

STUDY OF PSYCHOSOCIAL FACTORS INFLUENCING MIGRATION TO OTHER COUNTRIES AMONG YOUNG JAMAICANS IN KINGSTON



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| Doi : 10.5281/zenodo.13695738 | Received August 06, 2024 | Accepted September 20, 2024 | Published September 25, 2024 | ID Article | Rohalia-Ref03-3-19ajiras050924 |

ABSTRACT

Background: Migration is a longstanding phenomenon that affects individuals and societies globally. For young Jamaicans aged 18-24, the decision to migrate is often driven by a combination of psychosocial factors, significant life transitions, and the pursuit of better employment and living conditions. This study explores these factors to understand the motivations and implications of youth migration from Jamaica. **Objectives:** This research aims to investigate the psychosocial factors influencing migration decisions among young Jamaicans. It seeks to identify key motivators for migration, assess the associated risks and benefits, and analyze migration patterns related to age groups within this demographic. **Methods:** The study employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative techniques. A structured questionnaire will be used to gather numerical data on migration influences, while open-ended interviews will provide in-depth insights into the personal experiences and psychosocial factors affecting migration decisions. Participants will include young Jamaicans who have migrated or are considering migration. **Results:** Preliminary findings suggest that significant life transitions, such as entering the workforce, combined with limited local resources and societal pressures, play a critical role in the decision-making process. Young Jamaicans are motivated by the search for better economic opportunities and improved living conditions abroad. However, this migration often entails risks such as exploitation and challenges in adaptation. **Conclusion:** The study highlights the critical psychosocial factors influencing migration among young Jamaicans. It underscores the need for targeted interventions, including enhanced psychosocial support, improved economic opportunities, and effective policy strategies to address brain drain and retain local talent. By implementing these recommendations, Jamaica can better support its youth, foster social and economic development, and build a more resilient society.

Keywords: migration, psychosocial factors, youth, Jamaica, brain drain, economic opportunities.

1. INTRODUCTION

The complex dynamics of youth migration, particularly from developing countries like Jamaica, remain incompletely understood despite their significant socioeconomic implications. While global trends in youth migration have been documented, the specific psychosocial factors driving young Jamaicans to seek opportunities abroad are not fully elucidated (World Youth Report, 2014).

Migration, defined as a permanent change of residence by an individual or group, has long been a feature of human societies (Britannica Encyclopedia, 2024). It is intricately linked to global issues such as poverty, economic development, and human rights. Youth migration, in particular, has gained prominence in recent years, with young migrants constituting over 10% of the 232 million international migrants worldwide (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2020).

Existing research has identified several broad motivators for youth migration, including economic opportunities, educational pursuits, and escape from conflict or environmental pressures (United Nations, 2023). The International Labour Organization reports that unemployment remains a significant driver, with an estimated 73 million young people unemployed globally (ILO, 2020). However, migration also presents challenges, including family separation, cultural adjustment, and potential exploitation in the labor market (Cortina et al., 2014).

In the Jamaican context, there is a noticeable trend of young adults (18-24 years old) choosing to leave the country in search of better employment and living conditions abroad. This phenomenon occurs against a backdrop of high youth unemployment and limited domestic opportunities for decent work (Statistical Institute of Jamaica, 2022). However, the specific psychosocial factors influencing these migration decisions among young Jamaicans, as well as the interplay between these factors and significant life transitions, remain understudied.

This research study aims to examine how psychosocial factors, significant life transitions, and limited resources in their home country influence the migration decisions of young Jamaicans, ultimately leading to a notable increase in the number of young adults choosing to leave Jamaica to pursue better life experiences in other countries. By investigating these factors, this study seeks to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of youth migration from Jamaica, potentially informing policy decisions and interventions aimed at addressing the root causes of migration and improving opportunities for young people within the country.

