

# The Factors Influencing Undergraduate Students' Intentions Toward Foreign Employment. As a case of Undergraduates at the University of Sri Jayewardenepura

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## Abstract

The local education system produces much of Sri Lanka's highly skilled human capital. A highly skilled workforce is essential for supporting Sri Lanka's economic growth. Unfortunately, Sri Lanka has faced a brain drain problem. While research studies have focused on the brain drain of professionals, limited research has been conducted on undergraduates' perceptions of expatriation. This study aims to identify the intentions of undergraduate students to seek foreign employment. Required information was obtained through a structured questionnaire and the sample size was 361. The sampling technique was stratified proportional random sampling. Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was employed to derive the inferences. The results indicate that career aspirations and the influence of family and friends significantly impact undergraduate students' intentions to work abroad. In contrast, salary expectations and quality of life do not have a significant effect. Additionally, positive relationships exist between these factors and students' intentions to seek foreign employment. Future research could focus on the intentions of foreign employment of undergraduates from state and private universities.

**Keywords:** *Salary Expectation, Career Prospects, Quality of life, Influence of family and friends, Foreign employment intentions*

## 1. Introduction

Individuals migrate from their home countries to other countries for various reasons. Approximately 3% of the world's population lives outside their country of birth. Among international migrants, the most common motivation is the pursuit of work. Globally, there were 281 million international migrants in 2022, accounting for 3.6% of the world's population (World Migration Report, 2022). Analyzing the global distribution of international migrants by economic sector, the majority (66.2%) migrated for services, while the rest migrated for industrial activities (26.7%) and agricultural activities (7.1%) (International Labour Organization, 2019). Asia, home to about 4.6 billion people, is the origin of more than 40% of the world's international migrants.

Due to unemployment and low wages, most South Asians leave the sub-region to work in Gulf countries such as Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. Sri Lanka is also reported as a country with high external migration. Of the Sri Lankans living temporarily abroad, 85% have migrated for work. Among them, 60% are male and 40% are female (Department of Census and Statistics, 2012). In 2020, the total number of Sri Lankans who went abroad for work was 53,711, which increased to 122,264 in 2021 (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, Annual Report, 2021).

The Middle East is the top destination for Sri Lankans seeking foreign employment. In

2021, most Sri Lankans who emigrated for work (30,516) went to Qatar. Additionally, many migrated to Saudi Arabia (27,313) and the United Arab Emirates (20,185) (IT Sector, Foreign Employment Bureau). In the late 1970s, when the unemployment rate in Sri Lanka was high, oil-producing countries in the Middle East, experiencing a labor shortage, opened their labor markets to foreign workers. This created employment opportunities for construction workers and other unskilled laborers, leading to a wave of Sri Lankan workers migrating to the Middle East. This trend has continued to this day.

Countries like Australia and New Zealand have become popular destinations for talented and educated Sri Lankans due to their vibrant social and ethnic harmony. While many still migrate to the Middle East for jobs, there has been a significant trend of Sri Lankans moving to the Maldives and South Korea for employment. Between 15,000 and 20,000 Sri Lankans are employed in the Maldives, and about 22,000 works in low-skilled jobs in South Korea. This shift is driven by the employment opportunities available in these countries and the annual opportunities provided by the South Korean government to Sri Lankans (Dissanayake & Samarakoon, 2021).

Sri Lankan scholars, intellectuals, and professionals' emigration is rapidly increasing. This situation has arisen against the backdrop of countries like Australia and China implementing large-scale projects to attract people with high intellectual and innovative abilities. The emigration of professionals is known as a brain drain, a recognized social phenomenon in Sri Lanka. The top three factors driving the brain drain are career prospects (66%), compensation (54%), and social injustice (60%) (The World Bank Report, 2011).

Talented Sri Lankans have continuously migrated to developed countries, driven by the economic and political instability in Sri Lanka. Other contributing factors include the lack of recognition for talent and ability, inadequate support for research, and the failure to benefit from the country's talented individuals. The departure of highly skilled professionals such as doctors, engineers, scientists, lawyers, and graduates significantly impacts Sri Lanka. These individuals are in high demand globally, and developed countries attract them by offering high salaries and privileges. Currently, 27% of Sri Lankans are willing to go abroad if given the opportunity, with the majority being young and educated (Institute for Health Policy, 2021).

According to data from the SLOTS survey conducted by the Institute for Health Policy, Sri Lanka has a migration culture, with millions of Sri Lankans leaving for work permanently or temporarily over the past few decades. The desire to go abroad is not new, but the SLOTS data shows that this desire has grown in recent years. Men (34%) are more willing to migrate than women, but the group most willing to migrate is youth aged 18–29 (48%). Among them, university graduates (53%) with degrees and higher educational qualifications are the most willing to go abroad (Sri Lanka Opinion Tracker Survey, 2021).

