

## Chapter #17

### STUDENTS' EMIGRATION INTENTIONS AND EMIGRATION PLANS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE MIGRATION BELIEF MODEL

Marta Dobrowolska-Kulanová<sup>1</sup> & Oľga Orosová<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Psychology, P.J. Šafárik University in Košice, Slovakia

<sup>2</sup>Department of Educational Psychology and Psychology of Health, P.J. Šafárik University in Košice, Slovakia

#### ABSTRACT

Background: The Migration Belief Model (MBM) assumes that emigration intentions and emigration plans are determined by perceived economic threat, perceived emigration benefits, perceived emigration barriers and emigration self-efficacy.

Objective: To examine the relationships between factors of the MBM and emigration intentions and plans separately. In addition, to explore the relationship between emigration intentions and emigration plans.

Methods: Data were collected online at 17 universities in Slovakia (n=489, 76.5% women, M=22.8, SD=3). Emigration intentions, emigration plans and factors of the MBM were identified. A linear regression and a multinomial logistic regression were used.

Findings: 24% of students planned to emigrate long-term. The factors of the MBM explained about 33.6% of variance in emigration intentions and 32.9% in emigration plans. Those who reported higher level of emigration intentions or plan a long-term stay abroad were more likely to report a higher level of perceived economic threat, perceived emigration benefits and emigration self-efficacy and a lower level of perceived emigration barriers than those with lower level of emigration intentions or without a plan to leave. Emigration intentions explained about 52% of variance in emigration plans.

Conclusion: The findings have supported the relevance of the MBM in the study of emigration intentions and plans.

*Keywords:* emigration intentions, emigration plans, migration belief model, modified health belief model, barriers and benefits of emigration, self-efficacy.

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

The migration of highly educated people, students or graduates is called the 'brain drain'. Slovakia, as well as many other EU countries, faces an outflow of educated and qualified people abroad after graduating or even before finishing university. Káčerová and Horváthová (Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, 2014) state that Slovak emigrants are most often those with secondary school education (53.68%) followed by those with university education (21.55%). According to newer sources which have looked at nearly 500 university students from the whole country, approximately 23% of students plan to leave Slovakia after finishing their degree for more than one year or permanently (Orosová & Gajdošová, 2017). Thus, this exodus of young skilled people from Slovakia is becoming more and more urgent and the research of factors that are related to students' emigration intentions can be useful.

Migration is not a matter of a single act but rather a process with several distinguishable phases (e.g. Tabor & Milfont, 2011; Kley, 2009; Krieger, 2004). Krieger (2004) considers the decision to emigrate as a stage process including several levels of commitment to emigration. The first level before intentions can be described as a general inclination towards emigration which can be expressed as a favorable attitude to emigration. This stage is followed by the stage of intention itself which is characterized by more frequent considerations of emigration. Finally, a firm intention, i.e. emigration plan is formed which shows signs of a specific plan to emigrate (i.e. one knows where to leave or for how long). In this study, both emigration intentions and emigration plans are considered. Our additional aim was to explore whether the amount of considering emigration can explain emigration planning.

According to Massey et al. (1993), the complexity of the migration phenomenon requires a sophisticated approach which is willing to integrate different perspectives and views. In contrast to migration theories, health theories including the Health Belief Model (HBM) predominantly concentrate on the psycho-social factors that affect behavior such as knowledge, beliefs, intentions and personality traits. In order to find an effective way of influencing migration, it is worth examining the possible use of belief and intention concepts in health behavior research to see if the findings from health research can be transferred to migration research (Groenewold, Bruijn & Bilsborrow, 2006, 2012).

The HBM assumes that what people believe about a condition or behavior targeted at changing this condition determines what they will do about it. The original HBM has been revised to six factors predicting the probability that an individual implements a certain health behavioral strategy (Groenewold et al., 2006). The first two factors, namely perceived susceptibility (an individual's beliefs about the likelihood of meeting a health disorder) and perceived seriousness (an individual's beliefs about the seriousness of meeting that health disorder) represent the perceived threat of a situation. The factors of perceived benefits and perceived barriers represent outcome expectations from the behavior directed at reducing the perceived threat (e.g. the prevention action). The concept of cues to action relates to events or experiences that stimulate an individual's direct need to perform this behavior. However, its role has been less sufficiently examined, mainly due to complications with its operationalization. The last and newest factor to be added to the HBM is self-efficacy, which was directly adapted from Bandura's social cognitive theory (Rosenstock 1988 as cited in Groenewold et al., 2006).

