

The Impact of Migration on Optimism and Subjective Well-Being: Evidence from the Indonesian Family Life Survey

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Abstract

When migrating, a person will expect better well-being than they had in their area of origin. Much research only focuses on how migration affects objective well-being, even though subjective well-being describes well-being more than an economic perspective. This study aims to investigate the impact of migration on the optimism and subjective well-being of migrants. Migration is considered when it crosses district or city boundaries, whether internal or international. The method used in this study is the difference-in-differences (DID) method, which allows us to determine the impact of migration. Using panel data from the Indonesian Family Life Survey (IFLS) in 2007 and 2014, the results show that migration has a positive effect on optimism, economic opinion, personal and household needs opinion, children's needs opinion, and happiness of migrants. Migration does not have a significant impact on happiness despite a positive correlation towards it. Other control variables, such as urban regional classification, younger age, male gender, married status, and higher education, positively affect subjective well-being.

Keywords

Difference-in-differences; impact evaluation; migration; optimism; subjective well-being

Introduction

One of the world's trends toward globalization is migration. It is an unstoppable, objective phenomenon (Podra et al., 2020). In many ways, migration develops in response to the speed of adaptation to societal and economic changes (Noja et al., 2018). This trend is also observed in Indonesia, which had a 269 million population in 2020 (BPS-Statistics Indonesia, 2023) and was Asia's fastest urbanization growth, with an average annual growth rate of 4.4% for the past 40 years. In the next ten years, 68% of the population will reside in urban areas.

Socioeconomic differences and population growth between regions also occur in Indonesia, naturally leading to migration. This causes the opportunities for migration in Indonesia to increase (Alabshar et al., 2021; Bryan & Morten, 2019; Marta et al., 2020). For an individual who migrates, migration has various purposes (Bednařiková et al., 2016; Stockdale, 2016), such as to increase well-being (Alerstam et al., 2003; De Jong, 2000; Sundari, 2005; White et al., 2014), to survive (Kleemans & Magruder, 2018; Marta et al., 2020), or to get out of the poverty line (Nabila & Pardede, 2014). In reality, however, not all migrants can meet their goals, thus giving rise to a debate about the impacts obtained from migration.

For many years, the debate between optimistic and pessimistic views on migration has evolved (De Haas, 2010) due to the absence of theoretical consensus on the developmental direction of the impact of migration on migrants. The solution to this question cannot be found in any literature (Fernández-Reino, 2016; Sobiech, 2019; Tokhirov, 2020). Optimists consider migration good for development, providing equality, remittance investment, and development. Meanwhile, pessimists believe migration can cause brain drain, inequality, consumption, and dependency (De Haas, 2010). After years of debating between pessimism and optimism about the impact of migration, in recent years, the perception of migration as being more likely to be advantageous and have a positive effect on well-being (Taylor, 1999). These advantageous and positive impacts align with the expected value of well-being (Alabshar et al., 2020; De Jong & Fawcett, 1981).

De Jong and Fawcett (1981) noted that there are values and goals to be achieved when someone migrates, one of which is 'comfort.' We also refer to psychological comfort, such as less stress and healthier and better living conditions. If migration is linked to hope in a person's psychology, we can conclude that migration will make a person more optimistic about their life in the future. Most studies on optimism in migration focus on educational or economic migration (Muliansyah & Chotib, 2019), where optimism will be evident due to the motives of the migratory flows. For instance, Cebolla-Boado and de Lizarrondo (2015) found that migrant children are more optimistic about education than non-migrant children. Hereafter, Muslimah and Prihatsanti (2022) stated that, in general, it can be concluded that migrant workers are optimistic about their work and can overcome the obstacles they face. Therefore, it is essential to examine optimism in all types of migration.

Several studies have examined the well-being of migrants compared to non-migrants within Indonesia. Alabshar et al. (2021) discovered that migrants demonstrated higher well-being levels regarding assets and housing quality. Meanwhile, Muliansyah and Chotib (2019) found that migrants have higher levels of well-being and higher purchasing power. However, much research has not been explored in-depth on how migration impacts migrants' subjective well-being. Surprisingly, the impact of migration on subjective well-being has not been paid much attention in the world (Cardozo Silva et al., 2023), even though subjective well-being is one of the approaches to evaluating well-being suggested by researchers (Voukelatou et al., 2021).

