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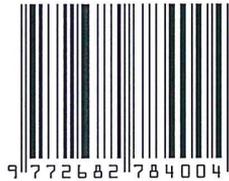
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The Effect of Family-Spouse Adjustment on Expatriate Adjustment: Malaysia as a Host Country

Noor Hafiza Zakariya¹, Abdul Kadir Othman², Zaini Abdullah³

¹School of Business Management, Universiti Utara Malaysia, Kedah, Malaysia

^{2,3}Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia

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Corresponding Author:
noorhafiza@uum.edu.my

ABSTRACT

Multinational corporations (MNCs) tend to employ and send their expatriates to other countries known as host countries to manage international businesses. Once expatriates could adapt and adjust themselves to the host countries, perhaps in return would enhance their job performance. Normally, expatriates are accompanied by their spouse and family members in the host countries. They could be a major influencer to expatriate adjustment during the accomplishment of the international assignments at the host country. Thus, the purpose of this study is to investigate the effect of the family-spouse adjustment on expatriate adjustment in the host country, Malaysia. This study adopted a quantitative method with purposive sampling. Based on the result of 139 expatriates who are working at MNCs in Malaysia, family-spouse adjustment significantly influences expatriate adjustment. Therefore, MNCs should consider this factor in managing expatriates' adjustment in the host country. Also, this study would promote new insights for international human resource management field and cross-cultural managements' scholars and practitioners.

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1. Introduction

Due to globalization, organizations tend to expand their international business and operation around the globe, which require organizations to select their best expatriates to manage overseas subsidiaries and companies. Despite achieving a high level of job performance during the international assignment, expatriates may face poor adaptation and low level of acculturation at the host country due to several factors. Among the relatively important factors that can not be ignored is a family-spouse adjustment. Besides, during expatriation period, most expatriates are married and accompanied by their spouse and family members. As supported by Chen and Shaffer (2018), almost 80% of today's expatriates relocate with their spouse or partner. Their spouse represents a valuable asset or liability for MNCs (Chen & Shaffer, 2018). Further, the importance of expatriates' spouses before and during the international assignment has been well documented in prior studies (Shaffer & Harrison, 2001). Moreover, expatriates would choose to return early or prematurely to their home country when their spouse faces a lack of adjustment at the host country (Kennard,

2013). Thus, it shows that family-spouse adjustment could be one of the crucial factors of expatriate success (Erogul & Rahman, 2017). Therefore, this study tries to provide empirical evidence of the effect of the family-spouse adjustment on expatriate adjustment at the host country, namely Malaysia.

2. Literature Review

Expatriate Adjustment

Normally, when expatriates arrive at host countries, the changes take place in their response to a new environment. They will be sensitive to any feelings of misplacing trust, especially during the initial time abroad (Haslberger & Brewster, 2009). They are required to perform the same set of functions that they would have on the domestic environment but this time in a very different complex environment, with differences in cultural norms, regulations, routines, organizational work practices, and professional cultures (Konanahalli, Oyedele, Meding, & Spillane, 2011). Therefore, personal conflicts and stress situations could exist, which significantly affect their job performance and the organization's performance (Konanahalli et al., 2011).

Black (1988) defined expatriate cross-cultural adjustment as the degree to which an expatriate is psychologically comfortable with various aspects of the foreign country. While Black and Gregersen (1991) defined it as the degree of psychological comfort and familiarity that an individual has for the new environment. Additionally, Peltokorpi and Froese (2012) defined it as the degree to which expatriate can successfully cope with the nuances of a new environment and become comfortable with different aspects of a different environment. Despite these various definitions, Haslberger and Brewster (2009) noted that expatriate adjustment could be defined in many different forms, depending on the aspects one wants to stress. Therefore, this study has conceptualized expatriate adjustment as the degree to which expatriate can successfully cope with the nuances of a new environment and become comfortable with different aspects of a foreign environment (Peltokorpi & Froese, 2012) by adopting Black and Stephens's (1989) scale. Black and Stephens (1989) have promoted three facets of expatriate adjustment. These three dimensions have been used in prior expatriate researches (e.g., Konanahalli et al., 2011; Peltokorpi & Froese, 2012; Bhatti, Kaur, & Battour, 2013b; Bhatti, Battour, Ismail, & Sundram, 2014). First, the adjustment to the general living environment in foreign culture includes housing, food, and other aspects of the foreigner culture. Second, the adjustment to work, such as meeting job responsibilities and performance expectations. Last but not least, the adjustment to interactional situations and norms of the host culture, such as socializing and speaking with host-country nationals (Black & Stephens, 1989).

