was transcribed, and the quotes were coded based on emerging themes. Creating themes involved grouping responses under the same topic and assigning relevant codes. Impactful statements were identified to help derive meaning from the interviews. Inductive thematic analysis was conducted through constant data review, comparison of information against the codes, and recoding. Themes rooted in the data emerged, and overarching patterns were observed. The data was condensed and described to identify concepts explaining the factors influencing Ugandan domestic workers in seeking jobs in Saudi Arabia. The emerging patterns and themes facilitated the presentation and interpretation of the findings. The push and pull factors were visualised in concept maps created using Nvivo version 10.0.

### **3.4 Ethical consideration**

The study strictly adhered to ethical guidelines outlined in the research conduct policy of Uganda Martyrs University's Postgraduate Studies office. Clearance from Uganda Martyrs University was obtained and presented to the Uganda Christianity University Research Ethics Board, which approved the researcher for data collection. Clearance from the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST) was also obtained. The purpose and nature of the study were explained to each respondent to obtain consent. For participants who could not read and understand English, informed consent was verbally provided. Prior to each interview, the researcher requested permission to record the session. Data collected was stored securely with password protection to ensure confidentiality. Respondents were advised not to use real names; however, if names were mentioned, they were replaced with pseudonyms by the researchers. Respondents were advised not to use their real names. However, where some participants disclosed their names during interviews, contrary to instruction, their names were replaced with pseudonyms to safeguard confidentiality while maintaining ethical standards.

## **4. Presentation of Data**

The fundamental issues that formed the major foundation for this study were the factors for the migration of Ugandan domestic workers to Saudi Arabia amidst exploitation challenges, which were divided into push and pull factors for migration.

### **4.1 Push factors**

To answer the first research question, the responses of the participants regarding the reasons for seeking domestic employment in Saudi Arabia were analysed. The findings showed that the push factors differed from individual to individual, although they sometimes seemed very similar, and the priority placed on them varied. The study findings are presented in more detail in Figure 1.

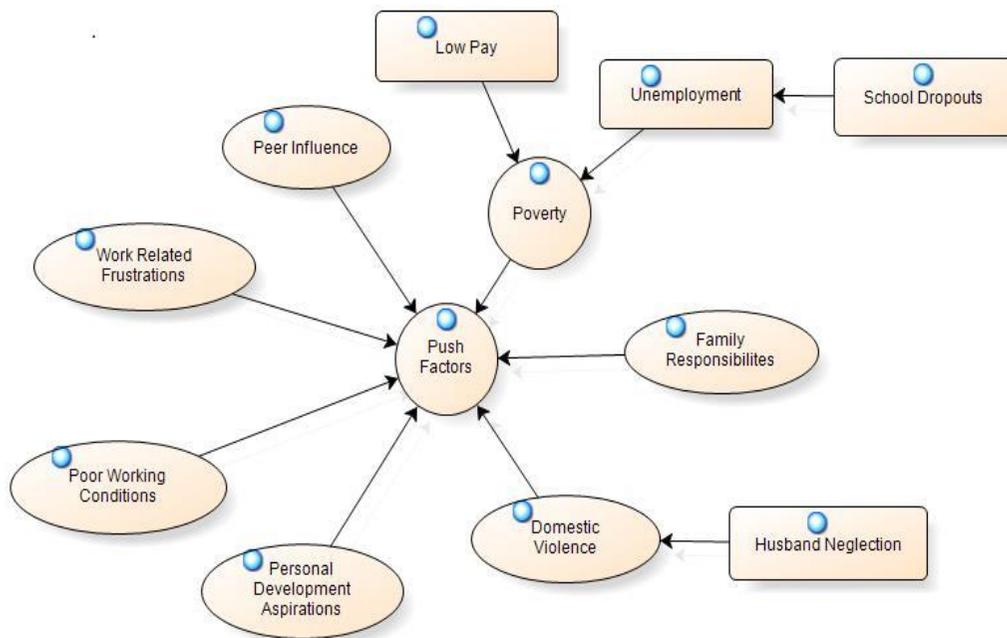


Figure 1: Thematic Results for Push Factors

### Theme 1: Poverty

Ugandan Domestic Workers (UDWs) and some key informants stated that poverty was an important driver for young people to seek jobs in Saudi Arabia. Poverty was linked to two major factors: low wages and unemployment. Some key informants mentioned that poverty is so prevalent among Ugandans that many of them seek work in Saudi Arabia. A Senior Uganda Association Employment Recruitment Agency (UAERA) official explained:

...another key element driving young people to seek employment abroad is poverty. We are sometimes forced to warn them to stay back and work from here, but they inform us that their living situations are rather complicated. As a result, they argue that Saudi Arabia holds solutions to the poverty-stricken circumstances in Uganda....