The local education system produces much of Sri Lanka's highly skilled human capital. A highly skilled workforce is crucial for supporting Sri Lanka's economic growth and moving towards a knowledge-based economy, particularly in developing innovative technology. However, due to the ongoing brain drain, this has become a challenging task for the Sri Lankan government. While research has focused on the brain drain of professionals, limited studies have been conducted on undergraduates' perceptions of expatriation. The country needs to understand the decisions and attitudes of undergraduate students regarding foreign employment during their university education. Accordingly, this study

seeks to identify the intentions of undergraduate students to seek foreign employment.

*Main Objective:*

To identify the factors affecting undergraduate students' intention to work in foreign employment.

*Sub Objectives:*

1. To identify the influence of salary expectation, career prospects, quality of life, family, and friends on the foreign employment intention of undergraduate students.
2. To identify the interaction effect of gender and family monthly income on the relationship between undergraduate students' foreign employment intention and independent variables.

## **2. Review of Literature**

The recent history of human society has seen the migration of people from different regions. Migration is the temporary or permanent movement of a person or group from one place to another for reasons ranging from persecution to job opportunities (J. Hagen-Zanker, 2008). Sri Lanka is home to 1.8 million international migrants. Most Sri Lankans migrate for employment (United Nations Migration Network in Sri Lanka). It is difficult for people with limited experience to secure good job opportunities in the local market. Due to this, young people are more inclined to go abroad (Bashir et al., 2014). Emigration mainly affects the age and gender composition of the population, as well as the educational and skill composition of the workforce (Van Dalen et al., 2005, as cited in Bashir et al., 2014). Young people intending to migrate often have siblings or friends abroad (Cairns & Smyth, 2011). Additionally, living in a family with migration experience increases young people's intentions to migrate (Purwatiningsih, 2021). A person's decision to migrate from their home country to another is not an individual decision; it is often a collective, social decision made for their family's well-being. The reasons for this include the need to earn income for the family in a challenging economic situation, the lack of educational opportunities in the country, and relatively low wages. Non-economic factors such as reduced social freedom, the need for equal opportunities, and others can also drive migration. The factors that attract people to migrate for work include higher salaries in foreign countries compared to their home country, the opportunity to raise their standard of living, and the ability to fulfill professional expectations (Purwaningsih et al., 2020).

Approximately 11% of Sri Lanka Medical Council-certified doctors have not returned to Sri Lanka after completing their training abroad or left the country after returning to Sri Lanka. As a result, Sri Lanka is at risk of a brain drain, which is likely to grow as many locally trained graduates intend to leave the country (de Silva et al., 2014).

In the pattern of temporary international migration in Sri Lanka, employment is the primary reason for migration. Poverty is one of the driving factors for temporary migration abroad in search of work. The volatility of income-generating activities of individuals engaged in informal sector employment in the North West Province of Sri Lanka has been a driving factor for temporary international labor migration (Dissanayake & Samarakoon,

2021). Additionally, household income generally positively affects the decision to emigrate. Wealthier individuals or families can more easily afford the cost of migration, thus positively influencing their decision to migrate. Since emigration is expensive, more affluent families are better positioned to afford those costs and have better opportunities to arrange work permits or pay for education abroad (Shehaj et al., 2011).

Students are attracted to study abroad due to the higher salaries and more excellent earning opportunities there (Ahmed & Ilahi, 2020). Dissatisfied with the low salaries and compensation offered by jobs, accounting professionals in Malaysia are choosing to migrate to developed countries in search of higher-paying and better-compensated jobs (Jauhar et al., 2015). It has also been revealed that professionals in Malaysia's construction industry have left their home country due to similarly low wages (Ishak & Rashid, 2015). Working adults in Malaysia are not satisfied with the unattractive salaries provided by employers in their home country. Accordingly, unattractive wages in the home country can be identified as a significant factor influencing Malaysian adults' intention to work abroad (Choong et al., 2013). Bashir et al. (2014) found that people intending to work overseas typically migrated from low-income to high-income countries. They further confirmed that good salaries and compensation are the main factors influencing people's intention to work abroad. Many professionals turn to working abroad because they do not receive salaries commensurate with their abilities in their home country (Liew, 2013). Dissatisfied with their pay, nurses working in Belgium are also considering moving abroad for jobs with better pay and compensation (Behar et al., 2007). Of 1,100 graduates from Pakistan who went for higher-level training in the United States, only 40 have returned to their home country. The two main reasons identified are good job opportunities and expected high income abroad (Bashir et al., 2014). Furthermore, wage and unemployment differences have positively affected migration to another country (Gani, 1998, as cited in Bashir et al., 2014). Rosenweig (2006) concluded that students are highly drawn to the United States due to their home country's low-skill job pay. He also pointed out that GDP per capita in the home country has positively affected student outflows. Most skilled, educated, and high-income Sri Lankan migrants prefer to work in countries such as Australia and New Zealand. The wage disparity has also led Sri Lankan skilled migrants to refuse to return to their home country. Low wages for engineers in Sri Lanka have been identified as the main driving force for young Sri Lankan engineers to migrate to Australia (Wijesinghe & Jayawardane, 2021). The migration of professionals from Sri Lanka to other developed countries has also been driven by higher salaries and the possibility of saving more money in foreign jobs (Balasooriya, 1975).

