



Exploring Factors in the Intent to Move Abroad Among Medical Technologists of Selected Private Hospital in Poblacion District 1 Davao City: A Qualitative Study

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ABSTRACT:

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, disparities in healthcare workforce supply and demand in locations like Davao City underscored global healthcare system vulnerabilities. Health workers constitute a significant segment of this global mobility during what has been termed the "age of migration" (Bludau, 2021; de Haas et al., 2019), with half originating from low- and middle-income countries (Pressley et al., 2022). This study employed a phenomenological qualitative approach to explore the primary factors influencing Filipino medical technologists of private hospitals in Poblacion District 1, Davao City as they seek career opportunities abroad. The study revealed that the lived experiences of medical technologists whether negative or positive experiences, are contributing factors to the intent of international employment. The study further revealed that the intent of Filipino medical technologists to move abroad is hampered by various challenges, including financial difficulty and long-time processing of necessary documents. Additionally, the findings disclosed several push and pull factors that influence one's decision to move abroad. The majority of the responses are focused on the low compensation for medical technologists in the Philippines as a key driver for migration. As a recommendation, support for career development and growth must be prioritized by employers, as well as ensuring that compensation packages are competitive and in line with the standards offered by international employers.

Keywords: push and pull factors, migration, compensation, medical technologists

Introduction:

In 2019, an estimated 272 million individuals engaged in international migration, marking a notable increase of 51 million from 2010 (United Nations, 2020). Health workers constitute a significant segment of this global mobility during what has been termed the "age of migration" (Bludau, 2021; de Haas et al., 2019), with half originating from low- and middle-income countries (Pressley et al., 2022).

Migration motivations often include pursuing career advancement, family reunification, personal freedom, and security (Paciente et al., 2023). This trend is evident among medical professionals from Southeast Asia, such as medical technologists from the Philippines, who relocate to OECD member nations attracted by better remuneration and working conditions (Paciente et al., 2023).

Between 1990 and 2017, the number of Filipino health workers migrating abroad, primarily as temporary migrants, steadily rose. For instance, from 2019 data, approximately 350,361 doctors, nurses, midwives, physical and occupational therapists, and medical technologists left the Philippines for international employment (Commission on Filipino Overseas [CFO], 2019; Philippine Overseas Employment Agency [POEA], 2019). Notably, male health workers are more likely than their female counterparts to express Intent to migrate (Institute of Health Policy and Development Studies, 2005; Moncatar et al., 2023).

The emigration of healthcare professionals contributes significantly to human resource shortages in healthcare systems (Hajian et al., 2020). This shortage compromises patient safety and well-being in countries of origin and impedes progress toward achieving Millennium Development Goals in developing nations.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, healthcare workforce supply and demand disparities in locations like Davao City underscored global healthcare system vulnerabilities. Challenges such as inadequate long-term workforce planning, low retention rates, and heightened global demand for healthcare workers have exacerbated these issues (Murataj et al., 2022).

This study employs qualitative methods to explore the primary factors influencing Filipino medical technologists of selected private hospital in Poblacion District 1, Davao City as they seek career opportunities abroad. By examining the motives behind their migration intentions, this research offers valuable insights for current and prospective Filipino medical technologists in Davao City.

Methodology:

Research Design

Following a qualitative approach, this study employed interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to fully explore the participants' subjective experience of the topic. This method was utilized to gather reliable information through a one-on-one interview guided by a set of open-ended questions prepared by the researcher. A qualitative study through interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is focused on thoroughly examining personal lived experience, conducted on its terms, and emphasizing participants' meaning-making.

Sample and Sampling Design:

The selected participants for this study are ten (10) registered medical technologists employed at the selected private hospital in Poblacion District 1, Davao City. Nonprobability purposive sampling is employed to fill in the required number of study participants conveniently. Also, the participants were chosen based on the following criteria: 1) they must be registered medical technologists currently working in the selected private hospital of Poblacion District 1, Davao City. 2) they must be among Filipino medical technologists contemplating working overseas, and 3) Filipino medical technologists have migrated for at least less than a year.

Research Instrument

The primary instrument utilized in this study is a researcher-made ten (10) interview guide questions. Each question was created to assess the participants' lived experiences about the topic. Probing and follow-up questions were also incorporated to allow appropriate narration. Every item was made to answer the specific questions and objectives of the study.

Additionally, the research instrument was validated by three (3) experts in the field prior to the interview.

Data Analysis Procedure

A series of data analysis procedures was employed to summarize the results and findings of the study. Furthermore, the researchers considered all of the data before deciding on saturation. Creswell's (2013) qualitative data analysis procedure was used, which included (a) data organization; (b) reading and memoing; (c) describing, classifying, and interpreting data into codes and themes; (d) interpreting the data; and (e) representing and visualizing the data. The interview data were transcribed, read, scrutinized several times, and then reduced and categorized using a thematic-analysis approach based on themes and subthemes. Additionally, manual coding was used to assign themes and subthemes.

Furthermore, member checking was employed to obtain participant comments on the accuracy of the data collected and the researchers' interpretations. In the last stage, responses to every item of the interview guide questions were linked to the research questions to determine whether the query had been answered. The researcher rigorously adhered to these phases and techniques.

