

Predictors of Life Satisfaction of the Expatriate Spouse/Partner

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This paper looked into the factors that determine the life satisfaction of an expatriate spouse/partner. Social identity and identity disruption theories informed the testing of hypotheses. This study utilized snowball sampling. The initial survey started by sending emails, containing the link to a questionnaire in Google Forms, to expatriate spouses/partners who were in Malaysia and Singapore. They were encouraged to forward the email to other expatriate spouses/partners. The total number of respondents was 128. The survey was undertaken from September 2016 to April 2017. Regression results supported the predictions on the individual determinants of life satisfaction, namely, a negative change in employment status and self-efficacy. The study did not find support for the hypotheses regarding interpersonal and environmental factors and life satisfaction. Future research can further look into the mediating role of self-efficacy on the relationship between support from family and life satisfaction, and the nuances of the relationship between support from friends and life satisfaction.

Keywords: Expatriate, expatriate spouse/partner, life satisfaction, social identity theory, identity disruption theory

1 Introduction

Globalization progresses at an increasing pace: from simple export and import, to physically locating plants and offices in areas where factors of production, including labor are inexpensive; or where new and vibrant markets for products are more attractive compared to the home market that may have grown stagnant.

For global business, recruitment is conducted on a global scale, to staff international units with expatriates, from the parent company or headquarters, depending on what these units need. The needs can be in terms of coordination, control, and transfer of knowledge (Torbiorn, 1994). In addition, expatriates who may be third-country nationals may be recruited to address other needs, such as exposure to international operations, knowledge transfer, as well as training.

There have been considerable studies on expatriation, most of them dealing with expatriate adjustment (Harvey, 1997; Selmer, 2001; Shaffer, Harrison, & Gilley, 1999; Shaffer, Harrison, Gregersen, Black, & Ferzandi, 2006; Stroh, Dennis, & Cramer, 1994; Takeuchi, Yun, & Tesluk, 2002), job satisfaction (Naumann, 1993; Supangco & Mayrhofer, 2014), performance (Kraimer, Wayne, & Jaworski, 2001; Liu & Shaffer, 2005; Shaffer et al., 2006), termination (Caligiuri, 2000; Garonzik, Brockner, & Siegel, 2000; Shaffer & Harrison, 1998), and repatriation (Briody & Baba, 1991; Feldman & Tompson, 1993; Gregersen & Stroh, 1997; Linehan & Scullion, 2002), among others. Studies have also shown a positive relationship between expatriate and spouse/partner adjustment (Black, 1988; Black & Gregersen, 1991; Takeuchi et al., 2002). However, the inability of the spouse/partner to adjust is cited as one of the causes of expatriate failure: commonly defined in terms of premature returns (Black & Stephens, 1989; Cole & Nesbeth, 2014). In response, studies have begun to focus on what determines spouse/partner adjustment (Ali, Van der Zee, & Sanders, 2003; Black & Gregersen, 1991; Mohr & Klein, 2004; Punnett, 1997; Ramos, Mustafa, & Haddad, 2017; Shaffer & Harrison, 2001; Takeuchi & Hannon, 1996; Wiese, 2013; Wilson, 2011).

While expatriate spouse/partner adjustment has been fairly studied, the psychological health of the expatriate spouse/partner, often measured in terms of life satisfaction, remains understudied (Ramos et al., 2017; Wiese, 2013; Wilson, 2011).

"Life-satisfaction is the degree to which a person positively evaluates the overall quality of his/her life as-a-whole. In other words, how much the person likes the life he/she leads" (Veenhoven, 1996, p. 6). It is the cognitive component of subjective well-being. The other components include positive

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affect and negative affect. Inasmuch as life satisfaction is based on an overall evaluation of a person's quality of life, it is hardly susceptible to changes in short-term emotional reactions to life events. It is therefore considered a more stable component (Eid & Diener, 2004), and a key indicator of positive subjective well-being (Diener & Diener, 1995). Life satisfaction is important in itself. It also leads to good health and longevity, stable and rewarding social relationships, high productivity, and good citizenship behavior (Diener, 2020). Thus, given the sacrifices the expatriate spouse/partner has to bear to effect a successful expatriate assignment, he/she deserves to be satisfied with life as an expatriate spouse/partner.