In agreement with the UAERA senior official, a Ministry of Gender Labour and Social Development (MoGLSD) key informant had this to say:

A good number of Ugandans live below the poverty line and automatically view travelling to the Middle East as the only way to earn good money and escape from poverty.

Still on poverty as a push factor, a recruitment company employee in Uganda explained:

Poverty is one of the major reasons why our Ugandan youth go to Saudi Arabia. Some even approach us, but they are sometimes not qualified, but their parents come and beg us to take them, even though sometimes they do not have qualifications like age. Mothers come here and beg that we take their children so that they can go out and make money for the family, but when we explain, they do not want to understand. They even tell us that the people we are rejecting are

already mothers and are not at school. Madam, have you forgotten that some of our children fall pregnant at 19 years of age and become single mothers without any help, and they are just struggling to look after children when they are also children.

Some of the UDWs also sighted poverty as a major push factor; for example, a 34-year-old Dina from Western Uganda recalled the situation she was in before travelling:

My situation was very pathetic, madam. Though I and my husband had degrees, we were very poor, and we did not have anything; therefore, the only alternative was to sacrifice myself to go and work for the family, my children, and my husband.

While a 26-year-old Fifi from the Central region was compelled to get a job in Saudi Arabia because:

Poverty was choking me. I was really poverty-stricken, and I am a single mother who could not even provide basic needs for my children. Worse still, my children are sicklers, and they need money for medicine every day. The only alternative was to look for work in Saudi Arabia. Madam, you joke about poverty in Uganda; it can push you to literally do anything; we would even sleep hungry. In my situation, I was torn between swallowing fire or spitting sweetness, a common saying among our people. I ended up swallowing fire. Regardless of the sorrows and pains that I knew were in Saudi Arabia, I had to accept them and go to work for my sick children and my mother because poverty was unbearable. This is what we endure as migrant domestics from Uganda.

The responses above suggest that poverty was a major factor that compelled Ugandan youths to seek jobs in Saudi Arabia. Despite being aware of the human rights abuses taking place there, the conditions in their country pushed them to take the risk. Poverty was compounded by high unemployment levels, low pay, and a high number of youths being dropouts with nothing to hold on to.

### ***Theme 2: Low-paying jobs***

The findings revealed that the increasing cost of living and life's demands, like paying fees and providing food, made it challenging for women to meet their basic needs and to care for their loved ones, who could be children, parents, or other relatives. This situation forced them to look for jobs in Saudi Arabia. Some interview excerpts in this report demonstrate that poverty is evident through inadequate salaries, prompting individuals to search for better job opportunities. For instance, 28-year-old Sullivan from the Central region recounted:

While I was in Uganda, my condition was bad, I was working in the saloon, and my pay was really bad. I could not provide the mere basic needs of life, so I wanted to earn a good salary, so I left for Saudi Arabia.

On low pay Rinah from Central Uganda was badly affected and highlighted:

Workers in Uganda are often paid less than jobs in Saudi Arabia.... before I left, I was earning Ug Shs150,000 in salary and two thousand was for lunch from one of the Betting Company. My salary was low, so my friends encouraged me to look for a better job.

A former teacher Nasumba from the Central region shared her condition before she travelled:

Prior to travelling, I worked as a nursery teacher, but life was very difficult due to the low pay. When I saw what was going on, I knew I had to look for another job and save money. When I discussed this with my husband, he allowed me to travel to Saudi Arabia so that I could make more money than the Ug Shs150, 000 I was making on my teaching job.

The UAERA senior officer, who doubled as a key informant, confirmed the assertion:

Young people are running away from jobs like teaching, saloon work, tailoring and domestic work because of the low pay related to these jobs here in Uganda. They prefer to go and earn a million from Saudi Arabia, which most educated people cannot earn here in Uganda.

