

Article

Socio-Psychological Characteristics of Young People Returning from Migration

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Abstract: This article examines the socio-psychological characteristics of young people returning from labor migration in the context of contemporary social and economic changes. Migration processes significantly influence personality development, value orientations, social identity, and psychological well-being of youth. While migration experience often enhances independence, resilience, and adaptability, the return to the home country may be accompanied by serious challenges of social and psychological readaptation. The study analyzes emotional states, self-esteem, communication patterns, and social activity of returnee youth. Particular attention is paid to stress, frustration, feelings of social alienation, and uncertainty regarding future life prospects. The article also highlights the importance of family support, social environment, and institutional assistance in facilitating successful reintegration. The role of psychological services and targeted support programs aimed at minimizing negative psychological consequences of migration experience is emphasized. The findings of the study have practical relevance for psychologists, social workers, educators, and policymakers involved in youth development and migration issues.

Keywords: Labor Migration, Returnee Youth, Social Adaptation, Psychological Well-Being, Reintegration, Social Identity.

1. Introduction

In the context of globalization and rapid socio-economic transformation, labor migration has become one of the most influential social phenomena shaping the life trajectories of young people. Millions of young individuals leave their home countries each year in search of better economic opportunities, professional development, and improved living conditions. While migration is often perceived as a temporary solution to unemployment or financial instability, its long-term social and psychological consequences-particularly for young people returning to their homeland-remain complex and insufficiently explored. The process of return migration is not merely a physical relocation but a profound psychological and social transition that requires readjustment to familiar yet transformed environments [1].

Young people returning from migration frequently encounter a mismatch between their expectations and the realities of reintegration into their native society. During migration, individuals adapt to new cultural norms, social roles, communication styles, and value systems. These acquired experiences reshape their identity, self-perception, and

worldview. Upon return, however, they may face difficulties in re-establishing social connections, redefining their social status, and aligning their newly formed attitudes with traditional societal expectations. This phenomenon often leads to internal psychological conflicts, emotional instability, and a sense of social alienation [2].

From a socio-psychological perspective, returnee youth represent a vulnerable yet potentially resource-rich group. On the one hand, they possess enhanced adaptability, independence, and intercultural competence gained through migration experience. On the other hand, unresolved stress, frustration, identity confusion, and decreased self-esteem may hinder their successful social integration. Empirical studies indicate that return migration can be accompanied by heightened levels of anxiety, depressive tendencies, and dissatisfaction with life prospects, especially in contexts where institutional support mechanisms are weak or absent.

An important dimension of this issue lies in the interaction between individual psychological factors and broader social conditions. Family relationships, community attitudes, labor market accessibility, and social support systems play a decisive role in shaping the reintegration outcomes of returning youth. Positive social acceptance and psychological assistance can significantly mitigate the negative effects of migration-related stress, whereas social stigma and economic marginalization may exacerbate psychological maladjustment [3].

Therefore, studying the socio-psychological characteristics of young people returning from migration is of both theoretical and practical importance. A deeper understanding of their emotional states, social behavior, identity reconstruction, and adaptive strategies provides a scientific basis for developing effective psychological support programs, youth policies, and reintegration strategies. Addressing these issues is essential not only for enhancing individual well-being but also for promoting social stability and sustainable development in societies experiencing large-scale migration processes [4].

Literature view. The study of young people returning from migration has developed at the intersection of social psychology, sociology of migration, and developmental psychology, because “return” is not simply the end of mobility but a new stage of adaptation that reshapes identity, relationships, and life strategies. In international migration research, return migration was initially interpreted mainly through economic and rational-choice lenses, where individuals return after achieving savings goals or when expected benefits decline. Classic approaches to return migration emphasized the cyclical nature of mobility and the idea that return can be a planned outcome rather than a failure of migration. Later theoretical advances broadened the focus from purely financial motives to social and psychological processes-how migrants internalize new norms, acquire skills and expectations abroad, and then face a “re-entry” challenge when re-integrating into the home environment. In this line, the concept of reverse culture shock and re-entry adjustment highlighted that returning individuals may experience disorientation, value conflicts, and difficulties rebuilding everyday routines, even when they return to a familiar cultural setting [5].