Studies on life satisfaction of the expatriate spouse/partner found that social support was directly related to the life satisfaction of the expatriate spouse/partner (Ramos et al., 2017, p. 11; Wiese, 2013; Wilson, 2011, p. 16). Wilson (2011) also found, however, that general adjustment and interaction adjustment did not predict life satisfaction but remained positive predictors of affective balance. This implied that general and interaction adjustment did not necessarily result in the life satisfaction of the expatriate spouse/partner. These studies focused on the role of social support in explaining the life satisfaction of the expatriate spouse/partner. Moreover, given the contribution of the spouse/partner in the success or failure of the expatriation assignment, it is important to further our understanding of the life satisfaction of the expatriate spouse/partner by expanding the set of explanatory variables in this study.

This paper answers the research question: *what determines the life satisfaction of an expatriate spouse/partner*. Understanding the determinants of the life satisfaction of an expatriate spouse/partner is important in its own right, because the expatriate spouse/partner gives up many things that are very important to oneself, such as a career, social ties, cultural comfort, and much more. In addition, to the extent that life satisfaction directly affects intention to stay of either the spouse/partner or the expatriate (Wiese, 2013), it becomes relevant to the organization.

2 Models of Expatriate Adjustment

Black (1988) advanced that the degree of expatriate adjustment was composed of three dimensions, namely, general adjustment, interactional adjustment, and work adjustment. *General adjustment* pertained to external environment and general living conditions. *Work adjustment* was the expatriate's ease in doing job tasks and dealing with the work environment. *Interactional adjustment* related to dealing with host country nationals, whether at work or outside of work. Expatriate adjustment was conceptualized as being influenced by both anticipatory and in-country adjustment. The former included individual and organizational factors. The latter was composed of individual, job, organizational culture, organizational socialization, and non-work factors that encompass culture novelty and family-spouse/partner adjustment (Black, Mendenhall, & Oddou, 1991).

Aycan (1997) simplified and extended the framework of Black et al. (1991) by specifying expatriate characteristics and organizational characteristics of both parent and host companies, before as well as during expatriation, as predictors of general adjustment and consequently, work adjustment. Adjustment was multifaceted and defined as "*the degree of fit between the expatriate manager and the environment, both work and socio-cultural*" (Aycan, 1997, p. 436). In his model, Aycan (1997) specified that general adjustment, the degree to which the expatriate experiences psychological adjustment and socio-cultural adjustment, was the immediate predictor of work adjustment, which was composed of effectiveness and commitment especially to the host organization. Family adjustment was considered under employee characteristics in the post-arrival period.

However, models of expatriate adjustment fall short in explaining the expatriate spouse/partner adjustment. The expatriate spouse/partner experiences disproportionately significant disruption in his/her routines during expatriation. This is because the expatriate continues to work in the host country, and school-age children continue with their schooling, whereas some expatriate spouse/partner may have to settle without a career, and have to manage the household in a new and even utterly different culture (Adler, 2002). Thus, some of the factors considered important in

explaining expatriate adjustment are inadequate in explaining expatriate spouse/partner adjustment.

In order to realistically capture the factors that explain expatriate spouse/partner adjustment, Shaffer and Harrison (2001) developed a conceptual model that is anchored on social identity theory (Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1985), and identity disruption theory (Burke, 1991). Social identity theory proposes that aspects of a person's self-concept are influenced by the groups that one belongs to, implying that an individual has multiple identities, with each identity corresponding to a particular group (Tajfel & Turner, 1985). The process of identity formation is similar to a control system (Burke, 1991), where an identity is composed of the meanings of oneself in a social situation (Burke & Tully, 1977). The set of meanings constitutes a standard for defining oneself. When inputs from the environment or feedbacks do not conform to internal standard, some form of calibration occurs, where the individual alters his/her behavior in an effort to match the input from the environment with one's internal standards, thus reducing distress in the process.

On the other hand, the identity disruption theory asserts that any interruption of an organized process results in distress or anxiety (Burke, 1991). Thus, when the identity formation process is interrupted, distress occurs. In the context of expatriation, when an expatriate spouse/partner leaves home to accompany the expatriate to live in another country, the identity formation process is interrupted, resulting in distress. Effects of disruption of identity vary from lessened clarity of self-identity to a need to establish a new identity. Spouse/partner adjustment thus implies a loss of identity, such that new attachments must be formed and identity reestablished (Shaffer & Harrison, 2001).