The views above demonstrate that low-paying jobs occupied by educated millennials made them feel like they were working tirelessly, which led many to seek better opportunities. For example, a domestic worker in Uganda may earn between Ugx 50,000 and 100,000 (13–26 US\$) per month, which is considerably low compared to the salary of someone working in Saudi Arabia, where they could earn between Ugx 900,000 and 1,500,000 (250–350 US\$) - an amount that a graduate working for the Ugandan government might not earn (Bakunda & Walusumbi-Mpanga, 2011).

### ***Theme 3: Unemployment***

Unemployment in Uganda is at a very high rate, and it has not only affected young people and the elderly in other walks of life but it has also affected young women who feel that all they have to do is go to Saudi Arabia and pursue work to be able to attain the desired lifestyle. The qualitative interview excerpts from Sullivan:

I went specifically to Saudi Arabia because I was jobless and wanted to work and make my own money, which was not easy.

A 30-year-old Amil from Central region had this to add:

When I came back from Oman back to Uganda, I did not have a job, so all I had to do was take up the opportunity to go to Saudi Arabia, though I knew people were suffering.

A UAERA senior officer noted;

High levels of unemployment among Ugandan youths push many to seek employment opportunities outside of the country, and more so in Saudi Arabia.

MGLSD senior officer, in his response, articulated;

Some educated young people desperately yearn for domestic work abroad because they are not employed back at home.

A UAERA senior officer concluded:

The consequences of COVID-19 also act as push factors because many young people dropped out of school and business stalled, pushing people to look for jobs to survive. (70% of migrant workers are migrant domestic workers). Those who dropped out of school during the COVID-19 lockdown finally find that they have limited options, and thus, they see Saudi Arabia as a very appealing opportunity.

The responses above suggest that jobs in Uganda are often secured by young individuals from affluent backgrounds or those who can afford to pay for them. While turning to farming might seem like a feasible option, a large number of Ugandan youth lack access to essential resources like land and financial means. Some children are left orphaned at a young age and end up being single parents, burdened with numerous responsibilities. The extent of unemployment is evident in the sight of many young people wandering the streets of cities and urban areas in search of jobs with their qualifications, only to be disappointed. Consequently, if given the opportunity to work abroad, many individuals would choose to leave the country rather than remain and struggle to fulfil their basic needs.

#### ***Theme 4: Domestic violence***

The in-depth interview with migrant domestic workers and key informants revealed that domestic violence has forced many young women to leave Uganda in search of work in Saudi Arabia. Domestic violence in families takes numerous forms, including physical harm to victims and, in certain circumstances, emotional torture for the same victim. Fifi from the Central region, with a sad face, narrated her experience:

My husband became abusive when I gave birth to a Sickler child and the physical abuse became worse each day. Every time the child would cry, the man would chase me out of the room and sometimes beat me (started crying, took a break, and engaged the counsellor). When I threatened to report him to the police, he ran away from us, saying that, for those in their family, do not give birth to children who have sickle cells. But this was after too much torture and abuse. Yet those children, madam, are his. I could not believe that the man had decided to abandon us. I could not take care of myself and the sickly two children since he was the breadwinner. We were left with very limited choices, and the only choice was to get a job in Saudi Arabia as a maid

Meanwhile, 29-year-old Prissy from Central region too shared her story:

My husband was beating me day and night, and he could not provide us with the basic needs of life. I think he used to take drugs because every time I would ask for any assistance, his moods would change. My situation was bad, but I did not want to reveal family secrets because my parents advised me never to reveal bedroom matters. (Takes a long sigh.) I had to leave Uganda; otherwise, my husband would have killed me. Life is not easy, madam.

The responses from the participants indicate that women are the most affected gender. Consequently, they seek relief by escaping from abusive husbands to work overseas. The abuse towards women has escalated to the extent where husbands locate their wives in their paternal homes and abuse them there. Some have even resorted to maiming them to the point of death or hiring individuals to murder them if reconciliation is not achieved. In more extreme cases, some have gone as far as setting the entire family on fire if their wives refuse to reconcile with them. Furthermore, the feedback reveals that some partners neglect to provide basic necessities and instead focus on insatiable sexual desires. When their partners decline, they resort to physical abuse. As a result, young women make the decision to leave their homes and seek refuge in Saudi Arabia for two years, hoping that upon their return, their husbands may have moved on.