Groenewold et al. (2006, 2012) tried to adapt and verify the applicability of the HBM in the study of emigration intentions. They generalized the key concepts of HBM and transposed them into the 'modified HBM' with the following factors: the perceived threat to financial living conditions (state X) and emigration as a behavioral action directed at reducing this perceived threat and at improving living conditions (action Y), beliefs about the usefulness of emigration for decreasing this threat (perceived emigration benefits), the obstacles to emigration (perceived emigration barriers) and the confidence in one's ability to effectively perform the emigration behavior (emigration self-efficacy).

As the 'modified HBM' has been taken from health research but does not directly address health-related behavior in its modified version, this modified HBM is labelled as the Migration Belief Model (MBM) in this study in order to differentiate it from the basic HBM. To sum up, it is possible to compare the original HBM and the MBM. In the MBM, the first two factors of the HBM (perceived susceptibility and perceived severity) are presented in a single factor of perceived economic threat (instead of perceived threat to health). The perceived benefits of health-related behavior are replaced by the perceived emigration benefits, the perceived barriers to health-related behavior are replaced by

perceived emigration barriers, cues to action relates to cues encouraging emigration instead of cues encouraging health-related behavior and emigration self-efficacy relates to one's confidence about the ability of successfully emigrating instead of the ability of successfully performing a health-related behavior. The main aim of this study is to examine the relationships between the four main factors of the MBM, i.e. between *beliefs* in the MBM and emigration intentions and emigration plans separately, while omitting cues to action factor as a factor referring to external stimuli of emigration.

## 2. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this study were to examine the relationships between four beliefs of the MBM (perceived economic threat, perceived emigration benefits, perceived emigration barriers and emigration self-efficacy) and emigration intentions and emigration plans among Slovak university students separately. The additional aim of this study was to explore whether emigration intentions, i.e. the amount of considering emigration contribute to explaining emigration planning.

## 3. METHODS

### 3.1. Sample and procedure

All universities in Slovakia were invited to join the research project and 51% of them answered the official call for participation. Students were asked formally (by their university websites, information systems or official Facebook pages) or informally (by official Facebook page 'Slice Study 2016' created for the purpose of research promotion in unofficial Facebook student pages and groups) to fill in an online questionnaire, voluntarily and anonymously.

A total of 1091 students reacted to the invitation. The whole questionnaire was self-completed by 489 of them (a response rate of 44.8%). This value is in line with the commonly achieved value of the respond rate for online research, which is on average 33% (compared with 56% for paper research) (Nulty, 2008). 374 (76.5%) respondents of the sample were women; mean age of the students was 22.8 (SD=2.97), 22.6 (SD=2.84) for women and 23.4 (SD=3.28) for men. All grades and study levels were represented in the sample: 50.7% of students were in the first (bachelor level) of study, 38.9% of students were in the second (master) grade of study and 5.3% of the sample were PhD students. All regions of the Slovakia were represented in the sample as well.

### 3.2. Measures

- Emigration intentions as a continuous variable were identified. EI were measured by five-items Intention to Emigrate scale (Leong & Soon, 2011) which concerns individuals' considerations about living abroad. Each item required respondents to rate the frequency with which they thought of working or living in another country on a 5-item scale from 1 (never) to 5 (all the time). Higher scores denote a higher intention to emigrate ( $C\alpha$  of .9).
- Emigration plans were identified as a categorical variable, identified by the question specifying the circumstances of the leaving: „Are you planning to leave Slovakia after completing university?“ with possible answers: No, I am not planning to leave (1); I don't know, I have not thought about it (2); I don't know, I have not decided yet (3); Yes, I am planning to leave for a period up to 6 months

(4); Yes, I am planning to leave for a period from 6 to 12 months (5); Yes, I am planning to leave for a period longer than a year (6); Yes, I am planning to leave for a period longer than 5 years (7); Yes, I am planning to leave permanently (8). In order to simplify the initial results for our planned analysis, respondents were classified into 4 categories based on responses: a) those who do not plan to leave Slovakia (they answered with 1); b) undecided (they answered with 2 or 3); c) planning a short-term stay (they answered with 4 or 5) and d) planning a long-term stay (they answered with 6, 7 or 8).

