

Ties and Powers that Bind: Demographics, Social Networks and Immigrants' Decisions to Stay in Ghana

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Abstract. In migration discourse, scholarly theorizations of West African migrants have been widely undertaken but little literature exist, if any, on how their socio-demographic characteristics and social networks mediate their stay intentions in their host cities. Drawing on a mixed-methods research approach, this study examined how West African immigrants' socio-demographics and social networks shape their intentions to stay in Ghana. To do this, 779 itinerant immigrants were surveyed alongside the conduct of nine key informant interviews with immigrant key informants in the Accra Metropolis of Ghana. The results indicated that most of the immigrants intended to stay in Ghana temporarily, and advice from their social networks mainly familial ties influenced their stay intentions. A significant relationship was established between the immigrants' socio-demographic characteristics (i.e., gender, marital status, country of origin and duration of stay in Ghana) and their stay intentions. Hence, it was found that unmarried, immigrant women and those from Niger including those who stayed longer at the destination preferred a temporary residency. These findings have key policy significance for regulating and integrating permanent immigrants towards socio-economic development, including policy inputs on the complex roles of immigrants' social networks and socio-demographic characteristics on their stay intentions. The study further suggests a detailed register of all temporary immigrant residents nationwide for easy identification and monitoring of their activities, especially in an era characterized by rising insecurity within the West Africa region.

Key concepts: Ghana, social networks, socio-demographics, immigrants, West Africa

Introduction

The available literature indicates that studies on international migration have been largely focused on South–North migration (Short et al., 2017; Rahman & Salisu, 2023). That is, research on international migrants have mainly dwelled on the movement of people from less developed countries to destinations in the more advanced nations. However, statistics from the International Organization for Migration-IOM (2022) on international migration flows, reveal that more people migrate internally within the Global South (37 per cent) than from the South to the North (35 per cent). Moreover, another issue of significance is the general assertion in the literature that most migration movements within the Global South are generally temporary, with limited intention for permanent settlement among most migrants. In support of this claim, studies by Castles and Wise (2008), and Short et al. (2017) reiterated that most migration flows in the Global South are generally less selective and more temporary in nature. For instance, similar studies by Anarfi (2003), Adepoyu (2005), and Olsen (2011) in West Africa equally reaffirmed that seasonal, circular or temporary migration are the common migration configurations in the region. Consequently, policy discussions on South–North migration often revolve around the potential for migrants to attain citizenship, residency, or reunion with family members, while scholarly debates regarding

South–South migration generally focus on migrant-worker-treatment, and human rights issues with less scholarly attention on their intents to stay in their host destinations.

According to Massey et al. (1993), Yendaw (2018) and Conduah (2023), migrants' social networks are a complex array of interpersonal ties that bind new migrants, returned migrants, and non-migrants in areas of origin and destination through family and kinship bonds, friendship, and shared community origins. These network connections do not only serve as critical conduits for information exchanges between migrants and non-migrants, but also function as a power of influence in their migration and stay intentions (Yendaw, 2018; Lin & Zhu, 2022). In the literature, scholarly publications on the central role of migrants' social networks and demographic characteristics have been limited to how they mediate their livelihood strategies, migration motivations, decision-making and destination selections, housing choices and conditions, and how their activities underwrite local economic development (Awumbila et al., 2016; Yendaw et al., 2019a; Yendaw et al., 2019b; Koczan et al., 2021; Ryan et al., 2022; Abdulai et al., 2023; Yendaw et al., 2023; Abdulahi et al., 2024). However, a thorough scrutiny of the literature reveals that limited knowledge exists on whether the socio-demographic characteristics of immigrants and their social networks shape their intentions to stay permanently with the host or otherwise. Drawing on this background, the current study seeks to examine West African migrants' intentions to stay in Ghana. In particular, the study focuses on how their socio-demographic characteristics (e.g., gender, age, marital statuses, education etc) as well as social networks at their origins and destination influence their stay intentions in Ghana. Indeed, this is identified as one of the very crucial topics in the literature that has been glossed over by the majority of academic publications (Yendaw, 2018; Gu et al., 2020; Lin & Zhu, 2022).

However, research by Awumbila et al. (2016) highlights that poor migrants in some parts of Ghana rely on their networks, notably family ties and friendships for their livelihoods and stay in their host communities. In line with this evidence, Black et al. (2022) found that Guinean migrants often prioritize broader family dynamics, such as economic pressures in their stay decisions at a destination over individual preferences. Additionally, Birchall (2016) emphasizes the crucial role of migrants' characteristics such as gender in migration experiences, affecting access to family reunification processes, and citizenship. Similarly, Cerase (1974), Ghosh (2000) and Goldstein et al. (2000) have identified age and gender as key personal attributes shaping migrants' intents to stay at a destination. For instance, whilst Goldstein et al. (2000) found permanent migration to be predominant among migrant women, Ghosh (2000) observed temporary migration among older migrants and those who have worked in their host destinations for a considerable period.