Fewer job opportunities in the home country can be identified as one of the main reasons that motivate people to migrate for employment (Minza, 2012). Job promotions and work experience attract students to study or work abroad. Students who want to study or work in a foreign country decide to go abroad based on learning a foreign language, getting a better education, having high prospects, and gaining foreign work experience with high earnings (Ahmed & Ilahi, 2020). Individuals have decided to leave their home country due to difficulty reaching career aspirations there (Johannes, Marloes & Jaap, 2009). The scarcity of opportunities for skilled workers to achieve adequate career advancement in the home country has prompted them to leave (Oosthuizen & Ehlers, 2007, as cited in Ghazali et al., 2015). Economic instability in the home country, fewer opportunities for career advancement, and lower expected income for jobs in the home country are push factors. In contrast, the possibility of achieving better career advancement in foreign countries has become a pull factor (Tutik et al., 2014). Professionals in Malaysia's construction industry have left their home country due to a lack of professional

development, job opportunities, appreciation and recognition of their work, and weaknesses in the work environment (Ishak & Rashid, 2015). Choong et al. (2013) indicated that the lack of career prospects in the home country affects individuals' intention to work abroad. Accordingly, career aspirations have been identified as a significant factor influencing the intention of working adults in Malaysia to work abroad. They prefer to go abroad because they do not have enough opportunities for promotion and self-development in their home country, while other countries offer more opportunities for advancement. Wahab (2014) further revealed that push factors such as salary, compensation, and dissatisfaction with career and job opportunities affect students' intention to work abroad. The availability of professional development and educational opportunities has strongly influenced the migration of young Sri Lankan engineers to Australia (Wijesinghe & Jayawardane, 2021). Significant factors for migrating skilled health professionals from developing to developed countries include economic development in the destination countries and expectations of higher education opportunities among professionals (Laporte & Dodani, 2005). When university lecturers in Sri Lanka felt insufficient local opportunities, they sought highly qualified jobs or careers abroad (Tutik, Takeshi & Utomo, 2014). Accordingly, good career prospects abroad have mainly led to Sri Lankan university professors going abroad. University lecturers have decided to go abroad due to frustrations and difficulties in changing procedures in Sri Lanka's university system, lack of collegiality and teamwork, reluctance to adapt and change, political pressure and corruption. Additionally, attractive job opportunities in the countries they migrated to, better recognition abroad, and better economic benefits for university professors have motivated them to migrate (Gunawardena & Nawaratne, 2017).

Quality of life can be defined as the satisfaction or dissatisfaction of an individual with the cultural or intellectual conditions in which they live (The Free Dictionary, 2016). Living standards change significantly, influencing the decision to move abroad for employment (World Bank, 2011). Individual freedom, general freedom in rural and urban areas, the rule of law and justice, and a high standard of living attract young people to rich countries (Javed, 2011). Low quality of life, such as environmental safety and cleanliness, has been identified as a factor influencing the migration of Malaysian professionals to other countries (Ishak & Aziz, 2014). Additionally, better living conditions and work-life balance drive Malaysians to migrate to Australia and the UK for work (Ravendran, 2008). Political instability is positively related to the migration of people from Fiji to New Zealand (Gani & Ward, 1995, as cited in Bashir et al., 2014). The main reason for migration from Sri Lanka is employment. Changes in the economy and labor market drive these migrations. The current national issues in Sri Lanka, such as the rising cost of living and deteriorating living standards, can be identified as reasons that motivate Sri Lankans to migrate to other countries and regions with better and safer living conditions. Youth emigration can be recognised as a significant problem in Sri Lanka at present. Sri Lankan youth mainly migrate to developed countries for better living conditions. Most Sri Lankan professionals staying in Qatar have extended their stay there. Many of these professionals intend to migrate permanently to countries such as Australia and New Zealand rather than return to Sri Lanka, thus depriving Sri Lanka of the opportunity to benefit from their skills (Ekanayake & Amirthalingam, 2022). Professionally qualified engineers from developing countries migrate to developed countries for various reasons. Young engineers graduating from public universities in Sri Lanka are migrating to Australia at a faster rate. The Skilled Graduate Visa offered by the Australian government encourages young Sri Lankan engineers to immigrate to Australia. The main driving forces for this include the unwillingness of Sri Lankan engineers to expose themselves to new cultures, adverse