Statement of the Problem:

The study was aimed to explore the factors influencing the intent to move abroad among the Medical Technologists of selected private hospitals in Poblacion District 1, Davao City. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the experiences of Medical Technologists in selected private hospital in Poblacion District 1, Davao City in their Intent to move Abroad?
2. What are the factors influencing the intent of Medical Technologists of selected private hospital in Poblacion District 1, Davao City to move abroad?
3. What are the challenges and barriers in the Philippines, particularly encountered among Medical Technologists in the selected private hospital in Poblacion District 1, Davao City compelling them to move abroad?
4. What are the recommendations the Medical Technologists in the selected private hospital in Poblacion District 1, Davao City could provide to their colleagues to remain employed elsewhere in the Philippines?
5. What are the best interventions that can be established to address the factors influencing the intent of Medical Technologists in the selected private hospital in Poblacion District 1, Davao City to move abroad?

Results

MAJOR THEME 1: Experiences of Medical Technologists in the selected private hospital of Poblacion District 1, Davao City in their Intent to Move Abroad (SOP1)

The interview responses revealed five (5) specific perspectives about the experiences of Filipino Medical Technologists in the selected private hospital of Poblacion District 1, Davao City in their Intent of working in another country: (1) mastery of skills through experience, (2) lack of work-life balance, (3) working with old model machines, (4) low compensation at work, and (5) no professional growth.

SUB-THEMES:

1.1 Mastery of skills through experience

Medical technology is a profession where experience is essential for skill development and competence in the field. Experience impacts accurate diagnosis, laboratory equipment proficiency, and complex case handling. Several studies claim that an experienced individual can handle the pressures of a high-stakes environment and new technologies (Gonzales & Tognini, 2020).

In this regard, the medical technologist participants disclosed that among the negative push factors for migration, the acquired technical skills relative to the profession after years of working experience in a Philippine laboratory setting significantly contribute to their Intent to move overseas. The following responses reflect this perspective:

"My work experiences in the Philippines as a medical technologist were great. Nahimo kong hanas kung unsa man ko karon human nakapangamdam sa pila ka tuig before ko nag-apply sa posisyon sa US. (I got skilled into what I am now after having prepared for years before I applied for a position in the United States)" (P1)

For many Filipino medical technologists, working in the Philippines for years after passing the national licensure examination is an option to prepare before a job search overseas. The study conducted by (Batac et al., 2021) indicates that Filipino registered medical technologists were inspired to pursue their careers overseas by their job experience during the COVID-19 outbreak in the Philippines. The notion explains the importance of experience for competency. Many destination countries like the United States have stringent requirements, often including at least two (2) years of experience, to ensure that applicants have sufficient practical skills and knowledge of the medical technology practice (Smith & Wright, 2020). Many nations, particularly those to which Filipino medical technologists migrate, consider years of experience as a proxy for expertise and dependability.

1.2 Lack of work-life balance

Research suggests that work-life balance is a critical factor affecting job satisfaction and the overall quality of life. Filipino medical technologists are experiencing long working hours, heavy workloads, and staff shortages, negatively impacting work-life balance (Velasquez & Reyes, 2022). The participants in this study have also noted the same findings, which highlight their experiences with a lack of work-life balance. These insights were extracted from these interview excerpts:

"The experience that led me to consider moving abroad is... work-life balance in working abroad. In addition, having a work-life balance experience can lead to having time for yourself and spending more time with my family without thinking of work." P2

"Akong experience, grabeng struggle tungod sa kadaghan sa trabaho, semi ug manual pa gyud. Way mahimo! Na-realize nako gamay ra akong oras sa lab life, aw love life diay." (My experience, lot of struggles due to workload, machines are semi and manual. I feel so helpless. I realize that I only have a little time for lab life, I mean love life) P3

"The experience that led me to consider moving abroad as a medical technologist needs to be better compensated despite working more than our official hours. Here in the Philippines, we can't go home if we can't finish a difficult task. From what I heard from my colleague working outside the Philippines, their supervisors help them finish early or let them off work on time, and they do not need to finish that specific task because there will be someone who will continue it for them." P5

Filipino medical technologists experiencing burnout due to demanding work conditions may seek employment abroad to escape these stresses and find a healthier work environment. International positions are frequently seen as providing more reasonable working hours and better support networks.

1.3 Working with old-model machines

The experiences of Filipino medical technologists in dealing with outdated technology are a crucial factor driving migration. The old laboratory machines in the Philippines, particularly in government-funded facilities, affect the quality of diagnostics capacity and can limit a medical technologist's professional capabilities (Valdez & Miranda, 2021). According to Gacevic et al. (2018), dissatisfaction causes an individual to leave and work abroad four times more. Similar to the data gathered, variables management, job valuation, organization, and work equipment and apparatus all contribute to dissatisfaction and enhance the chance of applying abroad. From the interview, the following statements are connected with the experiences of Filipino medical technologists in Davao City working with outdated and old machines.

"Naglaum ug mas maayong career, like having access to cutting-edge technology nga wala gi-offer diri sa Pinas maoy experiences nga nakapa-isip nako mogawas." (Better career prospects, like having access to cutting-edge technology...not offered locally in the Philippines, are some of the experiences that prompted me to think about moving abroad.) P3

"In my three years of experience as a medical technologist, I realized I wanted to explore other types of machines related to this profession." P6

"Several factors have led me to consider moving abroad, including... lack of modern facilities and equipment" P4.

"Some types of equipment here in the Philippines are not advanced and outdated. Moving abroad can provide us with opportunities for career advancement that may be limited in our home country. This could include access to advanced training, exposure to new technologies, and the chance to work in specialized areas of medicine." P10

Generally, the disparity in terms of technological advancements between the Philippines and rich countries remains significant. Medical technologists in the Philippines frequently work with outdated diagnostic machines and laboratory equipment, making it difficult to conduct advanced diagnostic procedures. As a result, they are forced to look for work in nations where technology is more up-to-date, allowing them to use state-of-the-art equipment and advance their technical skills.

