

A Demographic Analysis of the Seekers of Cross Border Reproductive Care: A Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

Background

The use of assisted reproductive technologies abroad is a growing phenomenon; however, little is known about the individuals who seek cross border reproductive care (CBRC), the destinations they choose, and their reasons for travelling. We sought to gain more insight into the demographics of those travelling for CBRC, their geographic destinations, and their reasons for engaging in CBRC.

Methods

We employed a search of the published academic literature in the PubMed Database using combinations of various key terms.

Results

Important findings included that those who sought CBRC were over the age of 35, with a similar mention of both single individuals travelling as well as married or cohabitating couples. When sexual orientation was mentioned, CBRC seekers were more often homosexual, bisexual, or transgendered. The most frequently mentioned reason for travel was due to the availability of services in the home country. The majority of travelling was within or to Europe, with Belgium being the most popular destination.

Conclusion

CBRC seekers are not as diverse a population as had previously been assumed, with sexual orientation being the dominant clustering factor. Contrary to previous assumptions, reduced costs in low income countries are likely not the primary economic driver of the CBRC industry, but rather the lack of availability of services domestically.

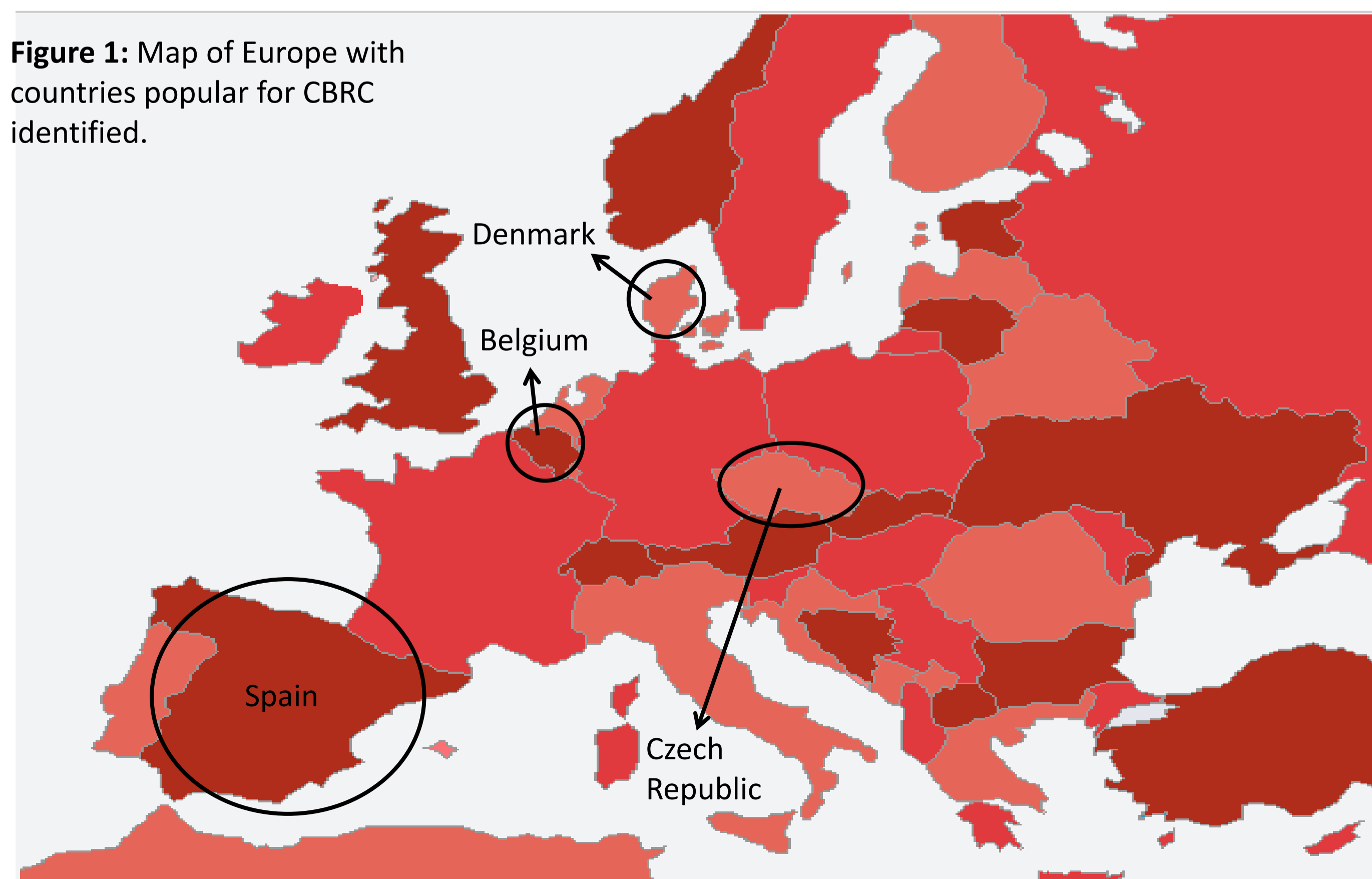
INTRODUCTION

Cross border reproductive care has become a global phenomenon. Individuals and couples alike are travelling outside of their home countries to various destinations for assistive reproductive technologies (ART). Little is known about those who are travelling, their reasons for seeking ART internationally, or which destinations these travelers are choosing.

OBJECTIVE

We sought to gain insight into the demographics of those travelling for CBRC, their geographic destinations, and their reasons for engaging in CBRC.

Figure 1: Map of Europe with countries popular for CBRC identified.



Map of Europe. Retrieved 27 April 2014 from <http://www.erc.org/images/map-of-europe7.gif>

METHODOLOGY

- Academic literature review was the methodology of choice
- Search of the published literature in the PubMed database
- Identified key terms, abbreviations, truncations, and combinations as listed in **Table 1**
- Both title and abstract were scanned for relevance, from which a complete article review was done for included papers

Table 1: Key Terms for Database Search

| |
|------------------------------------|
| Assisted reproductive tourism |
| Tour |
| Travel |
| Assisted reproduction |
| Cross border reproductive care |
| In vitro fertilization |
| Pre-implantation genetic diagnosis |
| Intracytoplasmic sperm injection |
| Demographics |
| Fertility |
| Statistics |

Table 1: List of key terms used in the PubMed database for identification of relevant articles.