working conditions, political influence, and corruption (Wijesinghe & Jayawardane, 2021). One of the driving factors influencing the migration of professionals from Sri Lanka to other developed countries is the desire for better educational opportunities for their children (Balasooriya, 1975). Sri Lankan university lecturers decided to go abroad because of unfavourable conditions in Sri Lanka. The income from employment in Sri Lanka is insufficient to live a good life, and additional sources of income must be found (Gunawardena & Nawaratne, 2017). As a result, people with tertiary education sought better living conditions and opportunities for themselves and their loved ones. The presence of better educational facilities and an easier life for children in foreign countries has mainly led Sri Lankan university professors to go abroad.

Family and friends influence students' intentions to work abroad (Ghazali et al., 2015). Young people intending to migrate are likelier to have siblings or friends in foreign countries (Cairns & Smyth, 2011). A study conducted by Suanmali and Saengsathien (2015) identified that family members and friends influence students' intentions to work abroad. Students' experiences with family and friends living and working abroad also influence their intention to work abroad (Vandenbrande, 2010). Furthermore, family members who work abroad are often encouraged and supported to direct other family members to work abroad based on the positive experiences they gain abroad (Wahab, 2014). Most students intend to work abroad because they want to reunite with their family members and friends who are abroad, or they want to work abroad for several years (Gliosaite, 2004).

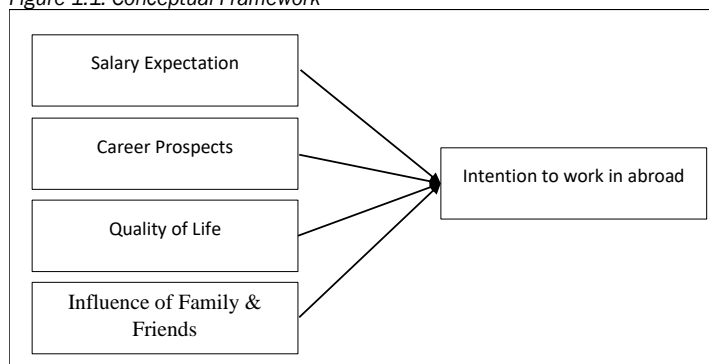
### 3. Materials and Methods

#### *Population, Sample, Sampling Method*

There were a total of 6109 undergraduate students in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Faculty of Management Studies, and Faculty of Applied Sciences of the University of Sri Jayewardenepura in the academic years 2019/2020 and 2018/2019, and a preliminary sample of 361 was selected based on the stratified random sampling method.

#### *Conceptual Framework*

Figure 1.1: Conceptual Framework



Source: Field Survey, 2023



### *Sources of Data, Data Collection Methods and Analytical Tools*

Primary data was collected through a questionnaire consisting of four main sections: sociological and economic factors, educational factors, study factors, and foreign employment intentions. A five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5 was used to assess variables such as undergraduate students' foreign employment intentions, career prospects, salary expectations, quality of life, and the influence of family and friends, with 1 indicating 'strongly disagree' and 5 indicating 'strongly agree.' Structural equation modeling analysis was conducted using Smart PLS statistical analysis software to identify the factors affecting the foreign employment intentions of undergraduate students.

### *Limitations*

The study focuses exclusively on third- and fourth-year undergraduate students from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce, and Faculty of Applied Sciences at the University of Sri Jayewardenepura. Only a few variables influencing the intention to work abroad among undergraduates were considered in the study, while other potential variables were not examined.

## **4. Results and Discussion**

The results and discussion section presents the findings generated from the statistical analysis described in the previous section.

