



Mobility trends of psychiatric trainees in Turkey: hard to leave, harder to stay?

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Received: 13 March 2018 / Accepted: 11 June 2018 / Published online: 25 June 2018
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Dear Sir,

The “brain drain” of the health workforce has been a long-standing concern, leading to major workforce shrinkage. Worldwide, unsatisfactory working conditions, lack of local training opportunities [1] and better-paid jobs abroad [2], have been pointed out as the key “pull” and “push” factors leading to psychiatrists’ migration.

From the 1960s to 1980s, many Turkish workers immigrated to another country in Europe [3], labeling Turkey as a “donor” country. Notably, in the last two decades, highly educated workers have become a larger portion of emigrant labor [4]. Given the importance of mobility trends, the European Federation of Psychiatric Trainees (EFPT) conducted the Brain Drain study exploring migration trends in 33 European countries ($n = 2281$) [5, 6]. Turkey’s unique geographic position, a junction between east and west, its status as a non-European Union (EU) country with a low

number of psychiatrists (2.13 per 100,000 population) [7], a heavy burden of work, and changing trends in migration makes it worth knowing how Turkey sits in these migratory flows of junior doctors across Europe.

Therefore, we aimed to assess: (1) the proportion of psychiatric trainees in Turkey that have already moved country, (2) the proportion of those who would consider such a move in the future and (3) the reasons for considering leaving the country. Data were collected as part of the EFPT Brain Drain study through an anonymous survey distributed in English through SurveyMonkey to the e-mail contacts of psychiatric trainees in Turkey. This questionnaire covered their experiences of short-term mobility (from 3 months up to 1 year), of long-term migration (of more than 1 year) and their attitudes towards migration.

All trainees taking part in the National Psychiatry Trainees organization (750) were contacted and sent the questionnaire by e-mail, of which 107 completed the survey. In Turkey, 13.1% of psychiatric trainees had a short-term mobility experience and 4.7% had migrated to another country.

Remarkably, 75.0% of psychiatric trainees in Turkey are now considering living abroad. However, the rate of migration is much lower (4.7%). Importantly, in regards to their 5-year work intentions, 57.6% of trainees ($n = 53$) expressed that they would like to be working in Turkey. Table 1 shows the main characteristics of the sample and Table 2 shows the responses to the hierarchical questions on migratory tendency. The respondents’ top three reasons to leave Turkey were: academic ($n = 80$), working ($n = 78$) and financial ($n = 76$); while academic conditions were perceived as the most important aspect that needed to be improved in the training ($n = 94$).

The lower rate of actual migration of psychiatric trainees in Turkey might be explained by several factors. First, the fact that Turkey does not have an EU membership status makes it difficult to register in the healthcare system, due to the extensive bureaucracy such as a visa, series of exams, and work permit. Another reason could be that

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Table 1 Main characteristics of the sample ($N=107$)

Age (years) (mean \pm SD) (min–max)	28 \pm 2.7 (25–41)
Gender (n , %)	
Male	22 (27.2)
Female	59 (72.8)
Marital status (n , %)	
In a relationship	53 (65.4)
Not in a relationship	28 (34.6)
With children (n , %)	7 (8.6)
Living status (n , %)	
Living alone	18 (23.4)
Living with others	59 (76.6)
Income level (median)	1000–1499€
Trainees dissatisfied with income (n , %)	47 (58.0)
Immigrants (n , %) (> 1 year)	5 (4.7)
Mobility (n , %) (3 months–1 year)	13 (13.1)

this sample consisted of psychiatric trainees with a job contract in Turkey. Therefore, Turkish doctors who have already migrated may not be in this sample. Third, a language barrier could be linked with additional time and effort to learn a new language, which might discourage some psychiatric trainees who considered leaving the country. Finally, the cultural norms linked with establishing a life abroad, away from core relationships, might not be perceived as conventional in Turkish doctors, discouraging them to migrate.

The key matters that Turkish trainees pointed out to be improved in their training were: academic ($n=94$), working ($n=69$) and financial conditions ($n=68$). Our findings concur with other studies, showing that inadequate training [1] and working conditions are important reasons for mental health professionals' migration [2], together with financial conditions, which has been labeled as “typical migration” of psychiatric trainees, who move to another country for financial reasons [6]. The three main reasons to leave Turkey are similar to the overall reasons expressed by the European psychiatric trainees to leave their countries of origin (financial, personal and academic) [6], with the exception of

personal reasons, which was less important for psychiatric trainees in Turkey.

Data about migration rates of doctors in Turkey is scarce, except a collection of individual experiences broadcasted in the media. A study conducted in 2009 indicated that more than half of the medical graduates considered a clinical or academic career abroad. Nevertheless, only one in five moved country [8]. Another survey examining the expectations of doctors and nurses during the EU membership negotiations showed that 66.2% of doctors and 65.2% of nurses desired to work in another EU country if Turkey would join the EU. The reasons expressed were better working conditions and educational opportunities, and less so financial motives [9].

In our findings in Turkey, the rate of intention to migrate is much higher than the actual migration. Although these numbers do not show evidence of brain drain of psychiatric trainees from Turkey to other countries, that could take place if the country's situation changes. In the case of Turkey's integration into the EU, this could facilitate the mobility and access to several other work opportunities in Europe. In 2002, a study explored the rates of intention to migrate (general and firm) in the Turkish population if Turkey would join the EU. A general intention to migrate (6.2%) was higher than a firm intention to migrate (0.3%), which concurs with our findings in this study. Still, when comparing the educational background of respondents, more than 15% of those in tertiary education expressed intention to migrate [10].

Considering the current political and migration developments in Europe and worldwide, these results can be relevant. In the near future, it is unlikely that Turkey will join the EU. However, the combination of dissatisfaction with academic and working conditions together with possible political and economic instability in Turkey could trigger an outflux of highly educated mental health professionals in the coming years. The possible shortage of psychiatrists and this migratory trend might add to the heavy workload, forming a vicious cycle in Turkey. If policymakers take these findings into consideration, they might take a decision to improve academic and working conditions.

Table 2 Response flowchart of migratory tendency

Step 1 \Rightarrow	Step 2 \Rightarrow	Step 3
Have you ever considered leaving the country you currently live in? Yes (75.0%)	I am considering leaving the country now? Yes (55.6%)	Did you take any practical steps toward migration? Yes (7.6%)

Step 1 > Step 2 > Step 3

Acknowledgements We would like to thank the European Federation of Psychiatric Trainees (EFPT) Brain Drain Study Group for their support to this research project.

Compliance with ethical standards

Conflict of interest The authors have no conflict of interest.

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