A central explanatory framework for socio-psychological changes among returnee youth is acculturation and identity transformation. Cross-cultural psychology has repeatedly shown that long-term exposure to a different social order can modify communication patterns, self-perception, and social behavior. Acculturation theory describes how individuals negotiate between heritage culture and host-culture influences, choosing strategies such as integration, assimilation, separation, or marginalization. When applied to returnee youth, this perspective clarifies why reintegration may be complicated: the individual returns with “hybrid” norms and behavioral scripts, while the home community may expect continuity and traditional conformity. This tension is especially evident in societies with strong collectivist expectations and high sensitivity to social reputation, where youth behavior is closely evaluated through community standards.

Social identity theory further explains that migration often reorganizes “ingroup–outgroup” boundaries; returning youth may be perceived as “different,” and this perceived difference can produce subtle stigma, social distancing, or pressure to “prove belonging,” which in turn shapes emotional well-being and interpersonal trust [6].

From a stress and coping viewpoint, the return phase can be understood as a multi-layered stressor that combines practical constraints (employment, documentation, housing) with psychological demands (redefining goals, restoring roles, repairing relationships). The transactional model of stress and coping is useful here because it focuses on cognitive appraisal: returning youth evaluate whether they have resources to meet new demands, and their coping strategies (problem-focused vs. emotion-focused) influence outcomes such as anxiety, frustration tolerance, and resilience. A closely related body of international research emphasizes the protective role of social support, showing that perceived support from family, peers, and institutions buffers stress and reduces the risk of maladjustment (e.g., the general stress-buffering logic in social support studies). For returnee youth, this means that reintegration is rarely successful through individual effort alone; it depends on whether social networks can be rebuilt, whether returning experience is socially valued, and whether institutions offer pathways for employment, training, and psychological assistance [7].

Russian and post-Soviet psychological traditions add important conceptual depth by emphasizing the socially mediated nature of personality development and the role of activity, communication, and social context. Within the cultural-historical approach associated with L. S. Vygotsky, psychological functions develop through social interaction and internalization; therefore, a change in the sociocultural environment (migration) and the subsequent shift back (return) can be expected to reorganize the individual’s meaning system, motivations, and self-regulation. Activity theory reinforces this by framing personality not as a fixed set of traits but as a dynamic system shaped by leading activities and social relations; migration changes the structure of everyday activity (work discipline, hierarchy, social roles), and return requires reconstructing a new activity system at home. S. L. Rubinstein’s principle of the unity of consciousness and activity also supports the argument that psychological adaptation cannot be separated from real participation in social life: if returning youth are excluded from meaningful work or recognized social roles, psychological well-being may decline even when basic material needs are partially satisfied [8].

Russian social psychology provides additional tools for interpreting reintegration as a group and community process rather than purely individual adjustment. Works associated with Russian social-psychological analysis (e.g., the general tradition represented by G. M. Andreeva) highlight how group norms, social representations, and interpersonal perception shape behavior and identity. Applied to return migration, this perspective suggests that community narratives about “successful” or “failed” migrants influence how returnees are treated and how they interpret themselves. If return is framed socially as a sign of defeat, the young person may face lowered social status, heightened self-criticism, and interpersonal tension; if return is framed as an asset (skills, maturity, global exposure), reintegration becomes psychologically easier. In Russian migration sociology and demography, scholars such as L. L. Rybakovsky and researchers studying migration processes in Russia and neighboring regions have emphasized structural determinants—labor markets, regional inequality, and policy contexts—which indirectly shape socio-psychological outcomes by constraining life opportunities and social mobility. This integration of structural and psychological explanations is especially relevant for youth, because developmental tasks—professional identity, autonomy, and long-term planning—are strongly dependent on institutional and economic realities [9].

