

# Rural Youth Migration to Debre Markos Town: Perceived Causes and Psychosocial Consequences

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**Abstract:** This study was conducted to explore the perceived push and pull factors and psychosocial consequences of rural youth migration. The study was conducted on youth migrated from suburb districts to Debre Markos town, East Gojjam Zone, Ethiopia. Qualitative approach, particularly narrative was employed. Data were collected from 21 youth migrants (F=15, M=6) and experts (n=5) using in-depth interview and Focus Group Discussion. Data were analyzed thematically. Poverty, early marriage and lack of land were the major push factors for migration. Need for education and communication with past migrants were the pull factors. Migrants face Sexual harassment, stigma and discrimination in the new setting. The findings of this study have implication for policy makers on youth and migration.

**Keywords:** migration, youth, psychosocial, pushes factors, pull factors, Debre Markos

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Rural youth migrate to towns in search of employment opportunities (Frasen, & Kuschminder, 2009). As youth move into emerging adulthood, their choices and challenges shift to include decisions about education or vocational training, (Zarrett & Eccles, 2006) entry into and transitions within the labor market, moving out of the family home, and sometimes marriage and parenthood.

Migration is considered as the movement of people from one geographic region to another which may be on temporary or permanent basis. The reason for migration differs from one person to another depending on the situation that brought about the decision (Adewale, 2005). One of the most important forms of migration is labor migration which can be conceptualized for employment purpose (Mahrjan, Subba, & Bhatta, 2015). Mass migrations could happen in a way to adapt crises in response to shocks to the cultural and natural ecology. Such kind of migration is rare and random. For instance great economic transformations, wars or violence, and environmental disasters create crises that set off mass migrations (Gould & Eldredge, 1997 as cited in Mahrjan, Subba, Bhatta, 2015). One of the factors causing migration is search for work (Massey, 1995; Zhou, 2001). Migration is linked with either by pull factors or push factors. Push factors are negative reinforces that motivate an individual to leave the home land. Good examples in point are low productivity, land scarcity and joblessness. Meanwhile, pull factors are attractions that motivate individuals to go to the new environment and this may include high wage, job access and better provision of social and economic services (Gmelch and Zenner, 1996; Broadly and Cunningham, 1994).

Rural-urban migration is accompanied by positive and negative consequences. For the rural people, migration helps to escape poverty by creating new income and employment opportunity and perceived to help in facilitating rural-urban economic and social integration and motivating the expansion of the urban sector. Yet, this may ultimately lead to congestion, unemployment, pollution and poverty in urban areas and decrease in productivity in rural areas (Aliyev, 2008).

In Ethiopia, rural-urban migration trend can be explained by a number of push and pull factors. According to Marinade and Regt (2016), the main push factors for rural urban migration of adolescent girls are poverty, failed marriage, avoiding marriage, need to pursue ones education and desire to help the family, death of parents, conflict with parents, abuse by parents, burdened with house hold activities and desire for more independence. In addition to these, rural youth are being pulled to urban areas as a result of better development of business (Betemariam & White, 1999).

Migrant rural youth population has not been without challenges. The first problem encountered by both the migrants and the host community is accommodation or increase in slums. This problem breeds other antisocial behaviours like crime, alcoholism, and infectious diseases. Besides, continuous migration may reduce the number of the young and productive forces from the rural village (Bhuyan et al, 2001 as cited by Belay, 2011).

To have a better understanding about push and pull factors of rural-urban migration and its implication to the areas of origin and destination, the researchers thought that it is important to investigate the economic, social and cultural factors for rural out-migration on the place of origin and impacts on the migrants themselves as well as on the place of destination.

East Gojjam administrative zone is one of the 11 populous regions of Amhara National Regional State located between 10<sup>0</sup>.32 North and 37<sup>0</sup>.51 East of North West Ethiopia. With moderately compact shape are of 14,004.47 square kilometers. East Gojjam is bordered on the south by the Oromia Region, on the west by West Gojjam, on the north by South Gondar, and on the East by South Wollo. The bend of the Abay River defines the Zone's northern, eastern and southern boundaries (Amhara National State Bureau of Finance and Economic Development, 2016).

