

Voluntary Turnover Decision from Nepali Civil Service: Unravelling the Experiences of Joint Secretaries

A Research Report

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Submitted by

Mr. Pramod Niroula
Mr. Shailendra Prasad Bhatt

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Research Team

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Abstract

This study is an endeavor to explore the reasons behind the voluntary turnover decisions of Joint Secretaries while still having their service tenures remaining in the Nepali civil service. Informed by an interpretivist research paradigm, this study adopted a case study method as a strategy of inquiry in which purposively selected 7 ex- Joint Secretaries were approached to explore their lived experiences regarding their decisions to leave the civil service before reaching their mandatory retirement age and service tenure. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to capture the personal and professional factors influencing their turnover decisions and the insights were analyzed using Descriptive Phenomenological Analysis (DPA) method. The study revealed that personal issues, such as health concerns and family responsibilities, combined with systemic challenges, like political interference in transfer decisions, career stagnation, and a lack of upward mobility was the determining factor for turnover decisions of Joint Secretaries. This study underscores the importance of addressing these issues within the Nepali civil service to retain experienced human resources for enhancing overall effectiveness of Nepali public administration. Key recommendations include promoting merit-based career progression, reducing political interference, and improving the work environment to ensure the retention of experienced personnel within the Nepali civil service.

Keywords: *Joint Secretaries, Nepali civil service, Voluntary turnover*

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Chapter I: Introduction

1.1 General Background

Employee turnover, the movement of employees out of an organization, significantly impacts organizational performance, productivity, and morale (Lyons & Bandura, 2020). Early studies focused on practical methods for turnover reduction, but theory development and testing gained prominence in the mid-20th century (Hom et.al. 2017). As organizations grapple with the challenges posed by turnover, strategies such as effective onboarding, competitive compensation, and career development play crucial roles in retaining talent. Yet, understanding turnover dynamics remains essential for organizational success in a global context (Allen & Vardaman, 2021) and Nepali civil service is not an exception. The Nepali civil service plays a crucial role in implementing government policies and delivering essential services to the public. However, employee turnover has become an increasing concern, with more civil servants expressing decisions to leave their positions. High turnover rates can disrupt service delivery, lead to a loss of institutional knowledge, and impact on the overall efficiency of government operations. Addressing turnover decisions is therefore vital for maintaining a stable and effective civil service. Despite its significance, there is a lack of comprehensive empirical research focusing specifically on the Nepali context, hindering the development of targeted retention strategies. Understanding the factors that influence turnover decision among Nepali civil servants is essential for developing effective strategies to enhance retention and ensure the efficient functioning of public administration. In this regard, this study aims to explore factors leading to voluntary turnover decisions of the experienced bureaucrats from Nepali civil service.

1.2 Problem Statement

Employee turnover decisions are a critical issue for public sector organizations, where retaining skilled and experienced human resources is vital for effective governance and service delivery. According to the Department of National Personnel Records (Civil), over the past decade, a total of 6,604 civil servants have resigned while still having remaining service periods recorded in their civil records. Most of these resignations come from rank-less employees, including office assistants, postmen, forest guards, drivers, and gardeners. Specifically, in the fiscal year 2013/14, 1,239 employees resigned with their remaining service period. Records show that 701 civil servants resigned in 2014/15, 1,026 in 2015/16, and 682 in 2016/17. Furthermore, data indicates

that 909 employees resigned in 2019/20, 735 in 2020/21, 762 in 2021/22, and 550 in 2023/24, all while still having service periods left. Disaggregated analysis of turnovers within the Gazetted segment only depicts a decreasing number of turnovers moving from Gazetted class III to Special class (secretary level and equivalent) as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Number of Employees Resigned in Past 10 Years

SN	Level	Designation	Number of Turnovers
1	Special Category	Like Chief Secretary	3
2	Special Category	Like Secretary	32
3	Gazetted I Class	Joint Secretary	28
4	Gazetted II Class	Under Secretary	259
5	Gazetted III Class	Section Officer	620

Source: Department of National Personnel Records (Civil)

However, on the flip side, every year thousands of college graduates appear in the competitive examinations taken by the Public Service Commission (PSC) in search of a stable career and secure jobs in pursuit of stable and balanced life.

Yet, those, who have successfully cracked the PSC examination and secured their position in civil service following a grueling competitive selection process are observed to take voluntary turnover decisions from the Nepali civil service. Therefore, a focused study to identify and explore the underlying factors for the rising turnover decisions among civil servants is critical to addressing the issue and ameliorating employee retention in the Nepali civil service.

However, there is limited prior studies and evidence exploring this phenomenon in depth within this context. In this connection, the present study aims to fill this knowledge gap by conducting a qualitative study to investigate the underlying causes behind voluntary turnover decisions of Gazetted Class I (Joint Secretary Level) civil servants and to provide actionable recommendations for mitigating this issue.

1.3 Study Objectives

The main objective of this study is to explore the experiences of joint secretaries in their voluntary turnover decision from Nepali Civil Service.

1.4 Research Questions

This study raises the following research questions:

- What experiences do joint secretaries have in making the voluntary turnover decision from the Nepal civil service?
- Why joint secretaries decided to take the voluntary turnover decisions from the Nepali civil service?

1.5 Significance of Study

This study offers deep, context-specific and experiential insights into the turnover decisions of Nepali civil servants, addressing aspects that quantitative studies often miss. By delving into the lived experiences of the joint secretaries', the study seeks to reveal the subtle and complex factors that govern their decisions to separate from the Nepali Civil Service, ultimately informing the development of more effective HR policies, recruitment, development and employee maintenance practices in the Nepali Civil Service.

1.6 Study Limitations

This study primarily emphasized the reasons behind voluntary turnover decisions of Gazetted Class I (Joint Secretary Level) civil servants among many other service levels across different echelons of government services and hierarchies. Within the focused segment, the present study has selected a cut off time of past three years accounting to a total of 12 joint secretaries who have decided to take voluntary turnover decisions from the Nepali civil service. Therefore, the findings of this study may not represent a holistic picture of voluntary turnover decisions and its underlying causes in overall Nepali civil service.

Chapter II: Review of Related Literatures

2.1 Turnover Intention

Turnover intention refers to an employee's serious contemplation of leaving their job or organization. It reflects the individual's thoughts and plans regarding potential departure, influenced by factors such as job dissatisfaction, frustration, or perceived future opportunities (Tett & Meyer, 1993; Mobley, 1977). Empirical research indicates that turnover intention is primarily shaped by economic, personal, and organizational factors (Moynihan & Landuyt, 2008). It can be viewed as the likelihood of an employee switching jobs within a specific timeframe (Sousa-Poza & Henneberger, 2002), often serving as a precursor to actual turnover.