In conceptualizing adjustment of an expatriate spouse/partner, Shaffer and Harrison (2001) considered the sources of identity formation as antecedents to expatriate spouse/partner adjustment: within oneself, interactions with others, and interactions with the situation or the environment. Individual factors included language fluency, self-efficacy, and change in employment status. Interpersonal factors included family and social networks. Environmental factors included cultural novelty, living conditions, and assignment duration. These factors were conceptualized to influence spouse/partner adjustment that consists of personal, relational, and cultural dimensions.

Shaffer and Harrison (2001) tested their model. Not all of the variables yielded significant results, such as the two personal identity variables, change in employment status, and general self-efficacy beliefs. On the other hand, two social identity variables, expatriate adjustment and breadth of a social network influenced all facets of adjustment. The rest of the variables influenced the different facets of adjustment differently.

Studies on life satisfaction identify the following internal predictors: inborn temperament, personality, outlook, and resilience. Moreover, external predictors of life satisfaction include sufficient material resources, sufficient social resources, and desirable society (Diener, 2020). Inasmuch as the process of expatriation results in identity disruption, and identity must be rebuilt or recreated in a new setting, this paper extends the conceptual framework of Shaffer and Harrison (2001) in order to determine the life satisfaction of an expatriate spouse/partner.

3 Hypotheses Development

In using social identity and identity disruption theories as the frameworks, explanatory factors were broadened beyond the role of social support (Ramos et al., 2017; Wiese, 2013; Wilson, 2011). The disruptive factors that can bring about distress due to expatriation (a negative change in employment status) and factors that affect one's capacity to re-establish identity (self-efficacy, social support, parental demands, and duration of expatriation) disrupted by expatriation were examined.

These factors may also be viewed in terms of sources of identity formation: individual, interpersonal, and environmental. The following factors were included in this study: (1) individual factors: self-efficacy, and change in employment status; (2) interpersonal factors: support from family and friends, and parental demands; and (3) environmental factors: the length of stay in the host country. The gender and age of respondents are used as control variables.

3.1 Individual Factors

This study looked into the influence of two individual factors: a negative change in employment status and general self-efficacy beliefs.

One source of distress when an expatriate spouse/partner leaves home to join the partner in a foreign assignment is a negative change in employment status. Individuals spend at least eight hours a day at work. For some individuals, work is more than just getting the financial rewards from it; it is an important source of fulfillment (Wrzesniewski, 2002). For some people, work is an important source of self-identity by fulfilling the need to be productive (Taylor-Carter & Cook, 1995). From the perspective of social identity theory, work is a source of identity and status. The latter can be derived from being employed in a large organization, being part of management, etc. Thus, expatriate spouses/partners, who find themselves in different employment status, may experience distress and anxiety. It calls for a redefinition of work and employment, and their role in one's life in the new environment.

Studies have shown that employment enhances life satisfaction (Melin, Fugl-Meyer, & Fugl-Meyer, 2003). It has also been found that a negative change in employment status decreases self-esteem, and increases psychological withdrawal (Cakar, 2012; Schlenker & Gutek, 1987) and depression (Dooley, Prause, & Ham-Rowbottom, 2000). Thus, it is expected that:

H1a: Life satisfaction of spouses/partners who experience a negative change in employment is lower than those who do not.

Another factor that is advanced to explain life satisfaction is self-efficacy. Perceived self-efficacy pertains to the assessment of one's success in dealing with a task or a situation (Bandura, 1982). Sources of self-efficacy information include prior experience, behavioral models, persuasion from others, and perception of capacity to achieve goals (Bandura, 1977). Individuals in a new environment face uncertainty, and even experience a loss of bearing on who one is. To the extent that a person holds positive self-efficacy beliefs in finding one's bearing and managing oneself in the new environment, a higher life satisfaction is expected. Bandura (1997) argues that inasmuch as individuals with high self-efficacy are confident in their ability to achieve goals, they are less affected by any negative feedback from the environment. Thus, even occasional setbacks that are eventually overcome serve as cues that difficult challenges can be mastered by persistent effort. Moreover, once self-efficacy is restored, it can be generalized to other similar situations (Bandura, Adams, & Beyer, 1977).

Empirical studies show a positive relationship between self-efficacy and life satisfaction (Cikrikci & Odaci, 2016; Coffman & Gilligan, 2002/2003). In another study, the effect of self-efficacy on life satisfaction is mediated by positive affect (Zhang, 2016). Thus, it is hypothesized that:

H1b: Self-efficacy is positively related to life satisfaction.