Informed by the theoretical perspectives of the neoclassical migration theory, new economics of labour migration theory and the social networks theory which examine conflicting claims regarding people migration motivations and settlement durations, as well as the binding role of networks in migration decisions, the study examined the following objectives:

1. To ascertain the prospects of immigrants' intents to stay in Ghana;
2. To assess the impact of socio-demographic characteristics on their prospective stay intents; and
3. To explore the influence of their social networks on the intention to stay in a destination.

This study manifests its relevance in two key ways. One, examining migrants'

stay intents at the host destinations and the critical role of their social networks and personal characteristics is crucial to extending our understanding of the nature and functioning of immigrants' social networks and characteristics in shaping migration and destination stay decisions. Two, findings from the study could potentially provide relevant, up-to-date information for policy framers in the design of key migration and integration policies to manage contemporary migration dynamics in Ghana. Following the introduction, the next section discusses the conceptual and theoretical review. This is followed by a discussion of the study methods adopted before presenting the results in the fourth section. In the fifth section, the discussion of the results is presented, while the conclusions and policy recommendations form the closing phase of the paper.

Conceptual and Theoretical Review

The term migration is variously defined as the permanent, semi-permanent or temporary change of residence from one geographical area to another and this change according to Yendaw et al. (2017) generally entails the detachment and relocation of activities. Migration can also be categorised as internal or international, and concerning duration, it could be permanent or temporary. However, this study focuses on transnational migrants from different West African countries who dwell in Ghana and undertake itinerant retail activities in urban and peri-urban Ghana. These immigrants, who are usually termed in the local Hausa Language as 'Aboki' (which means a friend), are a group of small-scale immigrant merchants who carry local and foreign manufactured wares of various kinds and retail them on the principal streets and pavements of African cities.

A thorough search of the literature indicates that most studies on this category of immigrants in West Africa focus more on the reasons and motives for their migration and livelihood activities, with limited attention on their stay intentions in host cities, especially on how their social networks and socio-demographics influence their stay decisions. The terms 'stay intention' or 'stay decision' are used interchangeably in this study, and mainly denote migrants' free will to decide whether to reside permanently or temporarily at their destinations. For instance, adherents of the neo-classical theory portray financial and psychological factors as the driving forces of migration (Todaro & Steven, 2006; Kurekova, 2011). According to this theory, owing to global imbalances in the supply of capital and labour, including wage disparities and standards of living across world regions, most migrants go to areas where employment avenues and general economic conditions are better than in their origins (Kurekova, 2011; Yendaw et al., 2019b). From this review, the neo-classical writers linked migration to wage disparities and job opportunities, and suggested that people migrate permanently to raise and maximize their wages in receiving countries (Stark, 1985).

Moreover, in the literature, several studies (Gu et al., 2020; Koczan et al., 2021; Lin & Zhu, 2022) have highlighted the reasons that account for migrants' decision to permanently or temporarily stay in their destination areas. For instance, Koczan et al. (2021) suggest that the ability of migrants to withstand difficulties influences the decision to stay permanently in the destination areas while the reverse holds for those who cannot. Similarly, if the economic opportunities at the destination areas are more available and better than those at the origin, migrants are likely to stay longer (Gu et al., 2020; Görlach & Kuske, 2022). Moreover, immigrants'

socio-demographic characteristics such as age, level of education and skills influence the decision to stay longer or otherwise (IMF, 2016, 2020; Koczan et al. (2021).

Contrary to the neo-classical standpoint, the new economics of labour migration theory perceives migration as a temporary endeavour by individuals with target earning thresholds, mostly negotiated within the household or family unit. According to this theory, migration can be best explained within a wider societal context including wider network ties, and hence the family is the most appropriate decision-making unit (Stark, 1999). This thinking expands the scope for incorporating factors other than individual utility maximization perspective as affecting peoples' migration and destination stay decisions. Similarly, Arango (2000) and De Haas (2008) writing within the new economics of labour migration viewpoint reiterated the role of key meso-level factors, such as migrant households, friends and community-level influences in the migration and destination stay intentions of migrants.

Under the new economics of labour migration (NELM), return migration is the norm – the expected outcome of a successfully implemented strategy of migrating, earning, remitting, saving and, finally, returning to a more secure and comfortable life at their origins (King & Kuschminder, 2022). Barrett and Goggin (2010) for instance, find that wage premia affect Mexican, Albanian, Hungarian, and Irish migrants' decision to return. A study by Görlach and Kuske (2022) found that on average, 15% of migrants leave their host country in a given year, many of whom will return to their home countries. Temporary migration benefits sending countries through remittances, investment, and skills accumulation. Receiving countries benefit via increases in their prime-working-age populations while facing fewer social security obligations (Görlach & Kuske, 2022).