1.4 Low compensation at work

A common ground for all Filipino medical technologists is the experienced low compensation and benefits at work. According to research, medical technologists in the Philippines earn significantly less than their colleagues in other nations. According to numerous wage surveys and statistics, the typical yearly compensation for a Filipino medical technologist may be much lower than that of professionals in comparable professions in industrialized nations. Based on the job offers posted on different Philippine hiring sites (i.e., Jobstreet), the entry salary for a newly licensed medical technologist ranges from Php17,000 to Php 20,000 (Jobstreet, 2024). The participants of this study also shared the experience with low salaries; below are the excerpts from the interview:

"It is very sad to say that the wages we earn as a healthcare professional in the Philippines cannot sustain with the on-going high inflation rate in the country." P1

"Based on my travels abroad, I've realized med techs in the Philippines are extremely underpaid compared to other countries." P4

"I considered moving abroad as a medical technologist due to the low salary" P9

Significantly, respondents added that the salary of a medical technologist in the Philippines is not commensurate to the pile of responsibilities one must perform at work; this was expressed in the following excerpt:

"Wala man lang nakatugbang ang sweldo nako sa akong katungkangan ug obligasyon sa trabaho isip medical technologist so akong huna-huna, mas hayag nga oportunidad ang naghulat nako abroad". (My salary did not even equate my duties and responsibilities at work as medical technologist so I think better opportunities wait for me abroad)." P7

"Sa tinuod nga pagka-storya, mas giila pa ang mga medical technologist sa laing nasud kaysa diri sa ato sa Pilipinas". (Real talk, Medical Technologists abroad are more professionally recognized than here in the Philippines.) Modern technologies and trainings are far better than what we have here. Also, the compensation is way much higher than what we are getting as a professional." P8

"The experiences that led me to consider moving abroad as a medical technologist are the compensation that we receive. It is not enough for the work we render and the benefits as medical technologists" P6.

Based on these findings, most participants experienced the long-time echo of Filipino medical technologists regarding compensation and benefits. The desire for higher financial rewards and professional prospects overseas is a significant driver of these migration patterns.

1.5 No professional growth

According to the study of De Guzman (2020), medical technologists in the Philippine healthcare system have limited prospects for leadership roles and specialization and stagnant career advancement due to the need for defined professional advancement pathways. Moreover, career advancement is further hampered by the need for more easily available professional development and continuing education opportunities (Santos, 2019). According to Arthur (2019), every Filipino's career development is driven by motivation and inspiration. This involves working abroad to accomplish their objectives and to apply their educational attainment in a practical context.

Based on the responses of the participants, it was also evident that the majority experienced limitations and a lack of support for career growth and development, as expressed in the following statements:

"The experience that led me to consider moving abroad are career development and specialization because of the advanced techniques and specialized training that are not available here in the Philippines" P2

"Several factors have led me to consider moving abroad, including limited opportunities for career advancement" P5

"Experiences that led me to consider moving abroad. One is that they offer advanced training in specialized programs that may not be available in our country or professional development." P10

"Moving abroad can provide us with opportunities for career advancement that may not be readily available in our home country; this could include access to advanced training..." P8

"Other countries offer better avenues for professional growth, like higher salaries and certifications. P9

Additionally, a respondent mentioned the typical scenario in the Philippine work setting, which connotes the "Palakasan system." Cronyism and favoritism are inherent to the "palakasan system," undermining merit-based promotion and contributing to unequal organizational chances. Studies have shown that these methods can perpetuate inefficiencies and stifle corporate progress by promoting individuals based on personal relationships rather than qualifications (Reyes, 2019). The excerpt is provided below:

"Walang suporta ang admin ng aming hospital pagdating sa mga trainings na available, kapag mayroon naman, madalas pinapadala yong malakas lang sa chief namin" P4

Moreover, Filipino medical technologists are more likely to leave their positions and seek opportunities abroad when they realize they are stagnant. Thus, the limited experience of career growth and advancement opportunities contributes to the intention to find jobs abroad.

MAJOR THEME 2: Factors influencing the Intent of Medical Technologists in the selected private hospital of Poblacion District 1, Davao City to move abroad (SOP 2)

The theory on migration by Lee (1966), also known as the "Push and Pull Theory," is an essential fundamental concept in understanding human migration. Several push and pull factors influence Filipino medical technologists' desire for international employment. Consequently, the responses from the interview revealed four (4) significant factors reflecting (1) Working Conditions, (2) Economic Factors, (3) Personal and Family Aspiration, and (4) Professional Aspiration as factors influencing their Intent to work abroad.