3.2 Interpersonal Relationships

Interpersonal relationships, as well as goals and values congruent with them, are an important part of social identities (Oyserman, Elmore, & Smith, 2012). Family and friends are important interpersonal networks that can help an expatriate spouse/partner adjust in the new environment and enjoy a satisfying life. They lessen the disruptive effects of any transition, such as expatriation, to one's identity.

Although family and friends are a source of support, they fulfill distinct needs in the individual (Simons & West, 1984-1985). One study shows that emotional support from family relates to well-being. However, it is the instrumental support from friends that relates to well-being (Merz & Huxhold, 2010). Thus, separate hypotheses for these two sources of support are tested. The perceived closeness of family and friends influences happiness. Moreover, the perceived closeness of family explains life satisfaction, while the perceived closeness of friends influences self-esteem (Nguyen, Chatters, Taylor, & Mouzon, 2016). It also appears that as individuals get older, support from friends becomes a stronger predictor of well-being (Secor, Limke-McLean, & Wright, 2017), and life satisfaction (Roh, Lee, Lee, Shibusawa, & Yoo, 2015). However, support from friends has a weak effect on well-being in younger children and adolescents (Chu, Saucier, & Hafner, 2010). Thus, it is hypothesized that:

H2a: Support from family is positively related to life satisfaction.

H2b: Support from friends is positively related to life satisfaction.

Moreover, an expatriate spouse's/partner's activities revolve around the expatriate and immediate family. The immediate family can be a source of the familiar to an expatriate spouse's/partner's life, which buffers the effect of identity disruption. The children can open avenues for parents to interact with other members of the community through school activities, thus expanding the parents' social network as well (Braseby, 2010; Shaffer & Harrison, 2001). In addition, older children can explain to the parents the language and cultural practices they learn from the host country (Haslberger & Brewster, 2008). Thus, it is hypothesized that:

H2c: The number of accompanying children is positively related to life satisfaction.

3.3 Environmental Factors

Under environmental factors, the duration of stay in the host country is used. The duration of stay provides the expatriate spouses/partners enough time to learn the language and adjust to the culture of the host country (Haslberger & Brewster, 2008). Thus, they gain role clarity and are able to re-establish identity. It is also an indicator that they have developed some degree of acculturation in the new location.

One study reveals that within a three-year duration of an expatriate assignment, the length of time in the host country is directly related to adjustment, where adjustment results in psychological well-being (Haslberger & Brewster, 2008). However, beyond three years, deep-seated changes in identity are expected (Haslberger & Brewster, 2008). Moreover, studies have shown that the assignment duration is positively related to spouse/partner adjustment (Shaffer & Harrison, 2001). Thus, it is hypothesized that:

H3: Duration of stay in the host country is positively related to life satisfaction.

4 Data collection and analysis

The study utilized snowball sampling. After pretesting the questionnaire, the survey was started by sending emails, with the link to the online questionnaire in Google Forms, to expatriate spouses/partners who were in Malaysia and Singapore, and to others who may have known expatriate spouses/partners. They were informed of the objective of the study, how long the survey would take, and ensured confidentiality of data. They were also encouraged to forward the email to other expatriate spouses/partners. The results of the study were shared with respondents who indicated interest in receiving the results. The target number of respondents was 100, which gives an approximate margin of error of 10 and a significance level of five percent. However, a total number of 128 expatriate spouses/partners responded to the survey. The survey was undertaken from September 2016 to April 2017.

Frequency distributions, means, and mode were used to describe the profile of the respondents. To verify the dimensions of the measures used, factor analyses were conducted. Factor scores were saved and used in the subsequent regression analysis, which was used to address the research question. Collinearity and residual diagnostics were undertaken to ensure the robustness of results. Outliers were coded and included in the final regression run, and not excluded, in order to maintain degrees of freedom. Normality of residuals was determined using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test.

To minimize the threats of common method variance, several actions were undertaken. Both perceptual and non-perceptual measures were used in the analyses. In addition, items on the dependent and independent variables were placed on different pages. Likewise, the Harman's one-factor test (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986) was performed. Factor analysis revealed five factors, and no one factor accounted for the majority of the explained variance indicating that common method variance was not a threat.