Diener et al. (1998) stated that subjective well-being is the best evaluation to assess a person's life to get an idea of their happiness. Substantiating this opinion, Kahneman and Krueger (2006) and Aryogi and Wulansari (2016) declared that subjective well-being is considered to describe more well-being compared to looking at it from an economic perspective. Diener et al. (2018) further explained that well-being, according to one's personal view, i.e., subjective well-being, can be seen through income, temperament, and social relationship support. Greater subjective well-being will be linked to better physical health (Kushlev et al., 2019; Sun et al., 2016), better social relationships (Lönnqvist & Große Deters, 2016; Rulangi et al., 2021), improved work performance (Diener et al., 2018; Möhring et al., 2021), or growing creativity (Wiklund et al., 2019).

Generally, research on the impact of migration on subjective well-being can be classified into three areas. First, research shows that migration has a positive effect on subjective well-being, so it is optimistic about the impact (Akay et al., 2014, 2017; Akdede & Giovanis, 2022; Betz & Simpson, 2013; Muliansyah & Chotib, 2019). Next, research has found that migration has a negative impact on subjective well-being (Ivlevs & Veliziotis, 2018; Longhi, 2014). Last, who discovered an insignificant connection between migration and subjective well-being (Giulietti & Yan, 2018; Papageorgiou, 2018).

Then again, numerous correlational research studies have shown that optimism and subjective well-being are positively correlated (Busseri & Choma, 2016; Carver & Scheier, 2017; Daukantaitė & Zukauskienė, 2012; Sagi et al., 2021). Unlike those who are pessimistic, more optimistic people focus more on encouraging stimuli, are more stable, reject negative information, ignore threats, and think they can avoid issues and problems (Conversano et al., 2010; Isaacowitz, 2005; Kelberer et al., 2018). Other than Indonesia, research on migrant optimism has been conducted in several countries (Cebolla-Boado & de Lizarrondo, 2015; Gil-Hernández & Gracia, 2018; Salikutluk, 2016).

This study's main novelty is examining migration's implications on the optimism and subjective well-being of migrants in Indonesia, which are calculated using panel data. The research results from this study are expected to be able to fill in the existing scientific gaps and also expected to help complement research related to the impact of migration on the optimism and subjective well-being of migrants, which is seen from a person's subjective opinion about their economic future, household, meeting personal and children's needs, and the happiness they feel. Therefore, this study aims to delve into the impact of migration on optimism and subjective well-being. Optimism is seen through predictions about their future life. Subjective well-being will be seen through personal well-being, namely through an individual assessment of their life.

Research method

Data and participants

This study was designed by analyzing two groups, namely the treatment group (those who migrated) and the comparison group (those who did not migrate), at two different time points, namely in 2007 and 2014. Additionally, changes before and after migration were compared to obtain changes in outcomes between migrants and non-migrants from time to time. The

objective was to evaluate the impact of migration on the migrated group compared to the non-migrated group.

This study used longitudinal data from the Indonesian Family Life Survey (IFLS) at the 4th wave (2007) and 5th wave (2014). The IFLS is a panel socioeconomic survey of individuals and households. Since 1993, the IFLS has been conducted five times by the RAND Corporation. The analysis in this study focuses on individuals aged 15 years and above. A total of 21,434 participants took part, consisting of 19,330 respondents who did not migrate and 2,104 respondents who migrated between IFLS 4 (2007) and IFLS 5 (2014). When analyzing the dependent variables one by one, we dropped missing responses so that each dependent variable had a different number of samples depending on the missing responses.

Measures

The variables used in this study were related to the individual sample's subjective well-being (Table 1). This study also used spatial demographic variables as control variables for variations in the subjective well-being of each individual, such as region status of residence, marital status, gender, education, and age. In the IFLS data, the subjective well-being variable was the respondent's well-being according to personal opinion, obtained from the IFLS questionnaire in Book 3A, Section SW (well-being). As it can be challenging to describe personal opinions, the IFLS questionnaire used scale groups to facilitate description.

Diener et al. (1999) identified several satisfaction domains as components of SWB: work, family, leisure and health, finances, self-happiness, and view of others' lives. However, due to limitations in the IFLS data, not all domains were included as indicators of SWB. For this study, the family domain was measured by household and child needs, the leisure and health domain was measured by healthcare needs, the finances domain was measured by economic level, and the self-happiness domain was measured by happiness level.

