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How Does the Brain Drain of African Doctors and Midwives Impact SDG 3 On Reducing Maternal And Infant Mortality?

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Abstract

Reducing maternal and infant mortality in Sub-Saharan Africa remains a critical target under Sustainable Development Goal 3. Despite the numerous initiatives and health policies, recent data from the World Health Organization indicates a reversal of gains in countries with overstretched healthcare systems. A disregarded element contributing to these setbacks is the phenomenon of the medical brain drain from Sub-Saharan Africa to higher-income countries. Although the phenomenon has been extensively studied in the context of economic and professional development, its specific impact on the ability of countries to meet Sustainable Development Goal 3 has not received sufficient scholarly attention. The purpose of this research is to address this gap. The study develops a theoretical framework based on a systematic literature review, analysing existing scholarship on brain drain theory, global migration dynamics, and the interplay between skilled healthcare worker emigration and maternal and infant health outcomes. The findings indicate that medical brain drain significantly undermines health system resilience and hinders progress towards reducing maternal and infant mortality. In the aftermath of the covid-pandemic, these vulnerabilities have been exacerbated for countries with critical shortages of health workers. This study emphasises the pressing necessity of incorporating migration-related considerations into the formulation of health policy. Policies should be adopted towards a more holistic approach that addresses both the push and pull factors in the migration of healthcare workers. In addition, there is a need to invest in retention strategies to strengthen local health systems and accelerate progress toward maternal and infant health targets.

Keywords: African healthcare; Sustainable Development Goals; International migration; medical brain drain