5 Measures

In this study, multiple items to measure some concepts were used. Factor analyses were done to verify the dimensions of existing scales. To determine the internal consistency of the items, Cronbach's α was computed for each measure.

5.1 Dependent Variable

Life satisfaction is the cognitive-judgmental element of subjective well-being. The affective components of subjective well-being are negative and positive affects. Life satisfaction is measured using the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). It consists of five items utilizing a seven-point Likert-scale, where “1” is strongly disagree and “7” is strongly agree. In this study, Cronbach’s α is .94.

5.2 Independent Variables

Although self-efficacy belief is not a global trait, rather situation-specific, there are conditions which allow such beliefs to be generalized across distinct areas, such as: when activities utilize similar sub-skills, when the development of competencies needed in different domains are developed simultaneously, and when one experiences an extraordinary mastery of a difficult task that affects efficacy beliefs in various domains (Bandura, 2006). Thus, a general self-efficacy belief exists (Sherer et al., 1982). Inasmuch as the tasks confronting an expatriate spouse/partner are varied and nonspecific, and in the absence of existing measures of a situation-specific self-efficacy of an expatriate spouse/partner, a measure of self-efficacy beliefs using the New General Self-Efficacy Scale developed by Chen, Gully, and Eden (2001) is used. This measures a person’s degree of confidence in performing different tasks. There are eight items of five-point Likert-type scale, with “1” as strongly disagree and “5” as strongly agree. In this study, Cronbach’s α is .94.

A negative change in employment status is a binary variable where “1” is assigned to spouses/partners who used to work in the home country and are no longer working in the host country, and “0,” otherwise.

To measure social support, the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, & Farley, 1988) is used. Perceived social support is an assessment of connectedness to others and the belief that one gets support when needed, rather than the actual support received (Barrera, 1986). The scale is composed of 12 items of seven-point Likert-type scale, where “1” as strongly disagree and “7” as strongly agree. The original scale is designed by including items about the sources of support, namely: family, friends, and significant other. However, factor analysis done on the scale summarizes it into two factors, where items on family and significant other load into one factor, and items about friends load into the other factor. The first factor, which is labeled support from family, has a Cronbach α of .94. The second factor, which is labeled support from friends, has a Cronbach’s α of .95.

Parental demand is measured in terms of the number of accompanying children.

The duration of stay in the host country is the number of years from year of arrival up to the year when data were collected.

5.3 Control Variables

The control variables are introduced to account for the effects of those that may be related to either the dependent or the independent variables. There are two control variables used in this study: age and gender. Changes in well-being tend to be positive as one ages, but decreases as health problems emerge (Diener, 1984; Herzog & Rodgers, 1981), while social relationships increase with age (Butt & Beiser, 1987). Moreover, studies have shown that there exist gender-based differences in the life satisfaction of an expatriate spouse/partner (Copeland & Norell, 2002). For example, male and female spouses/partners may have common concerns, but there are also those dictated by gender roles (Copeland & Norell, 2002), which can be highlighted when gender role expectations in the host country are different from those in one’s culture (Fontaine, 1986). Moreover, the predominance of male expatriate makes spouse/partner support groups predominantly female and cater to female issues, thus making the male spouses/partners left out (Caligiuri, Joshi, & Lazarova, 1999).

Age is simply the age of the expatriate spouse/partner when the data were collected.

Gender is a binary variable where female is assigned the value “1” and male is assigned “0.”

6 Profile of Sample

This section introduces the typical expatriate spouse/partner in terms of demographic background, and expatriation experience.

A total of 128 expatriate spouses/partners responded to the survey. Using the suggested medium effect size ($f^2 = .15$), the level of power for $N = 128$ was determined to be .997 ($p = .05$).

Table 1 shows the demographic background, where they come from and where they are located, and the employment experiences of respondent expatriate spouses/partners. The average expatriate spouse/partner is 40.0 years old, female, and has obtained a bachelor's degree. On the other hand, the expatriate employee is 41.3 years old, with a bachelor's degree. There is an average of 1.3 children living with the expatriate and spouse/partner.

The average expatriate spouse/partner joins the expatriate who is assigned by the organization or who took a job offer in the host country. The expatriate spouse/partner mostly comes from Asia (79.7%) – where 71.9% of total respondents come from the Philippines – and they are in Asia (62.5%) – where top destinations were Singapore, 14.1% and Malaysia, 13.3%. In addition, the expatriate spouse/partner was employed before expatriation, and has worked an average of 9.7 years before expatriation. Now in the host country for an average of 4.7 years, the expatriate spouse/partner is not employed, and is not looking for employment. For those who are employed in the host country, job search started after settling for 4.9 months, and job search lasted an average of 4.5 months.