Although the above theoretical postulations have contributed significantly to explaining the study objectives, their basic analyses have not addressed the critical role of migrants' social networks and socio-demographic characteristics as critical powers shaping migration decisions, particularly on how social networks influence immigrants' stay decisions, which is one of the fundamental lacunas the current study sought to unpack. Hence, the study discusses the basic keystones of the social networks theory to supplement the theoretical explanations of the neoclassical and the new economics of labour migration theories. The social network theory depicts the migration of individuals as a network process in which migrants help each other by communicating with close relatives and friends who provide them with critical information about the migration and destination, including navigating challenges before, during and after the migration journey (Esveldt et al., 1995; Bina, 2013; Conduah, 2023). These ties of network can function effectively to the extent of providing diverse assistance such as financial support and even assisting colleagues to find jobs after exchanging information.

The social networks' theory maintains that social interaction and communication facilitate the movement of people by reducing the costs and risks associated with their movement, as well as facilitating their smooth integration through various assistances notably housing, job-finding and sometimes feeding (Massey, 1990; Hugo, 1981; Abdulai et al., 2023). Once migration connections have been formed, the presence of family ties, friendships, and other significant relationships with people from the same community of origin may form a strong incentive for many migrants to want to remain at their destinations. Hence, this study inferred that the decision of immigrants to settle at their destinations permanently or temporarily is influenced by wider social contexts, including family ties, friendships and other significant bonds established before and after their migration. Additionally, given the conflicting theoretical perspectives among the above

theories reviewed, the study conjectured that the destination stay decisions of immigrants is significantly shaped and influenced by their socio-demographic attributes such as age, gender, marital status, educational level, country of origin and the length of time spent at the destination.

Methodology

3.1 The study area

The data used for the analysis in this paper were sourced from much wider research, which was executed in the Accra Metropolitan Area (AMA) on the topic “Migration patterns and livelihood activities of West African immigrant traders in Ghana”. The selection of AMA was informed by the fact that it is the largest and most developed city with more vibrant migrant flows relative to other cities or regions in Ghana (GSS, 2021; Yendaw et al., 2023). According to GSS (2021) and Yendaw et al. (2023), Accra constitutes a key destination for most West African immigrants. The 2013 GSS report suggests that more than 21% of all immigrants in Ghana reside in the Greater Accra Region (the highest in the country) and AMA hosts the majority of these immigrants. This phenomenon is due to the existence of key modern infrastructural facilities and other employment opportunities which continue to lure many migrants from all parts of Ghana and beyond (GSS 2021; Yendaw et al., 2023). Considering the built-up and congested nature of the study area in addition to the fact that the immigrants reside in clusters (GSS 2021), nine (9) neighbourhoods were identified to be the main residential places of the immigrants during a reconnaissance survey with community and immigrant leaders were purposively selected as the study sites. They comprised Abosse Okai, Abeka, Ablekuma, Agbogbloshie, New Fadama, Sukura, Lartebikorshie, Nima and Mamobi.

3.2 Design, approach, population, and sampling

This study used a cross-sectional research design and mixed methods research approach to unpack how West African migrants’ social networks and socio-demographics shape their stay intentions in Ghana. Creswell (2012) has emphasised that researchers using mixed methods are required to demonstrate the various stages of mixing the data in their research. Accordingly, the design of this study includes one phase of data collection in which the quantitative approach was given priority and guided the study, while the qualitative dimension was embedded into the study and provided a supportive role. The target population for this study was drawn from West African immigrants who resided in the AMA as itinerant retailers for a minimum period of six months or more, and who were not dual nationals, naturalized foreign citizens or nationals by marriage. After having considered the general difficulty in obtaining representative samples of itinerant populations like nomadic migrant retailers (Vigneswaran 2007), the snowballing procedure was used to select the respondents which produced a sampling frame of 842 respondents from the nine (9) study sites. The original intention for using the snowballing technique was to produce a sufficient sampling frame for a randomized sample selection as a result of the lack of accurate information on this group of immigrants in the country (GSS, 2012, 2021). However, being mindful of the fact that the study employed the mixed methods research approach and the argument in the central limit theorem that a large sample size is more likely to generate a normal distribution in a data set than smaller ones, the entire sampling frame of 842 was used in the study. For the qualitative aspect of the study, nine (9) immigrant leaders (one key

informant from each of the nine neighbourhoods) who possessed key knowledge about the immigrants' stay intentions were purposively selected for key informant interviews.