The questions of subjective well-being consisted of personal opinions about the current economic level (SW01), opinions about the fulfillment of personal and household needs (SW03–SW06), opinions about the fulfillment of children's needs (SW08–SW11), and opinions about self-happiness (SW12). In comparison, optimism consisted of views on the economy (OP01) and the ability to fulfill needs (OP02) in the next five years. In this study, a person was considered to have migrated if they moved across a district or city boundary, whether internal or international, between 2007 and 2014. This displacement was known from the IFLS questionnaire in Book K, Section SC (sampling information).

Table 1: Dependent Variables, Independent Variables, and Control Variables

Variable	Definition	Category	Freq.
Dependent Variable			
Economic opinion			
SW01	Opinions about the current economic level	1–6	21.381
OP01	Opinions about the economic level in the next five years (economic optimism)	1: Poorest 6: Richest	21.381
OP02	Opinions about the fulfillment of standard of living in the next five years (fulfillment optimism)	1–4 1: Very unlikely 4: Very likely	21.380

Variable	Definition	Category	Freq.
Dependent Variable			
Personal and household needs			
SW03	Opinions about the fulfillment of household's standard of living		21.380
SW04	Opinions about the fulfillment of personal standard of living	1: Less than adequate 2: Adequate 3: More than adequate	21.380
SW05	Opinions about the fulfillment of personal consumption		21.380
SW06	Opinions about the fulfillment of personal healthcare		21.380
Children's needs			
SW08	Opinions about the fulfillment of children's standard of living	1: Less than adequate 2: Adequate 3: More than adequate	12.060
SW09	Opinions about the fulfillment of children's consumption		12.060
SW10	Opinions about the fulfillment of children's healthcare		12.060
SW11	Opinions about the fulfillment of children's education		12.060
Happiness level			
SW12	Happiness	1-4 1: Very unhappy 4: Very happy	21.380
Independent Variable			
Mig	Migration	1: Yes 2: No	21.380
Control Variable			
Reg	Regional Classification	1: Urban 2: Rural	21.383
Age	Age group	1: 15-39 2: 40-64 3: 65+	21.382
Sex	Gender	1: Male 3: Female	21.382
MS	Marital status	1: Married 2: Not married /divorce	21.369
Edu	Education	1: Elementary school & lower 2: Junior high school /equivalent 3: Senior high school & higher	21.383

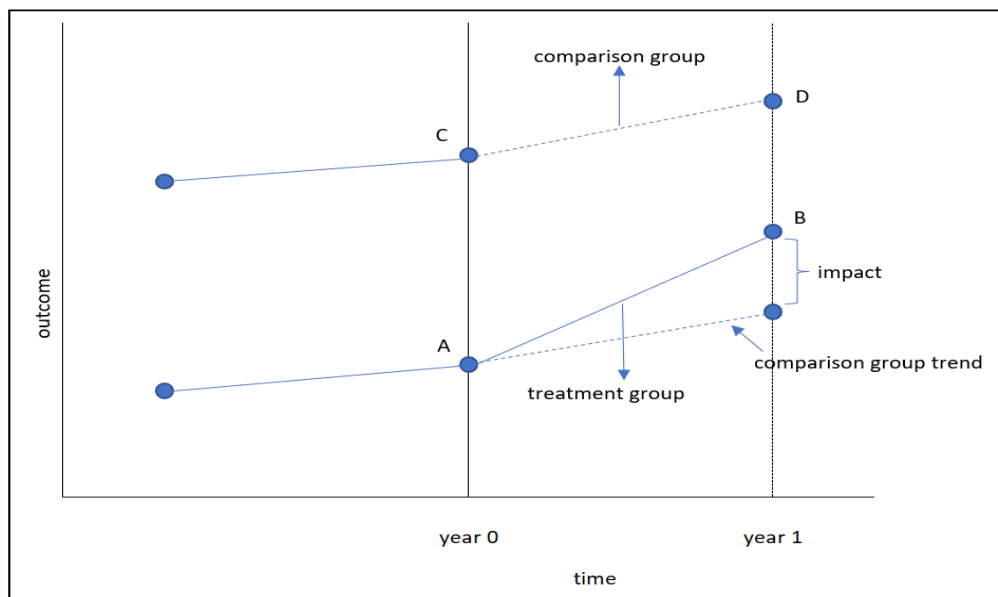
Data analysis

In our data analysis, the Stata 17 software was used to form, combine, clean, and process the IFLS data, which was initiated by merging all variables from IFLS 4 and IFLS 5 into the desired dataset. Next, we verified any district or city area code data updates. Note that there have been multiple updates to the location code within IFLS 5. As a result, it was necessary to change the location code back to the original location code so that individuals who remain in the area are not considered to have moved due to a change in location code. Third, we grouped individuals with the same location code in IFLS 4 and IFLS 5 in the control group and those

with different codes in the treatment group. Finally, we calculated the impact of migration using the difference-in-differences (DID) method.