Table 1. Profile of Respondents

Variables	Mean/ Percentage	Standard Deviation	Number of Observations
Respondent's age (Years)	40.0	9.5	128
Spouse's/partner's age (Expatriate's) (Years)	41.3	9.4	127
Gender: Female	85.9%		128
Educational attainment: Bachelor's degree	53.9%		128
Educational attainment of Expatriate: Bachelor's degree	48.4%		128
Number of children in host country	1.3	1.1	113
Expatriate status: Assigned by organization and took on job offer	73.4%		128
Where respondents come from: Asia	79.7%		128
Philippines	71.9%		128
Where respondents are: Asia	62.5%		128
Singapore	14.1%		128
Malaysia	13.3%		128
Employment status of spouse before joining the expatriate: Employed	81.3%		128
Years of work experience of spouse/partner before expatriation	9.7	7.3	116
Years in the host country of spouse/partner	4.7	5.8	126
Employment status of spouse/partner: Not employed	55.5%		128
Looking for job: No	73.2%		71
Time lapsed before looking for job after arrival in host country (Months)	4.9	10.2	54
Job search duration (Months)	4.5	9.1	53

7 Results and Discussion

Table 2 presents the correlation matrix of variables included in the study. While binary variables in the study are excluded in the correlation analysis, they are introduced in the regression analysis. Life satisfaction is positively correlated with perceived self-efficacy, perceived support from family and friends, and age. Among the independent variables, perceived support from family is positively related to self-efficacy. The number of children is positively, but weakly, related to years in the host country, and perceived support from friends is negatively related to years in the host country. On the other hand, the control variable age is correlated with life satisfaction, perceived support from friends, and years in the host country.

Table 2. Correlation Matrix

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
1. Life satisfaction as Expatriate Spouse/partner	.94						
2. Self-efficacy	.51**	.94					
3. Number of children in host country	-.07	-.10	–				
4. Perceived support from family	.21*	.39**	-.05	.94			
5. Perceived support from friends	.26**	.09	-.04	.05	.95		
6. Years in host country	-.04	-.16 ⁺	.20*	-.12	-.20*	–	
7. Age	.22*	.09	.01	-.03	.19*	.35**	–

Note. **p<.01; *p<.05; ⁺p<.10. Cronbach's alphas are on the diagonals

This study looks at individual, interpersonal, and environmental factors that explain the life satisfaction of the expatriate spouse/partner, holding as constant, the effects of age and gender. Of the two control variables, only age positively, but weakly, affects the life satisfaction of the expatriate spouse/partner. The gender of the respondent does not have a significant relationship with life satisfaction.

Table 3 presents the standardized coefficients of the variables that explain the life satisfaction of the expatriate spouse/partner. Overall, the regression model explains 42.9% of the variance in life satisfaction among expatriate spouses/partners. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test indicates that the residuals are normally distributed.

Table 3. Results of Regression Analysis

Variables	Model
Constant	-.555
Individual Factors	
Negative change in employment status	-.156*
Self-efficacy	.446**
Interpersonal Relationship	
Perceived social support_Family	.086
Perceived social support_Friends	.067
Number of children	-.018
Environmental Factor	
Years in host country	.037
Control Variables	
Gender	.045
Age	.145 ⁺
Dummy (Outliers)	-.425**
R ²	.429
F-test	8.349**
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z (Significance=.12)	1.190

Note. **p<.01; *p<.05; ⁺p<.10

The life satisfaction of the expatriate spouse/partner is explained by two individual factors: a negative change in employment status and self-efficacy. The results of the regression analysis show that life satisfaction of spouses/partners who experienced a negative change in employment is lower than those who did not, *H1a*. From the perspective of social identity theory, employment is an important source of identity and status. Some people work for satisfaction and fulfillment they derive from working. It gives them a sense of belonging to an organization, friendship, a sense of being useful not only to their families, but also to the organization and what it stands for from which identities are created. For some, work also provides financial independence and other subsequent identities derived from such. When work offers all these and more to an individual, a negative change in employment status can indeed result in distress and anxiety, which negatively affects the level of life satisfaction.