Literature Review

Due in part to a sharp fall in the birth rate but more so because of a high emigration rate, Jamaica is quickly heading into an advanced stage of demographic transition. According to the Economic and Social Survey of Jamaica 2019, there were 33,800 births and 18,100 deaths in 2020, resulting in a population growth of almost 15,700 people (Ivey, Falconer, Northover, Clarke & Haughton, 2021). However, net emigration resulted in the loss of an additional 18,000 persons, resulting in a slight population fall. Women and girls account for 48.9% of adolescent and young migrants and 51.6% of the total migrant population in industrialized nations (United Nations, n.d.). Women and girls make up a little smaller part of the total migrant population in developing and least developed nations (43.0 and 45.3 per cent, respectively) due to the rising proportion of males. There are several reasons why young people relocate (Ivey et al., 2021). The decision to migrate is frequently linked to significant life transitions, such as acquiring a higher degree, finding and beginning a job, or marrying. With 71 million young people worldwide unemployed as of 2016, the search for employment continues to be a significant factor in youth migration in both developed and developing countries (United Nations, n.d.). Overall, it was assumed that pull factors are more important than push factors, while both are important.

Economic considerations with excellent living standards and better economic prospects are the most highly scored by panelists (Ivey et al., 2021). Over the previous three decades, Jamaica's economic progress has been impeded by low or declining productivity growth. As a result, the country is unable to appropriately absorb, utilize, and compensate Jamaican talent. To that aim, economic prospects outside the country's borders appear to be becoming increasingly appealing (United Nations, n.d.). Facilitating continuous improvement in productivity growth may prove to be a worthwhile technique for addressing brain drain and other issues confronting Jamaica. This can create more favourable conditions for young people, reducing the need for them to migrate in search of better prospects elsewhere. In order to flee hardship, violence, and conflict, as well as to avoid being displaced by armed conflict or the effects of climate change, many young people migrate voluntarily or are compelled to do so because there is no other suitable solution. Additionally, as a result, youth are overrepresented in humanitarian migration, particularly as refugees, asylum seekers, and unaccompanied minors (United Nations, n.d.). A stable economy will aim to reduce instances of violence and conflict and provide resources for better infrastructure and programs that will create favourable living and working conditions, thus addressing some of the root causes of migration. To achieve sustained economic and social growth, addressing the opportunities and problems associated with migration is essential.

While it is important to underline that migration is a human right and that both sending and receiving countries gain significantly from migration, Jamaica's current level of net emigration is one of the causes of the present population reduction. Furthermore, if emigrants are more skilled than those who remain, this could result in a brain drain (Ivey et al., 2021). The process of intelligent and technically trained workers leaving one country (the home country) and moving to another (the host country), where the economic, geographic, or professional climate is more advantageous, is known as brain drain.

Brain drain happens when people obtain a university or college education or specialized skills and relocate to apply their knowledge and talents in a country where they were not born (Haughton, 2013). According to recent World Bank research, around 85 per cent of Jamaica's tertiary-level graduates relocate; Jamaica has the world's second-highest incidence of brain drain. Some developing countries lack the platform and capacity to employ all of their tertiary-level graduates, and as a result, some people move. There is also the case where more students seek a specific university degree or acquire a particular talent than the country requires (Haughton, 2013). If the government cannot employ a large number of graduates, some will be forced to migrate. Jamaicans typically travel to nations where employment is widely available, whether officially or unofficially, where they have the freedom to advance in their jobs, or where there are opportunities for personal improvement. The loss of significant human capital required to assist a country to grow and thrive is called brain drain. It is critical for countries to have informed professionals (technocrats) performing specific duties - people who are good at their occupations and can complete these tasks with greater effectiveness (Marie, n.d.). Otherwise, the country would continue to be underdeveloped. A more intelligent and competent economy can make more informed decisions, reducing waste and increasing efficiency and productivity.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Study Design

This study will investigate the psychosocial factors influencing migration among young Jamaicans in Kingston using a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative research techniques. Mixed-methods research is described as the process of collecting and analyzing both qualitative and quantitative data elements within a single study to achieve a comprehensive and holistic understanding of the research problem (Shorten & Smith, 2017).

2.2 Quantitative Data Collection

For the quantitative component, a structured questionnaire will be developed as the primary research instrument. Quantitative research involves the collection of numerical or measurable data (Hoover, 2021). The questionnaire will consist of closed-ended questions designed to measure the factors influencing migration decisions among young Jamaicans aged 18-24 years residing in Kingston. This age group is selected to represent young adults at a critical stage of making migration-related decisions. Kingston is chosen as the study location due to its diverse exposure to the economic, environmental, and social impacts of migration in Jamaica.