2.2 Factors Affecting Turnover Intention

The decision to leave an organization is influenced by multiple factors, including organizational characteristics, economic conditions, employee demographics, job satisfaction, and perceptions of management and the work environment (Cotton & Tuttle, 1986; Kellough & Osuna, 1995; Lambert, Hogan, & Barton, 2001). Based on the literature review, the following key factors have been identified as particularly influential.

2.2.1 Demographic Characteristics

Demographic variables significantly impact turnover intention. Older employees tend to have lower turnover intentions compared to younger workers, who are more likely to change jobs due to career exploration, willingness to relocate, and fewer personal obligations (Kellough & Osuna, 1995). Generational differences also contribute to higher turnover among younger employees, particularly after completing educational milestones (Stark, 2007). Additionally, job tenure plays a crucial role in turnover decisions. Early-stage employees typically exhibit higher turnover rates, which decrease as tenure increases (Blau & Kahn, 1981; Sørensen, 2000). Social interactions and the development of workplace bonds during the initial years help foster loyalty, reducing the likelihood of turnover over time (Sørensen, 2000).

2.2.2 Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction remains one of the strongest predictors of turnover intention. Numerous studies consistently demonstrate an inverse relationship between job satisfaction and turnover rates

(Cotton & Tuttle, 1986). Dissatisfaction with pay is one of the most robust indicators of turnover (Blau & Kahn, 1981; Cotton & Tuttle, 1986; Shaw et al., 1998). Furthermore, turnover intention is mitigated when employees experience high levels of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Houkes, Janssen, Jonge, & Bakker, 2003). Intrinsic motivation refers to performing activities for their inherent satisfaction, while extrinsic motivation pertains to actions driven by external rewards (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Employees who perceive limited support for career development are more likely to consider leaving in search of better opportunities. Inadequate role clarity, poor working conditions, and negative relationships with supervisors further elevate turnover intention (Judge & Klinger, 2008). Additionally, low organizational commitment, which reflects an emotional attachment to the organization, increases the likelihood of turnover (Meyer & Allen, 1991).

2.2.3 Social Support

Social support within organizations, which includes emotional and informational assistance from colleagues and supervisors, also influences turnover intention (Eisenberger et al., 2001). Positive social support fosters a sense of belonging and reduces the likelihood of turnover, as employees feel more valued and integrated into the organizational culture (Aggarwal-Gupta, Vohra, & Bhatnagar, 2010).

2.2.4 Work-Life Balance

Work-life balance has emerged as a critical factor affecting turnover intention. A lack of balance between work and personal life leads to stress, burnout, and ultimately higher turnover rates (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011). Employees seeking to escape job-related stress often turn to more flexible work opportunities that allow for better integration of personal and professional responsibilities. Work-life balance is another significant determinant, with employees struggling to manage work and personal life being more inclined to seek jobs offering better flexibility (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011).

2.3 Employee Turnover

Employee turnover, which refers to the voluntary or involuntary departure of employees from an organization, can either be functional—resulting in the removal of underperforming staff—or dysfunctional, leading to the loss of talented personnel (Hom et al., 2017). In Nepal's civil

service, the latter presents a significant challenge due to the long recruitment cycles, high training costs, and the loss of tacit knowledge essential for maintaining administrative continuity (Karki, 2023).

Several theoretical frameworks help explain turnover in this context. Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (1959) posits that job dissatisfaction arises from hygiene factors (e.g., salary, job security), while motivation depends on motivators such as recognition and career advancement. Despite strong job security, Nepalese civil servants often lack these motivators, leading to low morale and higher turnover intentions. March and Simon's (1958) theory also provides insights into turnover, emphasizing the perceived ease and desirability of moving to alternative job opportunities. This theory is particularly relevant to Nepal's civil service, where many mid-career civil servants transition to NGOs or INGOs, attracted by higher pay and greater autonomy (Shrestha, 2022). In addition, turnover decisions in Nepal's civil service are shaped by a combination of internal push factors—such as job dissatisfaction, inadequate salary, limited promotion opportunities, and politicization—and external pull factors, including better pay, work environments, and career growth opportunities offered by international organizations (Chaudhary, 2021; Rijal, 2021). For example, civil engineers frequently migrate from the Department of Roads to donor-funded development projects, especially following the 2015 earthquake, where better pay and job security are offered.

2.4 Theoretical Foundations of Employee Turnover

Employee turnover within Nepal's civil service has significant implications for governance, administrative continuity, and institutional effectiveness. This literature review synthesizes theoretical insights, structural realities, legal provisions, and practical challenges to understand the dynamics influencing voluntary and involuntary turnover within the civil service system. Turnover in public organizations is shaped by a complex interplay of personal, organizational, and systemic factors. Theories from organizational psychology and public administration offer valuable explanatory frameworks. Understanding the drivers of voluntary turnover in the civil service demands a multi-theoretical approach, especially in transitional contexts like Nepal's federal administration. The exit of capable senior officers, particularly Joint Secretaries, should not be reduced to individual dissatisfaction alone but seen through the lens of broader institutional and psychological dynamics. The following theories offer critical insight into this phenomenon.

2.4.1 Expanded Turnover Model

Dalton and Todor (1979) contend that turnover can stem from a lack of professional growth rather than organizational failure. In Nepal, many Joint Secretaries encounter prolonged career plateaus due to rigid hierarchies, infrequent vacancies at the Secretary level, and non-transparent promotional practices. Such career stagnation, especially when compounded by political interference, validates the theory's emphasis on unmet professional aspirations as a driver of voluntary exit.

2.4.2 Psychological Contract Theory

Rousseau (1995) conceptualizes the psychological contract as an employee's belief in mutual obligations with their employer. In Nepal's bureaucratic system, expectations around fair promotion, merit-based rewards, and stability are frequently violated—particularly through politicized transfers or perceived favoritism. This breach undermines trust, fostering alienation and eventual resignation (Morrison & Robinson, 1997).

2.4.3 Organizational Commitment Theory

According to Meyer and Allen (1991), employees stay with an organization due to affective (emotional), continuance (cost-based), and normative (moral) commitment. In Nepal's context, affective commitment weakens when integrity and merit are overlooked. With increasingly accessible external opportunities (e.g., NGOs, consultancies), continuance commitment also declines. Normative commitment, once rooted in patriotic public service ideals, is steadily eroded by systemic dysfunction and lack of ethical recognition.

2.4.4 Two-Factor Theory

Herzberg (1959) distinguishes between hygiene factors (e.g., salary, job security) and motivators (e.g., recognition, achievement). While Nepal's civil service often meets hygiene thresholds, it falls short on motivators—particularly for high-performing officers who seek meaningful roles, autonomy, and respect. The absence of such intrinsic rewards contributes to job dissatisfaction, reinforcing Herzberg's argument that motivators are essential for retention.