#### ***Theme 5: Poor Working conditions***

This is yet another reason why Ugandan migrant domestic workers seek refuge in Saudi Arabia to work as maids:

Before leaving, I worked with a company but worked from Monday to Monday without rest and felt that if I could go to Saudi Arabia, I could readily find a good place to work in a home with good conditions. (Plinye from Central Region).

A 28-year-old Gift from Eastern Uganda also narrated:

I tried to work as a maid here before I left, but I was treated badly by the family with whom I worked, and the pay was meagre; therefore Saudi Arabia was a God-sent opportunity.

The respondent's views indicate that even when workers choose to remain and work from home, they may face challenges due to the poor working conditions at their workplaces. For example, a maid in Saudi Arabia earns a much higher salary than one in Uganda, where the working conditions are poor. A maid working from Uganda may have the advantage of not being tied to a single employer for two years but receives a low salary that is barely sufficient for supporting our families.

#### ***Theme 6: Family responsibilities***

These are the primary reasons for these women to work in Saudi Arabia, and even more so, behind closed doors, performing backbreaking chores rather than in a public or corporate environment. On family responsibilities, Fifi, was overwhelmed:

I had two boys who happened to have sickle cell sickness. We had no money because the man had run away from us. I was obligated to buy medicine for them every day with no assistance. I had to get a job in Saudi Arabia in order to continue providing care for my children.

From the above interviews, it is evident that the influence of extended family places a significant burden on young people. They work not solely for their own needs but also to meet the demands of their extended families, which may encompass mothers, fathers, aunts, and children from the entire clan. Some family members may be suffering from chronic illnesses, while others might be living in poverty and lack educational resources. Consequently, a young family member who believes they can work abroad to support their family may seize the opportunity not for personal financial gain but to enhance the living standards of their families.

#### ***Theme 7: Personal Development aspirations***

Several young women were encouraged to move to Saudi Arabia by their personal ambitions to develop. Many people look around and observe what their peers are doing, such as paying school fees, building houses, purchasing titled land, driving vehicles, and running a variety of businesses. A 34-year-old Dina from Western Uganda, explained:

I wanted my husband and me to work and develop ourselves, and I felt that going to Saudi Arabia would help us achieve a lot faster than hunting for money in Uganda.

Assia from the same region had this to say:

I had a dream of building my own house so that I could provide my child and my mother with decent accommodation. I always had a need to work so that I could build a house, buy a car, and look after my child. The only opportunity to achieve this was to get a job abroad.

The director of a recruitment company narrated:

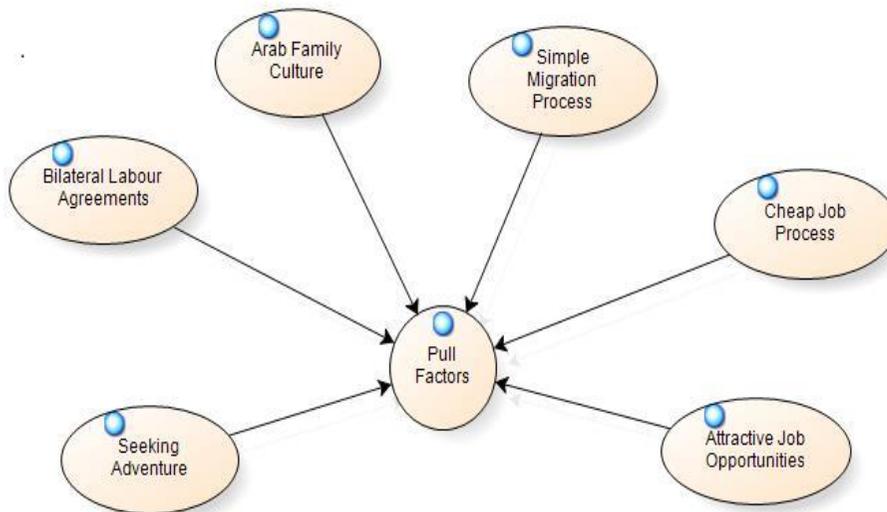
Many women come and want to go abroad so that they can work for their families and put up some projects that would make them live fulfilled lives. Working in Saudi Arabia is sometimes the only option.

Most of the development goals that motivated young people to work in Saudi Arabia included owning a great home, an expensive car, a good phone, a comfortable bed, and titled land. From these vantage points, everyone strives to ensure they benefit from working abroad as well.