East Gojjam zone has 20 woredas and a total of 2.5 million people, of which youth with the age range of 15-29 years consisted of 30 percent (Amhara National State Bureau of Finance and Economic Development, 2016). Debre Markos, its capital, serves as a canter for migrant youth from and out of the zone has a total population of 113,101 of which 52676 of them are males and 60425 of them are females.

There is excessive movement of young people from surrounding districts to Debre Markos town. But, there is no research conducted so far on perceived causes that lead youth to continually move to Debre Markos town.

Thus, the investigators thought conducting this study is valuable in order to identify the perceived causes of rural youth to migrate to urban settings and the psychosocial problems that these migrants face in the new environment. In other words, the absence of previous research on the area of youth migration and associated psycho social consequences in East Gojjam zone motivated the researchers to conduct this study. The finding of the study may serve as an input for policy makers, planners, public administrators and other professionals.

This study focused on investigating the demographic trends of migrant youth; the push and pulls factors and post-migration psycho-social consequences. To achieve this objective, the following research questions were formulated:

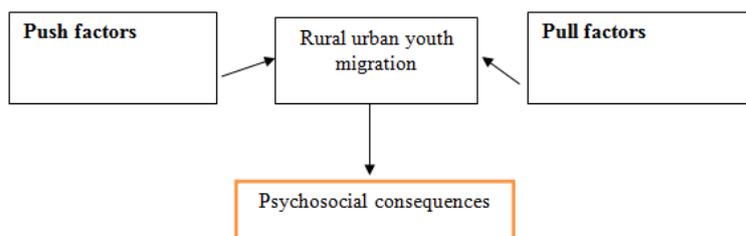
- (1) What does the socio demographic data of rural youth migrants look like in terms of age, sex, and marital status?
- (2) What are the push factors that led young people to leave their family and residential places?
- (3) What are the pull factors that attract rural youth to migrate into Debre Markos?
- (4) What are the major problems that rural youth migrants face in the new setting?

## II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research employed social cognitive theory as a framework. Social Cognitive theory was primarily developed by Bandura (1986). This theory assumes the dynamic interaction between behaviour, personal factors and the environment. Social cognitive theory favours a model of causation involving triadic reciprocal determinism. In this model of reciprocal causation, behavior, cognition and other personal factors, and environmental influences all operate as interacting determinants that influence each other bi-directionally.

### *The conceptual Framework*

Push factors in the context of this study are defined as those situations at home or place of origins that repel youth to leave their residence places. Likewise, pull factors are defined as those conditions that attract migrant youth to come to towns leaving of their place of residence. The following conceptual framework was developed to investigate the push and pull factors for rural youth migration.



**Figure1: A conceptual model showing the push and pull factors and psychosocial consequences of youth migration.**

## III. METHOD

### **Research approach**

Creswell (2007) stated that qualitative research helps to see the meanings that individuals give to social and human problems through listening their stories and hearing their voices. Similarly, Woods (2006) stated that qualitative research is concerned with life as it is lived, things as they happen, and situations as they are constructed. Furthermore, Strauss and Corbin (1998) indicated that qualitative research is in order to explore the life experiences and behaviours.

The philosophical assumption behind social constructivism is that individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences, and meanings directed towards certain objects or things (2007). Likewise, this study employed social constructivism approach and explored the perceived push and pull factors and psychosocial consequences of migration from participants' perspectives.

### **Population**

Youth migrants between the age of 15-29 years old who came from rural areas to Debre Markos town in the last five years are considered as population of this study. In accordance with Debre Markos women, children and social affairs office (2015), the total number of youth migrants in 2016 is 9593 out of which 5183 ( 1476 male and 3707 females).

These migrants participate in diverse activities once they come to Debre Markos. But, we focussed on those migrants who have been working as house maids, commercial sex workers and daily labourers. This group of migrants were selected for they have low level of education and lack awareness regarding urban life and are vulnerable to risks.

### **Participants**

In this study, we collected data from 21 youth migrants (F= 15, M= 6) and from key informants (n=5) who work as experts in the office of Women, Youth and children's affairs office of East Gojjam Zone. Thus, a total of 26 participants were involved in this study. Youth migrants were those who earn a living through participating in day labour (n= 8,) commercial sex (n= 6), and house maid (n= 7).