SUB-THEMES:

2.1 Working Conditions in the Philippines

The working conditions of Filipino medical technologists in their respective facilities significantly contribute to their decision to seek an opportunity abroad. According to Shah, Zaidi, Ahmed, and Rehman (2016), variables that contribute to a lack of motivation include inadequate compensation, unsuitable residence facilities, terrible work environment,

Supplies and medical facilities. A toxic work culture partnered with low compensation is consistently highlighted in most of the responses. Personal experiences emphasized by some participants are revealed in the following excerpt:

"Yes, my current working condition highly affects my Intent to work abroad. The medical technologists here are overworked and have low salaries. It can hardly support an individual in saving, plus the inflation in our country makes it hard for medical technologists to stay here." P2

"Yes, my current working conditions are a significant factor in my Intent to move abroad. The workload is often overwhelming, and the outdated equipment and resources hamper my ability to perform my job effectively." P5

In addition, the striking problem of understaffing coupled with the lack of regular employment positions in most healthcare facilities in the Philippines is becoming a major factor pushing more healthcare professionals, including medical technologists, to work abroad. Despite a staffing shortage, many facilities operate at full capacity, leaving health practitioners with heavy workload pressures, increased stress, and compromised patient care delivery (Lopez, 2017). This condition was captured through the following statements:

"Kani nga mga current working conditions maoy nakapa-motivate nako aron manipad sa gawas sa nasud: 1. Limitado nga kontrata. 2. Sobra-sobra nga trabaho. 3. Limited career growth ug gibatig laay sa current nga trabaho". (These current working conditions motivates me to move abroad: 1. Limited contracts. 2. Excessive workloads 3. Limited career growth and feeling bored in my current work)." P7

"Yes, first is the employment stability due to my status. "Dili ko regular nga empleyado, bisan pa nakaabot na ko ug duha ka tuig sa pagpanerbisyo, contract of service o COS lang gihapon ko". (I am not a regular employee even though I already rendered 2 years in service and am still under the contract of service.) "Ikaduha, mubo nga sweldo ug kulang nga benepisyo isip COS. Igo ra gyud tawon akong sweldo igasto sa akong pagkaon ug puy-anan tungod kay layo man ang hospital gikan sa among balay maong dili ko ka-ipon ug kwarta sa maong kadako nga sweldo nako karon". (Second is low salary & lack of benefits, as a COS (contract of service) I am at a low rate which means our salary is just enough for my expenses for food and accommodation since the hospital is far from our home it is hard for me to save money given the salary I had now.) And lastly, Lack of support from management and inadequate institutional this led us to dissatisfaction with our work. we felt unsafe in our work always." P6

"Yes, it is one of the factors. It is not easy to work 16 hours 3x a week. I am depriving my children of quality time with them. It is not healthy for my well-being, too." P9

Moreover, the feeling of superiority might affect successful interprofessional collaboration, which is essential for providing comprehensive patient care. Studies have shown that when certain healthcare professionals believe they are superior to others, it can result in communication hurdles, decreased teamwork, and a fragmented approach to patient care (Mendoza & Alvarez, 2020). Relevantly, P13 emphasized the observed problem in terms of superiority at work.

"Aside from unfair treatment, "Pamati ra gyud ang uban" (other colleagues also feel their superiority), especially if you are not in a plantilla position. "Abusado ra sila" (They are abusive), imposing that they are the boss and acting as if you are not part of the laboratory team. Those in plantilla positions

abuse their power over job order medtechs, "ihatag tanan ilang trabaho sa JO samtang galingkod, kaon ug FB na lang gibuhat" (delegating all the work to them while they sit at their desks, eat, and browse FB (social media)) without considering that their coworkers are busy working. They simply do not care." P8

Nevertheless, the abovementioned working conditions of participants indicate the significant drivers of their Intent to move abroad in the hope of liberating themselves from toxic and stressful working conditions.

2.2 Economic Factors

Healthcare professionals in the Philippines have low incomes and few opportunities for career progression despite the evident breadth of their work (Dumont & Zurn, 2007). In a 2020 study undertaken by "iPrice" - a data aggregator business based in Kuala Lumpur,

Malaysia and the Philippines were discovered to have the lowest salaries for healthcare personnel from Southeast Asian countries. Based on the statistics, mid-level experienced Filipino registered nurses and medical technologists make 468% and 612% less than the highest-paid healthcare workers in Singapore, respectively.

Various research demonstrates that pay disparities between the country of origin and the country of destination are a primary motivator for migration (Ranada, 2019). Most participants in this study stated that, although they suffered financial hardships while working in the Philippines, they were underpaid and did not receive overtime pay. Thus, economic factors play a crucial role in motivating Filipino medical technologists to seek employment abroad, as expressed in the following excerpts:

"Sakto lang ang bayad sa adlaw-adlaw nakong panginahanglan apan tungod sa inflation, nisaka ang mga presyo nga lisud nang ipa-igo sa akong sweldo ug mga benepisyo. Ang paglangyaw ra gyud maoy tubag aning kalisud sa kinabuhi". (The pay is just good for my daily needs but due to the inflation, prices are getting high that it is somehow difficult to keep up with my salary and benefits. Hence, moving abroad is the answer to this difficulty in life)." P7

"Compensation is a significant influence for me since other countries offer much higher salaries than here in the Philippines while doing the same job in the same amount of time. However, I work in a government facility in the Philippines with higher salaries than in private once. I still think that Medical Technologists deserves more." P8

"The salary is incomparable to the workload that we have" P9

"As I mentioned earlier, the reason I want to work abroad is due to the salary and benefits, which are more competitive compared to those in the Philippines." P10

"... our salaries and other benefits are not enough to let our families survive for a month" P3

Similarly, the participants also shared about working overtime without receiving additional pay. On the other hand, besides the high salary offers abroad, the participants showed excitement towards the benefit package offered to hospitals in a foreign country.

"Compensation and benefits play a huge role in working as a medical technologist. Here in the Philippines, you don't have benefits or compensation if you're not a permanent or regular employee. You will work 8 hours a day for 6 days with 1 day off, which is tiring. In some countries, medical technologists receive higher salaries, better benefits packages..." P6

Therefore, given the current cost of living in the Philippines and the comparatively low compensation, Filipino medical technologists are pushed to find more financially rewarding professions abroad.