- Perceived economic threat was defined by students' perception of the economic situation and life perspective in Slovakia. Students were asked: „How do you feel about the development of Slovakia's economy over the next 10 years in the context of your professional career and perspective of starting your own family?“ (1-very optimistic, 4-very pessimistic). A higher score indicates a higher level of perceived economic threat.
- Perceived benefits were measured by students' evaluations of the importance of six factors possibly attracting them to emigrate (1-not important at all; 5-very important), e.g. an opportunity to master the foreign language, an opportunity to gain a prestigious education abroad or an opportunity to have a better career abroad. A higher overall score indicates a higher level of perception of emigration benefits ( $\alpha$  of .8).
- Perceived barriers: were measured by the students' evaluations of the importance of six factors possibly repelling them from emigration (1-not important at all; 5-very important), e.g. strong relationships and commitments in Slovakia, expected difficulties with finding a job abroad, expected difficulties with learning a language. A higher overall score indicates a higher level of perception of emigration barriers ( $\alpha$  of .8).
- Emigration self-efficacy was measured by three items. The students were asked if they agree with the statements such as: “If I wanted I could easily emigrate; I believe I would be able to handle the leaving” (1-strongly disagree; 5-strongly agree). A higher overall score indicates a higher confidence about students' ability to successfully emigrate ( $\alpha$  of .8).

### 3.3. Statistical analyses

A linear regression with enter method and a multinomial regression analyses were applied. The reference category for multinomial regression was a group of students planning a long-term emigration from Slovakia (for more than one year or permanently).

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1. Preliminary results

Regarding the concrete emigration plans, the highest number of students are those who had not decided yet (about 42%). Overall, about 36% of students plan to leave Slovakia for some time (short or long term). There is also a comparable proportion of students who do not plan to leave Slovakia (about 23%) and students planning a long-term emigration from Slovakia (about 24%). There are no significant differences between men and women in planning emigration. The emigration plans among Slovak university students with respect to gender can be seen in Table 1.

Likewise, there is no significant difference between men and women in emigration intentions. However, women perceive both the barriers and benefits of emigration as more important and are less confident about their ability to emigrate compared to men. The descriptive characteristics in the measured continuous variables are presented in Table 2.

*Table 1.*  
*Emigration plans among Slovak university students.*

<b>Emigration plan (number of response)</b>	<b>Among sample (n=489)</b>	<b>Among women (n=374)</b>	<b>Among men (n=115)</b>
Not planning to leave (1)	110 (22.5%)	90 (24.1%)	20 (17.4%)
Undecided (2, 3)	203 (41.5%)	158 (42.2%)	45 (39.1%)
Planning short-term stay abroad (4, 5)	60 (12.3%)	47 (12.6%)	13 (11.3%)
Planning long-term stay abroad (6, 7, 8)	116 (23.7%)	79 (21.1%)	37 (32.2%)

*Table 2.*  
*Descriptive characteristics of the sample in the continuous variables.*

<b>VARIABLE</b>	<b>Theoretical range / Sample range</b>	<b>MEAN (Standard deviation)</b>			<b>T-test value</b>
		<b>Among sample (n=489)</b>	<b>Among men (n=115)</b>	<b>Among women (n=374)</b>	
Emigration intentions	5 – 25 / 5- 25	12.95 (5.14)	13.53 (5)	12.77 (5.17)	-1.384
Perceived economic threat	1 – 4 / 1 – 4	2.76 (.67)	2.71 (.82)	2.78 (.61)	.782
Perceived emig. benefits	6 – 30 / 15 – 30	24.43 (3.14)	23.76 (3.58)	24.63 (2.97)	2.39**
Perceived emig. barriers	6 – 30 / 6 – 30	20.14 (4.78)	18.97 (4.63)	20.49 (4.77)	3.01**
Emigration self- efficacy	3 – 15 / 3 – 15	11.66 (2.63)	12.53 (2.21)	11.39 (2.69)	- 4.59***

\*\*\*p ≤ 0.001, \*\*p ≤ 0.01, \*p ≤ 0.05

#### **4.2. Relationships between MBM factors and emigration intentions**

A linear-regression analysis with enter method was applied in order to identify the overall contribution of the MBM factors in the explanation of emigration intentions and to explore the relationships between MBM factors and emigration intentions (continuous variable). The final model adjusted for gender with four MBM factors was significant and explained 33.6% of the variance in emigration intentions among university students. In this final model, higher level of emigration intentions was positively related to higher level of perceived economic threat, of perceived emigration benefits and of emigration self-efficacy. Furthermore, higher level of emigration intentions were associated with a lower level of perceived emigration barriers. The final model with regression coefficients is presented in Table 3.

Table 3.  
Linear-regression model, relationships between MBM factors and emigration intentions.