### **Data collection procedures**

Before data collection, we contacted women, youth and children's affairs department of East Gojjam Administrative Zone and got permission from it. Next, we tried to contact gate keepers such as hotel managers and employers of the day laborers. Then, we introduced ourselves to the selected participants and spent about two hours with them so that they can build trust on us. Finally we asked if the participants are volunteer to take part in the study in the place and time they prefer.

### **Data sources**

Data were collected through in-depth interview, focus group discussion, and observation. Semi-structured interview was employed to collect primary data from 6 participants. To do this, open-ended interview protocols were employed. Using this protocol, data related to the push and pull factors for rural youth from surrounding districts and associated psycho-social consequences were collected.

Besides the in-depth interview, 3 focus group discussions were held and each discussion group consisted of an average of 6-8 participants. The discussions were conducted in Amharic language and audio data were recorded using digital media.

### **Data analysis procedure**

Data collected through in-depth interview and focus group discussion with the help of digital audio recorder were first transcribed in Amharic. Next, the transcribed data were translated to English and read and reread thoroughly to identify the major themes and sub-themes. The coding was done by giving numbers on the side of each theme. Finally, all the coded data were categorized into themes and subthemes.

### **Validity and Trustworthiness of the Study**

In order to ensure the validity of this study, pilot test was conducted with a similar population and data that were gathered from different sources have been triangulated. Besides, to determine the trustworthiness of the findings, the recorded data were checked twice to avoid obvious mistakes during the transcription process. The words and phrases of the informants were directly incorporated to give more space for their standpoint and to support the themes generated from data. Moreover, member check was used to crosscheck whether the themes emerged from the analysis are similar or not with that of the participants' perceptions.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethics are the rules of conduct for research characterized by honesty, frankness and personal integrity as well as confidentiality and courtesy is measured (Walliman, 2006). Understanding this, we tried to consider important ethical issues while conducting the study. To begin with, we obtained an official support letter from Debre Markos University Department of Psychology. Next we informed participants about the aim of the study and participation was based on their full willingness and consent. Moreover, participants were assured that any information that they give would be merely used for the purpose of the study and that they have the right to withdraw at any time if they wanted so. Moreover, anonymity (pseudonyms) was used in the analyses of data and the real names of the participants were not disclosed in the final report.

## **IV. FINDINGS**

This section deals with the findings of the study. Thus, major themes are the push factors, pull factors and psychosocial consequences that migrants face in the new setting are discussed in detail. Under each major theme, there are sub-themes presented in this section. To support our interpretations of the themes and sub-themes quotations taken from transcribed data are included.

## Participants' Demographic Characteristics

**Table1: Summary of Socio-demographic characteristics of participants**

Informant Pseudonym	Occupation	Age		Sex	Marital status	Education	Duration of stay in Debre Markos	Woreda <sup>1</sup>
		Current	Leave home					
Tegest	CSW <sup>2</sup>	22	14	F	Not married	Illiterate	4	'Dejen zuria'
Tebelet	CSW	17	13	F	Not married	Read and write	4	'Bibugn'
Marie	CSW	21	18	F	Divorced	5	3	'Senan'
Degitu	CSW	22	17	F	Divorced	7	3	'Machakil'
Hana	CSW	20	16	F	Single	5	4	'Machakil'
Mastie	CSW	21	18	F	Divorced	5	3	'Senan'
Berkie	House maid	21	15	F	Divorced	10	6	'Aneded'
Meseret	House maid	21	15	F	Divorced	10	6	'Aneded'
Lakech	House maid	22	15	F	Divorced	8	7	'Debay'
Emebet	House maid	19	16	F	Single	9	3	'Machakil'
Leyesh	House maid	20	13	F	Single	8	9	'Senan'
Mintamer	House maid	21	12	F	Single	9	10	'Debay tilat'
Senedu	House maid	22	14	F	Divorced	10	8	'Awabel'
Senait	Day labourer	20	16	F	Single	10	4	'Gozamen'
Sefeleg	Day labourer	27	19	F	Divorced	Illiterate	2	'Feresbet'
Getnet	Day labourer	21	19	M	Single	1 <sup>st</sup> year University	2	'Hulet Eju'
Mele	Day labourer	21	19	M	Single	1 <sup>st</sup> year University	2	'Goncha'
Zewdie	Day labourer	25	22	M	Divorced	Illiterate	3	'Gozamen'
Isayas	Day labourer	20	18	M	Divorced	Read and write	3	'Senan'
Mola	Day labourer	24	21	M	Single	Teachers college	3	'Bibugn'
Dessie	Day labourer	21	18	M	Single	Teachers college	3	'Bibugn'