2.4.5 Person-Organization Fit Theory

Kristof (1996) posits that congruence between personal values and organizational culture is key to retention. Many Nepali bureaucrats join the civil service driven by reformist zeal and a commitment to integrity. However, repeated exposure to politicization, corruption, and resistance to change results in disillusionment, especially among principled officers, leading to voluntary turnover due to ethical misfit.

2.4.6 Procedural Justice in HRM

Cho and Lewis (2012) emphasize fairness in HR decisions—such as recruitment, posting, and promotion—as central to employee retention. Nepal’s civil service is often criticized for ad hoc and politically motivated personnel decisions. When competent officers are transferred without cause or overlooked for promotion, the erosion of procedural justice becomes a significant push factor for exit.

2.4.7 Burnout Theory

Maslach and Leiter (2008) define burnout as a combination of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and diminished personal efficacy. In Nepal, chronic overwork, poor working conditions in rural postings, and political pressure to conform create an environment conducive to burnout. Officers deprived of institutional support or professional respect may choose to exit as a coping mechanism.

2.4.8 Public Service Motivation (PSM) Theory

Perry and Wise (1990) argue that individuals join public service out of a desire to serve the common good. However, when institutional environments discourage ethical behavior and reward loyalty over competence, motivation declines. In Nepal, reform-oriented officers often leave because their intrinsic motivations clash with prevailing institutional practices that undervalue transparency and civic duty.

2.4.9 Mobley’s Turnover Decision Model

Mobley (1977) views turnover as a logical progression: dissatisfaction leads to job search behavior, consideration of alternatives, and eventual exit. This model resonates strongly with Nepal’s civil service, where officers dissatisfied with career stagnation or politicized work environments often explore options in international organizations or the private sector before

making the decision to leave.

2.4.10 Switching Behavior Framework

Bansal et al. (2005) present turnover as a result of cumulative dissatisfaction, activated when attractive alternatives are available. Nepal's senior officers frequently tolerate multiple dissatisfiers—lack of recognition, forced transfers, or value misalignment—before exiting. Those with international networks or transferable skills are especially likely to switch, once the accumulation of grievances surpasses the threshold of tolerance.

2.4.11 Economic and Rational Choice Models

Becker (1962) and Kim (2005) assert that individuals make rational choices based on cost-benefit analysis. For Joint Secretaries in Nepal, who are underpaid relative to their education and workload, the decision to resign is often economically rational. The opportunity cost of staying—when other sectors offer higher financial and professional returns—becomes unjustifiable, especially for those with global qualifications or private-sector alternatives.

2.4.12 Affective Events Theory (AET)

AET posits that workplace events trigger emotional responses that influence job satisfaction and turnover intentions (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). In Nepal's context, frequent and unanticipated transfers act as negative affective events. For instance, the 61st report of the Auditor General revealed that 87% of transfers occurred outside of legally stipulated timeframes, leading to staff dissatisfaction and instability (Sharma, 2024).

2.4.13 Job Characteristics Theory (JCT)

JCT emphasizes that job attributes such as autonomy, task variety, and feedback shape motivation and satisfaction (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). Nepal's hierarchical, bottom-heavy structure often deprives officers of autonomy and role diversity, potentially lowering satisfaction and increasing exit intentions.

2.4.14 Social Exchange and Equity Theories (SET)

SET posits that perceived organizational support enhances loyalty (Blau, 1964), while Equity Theory (Adams, 1965) emphasizes fairness in the balance of inputs and rewards. In Nepal, political interference in promotion and transfer decisions undermines perceptions of fairness and

support, leading to disengagement and exits (Chaudhary, 2021).

2.4.15 Expectancy and Conservation of Resources (COR) Theories

Vroom's Expectancy Theory (1964) suggests that if employees perceive a disconnect between effort and reward, motivation suffers. COR Theory (Hobfoll, 1989) adds that individuals seek to protect valued resources such as energy and well-being. Overburdened and under-resourced local offices in Nepal contribute to burnout and attrition.

2.4.16 Person–Organization Fit and Psychological Contract Theories

When employees' values are misaligned with organizational culture, dissatisfaction grows (Kristof, 1996). For example, younger civil servants may prioritize transparency and innovation—values that clash with the traditional bureaucracy. Psychological Contract Theory (Rousseau, 1995) reinforces this by noting that unfulfilled expectations, such as career advancement, lead to feelings of betrayal and turnover.

2.4.17 Push–Pull–Mooring Model

This comprehensive model explains turnover through push factors (e.g., political interference), pull factors (e.g., better jobs in NGOs), and mooring factors (e.g., family or pension considerations) (Bansal et al., 2005). All three are prominent in the Nepali context.

2.5 Employee Turnover in Nepal's Civil Service: Provisions and Practices

Nepal's civil service is pivotal to the effective functioning of the state's public administration, translating political decisions into action and ensuring policy continuity across different levels of governance. However, employee turnover within this sector, particularly in the context of the federalized governance system, disrupts institutional memory and hinders the delivery of public services. This paper explores the issue of employee turnover by examining relevant theoretical frameworks, statutory provisions, and the practical challenges faced by Nepal's civil service.

2.5.1 Organizational Architecture

Nepal's civil service encompasses a vast range of service groups, from administrative to technical and health services, with approximately 80,108 employees (UNDP, 2009). Despite this, the service remains heavily “bottom-heavy,” with only 22.4% of the workforce at officer levels, which stymies upward mobility and fuels turnover among ambitious officers (Rijal, 2021). The

bottleneck in career advancement is especially acute in services such as education administration and agricultural extension, where the decentralization of authority post-federalism has limited opportunities for promotion or lateral transfers.

2.5.2 Demographic and Geographic Distribution

Though there has been some improvement in gender representation, with women comprising 15.3% of the civil service (UNDP, 2009), challenges persist. Female civil servants, particularly those from marginalized communities, experience higher turnover rates, citing a lack of support in remote areas, gender bias in transfers, and inadequate childcare options (Sharma, 2020). Geographically, an imbalance exists, with 47.5% of civil servants concentrated in the Central region, despite population imbalances. This uneven distribution exacerbates retention problems, especially in remote areas like the Karnali Province, where staff shortages are exacerbated by the reluctance of officials to accept postings in isolated districts (Schuster, 2018).

2.5.3 Recruitment and Inclusion

The Public Service Commission (PSC) ensures a meritocratic and inclusive entry system, which mandates that 45% of vacancies be reserved for marginalized groups (Nepal Law Commission, 2007). However, the centralized nature of PSC recruitment does not align with the localized staffing needs of municipalities and rural areas, making it difficult for local governments to fill technical positions effectively (Karki, 2023). Moreover, while the inclusion policy aims to diversify the bureaucracy, many entrants from reserved quotas face career stagnation due to a lack of mentorship and networking opportunities, which may contribute to early exits (Sharma, 2020).