2.3 Sampling for Quantitative Study

A targeted sample of individuals within the specified age range will be selected to participate in the quantitative phase. A random sampling technique will be employed to ensure a representative sample of the population, allowing for generalizable findings across the broader demographic of young adults in Kingston.

2.4 Qualitative Data Collection

The qualitative aspect of the study aims to gain a deeper understanding of the motivations, risks, benefits, and patterns associated with migration decisions among young Jamaicans. Qualitative research involves the collection of non-numerical data, such as narratives, images, and sounds, to capture detailed insights (Hoover, 2021). Open-ended questionnaires will be distributed to gather in-depth interpretations and personal experiences from individuals who have migrated or are considering migration, enabling exploration of the complex factors and dynamics influencing migration choices.

2.5 Sampling for Qualitative Study

The qualitative sample will include a diverse group of participants, such as current workers, university students, graduates, embassy officials, family members of migrants, and immigrants originally from Jamaica. A simple random sampling method will be employed using a random number generator to ensure each potential participant has an equal chance of being selected.

2.6 Research Instruments

A structured questionnaire for the quantitative phase, featuring closed-ended questions to collect measurable data on factors influencing migration. An open-ended questionnaire for the qualitative phase, designed to capture in-depth insights and personal experiences related to migration decisions. Participants will have the option to complete the questionnaires online or to download, print, and return them. This flexibility aims to maximize response rates and accommodate varying participant preferences.

2.7 Ethical Considerations

Prior to participation, all respondents will receive an informed consent form explaining the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights, including the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. Ensuring informed consent is crucial for establishing trust and maintaining the integrity of the research. All data collected will be securely stored in digital format to ensure its longevity and availability for future analysis.

3. RESULTS

Table 1 shows that, concerning the age of the respondents, out of 38 respondents, 12 (31.6%) were male and 26 (68.4%) identified as female. For occupation, of the 38 respondents who answered this question, 1 (2.6%) were self-employed, 7 (18.4%) were students, 31 (81.6%) were government workers, and 2 (5.3%) were searching for employment. Of the 38 respondents, when asked about their marital status, 33 (86.8%) stated they were single, and 3 (7.9%) were married. Of the remaining respondents, 1 (2.6%) was divorced and 1 (2.6%) was a widow. In regards to educational background, 13 (34.2%) were high school graduates, 4 (10.5%) had an associate's degree, 24 (63.2%) had a bachelor's degree, 2 (5.3%)

had a master's degree, 1 (2.6%) had a doctorate, and 3 (7.9%) had other degrees. For place of residence, 11 (28.9%) lived in the town area, and 27 (71.1%) lived in the city.

Table 1: Participants demographic information.

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	12	31.6%
Female	26	68.4%
Total	38	100%
Educational Background		
High School Graduate	13	34.2%
Associate Degree	4	10.5%
Bachelor Degree	24	63.2%
Masters Degree	2	5.3%
Doctorate	1	2.6%
Other	3	7.9%
Total	38	100%
Occupational Status		
Student	7	18.4%
Working	31	81.6%
Self Employed	1	2.6%
Not Employed	2	5.3%
Total	38	100%
Relationship Status		
Single	33	86.8%
Married	3	7.9%
Divorced	1	2.6%
Widowed	1	2.6%
Total	38	100%
Place of Residence		
Town	11	28.9%
City	27	71.1%
Total	38	100%

Table 2 presents the key motivational and influencing factors for migration among the surveyed Jamaican youth. A significant majority (71.1%) cited their educational qualifications as a driving factor in their decision to migrate, suggesting a strong link between academic achievement and perceived opportunities abroad. Family and peer influence also played a substantial role, with 63.2% acknowledging its significance in their decision-making process. The high percentage (86.8%) of respondents observing trends in destination countries chosen by young Jamaicans indicates a collective awareness of migration patterns within this demographic. Qualitative responses highlighted various cultural and social factors unique to Jamaica that impacted the desire to migrate, including economic challenges, perceived better opportunities abroad, and safety concerns. These findings collectively underscore the complex interplay of personal, social, and cultural factors in shaping migration decisions among young Jamaicans.