2.3 Personal and Family Aspiration

In the Philippines, migration is a part of family culture, with investments in exclusive education. Migration is viewed as a means of improving socioeconomic status and, more broadly, bringing the best for the family's well-being (Parchamento, 2017). The participant's shared experiences regarding personal motivation and family aspiration influenced their Intent to work abroad. Most of the participants expressed that working abroad is primarily to improve the quality of life of their family through remittances. These insights are reflected in the statements below:

"The dream to have an improved quality of life and achieving it easily when in abroad compared to working here in the Philippines is one of the factors I can consider. "Isip kamagulangang anak, gibati nako ang kabug-at sa responsibilidad". (As the eldest daughter, I feel the weight of responsibility on me.) "Tinguha nako nga makatabang nila sa pinansyal bisan pa man wala ko gi-obliga sa akong mga ginikanan. (It is my desire to help them financially, though my parents do not oblige me to do so.) I think I can provide if I am employed abroad rather than here in Davao City." P3

"Kulang akong sweldo aron maka-contribute sa akong pamilya. Sa nagtrabaho pa ko sa Pilipinas sarili ra nako akong gi-provide, kulang pa gyud. Akong paycheck igo ra pambayad sa bills. Na-realize ug motivate ra ko to do something sa dihang nigrabe ang sakit sa akong Papa ug sa current inflation" (My salary was not enough to contribute to my family. When I was working in the Philippines, I was only providing for myself, even that was not enough. My paycheck was only to pay for my bills. When my father's illness worsened, and with the inflation that we are experiencing up to this day, that's when I realized that I had to do something.) It gave me the drive and motivation to want more so here I am now. P10

“For my family relocation and stability, better educational opportunities for my children.” P9

“I am longing for a work-life balance that I believe other countries can offer. Working for two jobs obviously consumes my time, leaving a little for my family.” P6

“As a breadwinner in my family, I want to consider working abroad not only for future but also for my family. I want to give a better life for my family because I know there is more opportunities and there is much better offer than here.” P4

Moreover, some of the informants highlighted their personal aspirations as factors in their desire to move abroad. Similar to this, P6 added that working in another country will aid in attaining a comfortable life.

“Well, ang akong personal nga rason nganong gusto nako manarbaho sa laing nasud mao ang komportable nga kinabuhi”. (Well, my personal reason for wanting to work abroad is my dream to achieve a comfortable life). “Buot pasabot pagpalit ug akong kaugalingon balay, mag-abli ug negosyo ug pamalit ug mga gamit nga akong gusto”. (By this, I mean buying my own house, starting a business, and purchasing things I want), which I cannot do if I work here in the Philippines due to the low salary. Additionally, I want to provide a better life for my family.” P10

“The opportunity for personal growth, independence, and the adventure of living in a new country are compelling reasons for me to consider moving abroad.” P5

“Para nako, it’s more of personal ug career nga paglambo maoy nakahatag nako ug tinguha molangyaw”. (As for me, it’s more of a personal and career growth that has given me the desire to move abroad)” P7

According to a study, the lack of desire among healthcare personnel influences their satisfaction and retention with their work and migration (Shah et al., 2016).

All in all, the findings revealed that personal motivations, partnered with family aspirations, are a moving factor pushing and pulling Filipino medical technologists' desire to work abroad.

2.4 Professional Aspiration

Considering that most of the responses revolve around career growth and professional development reflects the gaps in the Philippine healthcare system in terms of providing opportunities for the advancement of the field. In this finding, the majority of the participants are driven to engage themselves in professional training and advancement once hired abroad, as indicated in the following statements:

“The urge to have professional development and career growth greatly influences my intent of moving abroad, because opportunities abroad are much advanced and can help me expand my knowledge in relation to being a medical technologist.” “Nakita nako ang mga vlogs ug posts sa akong mga kauban bahin sa ilang kinabuhi isip medical technologist sa gawas sa nasud nga maoy nahimong inspirasyon nako nga manimpad mo-abroad.” (I saw the vlogs and posts of my colleagues on their career as medical technologist overseas that inspired me to move abroad). P3

“Padayon ra gihapon ko sa pagkat-on sa akong propesyon sama sa pag-apil ug trainings ug seminars diin na-realize nako nga mas mapa-ayo pa nako sa abroad pinaagi sa pag-apply sa akong nakat-onan diri tungod kay limitado ra ang resources dinhi”. I’m continually learning in my profession by attending trainings and seminars which I realized I can do more of this abroad by applying what I have learned in here as there is only limited resources here.” P7

“Working abroad also allows me to have growth in my career as a medical laboratory scientist. Different laboratories here in the US offer state of the art facilities and equipment in which some are not readily available back in the Philippines. Also, being medtech here in the US provides opportunities that are not only within the bounds of the core laboratory. Different specialized sections such as molecular labs, cytogenetics, and more are readily available at big hospital institutions in the country.” P1

In addition, the findings of the study by Lorenzo et Al. (2005) revealed a similar point of view, wherein the respondents agreed that international employment could impart additional knowledge and career growth. Thus, the obvious potential for professional growth and progression are considered pulling factors that attract Filipino medical technologists to find a career overseas.