2.5.4 Career Progression and Performance Management

The dual system of promotion—based on both seniority and performance—guides career advancement in Nepal's civil service. However, the performance appraisal system, which includes subjective ratings accounting for 40% of evaluations, often leads to manipulation and favoritism, contributing to perceptions of organizational injustice (Giri, 2007; Dahal, 2016). Officers often compare their input-output ratios with peers, and when these comparisons are perceived as unfair, turnover intentions increase. For instance, officers in revenue and customs departments report that high-performing colleagues are passed over for promotion due to the

influence of political patronage (Rameshwor, 2021).

2.5.5 Compensation and Incentive Structures

Nepali civil servants earn significantly less than their counterparts in the private sector or international organizations. Although recent improvements, such as remote area allowances and responsibility bonuses, have been implemented, the lack of performance-linked incentives remains a major deterrent to employee retention. The IMF (2002) identified this issue two decades ago, and it continues to be a significant challenge. Furthermore, the pension system, once an attractive retention tool, no longer appeals to younger officers, many of whom prioritize immediate financial stability over long-term benefits (Karki, 2023).

2.5.6 Political Interference

Political interference in postings, promotions, and disciplinary actions is widespread, leading to a demoralized and disengaged civil service workforce. Officers often report that neutrality is punished, while alignment with political parties is rewarded (Rameshwor, 2021). This undermines the meritocratic ethos necessary for the professionalism of the bureaucracy (Schuster, 2018). For example, the frequent transfer of Chief District Officers (CDOs) based on political considerations disrupts administrative continuity and lowers morale, contributing to high turnover rates.

2.6 Reform Initiatives and Implications for Turnover

The reform initiatives undertaken in Nepal's civil service reflect an effort to address systemic issues contributing to employee turnover. However, while reforms such as decentralization and data-driven approaches have been introduced, their implementation has been uneven, and their impact on turnover has been limited. Inadequate infrastructure, unclear reporting structures, and slow integration of modern HRM practices contribute to ongoing challenges.

2.6.1 Decentralization and Field Assignments

The federal restructuring of Nepal's governance aimed to redistribute power and responsibilities across three levels of government—federal, provincial, and local. This decentralization sought to improve administrative efficiency and delivery of local service by ensuring a more balanced distribution of staff. However, many federal civil servants perceive postings at the local or provincial level as punitive. Key concerns include unclear reporting structures, inadequate

facilities, and heightened political instability, all of which contribute to a sense of disillusionment and frustration among civil servants. This environment exacerbates turnover, particularly in rural areas where employees often seek transfers to Kathmandu or pursue opportunities with international organizations (UNDP, 2009). As a result, the anticipated benefits of decentralization in terms of improved service delivery are undermined by a constant cycle of employee attrition and disengagement.

2.6.2 Civil Service Census and Data-Driven Reforms

To inform evidence-based reforms, the Asian Development Bank (ADB)-supported civil service census aimed to provide comprehensive data on staffing patterns and organizational needs (ADB, 2009). Despite this initiative, the implementation of reforms such as e-governance, Human Resource Management Information Systems (HRMIS), and training programs linked to promotions has been slow and inconsistent. The lack of a robust, longitudinal tracking system to monitor turnover patterns across service groups and regions further complicates the assessment of these reforms' effectiveness. Without adequate data and continuous monitoring, it remains challenging to identify the root causes of turnover and develop targeted strategies to address them, leaving the civil service vulnerable to high attrition rates (Karki, 2023). Therefore, while the census and other reform initiatives have the potential to inform policy, their impact on reducing turnover is yet to be fully realized due to gaps in implementation and evaluation.

2.7 Summary of Insights from Literature Review

Employee turnover in Nepal's civil service is a complex phenomenon that demands a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between theoretical frameworks, legal provisions, and the practical realities of public service management. Addressing the underlying causes of turnover, such as insufficient compensation, political interference, and stagnating career progression, is crucial for maintaining the long-term stability and efficacy of Nepal's civil service. By enacting targeted reforms and aligning recruitment and career management practices with the evolving needs of the civil service, Nepal can reduce turnover rates and cultivate a more committed and effective public administration workforce.

The existing literature highlights that employee turnover in Nepal's civil service stems from a confluence of structural inefficiencies, motivational deficiencies, and systemic inequities (Karki, 2023; Rijal, 2021). While theoretical models, such as Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory and March

and Simon's model of organizational mobility, provide insights into individual turnover decisions, they must be contextualized within the broader framework of human resource management (HRM) practices, institutional culture, and political neutrality (Herzberg, 1959; March & Simon, 1958). Effective retention strategies must thus integrate both theoretical understanding and context-specific evidence, fostering a more stable, motivated, and equitable civil service.

Employee turnover in Nepal's civil service is not merely a matter of human resource management; it reflects deeper institutional, political, and socio-economic challenges. The prominence of "push factors"—such as stagnant career progression, inadequate compensation, politicized decision-making, and subjective performance evaluations—combined with strong external "pull factors," including better pay and career opportunities in international organizations, creates a chronic cycle of attrition (Chaudhary, 2021; Shrestha, 2022). Despite progressive initiatives like inclusive recruitment and decentralization, these policies fall short in addressing core structural issues related to promotion, compensation, and workplace justice.

For retention efforts to be effective, they must focus on transparent performance evaluations, merit-based promotion systems, and equitable deployment practices. Such reforms would address the root causes of dissatisfaction and disengagement among civil servants. Future empirical research—disaggregated by service group, gender, and geographic location—is essential to developing targeted retention policies that respond to the unique challenges of different segments of the civil service (Schuster, 2018; Karki, 2023). By fostering a deeper understanding of turnover dynamics, these research efforts can contribute to a more resilient and competent civil service in Nepal.

Chapter III: Study Methods

3.1 Study Design

This study is grounded in the interpretivist research paradigm, which posits that social reality is subjective, multifaceted, and constructed through individuals' lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Given the aim to understand the deeply personal and contextual dimensions of voluntary turnover among Joint Secretaries in the Nepali Civil Service, an exploratory, qualitative research design was deemed most appropriate. Specifically, the study draws on Descriptive Phenomenological Analysis (DPA), a methodological approach rooted in Husserlian phenomenology that facilitates the rigorous exploration of participants' first-person accounts while bracketing pre-existing assumptions (Giorgi, 2009).

Complementing this, a multiple case study strategy was employed to capture variation across institutional and professional contexts. This approach enabled in-depth examination of individual cases while generating broader insights across the civil service landscape. Participants were selected purposively to ensure diversity in ministerial affiliations, service groups, and career trajectories (Patton, 2015). The integrity and accuracy of the sample were verified using official records maintained by the Department of National Personnel Records (Civil).

3.2 Population and Sample

The study targeted a population of 28 Joint Secretaries from all services who had voluntarily left the civil service prior to the mandatory retirement age. From this population, a purposive sample of seven ex-Joint Secretaries was drawn, specifically focusing on those who had made their turnover decisions within the preceding three years. This sampling strategy was guided by the principle of information-rich cases and the availability and willingness of participants to engage in the study. Sampling was designed to ensure the inclusion of diverse perspectives across civil service domains, thereby enhancing the depth and applicability of the findings (Patton, 2015).