3.3 Development of Instruments, administration and ethics

Structured and semi-structured questionnaires (specifically interview schedule and interview guide) were used to collect the data from the respondents. The interview schedule aided because the questions were worded in English which many immigrant retailers can neither express nor understand, especially those from French-speaking states (GSS 2012). Hence, for all other languages, an interpreter was used where the author did not understand the language. The instruments were developed under two key sections. Section one elicited information on the immigrants' socio-demographic characteristics namely: country of origin, gender, age, educational level, marital status and duration of stay in Ghana. Section two asked questions related to their intentions to remain in Ghana. That is, whether they planned to stay temporarily or permanently, and the factors influencing their decisions to stay or otherwise.

The interview guide, on the other hand, consisted of open-ended questions and pre-scripted probes. Before the actual field data collection, the instruments were pretested and reworked in the Kumasi Metropolis (the second-highest destination of West African immigrants) which helped to improve the validity. All ethical questions that guide the conduct of social sciences research were thoroughly adhered to. In particular, topics concerning informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality were followed throughout the field data collection. Regarding informed consent, the respondents for both the survey and the interview guide were briefed about the purpose of the study and the possible impacts on their participation in the study. Prior to the interview, a consent form was read and interpreted to them detailing their right to withdraw or avoid answering sensitive questions they deemed as private. In terms of anonymity, all personal identifiers that were likely to link the data to them were avoided. The research protocol was also reviewed and approved by the University of Cape Coast Institutional Review Board and assigned a protocol number UCCIRB/CHLS/2016/23 before the fieldwork was commenced.

The instruments were administered by the author and three final year master's students from the University of Ghana, who were fluent in the local languages (Asante Twi and Ga), French and Hausa which are the main languages spoken by the respondents. The questionnaires and key informant interviews were conducted face-to-face at the respondents' places of abode and workplaces. With the prior permission of the respondents and key informants, a voice recorder was used to record the interviews and was complemented by note-taking of the discussions. The average duration of each key informant interview was between 30-45 minutes. Concerning the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants, all of them were men and were between the ages of 28-45 years. Four out of them had no formal education, one was literate in Arabic, two attained basic education and the remaining two (one each) acquired basic and secondary level education. They were all Muslims and apart from two single participants, the rest were all married which contradicts GSS (2012) and Yendaw et al. (2019)'s findings that most itinerant immigrant retailers are generally unmarried and uneducated Muslim men.

3.4 Data processing and analyses

The data obtained from the survey questionnaire were validated by perusing the responses to ensure they were correctly filled and completed. Afterwards, it was realized that out

of the 842 questionnaires audited, about 779 were found useful giving a response rate of 92.5 per cent. The data from these questionnaires were processed and analysed via the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21. Descriptive statistics (frequency distributions, percentages, cross-tabulations) and inferential analytical techniques (binary logistic regression model) were used to analyse and present the results. Binary logistic regression was used to confirm whether key explanatory variables such as gender, age, marital status, level of education, country of origin and duration of stay of the immigrants had any influence on their intentions to stay at the destination (the dependent variable). The respondents' stay intentions at the destination were treated as a dichotomous variable (i.e., whether they intended to stay temporarily or permanently).

The data from the interviews were also validated by playing and listening to the content of the audio recordings several times to confirm if they were thorough and completed. After the validation, it was confirmed that all the audios were accurate and usable. The data were then processed and analysed manually using the thematic analysis technique. The thematic analysis procedure was employed to identify, analyse and report patterns that emerged from the interviews. The thematic analysis was performed by following the four steps indicated by Yendaw (2019): data preparation and close reading of text to get familiar with the raw data, development of categories from the raw data into a model or framework (coding of data), searching for themes and recognizing relationships (i.e. axial coding), and refining of themes through coding consistency checks such as independent parallel coding. As a way of guaranteeing the credibility and validity of the results, the participant validation technique was used by contacting three of the participants to ascertain the interview transcripts. The next section of the study presents the results, discussion, conclusions and implications.

Results

Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents

This section presents the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. Table 1 indicates that most of the respondents come from Niger (42.2%) with the least (1.1%) being those from other countries. The majority of them (89.1%) are men. About 62.0 percent of them are youthful (aged between 20-29 years) while a small percentage (7.1%) are between 40-49 years. The analysis also shows that about a sixth of them (60.0%) are unmarried and nearly 67.0 percent of them are without any form of formal education. Concerning their length of stay, the results reveal that 63.1 per cent of them stayed at the destination for 1-4 years (Table 1).