The age of migrants was found between 17-27 years and the majority of them left their residence while they were teenagers. Out of 21 participants, 17 of them were between the age ranges of 20-24 years. With regard to marital status, the majority of them were divorced ones. Male participants were those who earn a living by being employed as daily labourers in construction work while most of the females were engaged as commercial sex workers in hotels and bars or as housemaids.

### Salient Themes

Data analysis led to the identification of different sub-themes which can be categorized under the major themes of push factors, pull factors and psychosocial consequences as presented as follows.

#### 1. Push factors

Participants mentioned several push factors that led them to leave their birth places and to come to Debre Markos town. The push factors are categorized under the sub-themes of economic factors (e.g poverty and unemployment), social (e.g early marriage and divorce), familial (e.g abuse by parents) and personal factors (e.g need of independence and conflict with parents) that lead youth to leave their place of origin.

#### Poverty

Focus group discussants who worked as house maids and commercial sex workers indicate that rural poverty is the main driving force for rural urban migration. They mentioned that there is a scarcity of farm land and this led them to migrate to Debre Markos. Besides, they revealed that even the available land is triggered by low productivity and there is land fragmentation as a result of divorce. This worsened the poverty level and ultimately led them to come to Debre Markos with the expectation to be free from poverty.

#### Unemployment

Most of the FGD discussants remarked that unemployment was the primary reason for them to leave their birth places. Participants mentioned that because of the absence of land in the rural area, they were forced to come to Debre Markos with the hope to get a job. For example, the following quote taken from a 25 years old participant describes the above issue:

I came from Gozamn district, Qegn Abo kebele. I did not have the chance to go to school like my age mates when I was a child... because my parents did not for they there was no one to keep cattle keeper. But later

<sup>1</sup>Woreda is an Amharic term referring to local administration consisting of different 'kebelles'. East Gojjam zone is one of the largest zones of the Amhara Regional State consisting of more than 20 districts.

<sup>2</sup>CSW here refers to Commercial Sex Worker

I got married at the age of 16. But now we have been divorced.. And then I came to Debre markos along with one of my friends in the neighbourhood.

### **Early marriage**

Interview with key informants revealed that socio-cultural factors like marriage customs force girls to shoulder family responsibilities in their tender years, long before they mature physically and psychologically. As a result, the young women are vulnerable to domestic violence, being physically abused and harassed by their husbands who are much older than them. The succeeding quote taken from the interview conducted with a 21 years old female migrant worker illustrates this fact.

I am 21 years old and I came from Aneded district, zengoba kebele. Currently I am employed as a house maid. I got married at the age of 14. ...my aim was to pursue my education but my parents arranged marriage for my elder brother and me. But my life started to change dramatically. I dropped out of as a result. I was responsible for the house hold activity. Cooking food, collect fire wood, fetching water from remote area was my day today task. Besides, my mother in law and my husband mistreated me. I escaped and came to my home but my step mother frequently nagged me. Then I decided to leave my home and came to Debre Markos following my teacher at the age of 15.

Early marriage, sexual incompatibility and lack of mutual understanding between the newly married youngsters were attributed to be the push factor for migration. The life experience of a 22 years old migrant girl who faced the above situation describes this reality as indicated below.

I came from Debay Tiltatgin district, Shime kebele. I got married when I was 14. But my husband was 30 years at that time. I had to stay with my in-laws and the whole domestic work rests upon me. Having sexual intercourse was really painful and I hated my husband and his family members. Then I managed to escape, but my father returned me back to my in-laws. Fortunately, thanks to my aunt who lives in Debre Markos she brought me here. I stayed with her almost a year having done all household activities without any payment.