### **4.2 Pull factors**

To answer the second research question, the following pull factors were identified during the study: the influence of Arab family culture that promotes the demand for maids; the presence of the bilateral

labour agreements; seeking adventure; attractive job prospects; provision of free travel documents; a cost-effective job process; and an intuitive migration process.



**Figure 2: Thematic Results for Pull Factors**

### **Theme 1: Arab family cultural influence**

Noting the cultural values in Arabia, the qualitative results revealed that in Saudi Arabia, having a domestic worker is seen as a symbol of wealth. A man is deemed wealthy only if he can afford to have domestic help for household chores. Not hiring domestic helpers is viewed as a sign of financial mediocrity, as mentioned by a senior UAERA official who visited Saudi Arabia to engage with company owners and employers of Ugandan domestic workers:

Culturally, Arab men must get their wives a worker or workers if they are to show them love. If you fail to do so, you are a bad husband, and that is an indication that you do not love your wife. The wives in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries are treated like queens. Since the Arabs are rich from oil money, they normally do not work. So, if one is to show that he is a husband, he must provide his family with maids who will cook, clean, wash, and look after their children. Therefore, getting their wives maids is a must, as it is taken as a sign of love and respect. Having many workers signifies luxury and love for your family. Therefore, this creates a lot of demand, as every husband is struggling to appease his wife.

The views above explain why there is a high demand for maids, putting pressure on recruitment companies to continue providing them. However, each maid employed contributes significantly to the company. Therefore, efforts are made to maintain advertising and encourage young people to seek jobs so that companies can continue operating as required by bilateral labour agreements.

### **Theme 2: Presence of bilateral labour agreements (BLAs)**

BLAs have played a major role in attracting domestic workers from Uganda to go to Saudi Arabia. Many Ugandan domestic workers strive to travel to Saudi Arabia because they are aware of the BLA that Saudi Arabia signed with the Ugandan Government. A senior official from UAERA explained:

The Ugandan government signed bilateral agreements with Saudi Arabia and Jordan, but the one with Jordan fell through because there was no embassy, and no

one was available to take up issues raised by migrant domestic workers. The only bilateral labour agreement to export domestic migrant workers in place now is with Saudi Arabia, which expired on December 23rd, 2022, and is awaiting renewal. This was renewed by February 23rd, 2023, as directed by Saudi Arabia. Therefore, this is one of the reasons why we send these workers to Saudi Arabia. However, Ugandan MDWs are everywhere; they travel to other countries like Oman, Bahrain, and Qatar on their own, and these are occasionally trafficked. MDWs are typically trafficked using a visitor's or tourist's visa, which normally expires after three months, after which they become illegal migrants. Therefore, most of the social media stories come from migrant domestic workers who are trafficked to Oman, Jordan, and Qatar.

Some Ugandan Domestic Workers were also aware of the BLAs and revealed that they were motivated to work in Saudi Arabia because of the presence of these agreements. A 34-year-old Dina from Western Uganda affirmed:

I knew Uganda had a bilateral labour agreement with Saudi Arabia, so I had to seek a job from there since the UK and US were quite complicated and out of my league.

A 30-year-old Amil and a mother of four from Central Region noted:

I wanted to use legal means to travel to Saudi Arabia because previously, I was trafficked to Oman, and I suffered a lot. Therefore, I was told that since Uganda had some agreement with Saudi Arabia, I would be treated well.

From respondents' views, it is clear that migrating from Uganda to Saudi Arabia is much easier than moving to more developed nations such as America or the United Kingdom. Considering that Uganda has an active Bilateral Labour Agreement (BLA) with Saudi Arabia, policymakers must explore additional labour markets where Ugandan domestic employees can work to prevent exploitation.

### ***Theme 3: Seeking adventure***

Strangely, the qualitative findings also revealed that some young women go to Saudi Arabia purely for the joy, excitement, and experience of travelling abroad. Rinah from Central Uganda recalled her departure time:

The reason I went to Saudi Arabia was that I also wanted to board a plane and travel to new places. My friends and I were all excited to board a plane.

A UAERA senior officer who was a key informant also said:

Some workers are attracted to go and work in homes in Saudi Arabia just because of their insatiable appetite to board a plane.