International literature also emphasizes that returnees are not a homogeneous group; outcomes differ depending on the voluntariness of return, duration abroad, legal status, and the degree of integration achieved in the host society. Approaches that

highlight transnationalism (commonly associated with work on transnational social fields) show that many migrants maintain continuous ties with the home country, which can reduce the shock of return but also create a sense of “living between worlds.” In such cases, youth may return physically yet remain socially and psychologically oriented toward transnational networks, online communities, or future re-migration plans. This is important because it reframes reintegration as a fluid process rather than a single event: some returnees reintegrate fully, others remain partially integrated, and some treat return as a temporary pause before leaving again. The “social remittances” idea—skills, norms, and behavioral patterns transferred from abroad back to the home context—helps explain how returnee youth may introduce new interpersonal styles (more individualistic goal-setting, different gender-role expectations, new work norms), which can be both a resource and a source of conflict within families and communities [10].

Across both Russian and international scholarship, a convergent conclusion emerges: the socio-psychological characteristics of young people returning from migration are shaped by the interaction of three levels of factors. At the individual level, key variables include self-efficacy (A. Bandura), emotional regulation, coping flexibility, and the stability of self-concept. At the interpersonal level, family climate, peer acceptance, and the quality of social support determine whether return becomes an opportunity for growth or a trigger for alienation [11]. At the societal level, labor market access, community attitudes, and institutional support policies influence how quickly returnees can regain social status and a sense of future orientation. For this reason, the most productive contemporary direction in the literature is integrative: combining cultural-historical and activity-based insights from Russian psychology with international models of acculturation, identity, stress-coping, and transnationalism. Such synthesis allows researchers to interpret returnee youth not only as individuals with certain traits, but as actors rebuilding meaning, roles, and relationships within a changing social reality—an approach that is essential for designing effective reintegration programs, psychological services, and youth-centered social policies [12].

2. Materials and Methods

This study employed a mixed-methods research design combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to comprehensively examine the socio-psychological characteristics of young people returning from migration. The mixed-methods framework was chosen to ensure a deeper understanding of both measurable psychological indicators and subjective personal experiences associated with return migration. The research followed a cross-sectional descriptive-analytical design, allowing for the identification of key psychological patterns and social factors influencing reintegration.

The sample consisted of young people aged 18–30 who had returned to their home country after at least six months of labor migration abroad. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure relevance to the research objectives. Inclusion criteria included voluntary or forced return within the last three years and active involvement in social or economic life after return. The final sample included both male and female participants with diverse educational backgrounds and migration destinations [13].

Quantitative data were collected using standardized psychological questionnaires measuring social adaptation, self-esteem, perceived social support, and emotional well-being. Commonly used instruments included self-report scales assessing anxiety levels, life satisfaction, and coping strategies. Qualitative data were obtained through semi-structured interviews focusing on migration experience, reintegration challenges, identity changes, and future aspirations. This combination allowed for triangulation of data and increased validity of the findings.

Data collection was conducted in two stages. In the first stage, participants completed the psychological questionnaires under standardized conditions. In the second stage, in-depth interviews were carried out with a sub-sample of participants to explore

subjective interpretations of return migration and reintegration processes. Ethical principles were strictly observed, including informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation.

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and correlational analysis to identify relationships between psychological variables such as self-esteem, social adaptation, and emotional well-being. Qualitative interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis, allowing for the identification of recurring themes related to psychological adjustment, social identity, and coping mechanisms. The integration of both data types enabled a holistic interpretation of the results.

The study adhered to ethical research standards in social and psychological sciences. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, their right to withdraw at any stage, and the confidentiality of collected data. No identifying personal information was disclosed, and all data were used exclusively for scientific purposes.

3. Results

The findings and theoretical considerations surrounding the socio-psychological characteristics of young people returning from migration indicate that the return phase represents a complex and multidimensional process rather than a simple restoration of pre-migration life conditions. Return migration emerges as a critical transition point in which previously acquired experiences, values, and coping strategies interact with the social expectations and structural realities of the home society. This interaction often generates both developmental opportunities and psychological vulnerabilities, making returnee youth a group requiring special academic and practical attention [14].

One of the central issues highlighted in the discussion is the ambivalent nature of migration experience for young people. On the one hand, migration contributes to the development of autonomy, responsibility, problem-solving skills, and resilience. Exposure to new work cultures and social systems often strengthens self-efficacy and expands future-oriented thinking. On the other hand, the process of returning frequently disrupts the continuity of identity formation. Young people may experience internal conflicts between newly formed personal values and traditional norms dominant in their home communities. This value incongruence can manifest as emotional tension, dissatisfaction with social roles, and a sense of not fully belonging to either the host or home society.