FACTOR	B	S.E.	95% C.I.for B		$\beta$	Sig.
			Lower	Upper		
Gender	.086	.462	-.822	.995	.007	.852
Perceived economic threat	1.328	.288	.762	1.893	.173	.000
Perceived emigration benefits	.367	.063	.244	.491	.225	.000
Perceived emigration barriers	-.209	.044	-.295	-.124	-.194	.000
Emigration self-efficacy	.667	.081	.508	.826	.341	.000

Linear model: Adjusted R<sup>2</sup>=.336; F=50.445 (df=5, p<.000)

#### 4.3. Relationships between MBM factors and emigration plans with the respect of preferred length of the stay abroad

A multinomial-regression analysis was applied in order to identify the overall contribution of the MBM factors in the explanation of emigration plans and to explore the relationships between MBM factors and the emigration plans (categorical variable). The regression model adjusted for gender with the MBM factors explained 30.4% (Cox&Snell) – 32.9% (Nagelkerke) of the variance in emigration plans. The relationships of the MBM factors and emigration plans regarding the preferred length of stay can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4.  
MBM factors related to emigration plans among Slovak university students.

Group compared to the reference group <sup>o</sup>	Factor	OR	95% CI	
			Lower bound	Upper bound
Not planning to leave at all	Perceived ec. threat	.456**	.285	.730
	Perceived em. benefits	.864**	.780	.957
	Perceived em. barriers	1.208***	1.121	1.301
	Emigration self-efficacy	.632***	.541	.738
Undecided	Perceived ec. threat	.515**	.349	.759
	Perceived em. benefits	.936	.857	1.022
	Perceived em. barriers	1.137***	1.069	1.208
	Emigration self-efficacy	.677***	.588	.779
Planning short-term departure (for less than 1 year)	Perceived ec. threat	.510**	.312	.834
	Perceived em. benefits	.984	.879	1.100
	Perceived em. barriers	1.180***	1.093	1.274
	Emigration self-efficacy	.955	.796	1.145

<sup>o</sup>Group of students planning long-term leaving (for more than 1 year); OR – odds ratio, probability of chances; 95% CI – confidence interval (lower and upper bound); \*\*\*p ≤ 0.001, \*\*p ≤ 0.01, \*p ≤ 0.05

The model showed that those who plan a long-term stay abroad:

- 1) are more likely to report a higher level of perceived economic threat, perceived benefits of emigration and emigration self-efficacy and a lower level of perceived barriers to emigration when compared to those who don't plan to emigrate;
- 2) are more likely to report a higher level of perceived economic threat and a lower level of perceived barriers to emigration than the group of undecided;
- 3) are more likely to report a higher level of perceived economic threat and lower level of perceived barriers when compared to those who plan a short-term stay.

#### 4.4. Relationships between emigration intentions and emigration plans

Furthermore, using simple multinomial regression adjusted for gender it was also found that emigration intention, i.e. the amount of considering emigration explains about 47.9% (Cox & Snell) – 51.7% (Nagelkerke) of variance in emigration plans. Those, who plan a long-term stay abroad are more likely to report higher level of emigration intentions (i.e. emigration consideration) than those, who are not planning to leave, than those who are undecided about leaving and than those who are planning to leave short-term. It can be said, that emigration intentions (i.e. emigration consideration) are relatively good as the predictors of emigration planning itself. The details of this analysis can be seen in Table 5.

Table 5.  
*Relationships between emigration intentions and emigration plans.*

Group compared to the reference group <sup>∞</sup>	Factor	OR	95% CI	
			Lower bound	Upper bound
<b>Not planning to leave at all</b>	Emigration intention (considerations)	.459***	.403	.523
<b>Undecided</b>	Emigration intention (considerations)	.716***	.666	.769
<b>Planning short-term departure (for less than 1 year)</b>	Emigration intention (considerations)	.810***	.747	.878

<sup>∞</sup>Group of students planning long-term leaving (for more than 1 year); OR – odds ratio, probability of chances; 95% CI – confidence interval (lower and upper bound); \*\*\*p ≤ 0.001, \*\*p ≤ 0.01, \*p ≤ 0.05

## 5. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Since the MBM is still a relatively new adaptation of the HBM in the study of emigration, there are other possible ways that the model could be transformed and which factor indicators could be chosen. A further exploration of the relationships between and among the factors and their relationships with emigration intentions and behavior can bring new findings and explain the potential inconsistencies in previous outcomes regarding students' emigration. A better understanding of the processes accompanying emigration decision-making demands a longitudinal design in future research with moderation and mediation analyses (Orosová, Benka, Hricová, & Kulanová, 2018). This design would be appropriate to find out how well the MBM can predict the actual emigration from Slovakia and whether it can provide some evidence about the predictive power of emigration intentions.

Although this paper deals with the examination of factors related to emigration intentions and plans of students, the findings of this research and follow-up analyzes can also be transferred to other related areas of migration. The model does not neglect the economic and social factors that are also relevant for other types of migration such as migration from war-torn countries or from countries suffering from poverty.