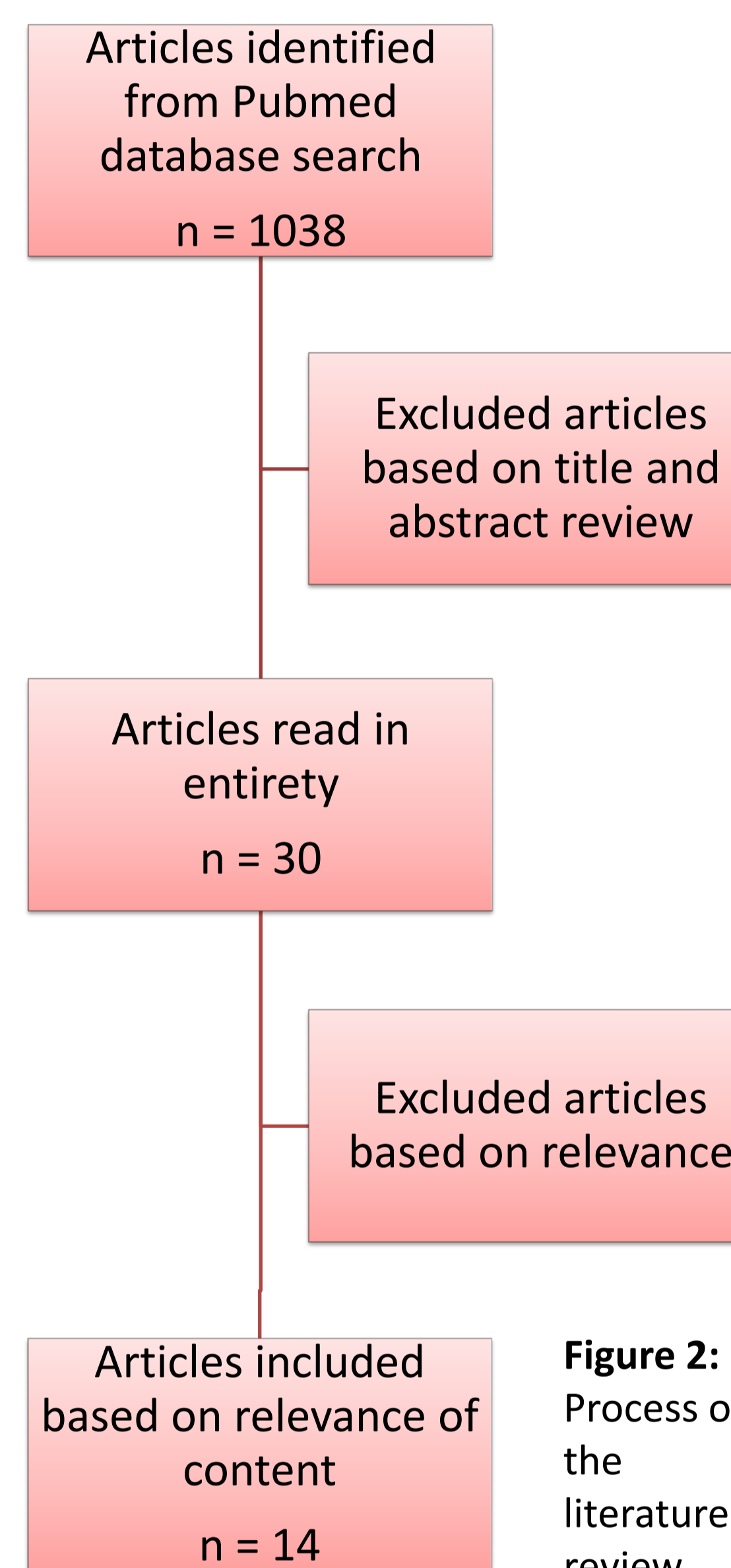


Figure 2: Process of the literature review.

RESULTS

- The results of the literature review are depicted in **Figure 2**
- 14 articles included in the review
- Information synthesized based on the extraction of themes that answered three questions:
 - Who is travelling?
 - To where are they travelling?
 - Why are they travelling?



Pregnant belly globe. Retrieved 27 April 2014 from <http://imagineioy.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Mother-Earth-04-1024x963.jpg>

- Findings are summarized and presented in **Table 2**

DISCUSSION

- There is little known about the seekers of CBRC, where they come from, where they are going, and why they are using it
- Our research indicates that there is a gap in the literature when it comes to these questions
 - The majority of what is known, based on this review, is from European countries
 - Lack of information from North America and Asia
 - Publication bias
- Results indicate that CBRC seekers are not as diverse a population as had previously been assumed
- Reasons for seeking CBRC are contrary to previous assumptions
 - Travel due to the availability of services and technology in home country
 - Previously thought travel was due to reduced costs in low income countries

CONCLUSION

In summary, those seeking CBRC tend to be older than 35 years of age, and have a single or married/cohabitating marital status. When sexual orientation is mentioned, the majority of travelers are homosexual, bisexual, or transgendered. CBRC seekers tend to travel to European countries, most often Belgium, and choose to do this due to the availability of services and technology in their home country.