The adventurous behaviour of these young women, which attracts them to Saudi Arabia, should not be overlooked. However, it's important to consider that some of these women might benefit from counselling. Instead of taking on domestic work in Saudi Arabia, where there are potential dangers and contractual obligations, they could have chosen to travel to another country by plane and explore different places.

### ***Theme 4: Job opportunities***

During in-depth interviews, it was revealed that some workers are attracted to Saudi Arabia due to the job opportunities available there. With their subpar skills, education level, and experience, many of these domestic workers realise that their earning potential in Saudi Arabia is limited compared to what the average worker earns in Uganda:

The high demand for domestic workers in Saudi Arabia is an indication that the jobs are there. During Ramadan the demand is so high that the labour exported from here cannot be matched with what is demanded.

A MoGLSD official supported this assertion:

Even though I was not working in MGLSD, I would still give this advice. I will dare anyone to stop this export of the girls to Saudi Arabia, and they will see how Ugandan youths and even mature ones will be stuck here and suffer.

The views above suggest that job opportunities in Saudi Arabia come with good pay, which cannot be resisted by unemployed young people who cannot provide for the basic needs of life back home in Uganda.

#### ***Theme 5: Affordable job process***

This was also another factor that attracted young women to go to Saudi Arabia. Compared to European countries and other more developed nations, it is relatively inexpensive to travel to Saudi Arabia and start working. Dina, a 34-year-old, knew that:

To get a domestic job in other countries like the USA, Canada, and Turkey, you pay a lot of money, yet Saudi Arabia is free of charge. Though some companies can demand payment for a medical check-up and passport processing, the majority of the services are provided at no cost.

Given the high cost of obtaining a visa for the USA and UK, some young people find it easier to seek employment in Saudi Arabia. Companies in Saudi Arabia make great efforts to ensure that all requirements are met at a minimal cost of only UGX 20,000 (5 US\$).

#### ***Theme 6: Attractive Salaries and Wages***

This is another important factor that enticed workers to seek jobs in Saudi Arabia. In the in-depth interviews conducted, it was revealed that the monthly pay these people receive is already specified in the BLAs:

When Uganda signed BLA with Saudi Arabia, it was agreed that every Ugandan migrant domestic worker should be paid Ug Shs 900,000 (250 US \$). Therefore, this is even indicated in the contracts that they sign before departure (UAERA Senior Officer).

Other key informants had this to say:

By the standards of this country, few people are paid between Ug Shs 900,000 and 1,000,000 (250-300 US \$). Even public servants' salaries are less than that. Therefore, when you see people are abandoning their jobs to go abroad for domestic jobs, do not be surprised (MoGLSD Senior officer).

Finally, a 30-year-old Rinah from Central Uganda had this to say:

Better pay is what drew me to work in a home in Saudi Arabia. I knew Arabs were paying good salaries because friends had told me.

Attractive salaries and wages are among the most compelling reasons why Ugandan youth seek employment overseas. In Uganda, it is extremely challenging to secure high-paying jobs for the services provided. The most pressing issue appears to be the common problem of working excessively and being underpaid, a widespread situation in the country.

## **5. Discussions of Findings**

Poverty manifests in various ways, as outlined by the Neo-classical Push and Pull theory of migration 1966 and further studies by Christiansen et al. (2019), Khalid and Urbanski (2021), and Zanabazar et al. (2021). Findings from these studies indicate that unemployment and low wages are key indicators of poverty in Uganda. For example, Khalid and Urbanski (2021) observed that economic challenges such as unemployment, poor living conditions, food scarcity, and housing shortages are poverty indicators in Romania and Poland, prompting migration. Iqbal and Gusman (2015) emphasised that poverty significantly drives migration in Indonesia due to factors like high population density, elevated unemployment rates (including disguised unemployment), substantial wage gaps for similar jobs, and a high poverty rate. The motivating factors for migration among migrant workers from other countries are similar to those pushing Ugandan youth to seek employment in Saudi Arabia.

On a different note, Zanabazar et al. (2021) highlighted push factors such as limited economic opportunities - such as inadequate job prospects, low salaries, and limited education - prevailing in origin countries, which fuel migration. The primary reasons Indonesian migrant workers choose Malaysia are lower incomes and a high unemployment rate (Djafar & Hisyam, 2012). Iqbal & Gusman (2015) pointed out Indonesia's high unemployment rate, disguised unemployment, significant income gaps for similar job levels, and a high poverty rate. Unemployment in Uganda is alarmingly high, affecting not only the youth but also the elderly (Langevang et al., 2012).