Table 2: Motivations and Influencing Factors for Migration.

Factor	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Educational qualifications as a driving factor	Yes	27	71.1%
	No	11	28.9%
Family or peer influence on migration decision	Yes	24	63.2%
	No	15	39.5%
Specific cultural or social factors impacting desire to migrate	Various (qualitative responses)	N/A	N/A
Observed trends in destination countries for young Jamaicans	Yes	33	86.8%
	No	5	13.2%

Table 3 illustrates the perceived impacts of migration on employment opportunities and living standards. An overwhelming majority (84.2%) reported a positive impact on their employment opportunities and career prospects post-migration. This is further reinforced by the 73.7% who experienced significant improvements in their standard of living. The perception that benefits outweighed risks and challenges was strong, with 60.5% strongly agreeing. However, the presence of neutral

(28.9%) and strongly disagreeing (10.5%) responses indicates variability in migration experiences. These findings suggest that while migration generally leads to perceived improvements in career prospects and living standards for most young Jamaicans in the sample, individual experiences can vary considerably.

Table 3: Impact of Migration on Employment and Living Standards

Factor	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Positive impact on employment opportunities and career prospects	Yes	32	84.2%
	No	6	15.8%
Improvement in standard of living	Significant Improvement	28	73.7%
	Neutral	9	23.7%
	No Improvement	1	2.6%
Benefits outweighed risks and challenges	Strongly agree	23	60.5%
	Neutral	11	28.9%
	Strongly disagree	4	10.5%

Table 3 delineates the various challenges encountered by young Jamaican migrants during and after their relocation. Social, cultural, and environmental challenges were the most prevalent, affecting 52.63% of respondents. This was followed by housing issues (13.16%) and financial challenges (10.53%). Notably, 36.842% of respondents reported facing difficulties due to their move, while 18.421% did not. Financial challenges showed an even split, with 50% reporting such hardships and 50% not experiencing them. These findings highlight the multifaceted nature of migration-related challenges, with sociocultural adaptation appearing as the most significant hurdle. The data also suggests that while migration often leads to improved circumstances (as seen in Table 2), it is not without its challenges for a substantial proportion of migrants.

Table 4: Challenges Encountered During and After Migration

Challenge Type	Frequency	Percentage
Social, Cultural, and Environmental	20	52.63%
Housing	5	13.16%
Financial (job, money)	4	10.53%
Language Barriers	3	7.89%
Racism	2	5.26%
No Challenges	4	10.53%
Faced difficulties or problems due to move (Yes)	14	36.842%
Faced difficulties or problems due to move (No)	7	18.421%
Financial challenges or hardships (Yes)	19	50%
Financial challenges or hardships (No)	19	50%

Table 4 presents data on the social aspects of the migration experience. While 42.1% reported that migration affected their relationships with family and friends in Jamaica, a majority (57.9%) did not perceive such effects. Notably, 89.5% of respondents successfully formed new social connections in their host country. The process of forming these connections varied in difficulty, with 21% finding it very easy, 55.3% neutral, and 23.7% finding it very difficult. Of those who formed new relationships, an overwhelming 81.58% reported a positive influence on their experience. These findings suggest that while migration can strain existing relationships, most young Jamaican migrants in the sample were able to establish new social networks, which predominantly had a positive impact on their migration experience.

Table 5: Social Connections and Relationships.

Factor	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Migration affected relationships with family and friends in Jamaica	Yes	16	42.1%
	No	22	57.9%
Formed new social connections or support networks in new country	Yes	34	89.5%
	No	4	10.5%
Ease of forming new social connections	Very easy	8	21%
	Neutral	21	55.3%
	Very difficult	9	23.7%
Influence of new relationships on experience	Positively	31	81.58%
	Negatively	1	2.63%
	Not sure	2	5.26%

Table 5 focuses on age-related factors of migration and future plans. The data shows a relatively even distribution of migration ages between 18-26, with a slight peak in the 24-26 range (34.2%). Interestingly, while the sample consisted of

young adults, the perceived age group most likely to migrate was 18-24 (63.2%), followed closely by 25-34 (42.1%). This perception aligns with the actual age distribution of the sample. The experience of age-specific challenges or benefits was evenly split (50% each), suggesting varied individual experiences. Only 26.32% felt their migration experience was similar to their peers, indicating significant individual variation in migration experiences even within the same age group. Regarding future plans, a notable 47.4% were neutral about returning to Jamaica, while 36.9% considered it very likely, suggesting a complex relationship with their home country post-migration. These findings highlight the diverse experiences and future intentions among young Jamaican migrants, emphasizing the need for nuanced understanding of age-related factors in migration studies.