3.3 Instrument

The primary data collection instrument was a semi-structured interview protocol. This format allowed for flexibility in eliciting in-depth responses while ensuring coverage of key thematic areas. The interview checklist included prompts on career trajectories, personal and professional motivations, institutional challenges, and critical moments leading to their turnover decisions.

Open-ended questions encouraged participants to share narratives in their own words, enabling the researcher to uncover nuanced insights and contextual understandings essential to phenomenological inquiry (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

3.4 Data Collection

Data was collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted in confidential settings, in-person on participant's preference. Each interview lasted between one to two hours, allowing adequate time for participants to articulate their experiences in detail. With informed consent, all interviews were recorded to ensure fidelity in data analysis. Following each session, the interviews were transcribed and subjected to preliminary memoing to facilitate thematic categorization. Thematic analysis, consistent with DPA principles, was then applied to identify recurrent patterns, meanings, and structural themes emerging from the narratives (Giorgi, 2009; Smith et al., 2009). This analytic process preserved the phenomenological commitment to grounding findings in participants' lived realities.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical rigor was maintained throughout the study process in alignment with established qualitative research standards. Confidentiality and anonymity of all participants were strictly protected. Identifying information was anonymized during transcription, and data were stored securely in encrypted digital formats. Participants were fully briefed about the study's aims, scope, and their rights, including the right to withdraw at any stage without consequence. Informed consent was obtained prior to participation. Furthermore, participants were assured that any sensitive information disclosed during interviews would be treated with discretion and would not be shared with any third parties.

Chapter IV: Analysis and Results

4.1 Data Analysis

The early turnover of Joint Secretaries in the Nepali civil service is a growing concern, often resulting from multiple personal, professional, and systemic challenges. This section explores the reasons behind such decisions based on the lived experiences of Joint Secretaries, presenting firsthand accounts of their struggles and decisions to leave the civil service early.

Case 1: Left 2.5 Years before Mandatory Retirement, General Administration Group)

Summary of the First-Person Accounts

I chose to leave the civil service earlier than planned—not just for financial reasons, but because I no longer saw a future for myself in a system that had become increasingly frustrating and unrewarding. Once you reach the position of Joint Secretary, the path forward becomes extremely narrow. The chances of being promoted to Secretary are slim, and even then, it often depends more on political connections than on merit or performance. I realized I had hit a ceiling, and there were no real opportunities left for growth. On top of that, I was being transferred from one ministry to another so frequently that I couldn't build any momentum or see the long-term results of my work. It felt like I was constantly starting over, never staying long enough to make a meaningful impact.

Inside the ministries, I also had to deal with resistance from within—my own department, and at times, the trade unions. Any effort to bring reform or introduce change was met with suspicion or outright opposition. I found myself spending more time managing internal conflicts than doing the substantive work I cared about.

One of the most frustrating aspects of my role as a Joint Secretary was the constant uncertainty surrounding transfers. Just when I'd start settling into a ministry, understanding the issues, building relationships, and setting long-term plans in motion, I'd be abruptly moved—often without explanation. These frequent and unpredictable transfers made it nearly impossible to create any lasting impact. What made it worse was the pressure behind many of these moves; sometimes it was informal political signals, other times direct instructions influenced by personal interests or internal power struggles. It became clear that transfers were not always based on institutional needs or

performance, but rather on who held influence, who I may have upset, or who wanted control over a particular post. The pressure was always there—subtle at times, overt at others—and it slowly wore me down. Eventually, I realized I was spending more time managing political dynamics than actually doing the meaningful work I came to do, and in that kind of environment, staying no longer felt worthwhile. And then there was the transfer process itself—riddled with unhealthy practices and unavoidable political interference. Instead of being based on where I could contribute most, my postings seemed driven by hidden agendas, favoritism, or pressure from above. Sometimes, it felt like transfers were used as a threat, a way to control or silence those who didn't play along.

After years of navigating this environment, I asked myself: why should I continue in a job that offers so little growth, so much stress, and such instability, especially when I was eligible for a pension and had better opportunities elsewhere? Many of my peers had already moved on to international organizations or consultancy roles, earning more and living with greater professional freedom and balance. Eventually, I made the same choice of resigning from the job, however I am not actively engaged in any profession.'

Case 2 (Left 1.5 Years before Mandatory Retirement, Nepal Audit Service)

Summary of the First-Person Accounts

'Despite having a strong performance record, I was overlooked for promotion while someone with political backing was promoted instead. That was when I realized that my efforts were not valued, and I decided to leave.' He stated, 'When promotions are not based on merit, motivation disappears. Seeing no future in a system that ignored hard work, I chose to step away.' He added that 'The Public Service Commission recommended me for promotion to a special class as the top candidate based on my performance. However, the government chose to promote another candidate who was ranked the lowest, citing the need to represent women in the special class'. He further mentioned that 'performance and integrity are the key factors for promotion,' yet the government's decision appears to have been based on a different set of criteria. He expressed, 'I never joined the civil service for personal gain. I believed in ethical service, but when I saw that those who aligned with powerful groups advanced while honest

officers were sidelined, I became deeply frustrated. I was given unimportant assignments and had no career growth. That was when I realized that staying in the system was no longer worth it.’ He further noted, ‘It became evident that those willing to do favors for politicians and influential groups were promoted quickly. Those of us who wanted to work honestly and remain neutral were left behind, making it impossible to stay motivated.’

Case 3 (Left 1.5 Years before Mandatory Retirement, General Administration Group)

Summary of the First-Person Accounts

Health issues were a big factor in my decision to leave the civil service earlier than I had planned. I’ve been dealing with chronic health problems for years, and over time, the job began to take a serious toll on me. The government transferred me to a province level that was far from ideal, and that made it even harder for me to manage my health. The stress of the job, combined with the physical challenges of the new location, left me feeling constantly drained and unable to focus on my well-being.

As my health worsened, my family became increasingly concerned. They started pushing me to reconsider staying in the job, especially as they could see how it was affecting me. Their support and concern played a major role in my decision-making. They were worried about my long-term health and urged me to think about my future. I also realized that at that point, there was no real chance for me to be promoted to Secretary. With no clear path forward and already being eligible for my pension, I saw that quitting the job made the most sense. It wasn’t an easy decision, but with my health and family’s well-being in mind, leaving the job seemed like the responsible choice.