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Table 2: Results of the literature review, sorted by theme.

| Who is travelling? | To where are they travelling? | Why are they travelling? |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Middle aged (35+) ^{1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6} | Travelling from within Europe to | Belgium ^{1, 2, 6, 8, 10, 11} |
| Single ^{1, 2, 7, 8} | | Spain ^{2, 6, 7, 8, 10} |
| Married / Cohabiting ^{2, 3, 6, 7} | Travelling to or within North America ^{4, 6, 12} | Czech Republic ^{2, 6, 8} |
| Homosexual / Bisexuals / Transgendered ^{1, 7, 8} | | Denmark ^{2, 8, 10} |
| Educated ^{2, 7, 9} | Travelling between Europe and North America ^{3, 7, 12} | Exclusion from treatment based on demographics in home country ^{1, 3, 5, 8, 11, 13} |
| Heterosexual ^{7, 8} | Travelling to or within North America ^{4, 6, 12} | Perceived quality of care abroad ^{4, 7, 9, 10, 11, 14} |
| Previous failed fertility treatments in home country ^{1, 4} | Travelling between Asia and North America ^{3, 12} | Other reasons (ex: expatriates travelling back to home country, vacation, psychosocial factors, etc.) ^{3, 6, 9, 10, 11, 14} |
| | Travelling to India ^{6, 10} | Donor shortages in home country ^{4, 7, 9} |
| | | Previous unsatisfactory experience in home country ^{7, 9} |