Socio-demographic profile of the respondents

Table 1

Socio-demographics	N	Percent
Country of origin		
Benin	39	5.0
Burkina Faso	32	4.1
Mali	176	22.6
Niger	329	42.2
Nigeria	146	18.7
Togo	49	6.3
Other	8	1.1
Gender		

Socio-demographics	N	Percent
Men	694	89.1
Women	85	10.9
Age (completed years)		
<20	89	11.4
20-29	479	61.5
30-39	164	20.0
40-49	55	7.1
Marital status		
Never married	462	59.3
Married	294	37.7
Widowed	13	1.7
Divorced/Separated	10	1.3
Educational attainment		
No formal education	520	66.7
Basic education	188	31.1
Secondary/tertiary	16	2.2
Duration of stay		
1-4	492	63.1
5-9	261	24.3
>=10	26	3.3

Intended stay decisions at destination

The intended stay decisions of the immigrants were examined by looking at their intended length of stay (residential status) at the destination in terms of whether their stay in Ghana was temporary or permanent. This analysis was done using descriptive, bivariate and inferential statistical techniques. The decision on whether or not their residential status was permanent or temporary was examined against key socio-demographic attributes, such as gender, education, marital status, educational attainment, country of origin and duration of stay at the destination. The descriptive analysis in Table 2 reveals that most of the immigrants surveyed intended to reside temporarily (85.6%) as against 14.4 per cent who preferred a permanent stay in Ghana.

Intended stay decisions by Socio-demographic characteristics **Table 2**

Socio-demographics	N	Intended stay decision at destination	
		Permanent residence (%)	Temporary residence (%)
Stay decision	779	14.4	85.6
Gender of respondents			
Men	694	12.5	87.5
Women	85	29.4	70.6
Age of respondents			
Less than 20	517	9.1	90.9
20-29	246	9.8	90.2
30-39	11	16.6	83.4
40-49	5	20.0	80.0
Marital status			
Married	294	20.7	79.3

Socio-demographics	N	Intended stay decision at destination	
		Permanent residence (%)	Temporary residence (%)
Single	462	8.7	91.3
Widowed	10	40.0	60.0
Divorced/separated	13	53.8	46.2
Educational attainment			
No education	517	16.6	83.4
Basic education	246	9.8	90.2
Secondary/Tertiary	16	12.5	87.5
Country of origin			
Benin	39	14.0	86.0
Burkina Faso	32	25.0	75.0
Mali	176	9.4	90.6
Niger	329	8.0	92.0
Nigeria	146	17.8	82.2
Togo	49	29.5	70.5
Other	8	23.1	76.9

In terms of their gender, a higher proportion of men (87.5%) indicated that their residential status was temporary. As regards age, a higher percentage of them who were youthful ($\leq 20-39$) said their residential status was temporary. Contrary to what was expected, Table 2 reveals that a higher proportion of those who were unmarried (91.3%) expressed their desire to stay at the destination temporarily. Respondents who were divorced/separated (53.8%) indicated their willingness to reside permanently at the destination. The analysis indicates that respondents who had no formal education indicated their resolve to reside at the destination permanently as against a higher percentage of those with basic education who intended to stay temporarily. For example, whereas 16.6% of those who were uneducated indicated their stay at the destination was permanent, less than ten percent (9.8%) of those with basic education and a little over ten percent of those with secondary/tertiary education (12.5%) said their stay in Ghana was permanent. Concerning their countries of origin, the results show that a higher proportion of the respondents from Niger (92.0%) preferred a temporary residential status. On the other hand, a higher percentage of those from Togo (29.5%) preferred a permanent residential status when compared to their colleagues from the remaining countries (Table 2).

Following from the descriptive results, a binary logistic regression model (Table 3) was used to estimate the intended stay decisions of the respondents. In the model, temporary residential status was designated as one representing increasing odds in favour of temporary stay while permanent residential status was captured as zero signifying decreasing odds in favour of permanent stay. From the results, the model (binary logistic regression) demonstrated to be a good predictor of the intended residential status of the respondents as shown by the Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficients (model=223.328; $df=14$; $p<0.050$) and the Hosmer and Lemeshow Test ($\chi^2=16.324$; $df=8$; $p>0.050$).

According to Pallant (2005), a model is considered a good predictor, when the alpha value of the Hosmer and Lemeshow Test is greater than 0.05 and in the case of the output of this data, the alpha value is 0.254, which signifies a strong reliability of the model. The binary logistic regression model predicted nearly about 34.0% of variations in the intended length of stay at the

destination. However, the utility of the model in predicting the respondents' residential status in the country, not all the independent explanatory variables were significant in explaining length of stay. Similar to the results in Table 2, three out of the five independent variables were found to be significant to the model.