Case 4 (Left 2 years before Mandatory Retirement, General Administration Group)

Summary of the First-Person Accounts

‘I was leading a critical infrastructure project when, suddenly, I was transferred without justification. It was clear that political interference was at play’. He said, ‘I tried to resist a vested interest of higher officials; however, I tried to refuse. After some days I was transferred to another place. I always took it as normal process, however the frequency to repeat same phenomenon is increases. Similarly, watching my hard work go to waste

was demoralizing. That's when I decided I no longer wanted to be part of such a flawed system.' He explained, 'I saw honest officers become scapegoats in corruption inquiries. I didn't want to take that risk. Leaving early ensured financial security and allowed me to avoid unnecessary stress.' He further noted, 'Staying too long in regulatory positions increases the risk of being dragged into controversies. I decided that early retirement was the safer choice.' He further explained, 'Transfers are often used as a tool for punishment. If an officer does not align with certain political groups, they are transferred to remote or irrelevant positions. This instability forced me to question my future in the civil service.' In some cases, after taking a stand against corruption, I noticed that my colleagues began distancing themselves from me. I was excluded from important meetings, denied crucial project approvals. The hostility and isolation made it impossible to continue my service with integrity.' The pressure became unbearable, and I had no choice but to leave.

#Case 5 (Left before 4 years Mandatory Retirement, General Administration Group)

Summary of the First-Person Accounts

'At the last phase of my career, I was forced to transfer to Province as a secretary, however, my health was not fine at that time. I frequently requested the government to arrange my posting inside the Kathmandu valley. However, the government posted me to the province. I will get a pension, anyway, so why should I take pressure to continue the job?'. Then I took a strong decision to resign from the job. Personal and family considerations also play a crucial role in early turnover decisions. He mentioned, 'Frequent transfers disrupted my family life. Leaving was the only way to provide them with stability.' He said, 'Being constantly transferred made it difficult to manage family responsibilities. After years of struggling to balance work and personal life, I chose voluntary retirement to prioritize my loved ones.' He further added, 'As my pension had already matured, why should I compromise my family's concerns? I decided to quit the job to balance my personal life and spend quality time with my family.'

Case 6 (Left 4 years before Mandatory Retirement, General Administration Group)

Summary of the First-Person Accounts

‘I had already qualified for my pension, so financially, I had a safety net. But staying on in government service meant continuing to earn just a fraction of what I could be making elsewhere. Why should I remain in a high-pressure, politically sensitive job when consultancy roles offer not only double the income but also greater autonomy and a healthier work-life balance?’ He further pointed out a broader trend among his colleagues: Many of my peers have transitioned to international organizations, NGOs, or policy think tanks, where they’re earning significantly more. The contrast is stark—low pay, constant political interference, and high stress in government versus high pay, professional freedom, and stability outside. For many of us, continuing in the system simply doesn’t make financial or personal sense anymore.’

Case 7 (Left 1 year before Mandatory Retirement, Nepal Parliamentary Service)

Summary of the First-Person Accounts

‘A significant number of employees tend to leave their positions soon after becoming eligible for a pension. This decision is often driven by the desire to secure their pension entitlements while avoiding the uncertainties and risks that may arise from remaining in service—such as organizational changes, policy shifts, or potential disciplinary actions. Even senior officials, who hold influential positions, are not immune to these concerns and often opt to resign once their pension is secured.’ Additionally, he emphasized that ‘balancing professional responsibilities with personal and family life becomes increasingly challenging as time goes on. For many, including himself, family commitments—such as caring for children or aging parents—play a critical role in deciding to step away from the civil service before reaching the mandatory retirement age.’ He further highlighted the financial limitations inherent in civil service roles: the income from civil service is very low. ‘I’ve always struggled to provide a quality life for my family—whether it’s affording good education for my children, ensuring access to proper healthcare, or meeting basic aspirations like owning a house or a vehicle.’ He continued, ‘Why should I work for half the salary when there are better opportunities available? Careers abroad and jobs in international organizations offer far greater

potential for financial growth and professional development. Since my priority is my family's well-being, I made the decision to leave my government job.' He further mentioned: staying in the civil service long-term would not allow me to meet my personal and financial goals. As a result, I decided to pursue more lucrative and fulfilling opportunities beyond the public sector.'

4.2 Theme Generation

Based on the lived experiences of seven Joint Secretaries who left the service before reaching their mandatory retirement age and service tenure, the following section highlights the reasons behind their turnover decisions. The interviews revealed multiple interrelated factors influencing voluntary early exits from the civil service. These factors reflect a convergence of personal, professional, and systemic challenges experienced by senior officers, particularly those at the Joint Secretary level. The following sub-sections present the thematic categories supported by first-person narratives (verbatim) drawn from the seven case studies.

4.2.1 Career Stagnation and Limited Growth Opportunities

A recurring theme across interviews was the sense of career stagnation after reaching the Joint Secretary level. Participants expressed disillusionment with the promotion system, which they perceived as opaque, politically influenced, and detached from meritocratic principles. Many felt that their professional growth plateaued, with limited opportunities for advancement based on performance. This perception eroded their motivation and loyalty to the service.

"After becoming a Joint Secretary, I realized I had hit a ceiling. Promotions were not about performance anymore—they were about politics. No matter how well I performed, the path to Secretary was blocked unless I played the political game." (Case 1)

"When someone ranked lowest gets promoted over you, even after you top the Public Service Commission's list, what message does that send? It told me that hard work didn't matter. That's when I decided enough was enough." (Case 2)

4.2.2 Frequent and Politically Motivated Transfers

Frequent and unpredictable transfers emerged as a major source of dissatisfaction. Respondents highlighted how such movements often lacked justification and were influenced more by political calculations than institutional requirements. These transfers disrupted the continuity of

their work, hindered long-term project implementation, and created personal instability, ultimately contributing to their decision to exit prematurely.

“Just when I started making progress in one ministry, I was abruptly transferred—no explanation, no reason. It felt like I was being moved around like a pawn in someone else’s game.” (Case 1)

“Transfers weren’t about institutional need—they were about who you upset or who wanted your post. It became clear that if you didn’t comply, you were sent off. That constant uncertainty broke my motivation.” (Case 4)

4.2.3 Political Interference and Corruption

Many participants expressed concerns about increasing political interference and the normalization of unethical practices. They reported being pressured by political actors to make decisions that contradict established rules or ethical standards. When they resisted, they often faced punitive transfers or professional isolation. The erosion of ethical norms made them feel alienated, and some feared being scapegoated for not complying with corrupt demands.

“I tried to resist the pressure from vested interests, and I paid the price. Suddenly, I was transferred. It wasn’t even subtle anymore—if you didn’t bend, you were out.” (Case 4)

“I didn’t join the civil service to please politicians. But I saw how those who aligned with power got ahead, while honest officers like us were sidelined. That’s when I knew I didn’t belong here anymore.” (Case 2)

“Being honest became a liability. I saw good officers being dragged into corruption cases just because they didn’t comply. I didn’t want to end up as another scapegoat.” (Case 4)

4.2.4 Health Issues and Personal Well-being

The demanding nature of civil service work, compounded by constant transfers and institutional neglect, took a toll on the physical and mental health of some officers. Participants shared how the pressure and lack of supportive environments impacted their well-being. The absence of mechanisms to accommodate health concerns made it difficult for them to continue in their roles, prompting voluntary exits.