Self-efficacy belief is positively related to the life satisfaction of the expatriate spouse/partner. This supports hypothesis *H1b*, which states that self-efficacy is positively related to life satisfaction. From the perspectives of social identity and identity disruption theories, any incongruence between feedbacks from the environment and internal standard requires some form of calibration, where the individual alters behavior. Individuals with high self-efficacy beliefs are able to buffer the appraisals of threats to identity. They see threats and stresses brought about by the disruption to the identity process as challenges, and try to adjust to the new environment by changing their behaviors and ways of looking at things.

This study fails to support the predicted positive relationships of interpersonal factors, such as family support (*H2a*), support from friends (*H2b*), number of children (*H2c*), and the lone environmental factor in this study, years in the host country (*H3*) to the life satisfaction of the expatriate spouse/partner.

However, the effect of family support and support from friends needs more exploration. Further examination of the correlation matrix points to a possibility of mediation of self-efficacy on the relationship between family support with life satisfaction. Note that the bivariate correlation between support from family and life satisfaction is significant. In addition, the bivariate correlation between support from family and self-efficacy is also significant. Moreover, the bivariate relationship between self-efficacy and life satisfaction is also significant. These are indicators of potential mediation effects; specifically, that self-efficacy mediates the relationship between support from family and life satisfaction (Baron & Kenny, 1986).

Although not part of the hypothesized relationships in this study, supplementary analyses were conducted to ascertain the presence of mediation (See Appendix). The Appendix shows that support from family is positively related to life satisfaction. Support from family is also related to self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is positively related to life satisfaction. When the two predictors are entered into the regression equation, the effect of support from family disappears, indicating a full mediation effect. Thus, support from family affects life satisfaction by increasing self-efficacy, which in turn influences life satisfaction. From the perspective of social identity theory, the family is another important source of identity. It provides the constant and stability to an expatriate spouse/partner in a foreign land. Support from family diminishes the impact of disruption to the other aspects of identity. But the direct effect of perceived support from family disappears with the presence of self-efficacy, indicating that its relationship to life satisfaction is mediated by perceptions of self-efficacy. Perceived support from family may take the form of verbal persuasion that the expatriate spouse/partner can accomplish whatever it is to be accomplished, thus increasing self-efficacy and hence life satisfaction.

8 Concluding Remarks

This study sought to determine the factors that affect psychological outcomes experienced by the expatriate spouse/partner, particularly life satisfaction. By using social identity and identity disruption theories as frameworks, this study examined the effects of disruptive factors that can bring about distress due to expatriation (a negative change in employment), and factors that affect one's capacity to re-establish identity (self-efficacy, social support, parental demand, and duration of expatriation) disrupted by expatriation.

The life satisfaction of the expatriate spouse/partner is explained by individual factors, both disruptive to one's identity, and having a personal resource that buffers the appraisals of threats to identity, and facilitates the transition to new behaviors and ways of looking at things. Life satisfaction is lower when there is a negative change in employment status, but increases with positive self-efficacy beliefs. Tentatively, interpersonal factor, support from family, also predicts life satisfaction of the expatriate spouse/partner to the extent that it increases perceived self-efficacy.

The above findings provide several implications for practice. For individuals who see employment as central to their identity, pre-expatriation preparation is important. They can start job search online so they would be aware of employment requirements and restrictions in the host country. In addition, they can identify friends who are in the host country and ask for leads in employment. Sending organizations can also take this issue into consideration when they provide pre-departure preparations for their employees and families. On the other hand, host organizations can provide training to spouses/partners on job search and even help them find employment, indirectly by connecting them to headhunters or to other companies, or directly by offering them a job and helping them with work permits or work visas.