Table 6: Age-Related Factors and Future Plans.

Factor	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age at migration	18-19	11	28.9%
	20-21	9	23.7%
	22-23	10	26.3%
	24-26	13	34.2%
Perceived age group most likely to migrate	Under 18	3	7.9%
	18-24	24	63.2%
	25-34	16	42.1%
	35 and over	6	15.8%
Faced unique challenges or benefits specific to age group	Yes	19	50%
	No	19	50%
Migration experience compares to peers in same age group	Yes	10	26.32%
	No	6	15.79%
	Not sure	3	7.89%
	Very unlikely	6	15.8%
Plans to return to Jamaica	Very likely	14	36.9%
	Neutral	18	47.4%
	Very unlikely	6	15.8%

4. DISCUSSION

This study examined the psychosocial factors influencing migration decisions among young Jamaicans in Kingston, focusing on how life transitions and limited resources in their home country affect their choice to seek better life experiences abroad.

The results reveal a complex interplay of motivations driving young Jamaicans to migrate. A primary factor is the pursuit of better opportunities and financial prosperity, with the allure of international currencies and the desire to assist family members emerging as strong motivators. This economic impetus is further underscored by respondents' acknowledgment of high living costs and poor conditions in Jamaica, highlighting significant push factors in migration decisions. This aligns with findings from Todaro and Smith (2015) on economic motivations for migration from developing countries.

Educational qualifications played a crucial role, with 71.1% of respondents citing them as a driving factor in their decision to migrate. This suggests that young Jamaicans view their education as a valuable asset for securing opportunities abroad, potentially indicating a mismatch between educational attainment and available job prospects in Jamaica. This finding warrants further investigation into the potential "brain drain" effect on Jamaica's economy and the implications for its development, as discussed by Docquier and Rapoport (2012) in their research on brain drain effects in developing countries.

The influence of family and peers on migration decisions was substantial, with 63.2% of respondents acknowledging their impact. This highlights the importance of social networks in facilitating migration, ranging from emotional support to practical assistance in finding job opportunities abroad. These findings are consistent with the network theory in migration studies proposed by Massey et al. (1993).

Cultural and social factors unique to Jamaica, including safety concerns and perceived lack of financial security, were also identified as migration motivators. This indicates that migration decisions are not solely based on economic considerations but also on broader quality of life factors.

The high percentage (84.2%) of respondents reporting positive impacts on their employment opportunities and career prospects post-migration suggests that these expectations are often met, at least in the professional sphere. However,

the migration experience is not without challenges. While 73.7% reported significant improvements in their standard of living, a considerable proportion (36.842%) faced difficulties during or after their move. These challenges ranged from language barriers to social, cultural, and environmental adjustments, highlighting the complex nature of the migration process.

The impact of migration on relationships with family and friends in Jamaica was mixed, with 57.9% reporting no effect and 42.1% indicating some impact. This points to the potential social costs of migration and the importance of maintaining transnational ties, as explored by Vertovec (2004) in his work on transnationalism and identity. Encouragingly, 89.5% of respondents reported forming new social connections in their host countries, suggesting successful social integration for most migrants.

The data on age groups most likely to migrate (with 18-24 and 25-34 being the most common) provides insights into the life stages most conducive to migration among young Jamaicans. This aligns with life course theory in migration studies, which posits that certain life stages are more conducive to migration (Elder et al., 2003). The fact that 60.5% of respondents strongly agreed that the benefits of migration outweighed the risks and challenges faced suggests an overall positive perception of the migration experience.

However, the future intentions of these migrants remain uncertain, with 47.4% neutral about returning to Jamaica. This ambivalence could have implications for both Jamaica and host countries in terms of long-term human capital retention and diaspora engagement.