“My health was deteriorating, but instead of being considerate, they posted me far from proper healthcare. The stress, the travel—it was just too much.” (Case 3)

“My family watched me fall apart. They told me, ‘You’ve given enough—now it’s time

to take care of yourself.’ I listened. At some point, health has to come first.” (Case 5)

4.2.5 Financial Constraints and Limited Income

Although civil service is traditionally seen as a stable career, financial dissatisfaction, especially in comparison to private or international opportunities, emerged as a secondary but influential factor. Some participants felt that after decades of service, they were not sufficiently compensated, particularly when considering the financial needs of their families or retirement plans.

“I was already eligible for my pension, and I saw my peers earning double—sometimes triple—what I did, working in international organizations. Staying back just didn’t make financial sense.” (Case 6)

“I couldn’t afford to give my kids the education they deserved. Civil service pay wasn’t cutting it. I had to leave to ensure my family’s future.” (Case 7)

4.2.6 Family Pressures and Work-Life Imbalance

Work-life imbalance due to institutional demands and frequent transfers emerged as another recurring theme. Participants described how their roles placed stress on family members, especially children and spouses. In many cases, civil servants had to prioritize professional obligations over familial responsibilities, leading to long-term strain and emotional fatigue.

“I kept getting transferred, and my family life took the hit. My children changed schools too many times, my spouse had to put their career on hold. I finally said—this isn’t worth it.” (Case 5)

“Balancing elderly parents, kids, and a stressful job became impossible. When my pension matured, I saw the chance to finally give my family the stability they needed.” (Case 7)

4.2.7 Frustration with Organizational Culture and Internal Resistance

Officers who attempted to introduce reforms or new ideas often faced resistance from within their own institutions. The bureaucratic culture was described as rigid and hostile to change. This internal pushback discouraged innovation and made some officers feel isolated in their roles.

“You try to bring change, and the very people in your department resist you. Sometimes it felt like I was fighting my own team more than solving real problems.” (Case 1)

“I was excluded from meetings; my files didn’t move. The message was clear: if you don’t fall in line, you get isolated. I couldn’t work like that anymore.” (Case 4)

4.2.8 Lack of Recognition and Reward for Effort

Participants also noted a lack of appreciation or acknowledgment for their sustained efforts and contributions. Recognition was perceived to be uneven and often politically motivated. This led to disillusionment among those who believed in a merit-based system.

“Despite consistently delivering results, I was never given important assignments. Everything went to those with the ‘right’ connections. It’s hard to stay motivated when nobody acknowledges your work.” (Case 2)

“I poured my energy into every role, but in the end, I was invisible. That realization—that effort alone doesn’t get you anywhere—was what pushed me to leave.” (Case 1)

Chapter V: Discussion and Conclusion

5.1 Discussion

The phenomenon of voluntary turnover decisions among Joint Secretaries in Nepal's civil service reflects a complex interplay of individual, institutional, and systemic factors. Drawing on thematic insights and the extant literature, it becomes evident that such exits are not anomalies but rather symptoms of deeper organizational dysfunctions. They emerge from the cumulative burden of career stagnation, politicized practices, health and family considerations, and diminishing professional motivation; all validated through multiple theoretical lenses including Organizational Commitment Theory (Meyer & Allen, 1991), Public Service Motivation (Perry & Wise, 1990), and Burnout Theory (Maslach & Leiter, 2008). The interview data reveal that voluntary turnovers are rarely driven by a single cause. Rather, they emerge from the cumulative burden of organizational stagnation, political interference, work-life imbalance, health issues, and a lack of meaningful recognition, which are underscored in the broader literature on public sector turnover (Grissom et al., 2016; Kim, 2005).

5.1.1 Career Stagnation and the Psychological Contract

A recurring theme was career stagnation—where Joint Secretaries felt they had reached a professional ceiling, with limited opportunities for upward mobility. This aligns with Dalton and Todor's (1979) expanded turnover model, which suggests that when employees perceive a lack of challenge or growth, their likelihood of exiting increases. The psychological contract—employees' beliefs about mutual obligations between them and the organization—appears to have been violated when performance and integrity failed to translate into promotions or meaningful roles. This breakdown leads to diminished organizational commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991), reinforcing the decision to resign. This finding resonates with Herzberg's (1959) two-factor theory, where the absence of motivators like recognition and career advancement drives dissatisfaction. Furthermore, Kristof's (1996) concept of person-organization misfit highlights the misalignment between individual aspirations and institutional culture, explaining the erosion of long-term commitment.

5.1.2 Politicization, Transfers, and Institutional Fragility

One of the most salient and demoralizing institutional stressors was the frequency and politicization of transfers. Respondents viewed transfers not as administrative tools but as mechanisms of control, punishment, or patronage. This theme echoes Cho and Lewis (2012), who argue that lack of procedural justice in human resource decisions significantly erodes employees' trust in the system. When performance becomes disconnected from rewards or recognition, the motivational foundation of public service begins to collapse. This institutional fragility is further evidenced in the literature by Dahal (2016) and Sharma (2024), who document how politicization undermines meritocracy and fosters cynicism. The burnout framework by Maslach and Leiter (2008) becomes particularly relevant to the employees' disengagement when they face value conflicts, repeated emotional stress, and organizational unfairness. This violation of the meritocratic ideal weakens morale and leads to resignation as a rational coping mechanism.

5.1.3 Public Service Motivation and Ethical Disillusionment

Drawing from Perry and Wise's (1990) theory of Public Service Motivation (PSM), many respondents entered the civil service with a strong ethical and reform-oriented mindset. However, over time, their intrinsic motivation eroded in the face of systemic dysfunction. Several respondents spoke of being marginalized after resisting corruption or failing to comply with vested interests. This disillusionment is particularly potent when an individual's personal and professional values are misaligned with organizational practices. This insight builds on Rijal (2021) and Chaudhary (2021), who observed that reform-minded civil servants in Nepal face institutional resistance. The discussion adds persuasive weight by showing that turnover is not merely reactive but represents an intentional exit from ethical conflict. It also enriches Mobley's (1977) decision-making model, revealing that exit is based on both rational cost-benefit analysis and normative disillusionment.