From the analysis (Table 3), gender emerged as a significant predictor of the respondents' stay intentions in Ghana. Table 3 indicates that respondents who were men were 0.397 times more likely to indicate that they would stay permanently in Ghana compared to their women counterparts. Moreover, age and educational attainment had no significant impact on how long respondents intended to stay in the country. This notwithstanding, the results indicate that respondents who were younger (20-29 years) and who had no formal education were most likely to opt for a temporary stay compared to those who were older (40-49 years) and had higher education (secondary/tertiary).

Table 3

Socio-demographic features	Intended length of stay (permanent or temporary)	
	P value	Odds ratio
Gender		
Men	0.030*	0.397
Women (RC)		
Age		
Less than 20	0.877	1.964
20-29	0.607	4.524
30-39	0.386	0.819
40-49 (RC)		
Educational attainment		
No formal education	0.629	0.880
Basic education	0.932	0.491
Secondary/Tertiary (RC)		
Marital status		
Married	0.050*	3.676
Single	0.000*	12.580
Widowed	0.343	2.407
Divorced (RC)		
Country of origin		
Benin	0.004	3.857
Burkina Faso	0.484*	4.520
Mali	0.000*	8.359
Niger	0.006*	9.614
Nigeria	0.001*	4.657
Togo	0.183	1.507
Other (RC)		

Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficients (model=223.328; df=14; p<0.050), Hosmer and Lomeshow Test ($\chi^2=16.324$; df=8; P>0.050), *Percentage of variance explained (33.8%)

Marital status in the study also demonstrates a statistically significant effect on preference for temporary residency. Contrary to what was anticipated, the never-married category (single) had the highest odds (12.580) of opting for a temporary stay at the destination. However, the

country of origin showed a statistically significant relationship with the intended length of stay, with respondents from Niger and Mali compared to the reference category more likely to prefer a temporary stay. In particular, it was observed that respondents from Niger were 9.614 times more likely to indicate that they will stay in the country temporarily whereas respondents from Mali were 8.359 times more likely to settle in Ghana temporarily. Likewise, while respondents from Nigeria were 4.657 times more likely to reside in Ghana temporarily, respondents from Benin were 3.857 times most likely to do the same. Overall, respondents from Togo (1.507) had the lowest odds of contemplating temporary residence in Ghana.

The findings presented in Tables 2 and 3 were similarly confirmed by the majority of the participants enrolled in the qualitative dimension of the study during the field interviews. During the interviews, most of them expressed their intention to stay at the destination temporarily and this decision for most of them was based on the ties and advice with their social networks, notably families, friends and significant others. They indicated that unless something unexpected took place to warrant a permanent stay in Ghana, they would be returning to their countries of origin. In underscoring this view, a 45-year immigrant leader from Niger and another 38-year-old immigrant leader from Mali who were interviewed at Nima and Abeka respectively in the study area had this to say regarding how the connections between them and their families and friends would not allow them to have a permanent residence at the destination:

“Before I travelled to Ghana, my family insisted I return after a certain period of my stay. All the friends I work with have the intentions to return home someday based on the advice of those who have been here for several years. Honestly, I have never contemplated living here (Ghana) forever. For me, unless something unforeseen happens to compel me to stay permanently, I do not envisage it happening. Even if I later decide to have a permanent residence, my family will kick against it. It is just a matter of time; if I can achieve why I came here, I will certainly return home to settle in my country”.

In buttressing the above observations, another participant from Mali highlighted how the ties and concern he has for his family influenced his stay intention in Ghana:

“Well, you know home is home, and by all means, I will return home. My trip here was planned with my family before I came here and many of my friends who were here before me also discussed with me regarding my return after a certain period of stay in Ghana. I am the eldest of my parents and the bond between us is strong that I cannot ignore them and stay here. However, one thing I cannot predict is that I do not know when I will be returning to my country” [38-year-old immigrant from Mali].

In carrying out further qualitative interviews with the participants, another intriguing issue which emerged regarding the participants' intended length of stay was put forward by another participant who was married with children back home in Benin. He lamented over how his conjugal and/or marital responsibilities made him shuttle between Ghana and Benin and how his status as a married man would not permit him to contemplate a permanent residency in Ghana:

“For me, I normally go home and come because I have my wife and children in Benin. I cannot say for a fact that I will stay here permanently or not since I do not have the resources to bring my family here with me. So, I only work, get money and support them back home” [36-year-old immigrant leader from Benin].

Duration of stay at the destination and intentions to stay

This aspect of the study finally sought to ascertain whether the immigrants' duration of stay at the destination had any statistically significant influence on their intentions to continue to stay in Ghana or otherwise. Hence, a binary logistic regression was conducted to predict the extent to which length of stay predicts whether immigrants would stay at the destination or otherwise (Table 4). The test results showed that the model with the predictor variable length of stay in Ghana was statistically significant at the 1 percent level ($\chi^2 = 53.829$; $df = 1$; $N = 779$; $p = .000$) in predicting whether immigrants will prefer to stay in Ghana. The Nagelkerke R^2 value of .12 suggests that about 12 per cent of the variation in immigrants' decisions to stay in Ghana permanently or temporarily is accounted for by the duration of their stay in Ghana which emerged as statistically significant (Table 4).