Gender-based violence emerged as a compelling factor driving some women to seek refuge in domestic work in Saudi Arabia. According to Chung et al. (2015), violence in various forms, such as emotional and physical, and the burdens associated with farming and household chores exacerbate difficult circumstances. Women often see Saudi Arabia as a place offering solace from domestic violence. Migration drivers vary by context; for instance, Sheu et al. (2021) identified common push factors in certain countries, including violence, gender inequality, political corruption, environmental degradation, climate change, and lack of access to healthcare and education. Among the push factors discussed by Sheu et al. (2021), gender inequality stands out as particularly relevant to Ugandan domestic workers, sometimes leading to domestic violence. Fernandez (2011) noted that many young Ethiopian women are migrating to Arab Gulf countries for domestic work despite the risks, such as low pay, physical violence, and harassment by some employers in Saudi Arabia. Similarly, Ugandan migrant domestic workers take risks and make sacrifices for their families (Fernandez, 2011).

Better job opportunities, higher income, improved facilities, better working conditions, and appealing amenities, among others, all of which stand in stark contrast to poor working conditions, have attracted Indians to move to Monywa township (Thet, 2014). Workers who endure poor living conditions in their home countries, such as cramped and substandard housing, lack of sleep, and limited access to healthcare, are more inclined to seek employment in countries offering better working conditions (Reza et al., 2019). Christiansen et al. (2019) highlighted that migration is the most effective strategy for reducing poverty and promoting prosperity, which aligns with the dual goals of the World Bank.

Data from the MoGLSD revealed that since 2016, at least 223,102 domestic and professional migrant workers have departed the country for the Middle East (Assumpta & Laiboni, 2019). However, these figures do not include Ugandans who have been trafficked to the Middle East. Only 32,876 individuals are engaged in professional roles. Saudi Arabia hosts 131,970 of the remaining 190,226 domestic migrant workers, the UAE has 45,636, and Qatar contributes 12,620 (Nampewo, 2021). According to The Observer, on Wednesday, July 13th, 2022, Ugandan migrant domestic workers in Saudi Arabia earn between Shs 900,000 and 1.2 million Ugandan Shillings (250-320 US \$) per month as maids. Despite the rising number of cases of abuse among migrant domestic workers, this trend is attributed to Uganda's limited opportunities for gainful employment for both skilled and unskilled youth (Guloba et al., 2022).

Laiboni (2020) noted that with the increased demand for domestic assistance in the Gulf Cooperation Council, a large proportion of East and West African migrant workers, especially women, continue to go to the Middle East. Galloti and Branch (2015) highlighted that the largest number of migrant domestic workers (almost 80% of the total) are found in high-income countries, where they also account for the majority of all domestic employees (nearly 66%). Parreñas (2021b) emphasised that Arab countries, North America, and Northern, Southern, and Western Europe account for around 52 per cent of the world's 11.5 million domestic workers. However, Craig and Churchill (2021) explained that unlike in many other parts of the world, research indicates that the Arab States' strong demand for domestic workers is only partly due to rising care demands driven by demographic factors (such as ageing societies) and increased labour market participation by indigenous women. However, as noted by Beaugrand and Thiollet (2023), it is vital that the countries of origin adopt rules and regulations that would neutralise the Kafala sponsorship structure in order to eradicate the exploitation vices widespread in the GCCs.

Chilton and Woda (2022) stressed that a great deal of agreements have been signed to govern one type of migration, namely temporary labour migration. Over the last 75 years, countries have negotiated hundreds of bilateral arrangements known as BLAs to regulate migrant worker movements (Peters, 2019). Although they take many forms, these agreements primarily govern the conditions under which migrant workers can migrate from countries that export workers to nations that receive workers (Farbenblum, 2017). A bilateral labour agreement, for example, may require sending countries to pre-screen migrant workers before they depart, receiving countries to provide certain protections to migrant workers during their deployment, and both countries to keep records, share information, and resolve disputes related to the cross-border movement of workers (Chilton & Woda 2022).