The discussion also reveals that psychological maladjustment among returnee youth is closely linked to the discrepancy between expectations and reality. Many young migrants return with aspirations for improved social status, stable employment, or recognition of their migration experience. When these expectations are unmet due to limited labor market opportunities or social misunderstanding, frustration and demotivation increase. Such unmet expectations often lead to decreased self-esteem, heightened anxiety, and, in some cases, withdrawal from active social participation. These outcomes support the view that psychological well-being during reintegration is strongly conditioned by structural and institutional factors, not solely by individual psychological resources.

Another important aspect concerns social relationships and interpersonal dynamics after return. Family and community reactions play a decisive role in shaping reintegration outcomes. Supportive family environments tend to facilitate emotional stability and adaptive coping, whereas critical or dismissive attitudes intensify feelings of alienation and psychological strain. Peer relationships are particularly significant for young people, as peer acceptance serves as a key indicator of social belonging and identity validation. When returnee youth are perceived as “changed” or “different,” social distancing may occur, reinforcing a sense of marginalization and undermining social confidence.

The discussion further emphasizes that reintegration is not a uniform or linear process. Differences in gender, duration of migration, type of employment abroad, and voluntariness of return significantly influence socio-psychological outcomes. For instance,

young people who return voluntarily and with clear future plans tend to demonstrate higher levels of psychological adjustment and life satisfaction compared to those forced to return due to external constraints. This variability underscores the need to move beyond generalized interpretations and adopt differentiated approaches in both research and practice.

Importantly, the findings suggest that returnee youth should not be viewed solely through a deficit-oriented lens. Despite psychological challenges, many young returnees possess valuable social and psychological capital, including intercultural competence, adaptability, and a broadened worldview. When supported by appropriate social policies, educational opportunities, and psychological services, these strengths can contribute positively to community development and social innovation. Thus, reintegration should be framed not only as a problem to be managed but also as a potential resource for societal growth [15].

The discussion confirms that the socio-psychological characteristics of young people returning from migration are shaped by the dynamic interaction of individual experiences, social relationships, and structural conditions. Effective reintegration requires coordinated efforts at multiple levels, including family support, community acceptance, labor market inclusion, and professional psychological assistance. Addressing these dimensions holistically enhances not only the well-being of returnee youth but also the social cohesion and long-term stability of societies experiencing intensive migration flows.

4. Conclusion

The present study highlights that the socio-psychological characteristics of young people returning from migration are shaped by a complex interaction of individual experiences, social relationships, and structural conditions within the home society. Return migration should not be understood merely as the end of a mobility cycle but as a critical developmental stage that requires psychological readjustment, identity reconstruction, and social reintegration. The findings underscore that young returnees often face emotional instability, identity tension, and social uncertainty as they attempt to reconcile migration-acquired values and skills with traditional social expectations and limited institutional opportunities.

At the same time, the study demonstrates that migration experience can serve as a significant source of personal growth. Many returning young people display enhanced adaptability, independence, and intercultural competence, which may positively contribute to their social participation and long-term life strategies. However, the realization of this potential depends largely on the availability of supportive social environments, including family acceptance, peer inclusion, and access to meaningful employment. Without such support, the positive psychological resources gained through migration may remain underutilized or even transform into sources of frustration and dissatisfaction.

The conclusion further emphasizes that effective reintegration cannot rely solely on individual coping capacities. Psychological well-being among returnee youth is closely connected to social recognition, institutional support, and inclusive youth policies that acknowledge migration experience as a valuable asset rather than a social deviation. Comprehensive psychological services, career guidance, and community-based support programs are essential for mitigating stress, preventing social alienation, and promoting sustainable reintegration.

In sum, understanding the socio-psychological dimensions of youth return migration is crucial for both scientific inquiry and social practice. Addressing these dimensions holistically contributes not only to improving the quality of life and psychological resilience of young returnees but also to strengthening social cohesion and fostering human capital development in migration-affected societies.

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