The odds ratio of 0.747 which means that for every additional unit increase in the length of stay, the odds of deciding to stay decrease by approximately 25.3%. The regression coefficient for the length of stay in Ghana ($B = -0.291$) indicates that for each additional unit increase in the length of stay, the log-odds of deciding to stay decrease by 0.291. This suggests that a longer duration of stay is associated with a lower likelihood of deciding to stay.

Table 4

Binary Logistic Regression Predicting if Duration of Stay in Ghana Predicts an Immigrant's Decision to Stay

Variable	B	SE	Odds ratio/Exp(B)	P
Length of stay in Ghana	-.291	.042	.747	.000*
Constant	3.102	.235	22.250	.000*

Note: Cox and Snell $R^2 = .067$; Nagelkerke $R^2 = .119$; $\chi^2 = 53.829$; $df = 1$; $p < .000^*$; $N = 779$

These quantitative findings were, however, different from the evidence generated from the qualitative interviews. During the interviews, it emerged that participants with the longest duration of stay at the destination expressed the desire to continue to remain at the destination. They argued that they have resided at the destination for long and that they were used to the Ghanaian context. They added that returning home was not an alternative because it would require them to start life all over. Putting the issues in context, a 39-year-old participant from Burkina Faso and another 38-year-old participant from Togo who resided in Ghana for a considerable period jointly had this to say about their stay intentions in Ghana:

“Well, your home is always your home. But the reality is that I have lived my life here for long and I am used to the environment and the people here. To go back home at this stage of my life would mean that I am starting everything all over. As our elders always put it, every place is a home, and I have my peace of mind here in Ghana.”

The above observations were similarly rehashed by a 41-year-old participant from Benin who dwelled at the destination for nearly ten years. In his own words, this was what was said about his intended plan of stay:

“Hmmm! Going back to Benin now will be difficult. See, I came to Ghana when I was just about thirty to thirty-one years. I am now above forty and you can imagine me going back home after having lived and worked here for all these years. It would be hard for me to re-adjust if I go back to Benin. Well, I am not God, but I am here in Ghana for good.”

Discussion

This study used a cross-sectional research design and a concurrent mixed-methods approach to examine West African migrants' intentions to stay in Ghana, including how their social networks and socio-demographic characteristics shaped their intents to stay at the destination. The analysis from the study indicated that most of the respondents intended to have a temporary stay in Ghana, which somewhat validates the basic underpinnings of the new economics of labour migration theory. The theory argues that migration is a targeted temporary livelihood activity aimed at accumulating the needed resources to support families back home (Stark, 199). The finding similarly accentuates what Castles and Wise (2008), and Short et al. (2017) found in their studies that international migration in the developing world is generally less permanent. For example, Anarfi (2003), Adepoju (2005), and Olsen (2011) reported that land-dependent migrants in West Africa search for alternative incomes through trade during difficult times to the extent that some migrants adopt regular movement as their culture and livelihood. The above findings are also in sync with what Hunter and Skinner (2001) found among immigrant retail traders in South Africa where most of the migrants said they intended to stay at the destination temporarily. The decision of the majority of the respondents to return home could, however, be linked to what Koczan et al. (2021) noted in their study that migrants who eventually decide to return mainly do so because they are unable to achieve the required success anticipated, notably higher wages and quality life.

Results from a binary logistic regression model in this current study established significant relationships between the respondents' socio-demographic attributes and their stay intentions (see Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficients: model=223.328; df=14; $p < 0.050$ & the Hosmer and Lemeshow Test ($\chi^2=16.324$; df=8; $p > 0.050$). This concurs with the exposés made by the IMF (2016, 2020) where immigrants' characteristics such as gender and age were found to have had a significant influence on their migration decisions including their stay intentions. Overall, three independent variables notably gender, marital status and country of origin were found to be significantly associated with their destination stay decisions which concur with the observation made by the IMF (2016, 2020), Gu et al. (2020), Koczan et al. (2021) and Lin and Zhu (2022) that the socio-demographic characteristics of migrants have the proclivity to influence their destination stay decisions. Gender, for instance, emerged as a significant predictor of the immigrants' stay intentions in Ghana and immigrant men were more likely to opt for a temporary stay in Ghana relative to their women counterparts. Marital status also demonstrated a statistically significant effect on preference for temporary residency. Contrary to what was anticipated, those who were unmarried were found to have had the highest odds of opting for a temporary stay. Hence, those who were divorced had the highest odds of opting for a permanent residence which could be attributed to their divorced status which might not have placed any serious socio-cultural and conjugal obligations on them to warrant their return. The fact that more migrant men relative to their women counterparts opted for a temporary residency at the destination buttresses the observation made by Goldstein et al. (2000) where permanent migration of women seems to be greater than for men.