Adventure and relaxation, among other things, boosted tourists' hopes to take part in space missions, according to Olya and Han's (2020) research. Some Ugandan migrant domestic workers were attracted to Saudi Arabia due to the job opportunities and the need for adventure. Economic factors are the primary motivators for migration, while low agricultural income, unemployment, and underemployment are major motivators for immigrants to travel to more developed areas with more job opportunities than their home countries (Van Hear et al., 2020). Pull factors are exactly the opposite of push factors that attract people to a certain location (Kirkwood, 2009). Irwan (2020) noted that typical examples of pull factors for a place are more job opportunities and better living conditions; easy availability of land for settling and agriculture; political and religious freedom; superior education and welfare systems; better transportation and communication facilities; a better healthcare system; a stress-free environment; and security. Attractive wages and salaries were another important factor that enticed workers to seek jobs in Saudi Arabia. The economic benefits of migration are frequently manifested in pay increases for migrants, a phenomenon well-documented in research (McKenzie et al., 2010; Clemens et al., 2018). When selecting whether, where, and when to migrate, potential migrants consider the costs and benefits of migration and make the option that best maximises this cost-benefit analysis (Fischer et al., 2021).

## **6. Conclusion and Recommendations**

Some push-pull factors appear to be insignificant, such as excitement at the thought of flying, while others are cause for concern. A large number of Ugandans are unemployed and struggle to meet their families' basic needs, such as food, shelter, education, and health care. The government seems to have eased immigration laws to attract acquitted Ugandans and encourage them to seek work in Saudi Arabia in order to increase remittances significantly. Recruiting a significant number of migrant domestic workers to Saudi Arabia boosts remittances for the government, which may be one of the reasons Uganda continues to sign bilateral labour agreements despite exploitation obstacles. However, women are disproportionately affected as they still tend to seek domestic employment abroad, a trend rooted in the historical association of domestic work with women. Overall, the

Government of Uganda should collaborate with all stakeholders to address these push factors by making Uganda a better place to live, work, and achieve development goals. The exploitation of Ugandan domestic workers is worsening each day, tarnishing the image of Uganda's labour sector and its international relations.

The article underscores the importance of implementing strict measures for labour migration, particularly for migrant domestic workers bound for Saudi Arabia. It stresses the necessity of recruiting individuals through authorised registered companies with a minimum of five years of operation. Prerequisites such as pre-departure orientation, medical examinations, Interpol checks, and MGLSD clearances are vital. The absence of these requirements could indicate potential fraudulent activities leading to worker abandonment. The article advises Ugandan youth to exercise caution and verify the authenticity of job opportunities, payment terms, and contract conditions before contemplating migration. It also urges the government to invest significantly in local livelihood projects like the parish development model (PDM) to generate employment and dissuade youth from seeking work in Saudi Arabia. Increasing the allocated funds for PDM is recommended to enhance its attractiveness. Furthermore, the article advocates for improving the domestic employment sector in Uganda, suggesting measures like fair wages, social security benefits, and free education to discourage young people from dropping out of school and seeking opportunities abroad.

## 7. Declarations

**Author Contributions:** Conceptualisation (A. F. M. & D. M.); Literature review (A. F. M. & D. M.); methodology (A. F. M. & D. M.); software (A. F. M.); validation (D. M.); formal analysis (A. F. M. & D. M.); investigation (A. F. M. & D. M.); data curation (A. F. M.); drafting and preparation (A. F. M.); review and editing (A. F. M. & D. M.); supervision (N/A); project administration (A. F. M.); funding acquisition (N/A). All authors have read and approved the published version of the article.

**Funding:** Directorate of Research and Graduate Training (DRGT) Kyambogo University, Uganda.

**Acknowledgements:** The completion of this article was made possible by the support of various individuals and institutions, to whom we extend our sincere gratitude. Special recognition is extended to the Ministry of Gender, Labour, and Social Development and the Uganda Association of External Recruitment Agencies. We appreciate the cooperation of the recruitment companies and their staff for allowing us to conduct this research and for actively participating in the study. We are also thankful to the migrant domestic workers who volunteered to take part in this study. We are grateful for the financial support from Kyambogo University, which made this research possible. Finally, we thank the Interdisciplinary Journal of Sociality Studies team for their comprehensive review and publication of this work.

**Data availability:** Data for the study is available from the corresponding author on request.

**Conflicts of Interest:** No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors during the study.

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