The analysis used in this study was the DID analysis. According to Gertler et al. (2011), the DID method is excellent in an impact evaluation, as it can eliminate unique effects on individuals and clean up the effects of unobserved characteristics. This study used the DID method because it fulfilled the assumptions of longitudinal data from the treatment and comparison groups to estimate the impact of the treatment. Figure 1 illustrates the DID method, in which a group enrolled in the program becomes the treatment group, and another group not enrolled in the program becomes the comparison group. The before and after outcome variables for the treatment group were A to B, while the comparison group was from C to D. In DID, the impact estimate is obtained by calculating the difference in change between the comparison group (D-C) and the treatment group (B-A).

Figure 1: Difference-in-Differences (DID) Method



Note: Adapted from Gertler et al. (2011)

Gertler et al. (2011) described the calculation of the impact estimate using the DID method as follows:

- a. Calculate the difference of outcome (Y) in the treatment group and the conditions before and after the program (B - A).
- b. Calculate the difference of outcome (Y) in the comparison group and the conditions before and after the program (D - C).
- c. Calculate the difference in the outcome difference between the treatment group (B - A) and the comparison group (D - C), or can be written as Double Difference (DD) = (B - A) - (D - C). This DD is the estimated impact that we get.

This DD value measures how the treatment impacts the desired variable. This value indicates how strongly the impact of treatment is on the treatment group compared to the comparison group. In this study, the DID method compared the differences in the impact on the two groups, namely migrants as the treatment group and non-migrants as the comparison group. The DID method analyzes trends in migrants before and after migrating, respectively, in 2007 and 2014 and then compares them to individuals who did not migrate (non-migrants) in 2007 and 2014.

The outcome variable in this study was optimism and the respondents' subjective well-being so that the outcome of the research can be compared to the impact of migration on optimism and subjective well-being, which is the respondent's assessment of their own life.

Table 2: Regression Results of Control Variables on Optimism and Subjective Well-Being

Control Variable	Economic opinion	Optimism		Personal and household needs				Children's needs			Happiness level	
	SW01	OP01	OP02	SW03	SW04	SW05	SW06	SW08	SW09	SW10	SW11	SW12
Regional Classification	-.018	-.049**	.045***	-.054***	-.056***	-.058***	-.048***	-.046***	-.080***	-.064***	-.050***	-.020***
Gender	-.210***	-.184***	-.110***	-.100***	-.091***	-.085***	-.106***	-.105***	-.094***	-.112***	-.067***	-.017**
Education	.229***	.203***	.077***	.130***	.144***	.151***	.159***	.159***	.160***	.156***	.163***	.060***
Age Group	.073***	-.219***	-.098***	-.079***	-.076***	-.081***	-.099***	-.153***	-.144***	-.137***	-.206***	-.080***
Marital Status	-.075***	-.067**	-.088***	-.072***	-.048***	-.052***	-.038***	-.126***	-.080**	-.085**	-.037	-.020**

Note: Author's calculations from 2014 IFLS data; Statistical significance: * $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$

Result and discussion

Control variables

Besides the primary independent variables of optimism and subjective well-being, other control variables explained variations in individual subjective well-being. To explore the impact of these control variables on optimism and subjective well-being, regression analysis is presented in Table 2.

Table 2 shows regional classification (Reg), which all show a negative direction. This indicates that individuals who live in urban areas were subjectively more well-being than those in rural areas. This result was supported by other research, which showed that subjective well-being was influenced by region (Han, 2015), and areas with urban status will increase an individual's subjective well-being (Asadullah et al., 2018; Badana & Andel, 2018). However, on the other hand, it was found that subjective well-being in urban areas would be lower than in rural areas (Cai & Wang, 2018; Knight & Gunatilaka, 2012; Winters & Li, 2017). This was due to the high crime rate in urban areas (Nathania et al., 2017), the psychological costs of getting far from home (Mulcahy & Kollamparambil, 2016), or there is no family and environmental support as in rural areas (Sun et al., 2016).