*Table 1.1: Reliability & Validity of the data*

*Source: Field Survey, 2023*

Variable	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Career Prospects	0.821	0.823	0.882	0.651
Influence of family & friends	0.855	0.865	0.896	0.633
Intention to work in abroad	0.878	0.883	0.908	0.623
Quality of life	0.876	0.88	0.907	0.62
Salary Expectation	0.712	0.711	0.84	0.637

Table 1.1 examines the reliability and validity of the data used for the structural equation model. The Cronbach's alpha values for the variables, career expectations (0.821, 0.882), influence of family and friends (0.855, 0.896), intention to work abroad (0.878, 0.908), quality of life (0.876, 0.907), and salary expectation (0.712, 0.840), and the Rho C values are all greater than 0.7, indicating that the data is reliable. Additionally, the validity of the data can be assessed through convergent validity and discriminant validity. Convergent validity is determined by the average variance extracted and the factor loadings of the indicators. Discriminant validity can be determined using the Fornell-Larcker criterion. If the Rho A value is 0.7 or higher and the AVE value is 0.5 or higher, the validity of the data can be confirmed. Accordingly, the Rho A values for the variables, career prospects (0.823), influence of family and friends (0.865), intention to work abroad (0.883), quality

of life (0.880), and salary expectation (0.711) are all above 0.7. Additionally, the AVE values for the variables, career prospects (0.651), influence of family and friends (0.633), intention to work abroad (0.623), quality of life (0.620), and salary expectation (0.637) are all above 0.5. Thus, it can be concluded that the data is valid.

Table 1.2: Outer Loadings

	Career Prospects	Influence of family & friends	Intention to work in abroad	Quality of life	Salary Expectation
CAR_PRO_LIC_1	0.819				
CAR_PRO_LIC_2	0.854				
CAR_PRO_LIC_3	0.791				
CAR_PRO_LIC_4	0.761				
FOR_EMP_INT_LIC_1			0.766		
FOR_EMP_INT_LIC_4			0.858		
FOR_EMP_INT_LIC_5			0.710		
FOR_EMP_INT_LIC_6			0.827		
FOR_EMP_INT_LIC_7			0.766		
FOR_EMP_INT_LIC_8			0.814		
INF_FAM_AND_FRI_LIC_1		0.822			
INF_FAM_AND_FRI_LIC_2		0.774			
INF_FAM_AND_FRI_LIC_3		0.856			
INF_FAM_AND_FRI_LIC_4		0.742			
INF_FAM_AND_FRI_LIC_6		0.778			
QUL_LIF_LIC_1				0.700	
QUL_LIF_LIC_2				0.835	
QUL_LIF_LIC_3				0.759	
QUL_LIF_LIC_4				0.774	
QUL_LIF_LIC_5				0.829	
QUL_LIF_LIC_6				0.822	
SAL_LIC_3					0.840
SAL_LIC_4					0.829
SAL_LIC_5					0.720

Source: Field Survey, 2023



It is also important to identify the extent to which each statement relates to each variable. For that, standardized factors are used. Values of 0.7 or more are also accepted as normal. Accordingly, it can be recognized that the standardized factor weights are greater than 0.7.

The square root values of the AVE values related to each variable were compared with the correlations between the variables to examine the discriminant validity of the data. The table is given below. Discriminant validity can be assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion values presented in Table 1.3. In this table, the diagonal values represent the square root of the AVE for each variable, while the off-diagonal values indicate the correlations between variables. For discriminant validity to be confirmed, the correlation values of a variable with other variables (off-diagonal values) should be smaller than the corresponding diagonal values. In this case, since the off-diagonal values are smaller than the diagonal values, it can be confirmed that discriminant validity is preserved.

Table 1.3: Fornell - Larcker criterion

	Career Prospects	Influence of family & friends	Intention to work in abroad	Quality of life	Salary Expectation
Career Prospects	<b>0.807</b>				
Influence of family & friends	0.423	<b>0.795</b>			
Intention to work in abroad	0.554	0.559	<b>0.789</b>		
Quality of life	0.582	0.503	0.493	<b>0.787</b>	
Salary Expectation	0.569	0.350	0.436	0.605	<b>0.798</b>

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 1.4: Variance Inflation Factor Values of the Variable

	VIF
CAR_PRO_LIC_1	1.749
CAR_PRO_LIC_2	2.202
CAR_PRO_LIC_3	1.755
CAR_PRO_LIC_4	1.497
FOR_EMP_INT_LIC_1	1.853
FOR_EMP_INT_LIC_4	2.505
FOR_EMP_INT_LIC_5	1.540
FOR_EMP_INT_LIC_6	2.273
FOR_EMP_INT_LIC_7	1.905
FOR_EMP_INT_LIC_8	2.310
INF_FAM_AND_FRI_LIC_1	2.831
INF_FAM_AND_FRI_LIC_2	2.197
INF_FAM_AND_FRI_LIC_3	2.439
INF_FAM_AND_FRI_LIC_4	1.563
INF_FAM_AND_FRI_LIC_6	1.702
QUL_LIF_LIC_1	1.685
QUL_LIF_LIC_2	2.277
QUL_LIF_LIC_3	1.753
QUL_LIF_LIC_4	2.072
QUL_LIF_LIC_5	2.479

QUL_LIF_LIC_6	2.549
SAL_LIC_3	1.818
SAL_LIC_4	1.836
SAL_LIC_5	1.170

Source: Field Survey, 2023

If the variance inflation factor (VIF) value is less than 5, then it can be recognized that there is no multicollinearity problem in the model. Accordingly, as shown in Table No. 1.4, it can be concluded that there is no multicollinearity problem in the built model because the variance inflation factor values related to all the variables are lower than 5.