MAJOR THEME 3: Challenges encountered among Medical Technologists in the selected private hospital of Poblacion District 1, Davao City in their Intent to move abroad (SOP 3)

The interview responses presented three (3) specific challenges faced by Filipino medical technologist in Davao City towards their Intent of moving abroad: (1) high competition for international employment, (2) high cost of document processing, and (3) dealing with homesickness and culture shock.

SUBTHEMES:

3.1 High competition for international employment

One of the major challenges medical technologists faces in longing to work abroad is the overwhelming competition for available positions. A study by Reddy et al. (2020) found that a significant increase in competent medical technologists looking for work overseas resulted from the ease of international

movement. With the increasing number of professionals in the field seeking to land a job in a foreign country, the requirements and competency is becoming a major competition. In this finding, statements reflecting similar insights are presented below:

“The competition in every hospital or recruitment facilities abroad is a challenge.” P5

“ The challenges that affect me in my decision to pursue in working abroad is... applying to hospitals abroad because of the certain competition to their resident and you need to be in their country to apply for the job.” P2

“Kanang naay available nga vacant posisyon sa usa ka institution sa US unlike diri sa Davao o Pilipinas kay Job Order (JO)” The major challenges I consider that affects my decision to pursue chances... (the availability of the position in an institution in the US unlike here in Davao or Philippines its Job Order). P4

In addition, a respondent added that making sure that the requirements and qualifications are met is an extra challenge of applying abroad.

“There is the challenge of ensuring that my qualifications are recognized and that I can secure a job that matches my skills and experience.” P5

On the contrary, medical technologist must meet different certification and qualification standards in different nations. For instance, in the US, a medical technologist is usually required to fulfill state licensing criteria and possess certification from the American Society for Clinical Pathology (ASCP) (ASCP, 2023). This adds up to shared challenges among the participants, as reflected in the following excerpts:

“ The pressure of passing the certification needed abroad. also, taking exams for licensure in a specific country can be expensive and challenging. “ P8

Ultimately, the competition for medical technology positions internationally is shaped by various challenges, including qualification requirements and the availability of positions in foreign facilities.

3.2 High cost of document processing

One big obstacle for Filipino medical technologist looking for work overseas is the high expense of document processing. Career advancement can be impeded and prospects for employment abroad delayed by the financial strain of credential examination, certification, and visa procedures. According to a study by Stone (2020), delays in processing documents have substantial economic cost, including extended recruitment cycles and potential loss of interest among healthcare workers. This challenge was shared among the participants as expressed in the statements below:

“Ang taas nga process sa pag-comply sa papers ug ang kamahal”. (The long process of complying papers and it is costly). P7

“The challenges that affect me in my decision to pursue in working abroad is getting or preparing my requirements. There are a lot of requirements that needs to obtain like license in working abroad, taking English examination and visas due to lack of time and preparation that to obtain. Other is finances, due to lack of money to pay all the desired requirements needed due to low salary and income that may affect some delays in working abroad.” P2

Aside from the expensive cost of the entire process, the long waiting time is also noticed as a challenge. Lengthy and intricate document processing procedures often impede the path to obtaining employment abroad.

3.3 Dealing with homesickness and Culture Shock

For Filipino medical technologists looking for work overseas, overcoming homesickness and cultural shock poses serious hurdles. Some of the participants' responses revealed that homesickness and adjusting to new culture could be pose a challenge to them, as indicated in the following statements:

“The challenges include the emotional and logistical difficulties of leaving family and friends behind, adapting to a new culture, and navigating the legal and administrative processes of working abroad.” P5

“ Also having to change most of my lifestyles, meeting new people and new colleagues can be quite challenging.” P8

“Being away from my family and friends, stepping out of my comfort zone... were one of my challenges to pursue” P9

These experiences are consistent with the research conducted by Snowball (2003), which found that one feature of the initial adjustment phase is culture shock. It was noted that the migrating Filipino healthcare professionals experienced cultural shock soon after beginning clinical work.

MAJOR THEME 4: Recommendations from Medical Technologists in the selected private hospital of Poblacion District 1, Davao City (SOP 4)

The interview responses revealed five (5) direct recommendations from Filipino medical technologists about the different ways to remain employed in a Philippine facility: (1) seek employment at a government facility, (2) seek skill enhancement through trainings and certifications , and mentorships (3) seek employment outside the Philippines (4) practice life work balance and (5) professional organization membership.

SUB-THEMES

4.1 Seek employment at a government facility

In the Philippines, healthcare facilities under a government budget offer a higher salary compared to compensation in a private facility. This claim is supported by the comparative study of Santos and Alonzo (2021), highlighting that government facilities generally offer higher salaries anchored with mandatory benefits for healthcare workers. In addition, competitive salary plays a crucial role in the retention of skilled medical technologists in the Philippines (Garcia et al. 2020). One of the recommendations from participants was to seek a position or employment as a medical technologist in a government facility, as reflected in the excerpts below:

“Suggest nako manarbaho sila sa lain-laing government hospital tungod sa mas maayong oportunidad sa trabaho nga nagpaabot nila. Pangita ug position sa government facilities aron makakuha ug dugang benefits ug sweldo. “ (I would suggest that they work in different government hospitals for the reason of having better job opportunities that awaits them. If they aim to have more benefits and compensation, it would be much better for them to secure a position in the government facilities). P1

In relation to this, the Salary Standardization Law (SSL), which offers a standardized pay scale for a variety of government positions, including a medical technologist position, governs government wage scales in the Philippines. In order to maintain the retention of highly-skilled medical practitioners, the consistency in positions must be observed in government facilities.