Family-Spouse Adjustment

Family-spouse adjustment in the present study has been defined as the ability of the family-spouse to adjust to an unfamiliar foreign culture (Black & Stephens, 1989). This construct would generally influence and play a vital role in expatriate adjustment (Black & Stephens, 1989). Previous scholars have examined the effects of family-spouse adjustment on expatriate adjustment (e.g., Caligiuri, Hyland, Joshi, & Bross, 1998; Shaffer and Harrison, 2001). Also, Takeuchi, Yun, and Tesluk (2002) have examined the relationship between family-spouse adjustment and expatriate adjustment and found that there are a cross-over effect and reciprocal relationships between expatriates and spouses adjustment. Consistently, Friedman, Dyke, and Murphy (2009) mentioned that expatriate adjustment could be influenced by family-spouse adjustment. Besides, Webb and Wright (1996) argued that the easier the family adjusts to the foreign culture, the easier the adjustment

of the expatriate becomes. More than that, a study from Ko (2014) has revealed that family-spouse adjustment has an impact on the decisions of an expatriate to accept an international assignment and may affect the general adjustment of an expatriate.

Further, Caligiuri et al. (1998) have found that family characteristics, such as family support, family communication, and family adaptation, were related to expatriate adjustment. Moreover, they found that family adjustment mediated the effect of family characteristics on expatriate work adjustment. Consistently, researchers have found that spouse and expatriate adjustment are positively related to expatriate intention to stay in the international business assignment (Ali, Zee, & Sanders, 2003). However, Malek, Budhwar, and Reiche (2015) have stated that there is no significant relationship between spouse adjustment and expatriate adjustment. Thus, previous research has shown conflicting results about family-spouse adjustment and expatriate adjustment (Simonelli, 2016). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between family-spouse adjustment and expatriate adjustment in Malaysia, known as a multicultural country. Thus, the present study proposes three main hypotheses that related to family-spouse adjustment and expatriate adjustment as per below:

- H1-** Family-spouse adjustment significantly influences general adjustment.
- H2-** Family-spouse adjustment significantly influences interaction adjustment.
- H3-** Family-spouse adjustment significantly influences work adjustment.

3. Research Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative method that focused on expatriates working at multinational corporations in the central region of Malaysia, particularly in Klang Valley and Selangor with 385 sample size. With purposive sampling technique, this study managed to get 195 responses through self-administered questionnaires. However, some responses were removed due to excessive missing and extreme outliers, which produced 139 data as a final sample.

In measuring the expatriate adjustment construct, this study adopted Black and Stephens's (1989) scale. By using a five-point Likert scale, respondents could respond to given statements from very unadjusted (1) to completely adjusted (5) for general, interaction, and work adjustment. On the other hand, in measuring family-spouse adjustment construct, respondents could rate their responses to five-point Likert scale ranging from very unadjusted (1) to completely adjusted (5) for general and interaction adjustment based on Black and Stephens's (1989) scale.

4. Results and Discussion

Based on the factor analysis of expatriate adjustment, the fourth component was produced and gave better result instead of three component. Based on the result, the total variance explained was 69.84%. Meanwhile, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value was 0.844, and there were no items dropped from the analysis. Also, with a value greater than 0.6, factorability was assumed. All the items were found above the acceptable level of 0.5 for measure sampling adequacy (MSA).

Table 1 Factor Analysis of Expatriate Adjustment

Items	Component			
	1	2	3	4
General Adjustment (GA)				
housing condition (ea2).	0.79			
living conditions in general (ea1).	0.78			
cost of living (ea5).	0.67			
food (ea3).	0.66			
Interaction Adjustment (IA)				
interaction with HCNs outside of work (ea9).		0.88		
socializing with HCNs (ea10).		0.85		
interaction with HCNs on a day-to-day basis (ea11).		0.75		
speaking with host country nationals (HCNs) (ea8).		0.52		
Work Adjustment (WA)				
performing specific job responsibilities/requirements (ea12).			0.80	
meeting performance standards and expectations (ea13).			0.79	
executing supervisory responsibilities (ea14).			0.73	
Additional Adjustment (AA)				
shopping (ea4).				0.71
health care facilities (ea7).				0.70
entertainment / recreation facilities and opportunities (ea6).				0.57
% of variance explained for each component	20.19	19.69	16.29	13.66
% of the total variance explained				69.84
Measures of Sampling Adequacy (MSA)				0.75-0.92
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO)				0.84
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (Approx. Chi-Square)				931.59
Degree of Freedom (df)				91
Significance				0.00

Therefore, the restatement of hypotheses was listed as per below:

- H1-** Family-spouse adjustment significantly influences general adjustment.
- H2-** Family-spouse adjustment significantly influences interaction adjustment.
- H3-** Family-spouse adjustment significantly influences work adjustment.
- H4-** Family-spouse adjustment significantly influences additional adjustment.