Table 1.5: Goodness of the Fit of the Model Statistics

	Saturated model	Estimated model
<b>SRMR</b>	0.078	0.078
d_ULS	1.804	1.804
d_G	0.7	0.7
Chi-square	1186.707	1186.707
<b>NFI</b>	0.738	0.738

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The estimated model's SRMR value (0.078) is less than 1. The NFI value (0.738) is higher than 0.7. Thus, this model is a good one.

Table 1.6: Identifying the factors affecting foreign employment intention

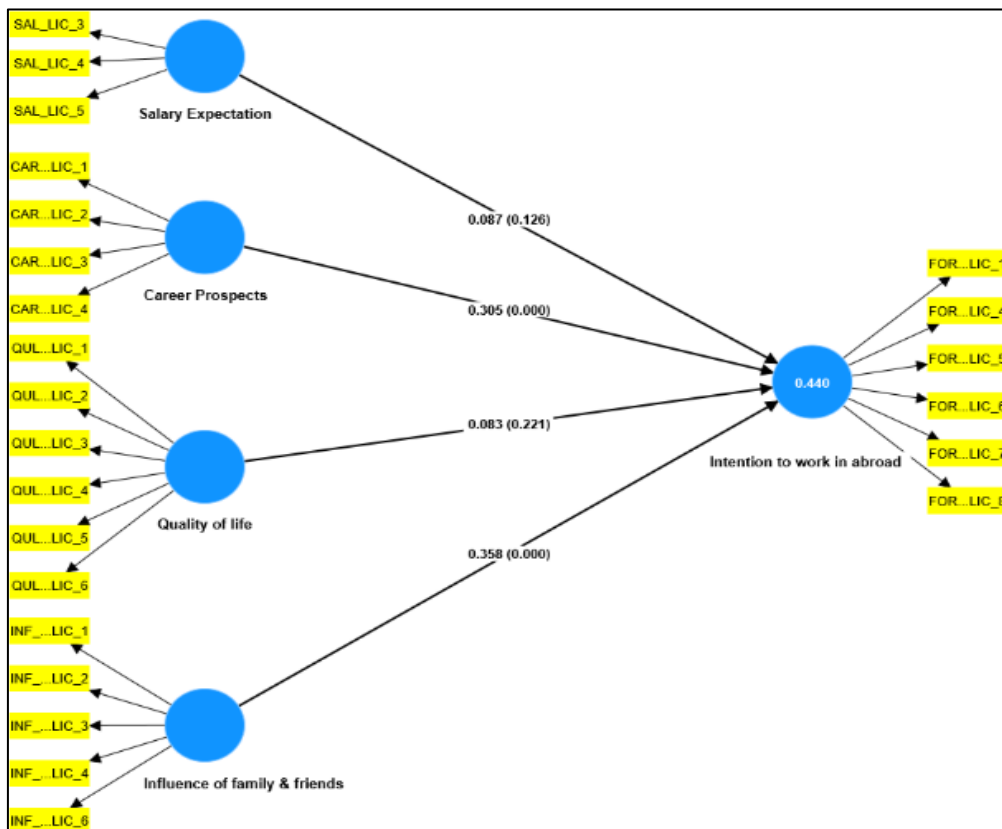
	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics ( O/STDEV )	P value
Career Prospects -> Intention to work abroad	0.305	0.304	0.068	4.47	0
Influence of family & friends -> Intention to work abroad	0.358	0.36	0.056	6.43	0
Quality of life -> Intention to work abroad	0.083	0.086	0.068	1.225	0.221
Salary Expectation -> Intention to work abroad	0.087	0.086	0.057	1.532	0.126

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Career prospects have a positive relationship with undergraduates' foreign employment intentions ( $\beta = 0.305$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). Therefore, it can be concluded that career prospects significantly affect undergraduate students' intentions to work abroad. As professional expectations increase, so does the intention of undergraduate students to seek employment abroad. This finding is consistent with the study by Choong et al. (2013), which revealed that career aspirations significantly contribute to the propensity for foreign employment. They identified career prospects as the most critical factor influencing the intention to work in foreign countries. Similarly, Ghazali et al. (2015) noted that trained individuals in developing countries are likely to seek attractive job opportunities abroad

due to the lack of opportunities in their areas of expertise. This study further supports the conclusion that limited career prospects and advancement expectations influence individuals to seek employment abroad. The survey by Wijesinghe and Jayawardane (2021) also identified professional development opportunities as a significant factor affecting the migration of young Sri Lankan engineers to Australia, as skilled workers tend to choose jobs with high career prospects to improve their future lifestyle. Accordingly, the studies' findings align with the current research in recognizing that professional expectations are a significant factor influencing foreign employment intentions.

