

LEBANESE PSYCHIATRIC SOCIETY

Order of Physicians

Beirut - Lebanon



الجمعية اللبنانية للطب النفسي

نقابة اطباء لبنان في بيروت

بيروت - لبنان

The Impact of the crisis on the career plans of psychiatrists in Lebanon

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Introduction

Since October 2019 Lebanon has been facing a multifaceted and protracted crisis. Following months of protests and a socio-political crisis, a series of events have unfolded, including the COVID pandemic and the Beirut Blast feeding inevitably into the ongoing economic collapse. This has had dire consequences on the Lebanese workforce. In fact, the current net migration rate from Lebanon has seen a 32% increase from 2020 (1). The healthcare sector has been particularly impacted. At the time of the survey in the summer of 2021 the Lebanese Order of Physicians released an estimate that 16-20% of Lebanese doctors are leaving or have already left (2).

The Lebanese Psychiatric Society (LPS) launched a survey amongst its members and affiliated trainees with the aim of assessing the impact of the crisis on the profession.

Methods

This was a cross-sectional survey conducted during September 2021. An online questionnaire was devised and sent via the LPS' mailing list. The questionnaire was in English and contained 10 questions. A total of 62 individuals participated in the survey, these included psychiatrists and trainees in Lebanon.

Results

The sample surveyed was grossly representative of the diversity of psychiatrists practicing in Lebanon. 29% of the participants were residents. Among the 46 fully qualified psychiatrists who responded, 39% had practiced for less than 10 years, 11% between 11 and 20 years and 29% had been in practice for more than 20 years. 37% were in private practice, 56% work in a university hospital and only 3% worked predominantly in the public sector. 39% of participants reported being single, while 55% were married with children. (Table 1)

Demographic variables	Count	Percentage
Years of practice		
0-10 years	24	39%
11-20 years	7	11%
>20 years	18	29%
Place of practice		
Private practice	23	37%
Public sector	3	5%
University hospital	35	56%
Other	1	2%
Marital status		
Single	24	39%
Married with children	34	55%
Married without children	4	6%

Table 1: Demographic variables

When asked if they are planning on leaving Lebanon for a position or training abroad, 23% answered yes, 32.8% answered no and 27.9 % are considering it. 16% of total respondents have already left. (Figure 1)

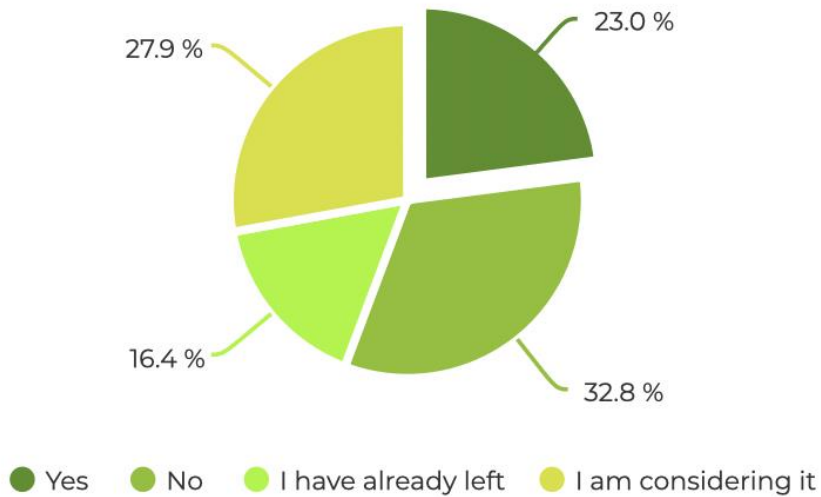


Figure 1: Percentages of psychiatrists leaving or considering leaving

Among those doctors who had left or were planning to leave: 38% are headed to Europe, 30% to Arab countries, and 9% to the USA. 52% of them said that the chances of them returning within 2 years are impossible or unlikely while only 14% of them reported that they might come back (Figure 2).

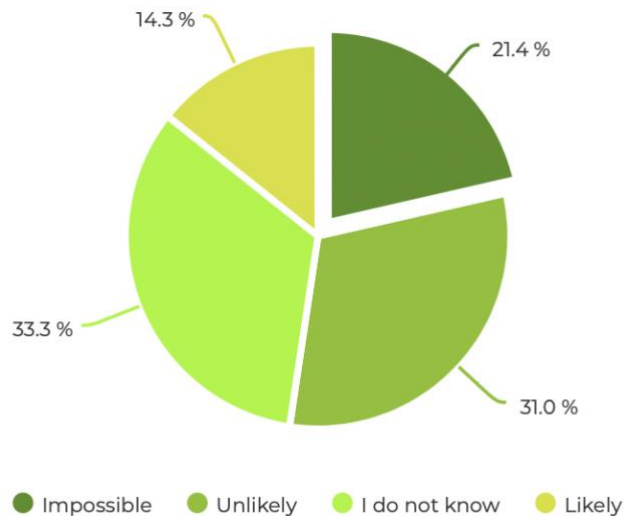


Figure 2: Likelihood of psychiatrists returning to Lebanon within 2 years

Some of the psychiatrists and trainees' future plans included pursuing further training abroad, repeating their residency or pursuing new positions (Figure 3).