The gender variable (Sex) also shows the same direction effect on all dependent variables, where the male is more optimistic and subjectively more well-being than the female. These results were inconsistent with other studies, which stated that females are more satisfied with their lives than males (Asadullah et al., 2018; Tay et al., 2014). Another opinion was conveyed by Zuckerman et al. (2017), which stated that although females experience depression more often, males and females are equally happy, with no significant difference.

Further, the Education variable (Edu) shows that higher education will make the individual feel more optimistic and have a higher level of subjective well-being than individuals with a lower education level. This supports other research which states that education and health are positively related to happiness and other subjective well-being (Cebolla-Boado et al., 2021; Dang & Sukontamarn, 2020; Kesornsri et al., 2019; Nizeyumukiza et al., 2021; Sun et al., 2016; Zuckerman et al., 2017). Sun et al. (2016) added that subjective well-being increased along with rising education and income levels with both control variables or without control variables.

Noteworthy results are shown by the age variable, where opinions regarding the level of household economic life were felt better by older people. However, a group of older people felt more pessimistic, found it more challenging to fulfill personal and household needs such as food and health, found it equally more challenging to fulfill all the needs of their children, and felt more unhappy than the younger people. These results are supported by other studies which stated that older adults had increased health care costs and living expenses. In addition, the emotional and social decline in older adults caused loneliness and sadness (Giang et al., 2019; Phuangcharoen & Thayansin, 2022).

Other research on age and subjective well-being showed different results where age had a significant correlation (Vicerra, 2023) and a positive association with subjective well-being (Pimpawatin & Witvorapong, 2022). This is suspected because, with age, simplicity increased and materialism decreased (Sung, 2017). Slightly differently, studies conducted by Sun et al.

(2016) found that the correlation between subjective well-being and age produced a “U” chart, where subjective well-being decreased until 30–50 and slightly increased after that.

Finally, almost all of them indicate that those with married status (MS) would be happier than those with single or divorced status. The positive relationship between marriage and happiness might have come from a causal effect, whereby someone happy was likelier to be in a relationship (Sandberg-Thoma & Kamp Dush, 2014). Chen and van Ours (2018) also found the same results, explaining that marriage would increase happiness; furthermore, cohabitation would also increase happiness, but only for young couples.

The impact of migration on optimism and subjective well-being

The findings of a study on how migration affects migrants’ subjective well-being are shown in Table 3. This analysis indicated that all DID results had the same (positive) direction toward the subjective welfare of migrants. Thus, it can be concluded that migration positively impacted the optimism and subjective well-being of migrants. It can also be seen that the estimated coefficient for the impact of migration is statistically significant on economic optimism, fulfillment of personal and household needs, and fulfillment of children’s needs condition variables.

Table 3: The Impact of Migration on Subjective Well-Being as a Result of DID

Subjective well-being	Difference in Subjective well-being before and after migration		DID (difference-in-differences)
	2007	2014	
Economic opinion			
SW01	0.071	0.098	0.028
Optimism			
OP01	0.159	0.259	0.101***
OP02	0.032	0.045	0.013
Personal and household needs			
SW03	0.051	0.119	0.068***
SW04	0.058	0.109	0.051***
SW05	0.058	0.110	0.051***
SW06	0.060	0.113	0.053***
Children's needs			
SW08	0.031	0.121	0.090*
SW09	0.036	0.105	0.069***
SW10	0.048	0.096	0.048*
SW11	0.044	0.111	0.067**
Happiness level			
SW12	0.025	0.032	0.007

Note: Author’s calculations from 2007 and 2014 IFLS data; Statistical significance: * $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$

Optimism

The analysis results in Table 3 on the optimism variable (OP01 & OP02) show that migration is significant and positively affects the estimate of economic level for the next five years by 0.101 points. This means that people who migrated had a more positive view of their future

economic situation in the next five years than those who did not migrate. Furthermore, optimism about fulfilling future needs also positively correlated with migration status, although not statistically significant.