Figure 1.2: Identifying the factors affecting foreign employment intention



Source: Field Survey, 2023

The influence of family and friends also has a positive relationship with undergraduate students' intentions to work abroad ( $\beta = 0.358$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). Therefore, it can be concluded that family and friends significantly influence undergraduate students' intentions to work abroad. As the influence of family and friends increases, so does the intention of undergraduate students to work abroad. This conclusion is confirmed by research conducted in Vietnam by Nghia (2019), which identified that the intentions of Vietnamese students to migrate depend on the willingness of their colleagues and families. Similarly, studies by Baruch et al. (2007) and Brown (2002) concluded that family is a source of support and encouragement for individuals to work abroad and that encouragement from family and friends influences students' career decisions.

Quality of life does not significantly affect undergraduate students' foreign employment intentions; however, there is a positive relationship between quality of life and foreign employment intentions ( $\beta = 0.083$ ,  $p = 0.221$ ). Previous studies by Choong et al. (2013) and Wijesinghe & Jayawardane (2021) have found that quality of life influences foreign employment intentions. According to Choong et al., quality of life significantly contributes to the intention to work abroad. Wijesinghe and Jayawardane (2021) also showed that Sri Lankans intend to seek employment abroad in anticipation of a higher standard of living. However, the current study concluded that living conditions do not significantly contribute to foreign employment intentions.

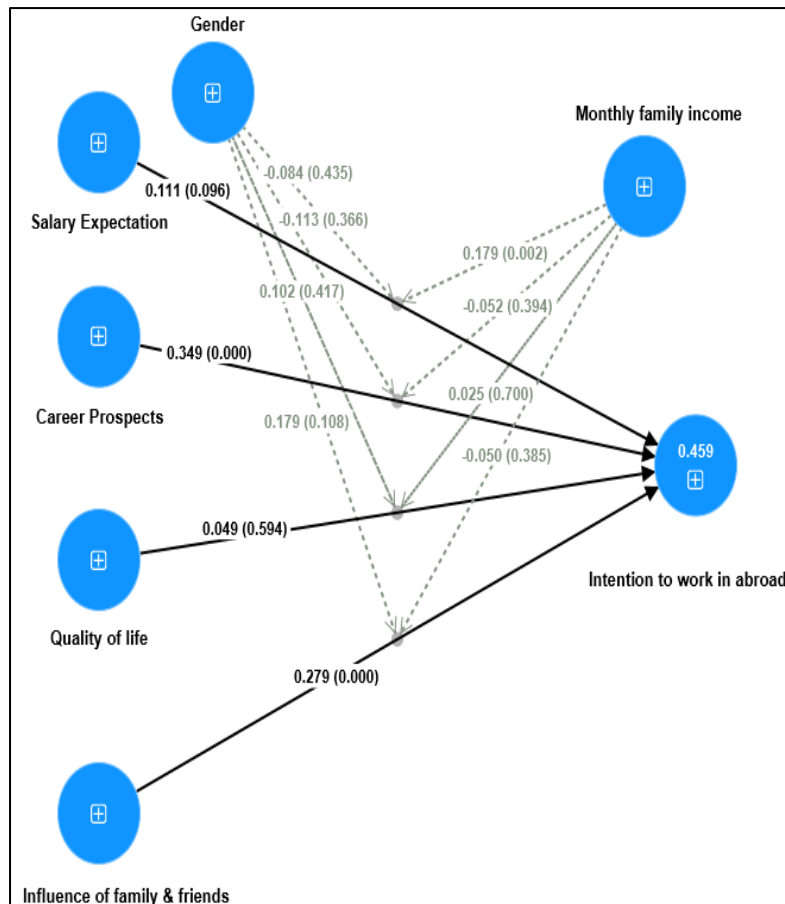
Salary expectations do not significantly affect undergraduate students' foreign employment intentions, although there is a positive relationship between salary expectations and these intentions ( $\beta = 0.087$ ,  $p = 0.126$ ). Research by Ghazali et al. (2015) and Jauhar et al. (2015) found that salary expectations influenced the foreign employment intentions of Malaysians, as higher salaries are offered in developed countries compared to local employment. However, the present study revealed that salary expectations do not influence undergraduates' foreign employment intentions. The findings of Choong et al. (2013) and Wijesinghe & Jayawardane (2021) contradicted the results of the present study, as they found that salary expectations influenced the foreign employment intentions of Malaysian and Sri Lankan young engineers who were dissatisfied with the unattractive salaries offered by employers in their home countries. However, the present study confirmed the conclusions reached in studies conducted by Sohoch (2012) and Cochran (2011), which found that salary and benefits do not have a significant relationship with the intention to work abroad.

