ABSTRACT

Female migration has gained increasing attention in migration literature, but little is known about the complex interplay of factors influencing female head porters' (*kayayei's)* decisions to stay or return. This study examines the return intentions of female migrant head porters (*kayayei*) in the Greater Accra Metropolis, focusing on the dynamics of north–south migration in Ghana. Guided by Cassarino's (2004) theorising of return migration, this qualitative study investigates five key objectives: the lived experiences of *kayayei*, reasons for remaining in Accra, motivations for returning, challenges influencing return decisions, and the role of support systems in shaping these intentions. The study adopted a phenomenological approach, using purposive and snowball sampling to recruit 34 participants, including female head porters and key informants from relevant government agencies, shop owners, community leaders, healthcare workers and transport union leaders. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and analysed thematically using NVivo software. The findings indicate that intentions to return were shaped by a combination of economic opportunities, family obligations, social networks, and perceived security at both places of origin and destination. Experiences of urban hardship, such as poor accommodation, harassment, and limited access to healthcare, often interact with support systems, vocational training prospects, and individual preparedness to influence return intentions. The study offers valuable insights for policymakers, development practitioners, and migration scholars, highlighting the need for integrated policy interventions that address both economic empowerment and social protection for migrant women.