5.1.4 Health, Family, and Work-Life Integration

Consistent with the burnout literature (Maslach & Leiter, 2008), health deterioration and chronic stress emerged as decisive factors for early resignation. Transfers to remote or inappropriate postings exacerbated existing health conditions, indicating a lack of institutional sensitivity to employees' well-being. Furthermore, family pressures, particularly the inability to balance care responsibilities or provide stability—prompted several officers to prioritize personal life over

continued government service. This shift is also reflective of a generational change in public employment norms. Unlike the past, where lifelong civil service careers were the norm, today's officers are increasingly attuned to personal well-being, alternative career paths, and the opportunity cost of staying in low-paying, politically fraught roles. The discussion extends the literature, particularly that of Giri (2007) and Sharma (2020), by revealing how new generations of public servants are redefining success in the civil service beyond tenure and hierarchy.

5.1.5 Financial Constraints and Opportunity Cost

Nearly all interviewees expressed concerns about the civil service's low remuneration relative to the responsibilities and risks involved. When juxtaposed with opportunities in international organizations, NGOs, and consultancy roles, the economic rationality of exiting becomes compelling. This supports economic models of turnover which assert that individuals make cost-benefit decisions based on expected utility (Mobley, 1977; Kim, 2005). Yet, the discussion also demonstrates that financial concerns act as a final trigger rather than the sole cause. They become significant only when compounded by stagnation, politicization, and burnout. This nuanced perspective complements Bansal et al.'s (2005) framework on switching behavior, where cumulative dissatisfaction leads to exit, particularly among individuals with alternative career capital.

5.2 Conclusion

Voluntary turnover among Nepal's Joint Secretaries is not a matter of personal choice alone—it reflects entrenched structural deficiencies in governance, motivation, and personnel management. Despite formal commitments to meritocracy and accountability, the civil service fails to offer meaningful career progression, fair HR practices, or protection from political interference. This dissonance between official rhetoric and operational reality fosters disillusionment, particularly among competent officers whose integrity and performance are met with stagnation, arbitrary transfers, and systemic neglect. A bureaucratic culture marked by hierarchy, internal rivalries, and weak institutional support further alienates dedicated professionals, while financial constraints render continued service increasingly untenable. Such attrition goes beyond individual exits—it signals erosion of institutional memory, disruption of reform efforts, and weakening of state capacity. These departures must be understood as critical indicators of disengagement and dysfunction. Addressing this crisis requires structural reform:

merit-based advancement, depoliticized HR systems, recognition of ethical service, and enhanced well-being support. Without these changes, the civil service risks a continued exodus of capable leaders, jeopardizing its role in sustaining democratic governance.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following policy and managerial recommendations are proposed:

- **Institutionalize Merit-Based Promotions and Transfers:** Create transparent, criteria-based systems for career advancement and postings. This would enhance predictability and fairness, helping rebuild organizational trust.
- **Strengthen Psychological Contract through Recognition and Voice:** Recognize and reward integrity, performance, and reform-oriented behavior. Institutional platforms for employee voice and feedback should be established.
- **Address Health and Work-Life Balance:** Design policies for health-sensitive postings, mental health support, and family-inclusive HR practices, especially for mid-career officers.
- **Revise Compensation and Benefits Structures:** Benchmark pay and benefits against private and development sectors to retain high-performing officers and reduce economic push factors.
- **Depoliticize Bureaucratic Processes:** Strengthen the Public Service Commission's autonomy and implement robust safeguards against political interference in transfers and appointments.

5.4 Suggestions for Future Research

- **Quantitative Validation:** Future studies should use larger datasets to quantitatively test the themes identified here, especially across service groups and geographic postings.
- **Gender and Inclusion Lens:** Disaggregated analysis by gender, ethnicity, and social background would shed light on differential turnover experiences and equity concerns.
- **Comparative Perspectives:** A cross-national study on mid-career turnover in similar bureaucratic contexts (e.g., South Asia or fragile democracies) would help benchmark Nepal's challenges and best practices.
- **Impact of Exit on Public Sector Capacity:** Longitudinal studies exploring how premature exits affect institutional memory, reform continuity, and policy outcomes are

critical for understanding long-term impacts.

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Appendix 1: Interview Checklist

Objective: To capture rich, first-person accounts and lived experiences and insights into the reasons for voluntary turnover decision in the Nepali civil service, focusing on organizational, personal, and systemic factors.

I. Introductory Questions

- ✓ Introduction, ice breakers and climate setting questions/dialogues
- ✓ Could you briefly describe your career journey in the civil service?
- ✓ How long had you been in service when you decided to resign?
- ✓ How would you describe your overall experience in the civil service?

II. Key Questions

- ✓ How would you describe your career growth during your time in the civil service?
- ✓ Did you feel there were opportunities for further career advancement after reaching your last position?
- ✓ How would you evaluate the promotion process during your career? Was it based on merit, seniority, or political affiliation?
- ✓ Did you experience any challenges regarding career progression, such as barriers or ceilings to advancement?
- ✓ Can you describe your experiences with transfers during your tenure? How often did they occur?
- ✓ How did these transfers impact your work performance and motivation?
- ✓ Were the reasons for your transfers communicated clearly to you?
- ✓ Do you believe these transfers were politically motivated or based on personal factors?
- ✓ Did you ever experience political interference in your work? How did it affect your ability to perform your duties effectively?
- ✓ Were you ever pressured to align with political groups or individuals?
- ✓ How did political dynamics affect your decisions and actions within the civil service?
- ✓ Were there situations where you had to navigate internal conflicts or resistance from colleagues or unions?
- ✓ Do you feel your hard work and contributions were recognized and rewarded?
- ✓ Were your achievements acknowledged within the organization, or did you feel sidelined?
- ✓ Did you observe any disparity between performance-based recognition and promotions within the organization?
- ✓ Did health concerns, either physical or mental, influence your decision to leave the service?
- ✓ How did the demands of your role impact your health and overall well-being?
- ✓ Did you find that the nature of your role made it challenging to manage your health, especially during the later years of your career?
- ✓ How did the financial rewards of the civil service compare with your options outside the service, such as consultancy roles or positions in international organizations?

- ✓ Did you feel financially constrained within the civil service compared to better-paying opportunities elsewhere?
- ✓ Were the availability of pension benefits a deciding factor in your decision to leave?
- ✓ How did your role in the civil service impact your ability to maintain a work-life balance?
- ✓ Were there conflicts between your professional responsibilities and personal/family commitments?
- ✓ How did your family's views or concerns play a role in your decision to leave?
- ✓ After leaving, how did your quality of life improve in terms of family time, personal freedom, and overall well-being?

III. Final Reflection Questions

- ✓ Looking back, what would you say was the most significant reason for your early resignation?
- ✓ How did you feel during the decision-making process?
- ✓ In your view, what changes could have been made to retain you within the civil service?
- ✓ Do you have any reflections on the future of the civil service in Nepal based on your experiences?

IV. Closing Questions

- ✓ What advice would you give to current Joint Secretaries who might be contemplating a similar decision?
- ✓ Have you found other ways to contribute to public service or policy, even if you're not in a government role now?
- ✓ Is there anything else you feel is important for me to know about your experience and decision to leave?