The value of the determined coefficient is 0.440, indicating that the basic model explains 44% of the total variation in the dependent variable. In other words, it can be concluded that only 44% of the total observed variation in undergraduate students' foreign employment intentions is explained by the basic model.

As shown in Table 1.3, the monthly family income level has a positive relationship with the connection between salary expectations and the foreign employment intentions of undergraduate students. Therefore, it can be concluded that family monthly income level has a significant effect on the relationship between salary expectations and foreign employment intentions of undergraduate students ( $\beta = 0.179$ ,  $p = 0.002$ ).

However, Table 1.3 also indicates that the monthly family income level does not significantly affect the relationship between the variables of career expectations, quality of life, the influence of family and friends, and the foreign employment intentions of undergraduate students. It can be recognized that the family monthly income level shows a positive relationship with the connection between quality of life and the foreign employment intentions of undergraduate students. Conversely, the family monthly income level shows a negative relationship with the connection between career expectations, the influence of family and friends, and the foreign employment intentions of undergraduate students. Furthermore, although the monthly family income level does not significantly affect the foreign employment intentions of undergraduate students, there is a positive relationship between family income and these intentions.

Figure 1.3: To identify the interaction effect of gender and family monthly income on the relationship between undergraduate students' foreign employment intention and independent variables.



Source: Field Survey, 2023

Bashir et al.'s (2014) study identified that household income level positively affects student emigration because emigration is expensive. Wealthy families can afford the costs, arrange work permits, or pay for education abroad. This study, in particular, found that students from low- and middle-income families had a firm intention to go overseas. Accordingly, this study identified the monthly family income level influencing migration intentions. However, the current study contradicts this conclusion by revealing that family monthly income level does not significantly contribute to foreign employment intentions, except in the relationship between career expectations and foreign employment intentions.

Motherhood does not significantly affect undergraduate students' intentions to work in foreign countries, but there is a positive relationship between motherhood and these intentions. Additionally, Table 1.3 shows that pride does not significantly affect the relationship between salary expectations, career expectations, quality of life, family and friends' influence, and undergraduate students' foreign employment intentions. However,

it can be recognized that pride shows a positive relationship with the connection between living conditions, family and friends' influence, and foreign employment intentions, and a negative relationship with the connection between career expectations, salary expectations, and foreign employment intentions.

The present study found that citizenship does not significantly affect undergraduate students' foreign employment intentions. The survey by Silvestri et al. (2014) further confirmed that citizenship does not contribute substantially to students' intentions to work abroad. However, studies by Bashir et al. (2014) and Nghia (2019) showed that homelessness affects students' intentions to work overseas.

Also, the overall model's coefficient of determination is 0.459, indicating that the overall model explains only 46% of the observed variation in undergraduate students' foreign employment intentions.

## 5. Conclusions

72% of the respondents intend to go abroad after their undergraduate studies, but 27% have no intention of going abroad after their undergraduate studies. Career aspiration and family and friends' influence significantly impact undergraduate students' intentions to work overseas. Salary expectation and quality of life do not substantially affect undergraduate students' foreign employment intention. Still, a positive relationship exists between salary expectation, quality of life factors, and undergraduate students' foreign employment intention. Being accustomed to living in a long-term society and liking social relations, being responsible for serving Sri Lankan citizens who have paid taxes for free education, lack of financial facilities, having a strong relationship with family, and wanting to live in Sri Lanka are the reasons for moving abroad. It can be identified as the reasons that have influenced the lack of intention to be.

### *Implication of the study*

Economic and political changes have dramatically impacted the migration flow of highly skilled people. Accordingly, the government should take necessary measures to create economic and political stability in the country, develop education and living standards, and retain citizens in the home country to create and promote job opportunities for graduates, to direct qualified people for relevant jobs, to increase the quality of the public sector, to encourage people for research and innovation, to maintain the rule of law, and to be efficient, competent, and complete of managerial and administrative abilities. It is essential to take the necessary measures and decisions to provide suitable jobs, positions, facilities, and privileges to skilled workers, control inflation, and increase national productivity.

### *Further Research Suggestions*

This study identified career aspirations and family and friends' influence as factors significantly contributing to undergraduate students' foreign employment intentions. Therefore, their influence on these intentions can be studied more widely in future studies.

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