4.2 Skill enhancement through training, certifications, and mentorships

Other recommendations from the participants in order to remain employed in the Philippines is to seek for competition in regular positions by skills enhancement through attending trainings, certifications and mentorships. These recommendations are reflected in the following statements:

“ My recommendation that I can give to my fellow medical technologist is seek more mentorship and guidance about career pathways. Explore specialization that may consider to enhance more skills and knowledge that is in demand locally. Lastly is to attend more workshops and training to enhance skills and stay competitive in our field as medical technologist.” P2

“ I would recommend seeking opportunities for further education and specialization locally...” P5

"Keep improving as a medical technologist. Don't settle for less, and know your worth as a professional. Also, plan your future career in the field and always set a goal." P8

“You can improve your credentials and employment chances in the area by pursuing advanced degrees or certifications, such as a Master's in Medical Technology or specialty certifications. Medical technologists can improve their prospects of keeping jobs and moving up the career ladder in Davao City or anyplace else in the Philippines by emphasizing professional growth, networking, adaptability, and upholding high ethical standards. “ P10

In summary, professional development programs are designed to update and help improve the skills of medical technologist. These structured trainings significantly enhance the laboratory technical competencies, leading to an improved diagnostic accuracy and reliability (Natawidat et al., 2021). Similarly, mentorship can play a vital role in career planning and progression. According to research by Bautista et al. (2023), mentoring aids medical technicians in navigating career routes, making wise decisions, and gaining access to networking possibilities that may result in job prospects and promotions. The advancement of medical technologist careers in the Philippines is greatly influenced by skill augmentation achieved through training, certification, and mentorship programs. These activities enhance job performance and employability while also fostering career advancement and general job satisfaction.

4.3 Seek employment outside the Philippines

Medical technologists in the Philippines deals with competitive hiring process partnered with various challenges, including a relatively lower salaries, lack of regular positions and a limited career advancement opportunity. According to the study of Reyes and Garcia (2021), Filipino medical technologist often seeks for international career due to significantly higher salaries offered with a generous benefit. Castro-Palaganas, Spitzer, Kabamalan, et al. (2017) report that Filipino healthcare professionals had a history of advancing their careers in other countries. In relation to this, the primary motivations for searching an international employment are the higher salaries and generous benefits, as manifested in the statements below:

“ Sa tinuod lang dili ko mag-recommend sa akong fellow Med Tech aron magpabilin, kay dili gyud paigo ang sweldo para sa adlaw-adlaw nga panginahanglan labi na ug pamilyado” (I honestly cannot recommend to my fellow Med Tech to remain employed here because the salary is not enough for your daily needs especially if you have a family to support)... As much as I want to serve the Filipinos, I also want to serve my family more and I can only give it to them if I will be in abroad.” P3

"None (I do not recommend), since there is no future here in the Philippines, especially if your goal is to be financially stable for yourself and your family." P4

Based on the findings, some participants were serious about advocating for the migration of their fellow medical technologists to another country. Considering their personal experiences, international employment is suggested as the most viable pathway for Filipino medical technologists seeking to progress in professional and personal aspirations

4.4 Practice Life work balance

According to a study conducted by Delos Reyes and Navarro (2022), medical technologists commonly work more than the standard 40-hour work week due to the nature of their employment, which includes irregular hours, on-call obligations, and emergency situations. Significant job stress becomes a challenge to maintain a life-work balance. Therefore, the participants recommend practicing such (life-work balance), as represented in the excerpts below:

“Ayaw padaug sa trabaho nimo ug pangita ug kalingawan pag day-off nimo. Makatabang ang part-time nga trabaho”. (Don’t let work consume you and find a hobby during your day off. Part-time work helps). “ P7

“What I can recommend to them is to try to find balance between work and personal life. Work here in our country is very exhausting and stressful, so do not let yourself get drained from those stresses.” P10

As stated above, lack of work-life balance has a negative impact on the physical and emotional health of medical technologists. Furthermore, medical technologists who struggle with work-life balance are more likely to have mental health concerns such as anxiety, sadness, and burnout. Lim and Torres (2023) found that medical technologists who struggle with work-life balance have poorer job satisfaction and turnover rates. This highly suggests how life and work balance dictate the retention at work of a Filipino medical technologist.

4.5 Professional organization membership

Membership in professional organizations can provide significant benefits to medical technicians in the Philippines, where work satisfaction and retention are a major concern. The participants viewed membership in an organization representing the field of medical technology as a recommendation for a greater turnover rate of Filipino medical technologists, as indicated in the following responses:

“Membership in professional organizations can provide significant benefits to medical technicians in the Philippines, where work satisfaction and retention are a major concern. Attending conferences, seminars, workshops, and joining professional organizations related to medical technology...” P9

Similarly, according to Hernandez and Ramos (2023), medical technologists actively involved in professional organizations are likelier to stay in their employment because participation provides better career support, professional growth opportunities, and job satisfaction.

In addition, the participants also mentioned how advocacy can help shape the professional landscape of medical technologists in the Philippines. In the aspect of salary disparities, the participants recommend participating in advocacy efforts, as reflected in the excerpts below:

“Be an advocate to seek reform and improve the labor policy in the Philippines. “ P10

“Gain more experience and fight for your rights as a medical technologist. “Kabalo magpailog ug labaw sa tanan, ipakita ang respeto kang bisan kinsa dili tungod sa ilang posisyon kundili tungod kay tao sila”. (Always be humble and, most importantly, show respect to everyone, not because of their position but because they are human beings).” P8

“Be proactive and get involved with the institution's quality improvement program. I am using this as an avenue to advance in one's career and promotion. Be united as a group of professionals raising one voice to be heard. In unity, achieving a goal is a step away. “ P7

In summary, collective advocacy efforts spearheaded by professional organizations similar to PAMET (Philippine Association of Medical Technologists) can lobby for positive changes in compensation and benefits policies.