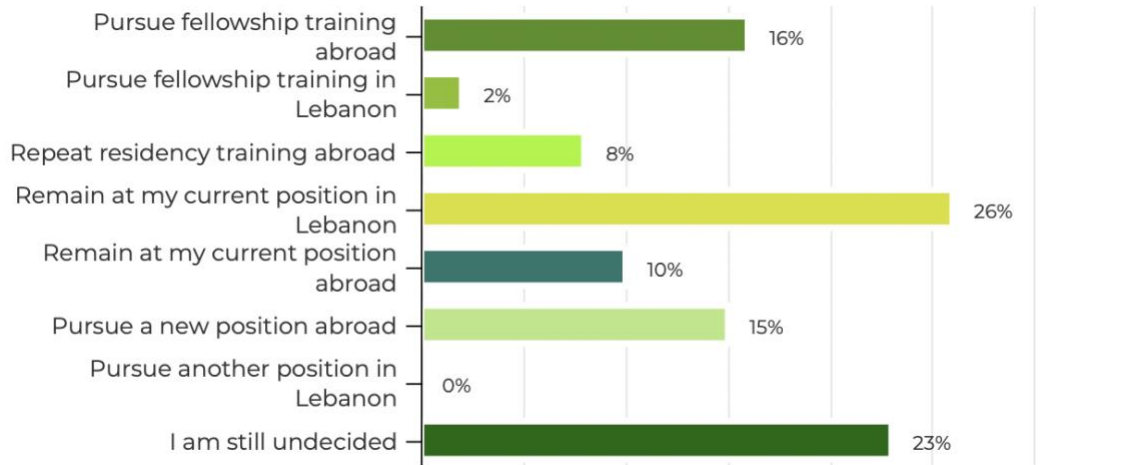


Figure 3: Future plans for psychiatrists

71% of them would not have made the decision to leave Lebanon before October 2019. The most common reason for psychiatrists wanting to leave Lebanon was the country's instability (Figure 4).

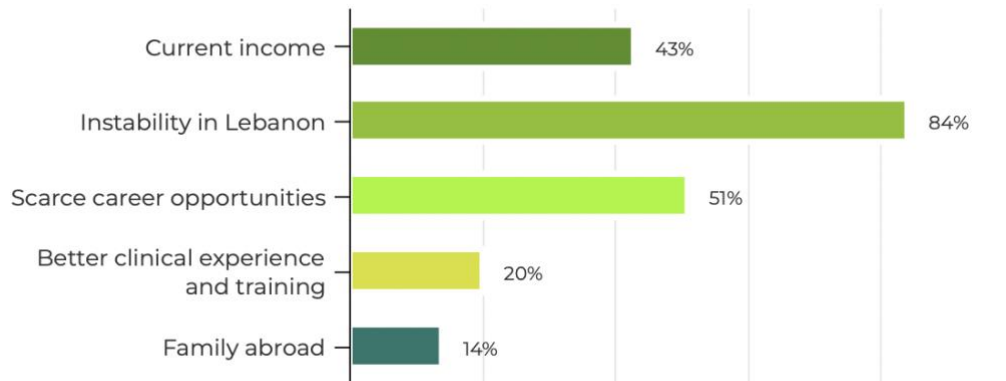


Figure 4: Reasons behind leaving Lebanon

94% believed that the state of mental health care in Lebanon is "worse" or "much worse" than it was before October 2019.

Discussion

In summary, the survey reveals that a significant numbers of psychiatrists and trainees had already left Lebanon or are planning on leaving, with half of those stating they were unlikely to return within a foreseeable period of time.

This exodus of mental health professionals highlights a crisis affecting an already fragile sector. In fact, gaps have always existed in Lebanon's mental health infrastructure. Even prior to the current crisis, Lebanon had around 1.5 psychiatrists per 100,000 people, with most working in private practice or NGOs (3). Moreover, the prevalence of mental disorders in Lebanon was around 25% of the population in 2008 (4). It is likely that these numbers would have increased in the current climate.

If the findings of this survey were to materialize effectively on the ground, the short and long term impact on the provision of mental health care in Lebanon could be disastrous. This situation calls for urgent and sustainable interventions to support psychiatrists and other mental health professionals so that they can continue to provide the necessary clinical, academic and professional services.

References

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