In this study, age was found to have no direct relation with their intended residential status. It was noticed that younger respondents were most likely to opt for a temporary settlement at the destination which controverts findings by Cerase (1974) and Ghosh (2000) that older migrants are more likely to return home after several years of working abroad compared to younger migrants. However, the fact that those who were elderly indicated their intention to reside

at the destination permanently could be explained by their ageing situation which might affect their socio-cultural and economic reintegration back home in case they decide to return (King, 2000). For instance, it is possible that going back home to start life all over again might be easier for respondents who are younger as compared to those who are older.

Similarly, country of origin showed a statistically significant relationship with intended length of stay (see Table 3), and those from Niger, Mali, Nigeria and Benin were more likely to prefer a temporary stay. This revelation was equally buttressed by the majority of the participants recruited for the qualitative interviews and the decision to reside at the destination temporarily was underlain by advice received from their networks, particularly families and friends. Intuitively, the study found respondents from Togo and Burkina Faso having the least odds of contemplating temporary residence in Ghana. This could be due to their propinquity to Ghana coupled with the historical and cultural affinity between Ghana and the two countries. For instance, the Ewe and the Mossi ethnic groups in Togo and Burkina Faso have some of their relations living in Ghana and may therefore see their stay at the destination as an extension of their homeland territories (Adepoju, 2004; Yendaw, 2019). In addition, the political stability in Ghana could be a factor contributing to the decision of some respondents intending to stay in Ghana permanently (Anarfi, 2003).

It further emerged that the immigrants' duration of stay at the destination had a significant effect on their intentions to stay at the destination. Contrary to what was anticipated, it was found that immigrants who had a longer duration of stay at the destination were most likely to prefer a temporary residency as compared to their counterparts who reported a shorter stay. This finding is somewhat contrary to the prevailing thinking in the literature that migrants with a longer duration of stay are most likely to be well-established and integrated into their host communities (Yendaw, 2018), and thus, most likely to prefer a permanent residency. However, the current revelation could be explained by the fact that perhaps those immigrants who stayed longer might have accumulated the required resources and prepared well enough to return home to settle for good. This finding was, however, incongruent with the qualitative results, where participants who had longer stay durations rather preferred a permanent residency.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the results and the discussion presented, therein, this study concludes that the immigrants' intentions to stay at the destination were influenced by several factors notably including social networks, mostly family ties; younger migrants; unmarried adult women; and those migrant-respondents who were without any formal education. All these were found to be most likely to consider a temporary residency in Ghana. This revelation vindicates the basic tenets of the new economics of labour migration theory. The current evidence, however, challenges the basic assumptions of the neoclassical theorists who considered the decision to migrate or return as an individual affair to maximize higher incomes at the destination. The study equally unveiled that despite the above factors, immigrants who stayed longer at the destination preferred a temporary residency relative to their counterparts who had shorter stay durations.

The above findings have key policy ramifications for the socio-economic advancement of Ghana, given that most of the immigrants indicated that they are in the country for a temporary residency. This implies that whatever benefits they are deriving from their migration and/or business activities would most likely be repatriated to their origin countries. In line with this

thinking, the study recommends that the government, through the requisite agencies such as Ghana Immigration Service (GIS), Ghana Investment Promotion Centre (GIPC), and the Accra Metropolitan Assembly develop an appropriate policy framework to ensure that the immigrants' stay in the country is mutually beneficial by enrobing them into the country's tax net. Additionally, given the rising security situation in the West African sub-region in recent times, the government should consider having a detailed register of all temporary immigrant residents for easy dialogue and monitoring of their activities.

It is equally proposed that the government could also consider supporting and integrating immigrants who are in the country for a permanent residency nationwide to ensure that Ghana benefits from their skills and activities. Also considering the key roles played by their social networks and socio-demographics in their stay intentions, the study proposes that any migration policy intervention of government that aims to manage migration effectively in the country ought not to preclude the important roles of immigrants' family ties, friendships, gender, areas of origin, marital status, and duration of stay in the entire migration management process. Finally, the study advocates for further research on this important topic nationwide to gain a thorough understanding of immigrants' stay intentions. This would provide valuable insights for government policies to effectively manage immigration issues in the country.

Declarations

Conflicts of interests

The author declares that the paper is original, neither has it been previously published nor under consideration for publication elsewhere. There are no conflicts of interest so far as the submission of this paper is concerned.

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Data availability statement

The data used for this paper are readily availability upon reasonable request.

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