MAJOR THEME 5: Best Interventions to retain the skilled Filipino Medical Technologist

The researcher seeks to address the overwhelming number of Filipino medical technologists pursuing a career abroad through an intervention titled “Katusok Thrive PH”. This is a comprehensive approach designed to retain skilled Filipino medical technologists by enhancing the holistic condition of the profession in the Philippines. Katusok Thrive PH aims to integrate several key components such as promoting professional satisfaction through career growth, and strict adherence to work-life balance. Specifically, Katusok Thrive PH will focus in the following areas:

1. Competitive Compensation and Benefits: This will ensure that every laboratory in the country will establish a competitive salary structure partnered with comprehensive benefits including secured health insurance and performance incentives.
2. Career growth and advancement: This aspect is to allow every Filipino medical technologist to participate in various conferences, trainings, and workshops relevant to the profession. It will advocate for the availability of specialization programs offered at the nearest local institutions. Mentorship programs for newly licensed medical technologists will be offered through virtual platforms and in-person options.
3. Recognition and Rewards: To provide visibility in the important role of medical technologists as a healthcare profession, an award system will be established to recognize individuals who contributed to the advancement of the profession including but not limited to conducting research related to the field.
4. Work-Life Balance: This aspect of the initiative aims to value the mental preparedness and stability of every Filipino medical technologist. Every laboratory in the country is encouraged to allow flexible scheduling and appropriate workload about the prescribed numbers of the Department of Health(DOH) should be strictly followed.

By focusing on these areas, MedTech Thrive PH hopes to build a more satisfying and sustainable work environment for medical technologists in the Philippines, eliminating the motivation to seek opportunities elsewhere

Conclusion

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Overall, ten (10) registered medical technologists employed in selected private hospital at Poblacion District 1, Davao City participated in this study. The primary objective of this study was to examine the factors influencing Filipino Medical technologists' Intent to Move Abroad.

The results of the study based on the conducted interview revealed five (5) specific perspectives about the experiences of Medical Technologists in their intent to work in another country. Majority of the respondents mentioned the importance of mastery of skills through experience for an individual aiming to work abroad. The participants disclosed that their negative experiences at the workplace including the lack of work-life balance is a contributing push factors as to why they would seek for international employment. On the other hand, dealing with an outdated technology was discussed as a crucial factor driving migration among the participants.

Similarly, the study disclosed that the desire for international employment among medical technologists in RLMCI is influenced by several push and pull factors. Among all identified factors, the economic factor is the shared push factor by the majority. Due to the country's low salary and poor benefits for healthcare practitioners, the drive for international employment is the top priority after gaining the required years of experience before applying for a job overseas. In addition, the participants cited professional and personal aspirations as factors for migration.

On the other hand, interview responses presented three (3) specific challenges faced by the respondents regarding their Intent to move abroad. The high competition for international employment was deemed a major challenge among the participants. Additionally, the high cost of document processing also hampers the immediate deployment of the applicants.

Moreover, to remain employed in a Philippine facility, medical technologists of RMLCI suggest that seeking employment at a government facility must be prioritized. On the contrary, a large percentage of the respondents highlighted the advantage of seeking an employment outside the Philippines for a better experience in the profession.

Nevertheless, the researcher designed a comprehensive approach dubbed as "Katusok Thrive PH" in order to retain Filipino medical technologists. The main goal of the proposed project was to enable a healthy working environment integrated with a competitive salary, benefit, and opportunities for professional advancement.

CONCLUSIONS

This phenomenological qualitative study explored the factors influencing the intent to seek employment abroad of ten (10) registered medical technologists of a selected private hospital in Poblacion District 1, Davao City.

The study revealed that the lived experiences of medical technologists of the studied facility, whether negative or positive, are contributing factors to the intent of international employment. The findings disclosed several push-and-pull factors that influence one's decision to move abroad. Most of the responses focused on the low compensation for medical technologists in the Philippines as a critical driver of migration.

In addition, the intention of Filipino medical technologists in this facility to move abroad is hampered by various challenges, including financial difficulty and the long-time processing of necessary documents. This paper concludes that most respondents consider international employment as a way for career progression and improved quality of life. As a recommendation, participants suggest seeking a position in a government facility for a higher salary or applying for a career overseas.

Moreover, this study further concludes that providing competitive compensation and benefits for Filipino medical technologists could improve the retention of skilled healthcare professionals in the Philippines.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Based on the conclusions and findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Employers in both government and private facilities must ensure that compensation packages are competitive in line with the standards offered by international employers. Local offers should include comprehensive benefits anchored with retirement plans and performance bonuses.
2. Employers must prioritize support for career development and growth to retain the country's highly skilled medical technologists. They must provide further education, training, and career progression opportunities.
3. Employers must promote a positive working environment at all costs by fostering strict work-life balance, feedback mechanisms, recognition, and fair promotion programs.
4. Job satisfaction surveys must be conducted annually to ensure that interest and autonomy remain prioritized.

5. Employers must possess a solid institutional reputation and leadership.
6. The Philippine government must consider implementing an effective strategy and intervention to retain Filipino medical technologists.

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