### **Abuse by parents**

Children, whose biological parents do not live together reported to have been abused by their stepparents in addition to labour exploitation. One participant mentioned how he was being abused as follows: I came from Mackal district. My father and my mother had a disagreement and hence they divorced when I was 9 years old. We were living in poverty. My stepmother used to prepare 'Tela<sup>3</sup>' and 'Areke' at home. I was responsible to make 'Areke' and 'Tela' in addition to the domestic work. My step mother beat me and insulted me... Finally, I interrupted my education and managed to escape first to Amanuel then to Debre Markos.

### **Work overload**

Some of the migrant girls described that they were forced to migrate due to extreme poverty and work overload. The next quote was taken from a 17 years-old girl's story.

I came from 'Bibug'h district. I left my birthplace when I was 13 years old. My mother died of mental problem when I was 6. My father married another woman having three children. The number of a family grew to 8. I was responsible for domestic work, cooking food, collect firewood, fetching water; cleaning of cow dung...everything was up on me. Because of this I was always late at school. And the teachers always order me to clean the toilet of the school as a punishment. My father was uninvolved in home affairs. There was no one but me who decided to flee to 'Mota'.

### **Need for independent life**

Though not common, the need for autonomy and independent life was mentioned as a cause for migration by participants. One of the participants, who is 22 years old mentioned that she left her residence to seek independent life.

I am 22 years old.... I came from 'Dejen' district. I earn a living by being commercial sex worker. My father died when I was too young. Two years later my mother married another husband and went to the neighbouring district of 'Ser Eyasus'. But I grew with my grandparents. ..I used to look after and I had no chance to go to school at all.

My grand mum always nagged me. She said you would become rude .....And she asked me to marry a husband. And because of this I left my birth place and moved to Dejen, , Addis ababa ...and finally back in to Debre Markos.

## **2. Pull factors**

From data analysis, the sub-themes identified under the pull factors for migration were need for education, and communication with past migrants who are relatives or friends.

### **Need for education**

Need for educational opportunities was one of the pull factors reported to have attracted migrants to leave their residential places. Once they come to Debre Markos, they attend night schools and distance education. All participants except commercial sex workers reasoned out that they had been attending night

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<sup>3</sup>Tela and areke are names referring to common traditional locally brewed alcohol drinks.

schools or distance education programs. However, house maids are usually devoid of this opportunity as indicated below:

I was brought here by my employers with a promise to continue my education. ... But they were not willing to allow me for education. Thus I was obliged to change different houses... and I am still in a trouble.

Communication with previously migrated friends and relatives

Participants in the focus group discussion mentioned they came to Debre Markos because they were informed by relatives and friends who settled in Debre Markos before them. 'Old' migrants who had more or less stable life in the town motivated those in the rural area that life in the town is better compared to living in the rural area.

### 3. Psychosocial consequences

Participants mentioned that once they began living in Debre Markos, they realized that life is not as they expected and their hopes were not fulfilled. Instead they faced a lot of challenges. These negative psychosocial consequences are categorized under the following sub-themes: Sexual exploitation, sexually transmitted diseases and stigma and discrimination.

#### Sexual exploitation and Violence

Youth migrants left their birth places with the dream to lead a better life but this was not realized. But, they mentioned that when they arrived to Debre Markos, they were dissatisfied with the living conditions. The problem is especially serious for female migrants who had been working as commercial sex workers. Female informants who work as commercial sex workers bitterly spoke out that they face severe physical and psychological violence. A female participant in the focus group discussion mentions the problem as follows:

I joined this work through the advice of my friend. But it is very difficult to live. I don't know what they see on my face ...my customers always beat me on my face. Sometimes my partners ask me sex without condom. When I refuse, they beat me. And unfortunately our customers are drinkers, smokers and drug users. They need sex when they drink. ... Sometimes, two or three of my customers may come at the same time.

#### Sexually transmitted diseases

Female migrant youth who earn their living by working as commercial sex workers contracted different sexually transmitted disease, unwanted pregnancies due to forced sexual intercourse. The story of Tigist is a good example of the seriousness of the problem.

I am HIV positive, and I was infected by one of my permanent partners in 'Yetmen'. He died two years before and I suspected that his death is the result of HIV. Then I decided to make a voluntary test and knew my status.