Figure 1 provides a research framework for this study.

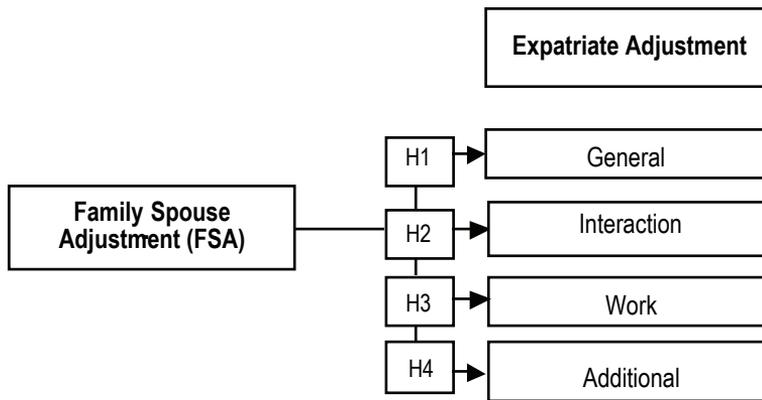


Table 2 Descriptive statistics, reliability coefficients and bivariate correlations (n=139)

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
Family-spouse adjustment	3.83	0.50	(0.86)				
General adjustment	3.97	0.63	0.36**	(0.81)			
Interactional adjustment	3.63	0.69	0.44**	0.42**	(0.84)		
Work adjustment	3.91	0.63	0.31**	0.60**	0.46**	(0.82)	
Additional adjustment	3.80	0.63	0.29**	0.47**	0.51**	0.41**	(0.63)

Notes: **p<0.01; *p<0.05; SD= standard deviation and coefficient alphas are presented along the diagonal.

As shown in Table 3, the result indicated that all four hypotheses were supported (H1, H2, H3, H4). In other words, the family-spouse adjustment would affect all dimensions of expatriate adjustment in the host country. The highest R-value was interaction adjustment, R= 0.444, and the lowest was an additional adjustment with R= 0.295. This finding was consistent with Black and Stephen (1989), who found that family-spouse adjustment, was highly correlated with expatriate adjustment. In a similar vein, Caligiuri et al. (1998) concluded that family characteristics comprising family support, family communication, and family adaptability were also related to expatriate adjustment. Thus, the issue of family-spouse adjustment should not be ignored by organizations if they want to ensure that their expatriates could adjust and achieve a high level of job performance during the international assignments. In other words, certain training or programs could be done for pre-departure and post-arrival at the host country by organizations.

Table 3 Linear Regression Analysis between Family-Spouse Adjustment and Expatriate Adjustment Dimensions

Independent Variables	Expatriate Adjustment Dimensions			
	General	Interaction	Work Adjustment	Additional
	Adjustment (G.A)	Adjustment (I.A)	(W.A)	Adjustment (A.A)
	Standardized Beta Coefficient			
Family-Spouse Adjustment	0.366**	0.440**	0.312**	0.295**
R	0.366	0.440	0.312	0.295
R ²	0.134	0.194	0.097	0.087
Adjusted R ²	0.128	0.188	0.091	0.080
F	21.209	32.968	14.781	13.043
Sig.	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Durbin-Watson	1.991	2.140	1.822	2.054

Notes: **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed)

5. Conclusion

Organizations should consider this factor while managing expatriate adjustment because expatriates' spouse and family members tend to feel stress at the early stage of arrival and the adjustment process. They are required to manage themselves to adapt to the new environment in the host country as they might face social isolation, socio-political constraints, and changes in their social or work status, that they are normally jobless. Therefore, the issue of family-spouse adjustment should not be ignored by organizations if they want to improve, enhance, or ensure that their expatriates could adjust and perform in their international assignment successfully. Last but not least, this study could provide additional insights for international human resource management practitioners, scholar, and expatriating firm in managing expatriate adjustment in the host country.

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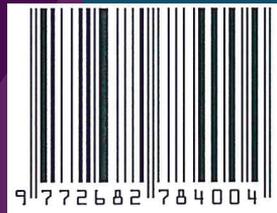
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