## 6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

It was found that all four beliefs in the MBM are significantly related to emigration intentions and emigration plans separately. It was found that those intending to emigrate and intending a long-term stay abroad perceive the economic situation in Slovakia more pessimistically, evaluate the benefits of emigration as more important and barriers of emigration as less important and are more confident about their ability to successfully emigrate. The MBM explains a relatively similar amount of variance in both emigration intentions and emigration plans.

The results of this study about the contribution of the MBM in emigration intentions supported previous findings by Groenewold et al., (2006, 2012) who have found that the MBM with four beliefs included explained between 29% (Turkey) and 56% (Morocco) of the variance in emigration intentions. Specifically, it was found that higher perceived economic threat is related to higher emigration intentions. Many studies have confirmed the importance of economic factors pulling students to migrate to more prosperous countries or pushing them out of their country due to unsatisfactory economic conditions (e.g. Mihi-Ramirez & Kumpikaite, 2013; Sheikh, Naqvi, Sheikh, Naqvi & Bandukda, 2012; Gouda et al. 2015; Santric-Milicevic, Terzic-Supic, Matejic, Vasic & Ricketts, 2014). Champion & Skinner (2008) have suggested that even if a person perceives threat, whether this perception leads to behavior will be affected by the person's beliefs regarding the benefits of the action for reducing this threat. Thus, individuals who perceive a threat to their living conditions are not immediately expected to take action unless they believe that a certain action would be beneficial in decreasing this threat. In other words, that the expected benefits of taking action would outweigh the barriers to action in which case they are more likely to take action they believe will reduce this threat (Champion & Skinner, 2008). In this study the significance of emigration benefits and barriers was supported in the explanation of both the emigration intentions and emigration plans as well. It has also been found that those with higher level of emigration intentions are more confident about their ability to successfully emigrate. Regarding emigration self-efficacy, its significance has been confirmed in various phases of the migration process and in the phase of the formation of intentions as well (Hoppe & Fujishiro, 2015, Aldwin, Oark, Jeong, & Nath, 2014).

The results of this study also indicate that emigration intentions as an amount of emigration consideration can be a precursor to concrete emigration planning and later to emigration itself and support Krieger's (2004) stage process of emigration. These findings offer several implications. Given the fact that about one third of Slovak students are considering some kind of emigration, it is important to recognize which factors, beliefs, motives or individual characteristics may contribute to emigration decision-making. Studies of emigration intentions and migration potential can provide valuable information about the motivations and characteristics of potential migrants and worthwhile data about their situation prior to migration (e.g. Kley, 2009; Van Dalen & Henkens, 2008, 2013). It is better to motivate students according to their interests or what they reflect to be important for them (Tumusiime, 2004). The findings support the contribution of the MBM in the explanation of students' emigration intentions and plans. This model can be further applied in the study of students' emigration taking into account other potentially contributing psychological factors or can be transferred to other relevant contexts of migration.



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## KEY TERMS & DEFINITIONS

**Emigration intention:** an act of volition which constructs the future implementation of social behavior in other social and cultural reality. The construct is identified as an amount of emigration considering.

**Emigration plan:** a firm emigration intentions showing signs of a specific plan to emigrate (i.e. one knows where to leave or for how long).

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## AUTHORS INFORMATION

**Full name:** Marta Dobrowolska-Kulanová, PhD.

**Institutional affiliation:** Department of Psychology, Faculty of Arts, PJ Safarik University in Kosice

**Institutional address:** Moyzesova 9, Kosice 040 01, Slovak Republic

**Email address:** mata.kulanova@gmail.com

**Short biographical sketch:** Marta Dobrowolska Kulanová is an internal PhD student in the study program of Social and Organizational psychology. Her main research interest lies in studying intrapersonal and interpersonal factors of emigration intentions among university students. She is also active in drug use prevention training of university students.

**Full name:** Prof. Olga Orosová, PhD.

**Institutional affiliation:** Department of Educational Psychology and Health Psychology, Faculty of Arts, PJ Safarik University in Kosice

**Institutional address:** Moyzesova 9, Kosice 040 01, Slovak Republic

**Short biographical sketch:** Olga Orosova is a professor of Educational, Counseling, and School Psychology. She is a principal investigator of research projects focusing on the factors of risk behavior among adolescents and young adults and the effectiveness of drug use prevention programs. She is a member of the European Health Psychology Society, International School Psychology Association (ISPA), the European Society for Prevention Research (EUSPR), and ESFRI working group on Social & Cultural Innovation Strategy Working Group (SCI).