#### Stigma and discrimination

From data analysis, we learned that commercial sex workers face stigma and discrimination by the society. For example, they are mistreated by others and considered as inferior. Hana, who works as a prostitute described the situation as follows:

The biggest challenge is to get a house for residence.... no one is willing to rent a house for a prostitute. We feel ashamed when house owners asked us about our job because we need the house during day time but at night we went out.

From the findings one can understand that both the push and pull factors contributed for rural youth to migrate to Debre Markos. But, compared to the pull factors, there were numerous push factors that put pressure on youth to leave their birthplaces. To conclude, this study aimed to identify the perceived push and pull factors for rural youth to move away from their place of birth and the psychosocial problems that they face once they left their place of origin. Accordingly, the themes and sub-themes emerged during data analysis are organized using the conceptual framework of the study as indicated in the following diagram.

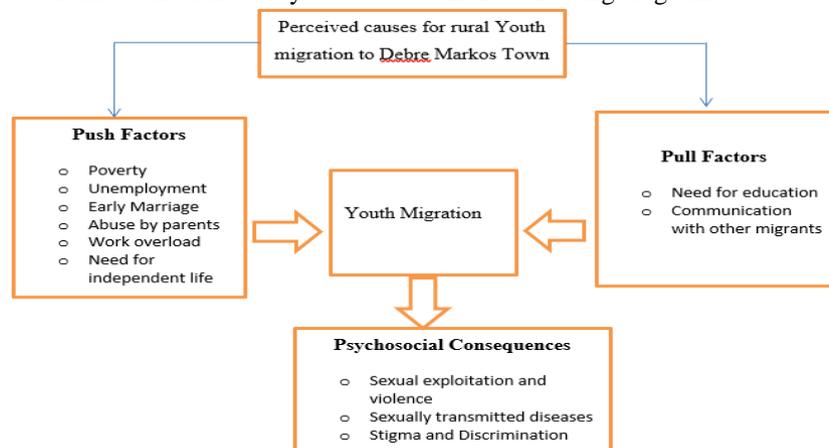


Figure2: A conceptual model showing the push-pull factors and psychosocial consequences of youth migration

## Discussion

Poverty, unemployment, and early marriage in the case of girls were found to be the major push factors for migration to Debre Markos. The desire to continue ones education on spare time was another pushing factor that informants repeatedly reasoned out for leaving their birth places. Our finding is similar to with that of Marinade and Regt (2016).

Rural households in East Gojjam zone depend on agriculture and the majority of households cultivate one hectare and producing only basic staple for the subsistence of their household members. In line with the current finding, Sosina and Holden (2014); and Adamnesh, Oucho and Zeitlyn, (2014) found that poverty and land scarcity to be pushing factors for rural youth to migrate to towns and employment opportunities to be pulling factors.

Early marriage, which is highly prevalent in East Gojjam Zone, was also found to facilitate young girls to migrate to Debre Markos. Early marriage takes place without the consent of the girl. But it is done with the agreement between parents of the bride and the groom. Thus many marriages formed in such a way are dissolved soon and divorced girls flog to towns. A recent study by the World Bank (2010) also found that for women and girls, early marriage and sexual abuse are drivers of migration.

Compared to males, female migrants reported to have faced more negative psychosocial consequences. This includes being victims of sexual and physical abuse and contracting with sexually transmitted disease. In a similar way, Sosina and Holden (2014) found that migrant women and girls were more disadvantageous than men. This might be because women are employed in low-income and risky working conditions which have dire consequences on their overall wellbeing.

## V. CONCLUSION

Rural youth migration is a serious issue in East Gojjam Zone. Anti-social behaviours like theft and robbery are common in Debre Markos town, committed by those young people who are unemployed who had probably migrated from rural areas. Thus, there is a need for the local government to take intervention strategies like minimizing rural youth unemployment, enabling them to have their own plot of land, and campaigning to end early marriage.

We recommend that large scale quantitative research need to be conducted to know the prevalence of rural youth migration from surrounding 'Kebelles' and small towns to Debre Markos town so that appropriate intervention measures could be taken by concerned bodies.

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