The implications of the role of self-efficacy in re-establishing identity call for further understanding of what it is. Bandura (1977) identifies several factors influencing self-efficacy beliefs, such as: prior experience, behavioral models, persuasion from others, and perception of one's capacity to achieve goals. Self-efficacy skills can be learned. It can help expatriate spouses/partners if the home organization provides training before the expatriate and family move to the host country. In addition, instrumental support from the host organization as the expatriate and family settles in the host country helps the family, particularly the expatriate spouse/partner, accomplish the initial tasks that have to be done. For example, a look and see trip for the expatriate and family may be offered to acclimatize them with the new country and provide them with the necessary information on what is needed for them to be able to adjust in the new environment. Once the family arrives in the host country, the host country can provide assistance in looking for a house to stay, information about schools, and where to get the basic needs of the expatriate family. These various forms of assistance can greatly help the expatriate spouse/partner gain positive experiences and success in addressing the basic needs of the expatriate family, and lessen the frustrations that one may encounter when settling in the host country, thereby reinforcing positive self-efficacy beliefs. Accomplishments are considered to be the most important source of expectancy information inasmuch as they are derived from experience and even mastery of tasks. Accomplishing tasks successfully leads to an increase in self-efficacy; in contrast, repeatedly failing to accomplish tasks diminishes self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura et al., 1977). This is why positive and successful experiences in the settling phase help in building self-efficacy. Behavioral models are also helpful sources in increasing self-efficacy beliefs. Introducing the expatriate spouse/partner to others in a similar situation, by providing membership to expatriate spouse/partner clubs or civic organizations, help build a social network. These clubs are potent sources of experiences where the expatriate spouse/partner may learn from, and can also be a source of positive persuasion from others. Access to facilities and sources that can help the expatriate spouse/partner in alleviating stress and vulnerability to self-doubts can also be helpful.

An empirical contribution of this study is the finding that the source of social support needs to be differentiated, thus there was a hypothesis for each of support from family and support from friends. Contrary to findings that show the relationship between social support and well-being (Ramos et al., 2017; Wiese, 2013; Wilson, 2011), this study finds no such direct relationship. The null results of the role of interpersonal factors lead to its reassessment. A closer look at the bivariate correlations leads this study to a tentative conclusion that the relationship of social support with life satisfaction is not straightforward. The results hint that the relationship of support from family to life satisfaction is mediated by self-efficacy. Thus, this relationship needs further investigation. Moreover, while support from friends also shows a positive bivariate correlation with life satisfaction, this relationship disappears in the regression analysis. This again needs further investigation.

On the other hand, a more nuanced measure of parental demand should also be looked into, inasmuch as children may be seen as a disruptive factor decreasing life satisfaction, or a factor that maintains identity. Future studies can also look into other environmental factors spouses/partners can draw from to maintain life satisfaction.

This study sought to determine the factors that affect the life satisfaction of the expatriate spouse/partner from the perspectives of social identity and identity disruption theories. Our understanding of the life satisfaction of the expatriate spouse/partner may be expanded by using other perspectives, such as self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Deci & Ryan, 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2000), culture, personality, etc.

Although looking at one psychological outcome, life satisfaction has expanded understanding of an expatriate spouse/partner, this study is confronted with some limitations. For one, a non-probabilistic sampling is employed, specifically snowball sampling, which tends to generate a homogeneous sample owing to the fact that initial contacts pass on the information to people they know. In non-probabilistic sampling, the results of the study apply only to the respondents of the study, and in this case, results apply to the expatriate spouse/partner respondents mostly coming from Asia, and located in Asia. However, this limitation opens to an insight into the effect of culture or location on life satisfaction. Thus, another direction for further research is the role of culture in the life satisfaction of the expatriate spouse/partner. Inasmuch as the design is cross-sectional, the relationships obtained must only be treated as correlational and not causal. Despite these limitations, the results enhance the understanding of the life satisfaction of the expatriate spouse/partner.

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Appendix
Mediating Role of Self- efficacy in the Relationship between Support from Family and Life Satisfaction

Variables	Coefficients
<i>Step 1: Support from family and Life satisfaction</i>	
Constant	.09
Support from family	.20**
Dummy (Support from family and Life satisfaction)	-2.88**
R ²	.331
F-test	28.24**
<i>Step 2: Support from family and Self-efficacy</i>	
Constant	1.551
Support from family	2.64**
Dummy (Support from family and Self-efficacy)	-8.03**
R ²	.441
F-test	43.53**
<i>Step 3: Self-efficacy and Life satisfaction</i>	
Constant	.78
Self-efficacy	8.30**
Dummy (Self-efficacy and Life satisfaction)	-6.20**
R ²	.436
F-test	48.40**
<i>Step 4: Support from family, Self-efficacy, and Life satisfaction</i>	
Constant	.777
Support from family	.20
Self-efficacy	7.541**
Dummy (Support from family, Self-efficacy and Life satisfaction)	-6.18**
R ²	.437
F-test	32.03**

Note. **p<.01; *p<.05; +p<.10