This optimism for the future was consistent with Melzer (2011), who indicated that migration affected long-term subjective well-being. A bit dissimilar, Nowok et al. (2013) found that migration was only optimistic in the first year; after that, it was influenced by environmental factors. Phongsiri et al. (2023) mentioned the great optimism of migrants because there was also a large well-being gap between migrants and non-migrants. However, concerning optimism and subjective well-being, high optimism could lead to low subjective well-being. Knight and Gunatilaka (2012) and Cai and Wang (2018) found that when high optimism of migrants was not in line with the situation, it made the subjective well-being of migrants decrease. This was due to the failure to achieve what had been dreamed of and expected in the target area.

Personal and household needs

The analysis results related to personal and household needs in Table 3 (SW03, SW04, SW05, and SW06) show that migration positively affects personal and household needs. This means that people who migrate would have more adequacy in fulfilling their personal and household life needs regarding daily food and health care needs. As seen from the above results, Phongsiri et al. (2023) argued migrants and non-migrants are very different from one another, namely in the space to fulfill their needs. Migrants were more flexible in moving and producing. Other results also show that income increased due to jobs owned by migrants, allowing migrants to fulfill their daily needs even though they are still vulnerable to poverty (Nguyen et al., 2015). Mocanu et al. (2020) looked at the benefits that migrants got in destination areas in terms of better health care. This was consistent with the results in Table 3, where migrants felt more able to meet their healthcare needs than non-migrants. Bartram (2011) and Betz and Simpson (2013) stated that life satisfaction and the adequacy of basic needs were both positively impacted by migration. In their view, migrants felt happier and more satisfied when their basic needs were met.

Children's needs

For those who have children, Table 3 shows that individuals who migrate subjectively will feel more adequacy in fulfilling the needs of their children, such as children's consumption, children's health, and children's education, compared to those who did not migrate (SW08, SW09, SW10, & SW11 has a positive result). This finding was the same as the research which found that migration and urbanization are positively related to child health (Jemiluyi, 2021), where health, education, and subjective well-being are the goals for migrants and their children in the destination area (Akdede & Giovanis, 2022; Ngoc et al., 2017). However, Akdede and Giovanis (2022) added that this positive impact on children did not apply to Southern European countries.

Happiness

Testing the impact of migration with DID was also conducted on the level of happiness (SW12) and found that happiness and migration status showed the same (positive) direction. From these results, it could be said that migration positively affected happiness despite the test

results not being statistically significant. This is suspected because migration did not guarantee the fulfillment of all desired expectations (Knight & Gunatilaka, 2012) and did not guarantee long-term happiness (Nowok et al., 2013). The above results were supported by a study by Stillman et al. (2015), who argued that although migration brought significant improvements to objective well-being, it did not always lead to an improvement in subjective well-being due to the complex nature of the impact. While Nowok et al. (2013) described that happiness was only significantly influenced in the first year of migration, it will slowly return to its initial level of subjective well-being, influenced by the surrounding environment.

Conclusion

Humans are getting more and more mobile. Not only do they move to more distant places, but they also move more often. The Migration phenomenon affects not only the physical and economic condition of migrants but also their subjective perceptions. This study analyzes the association between migration and individual optimism and subjective well-being.

Spatial demographic characteristics have an impact on subjective well-being. This study concludes that urban areas, males, higher education, younger age, and currently in a marital relationship will affect a subjective well-being issue. For the age variable, it seems to have a significant effect on a person's subjective well-being. Older age impacts increasing the economic level; however, they are not optimistic and find it more challenging to fulfill their personal, family, and children's needs. The negative influence on happiness also increases with age.

Migration has benefits on a person's subjective well-being. This research also concludes that migration positively impacts one's optimism about the future and confidence in fulfilling personal, family, and children's needs. However, migration is not significant to happiness even though there is a positive direction to happiness. This is indicated by the fact that happiness is complicated and affected by various factors from the environment in which one lives.

This finding will have implications for the development of the population sciences, particularly for understanding the role of migration in increasing the subjective well-being of migrants. As we know, so far, the role of migration has been emphasized more from an objective well-being perspective. The research's findings are believed to be consequential for development planning, as they could provide policymakers with significant insights for more accurate formulation of development policies, particularly population development policies.

Future research could identify the impact of migration motives on outcomes. Additionally, it would be valuable to investigate how specific segments of migrants perceive the effects of their migration. Furthermore, exploring the influence of household relationships on subjective well-being could provide valuable insights.

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