These findings have important implications for policymakers in Jamaica and potential host countries. For Jamaica, addressing the push factors identified in this study, such as limited job opportunities, safety concerns, and high living costs, could help retain young talent. For host countries, understanding the motivations and challenges faced by young Jamaican migrants can inform policies to facilitate their integration and maximize their contributions to the host society.

Future research could benefit from a longitudinal approach to track the long-term outcomes of migration for individuals and their families. Additionally, comparative studies with other Caribbean nations could provide broader insights into regional migration patterns and their underlying factors.

In conclusion, this study provides valuable insights into the complex decision-making process and experiences of young Jamaican migrants. It underscores the multifaceted nature of migration, involving economic, social, and personal factors, and highlights both the opportunities and challenges associated with international migration for this demographic.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research study highlights the significant psychosocial factors influencing migration decisions among young Jamaicans, contributing to the issue of human flight and brain drain in the country. The identified motivations, including significant life transitions, economic prospects, and societal pressures, underscore the need for targeted interventions. Strengthening psychosocial support, fostering economic opportunities, addressing societal pressures, conducting follow-up studies, and enhancing policy strategies are proposed as crucial steps to retain local talent and promote Jamaica's social and economic development. By implementing these recommendations, Jamaica can forge a more inclusive and resilient society, empowering its talented youth and shaping a promising future for the nation.

Recommendations

Based on the provided introduction, research questions, aim and objectives, and the review of literature, here are some recommendations:

1. **Strengthen Psychosocial Support:** According to Psychosocial Support (2016), psychosocial support meets a person's emotional, social, mental, and spiritual needs, which are all crucial for positive, and human development. Developing programs and initiatives that provide psychosocial support to young Jamaicans, addressing the emotional struggles they face when leaving behind cherished traditions and families. These support systems can help young individuals cope with the challenges of migration and foster a sense of belonging in their new environments.

2. **Foster Economic Opportunities:** The Planning Institute of Jamaica (2019) posits that focusing on improving economic prospects within Jamaica can reduce the allure of seeking employment abroad. Investing in local businesses,

entrepreneurship, and skill development can provide young Jamaicans with more attractive career opportunities, reducing the need to migrate for work.

3. Address Societal Pressures: Identify and address societal pressures that contribute to the high rate of human flight and brain drain. Brain drain refers to the emigration of highly skilled and educated individuals from one country or region to another, usually seeking better opportunities, higher salaries, or improved living conditions. Initiatives to create a supportive and inclusive social environment can help retain local talent and reduce the desire to migrate for reasons beyond economic factors (Young, 2024).

4. Conduct Follow-up Studies: Conduct follow-up studies to understand the long-term impact of migration on both individuals who have migrated and those who chose to stay in Jamaica (Powell & Janssen, 2013). This can provide valuable insights into the consequences of brain drain and inform future policy discussions.

5. Enhance Policy Strategies: Use the research findings to inform policy discussions and develop comprehensive strategies that focus on retaining local talent, creating opportunities, and addressing frustrations that drive migration (Bakker, Elings-Pels & Reis, 2009). Policymakers should consider both short-term and long-term approaches to support the development of Jamaica's talented youth.

6. Collaboration and Data Sharing: Encourage collaboration between government agencies, universities, and international organizations to share data and knowledge on migration trends (Bakker, Elings-Pels & Reis, 2009). This collaborative effort can lead to a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing migration and aid in the development of effective policies.

7. Targeted Outreach: Implement targeted outreach programs to connect with young Jamaicans aged 18-24 who are considering migration (Jamaica - Making Migration Work for Sustainable Development, n.d). Providing accurate information about the potential risks and benefits of migration can help them make informed decisions about their future.

8. Brain Gain Initiatives: Consider implementing brain gain initiatives that incentivize skilled Jamaicans who have migrated to return and contribute to the country's development (Young, 2007). Offering attractive opportunities and support systems for returnees can reverse the brain drain trend.

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How to cite this article: **Rohalia Bent, Shavel Edwards, Whitley Findlay, Brittania Roberts, Lisset Pickens and Kotra Mohan**. Study of psychosocial factors influencing migration to other countries among Young Jamaicans in Kingston. *Am. J. innov. res. appl. sci.* 2024; 19(3): 25-33. DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.13695738

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