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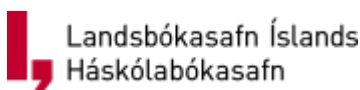
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The diplomatic spouse

Relationships between adjustment, social support and satisfaction with life

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to investigate the relationship between adjustment, social support and satisfaction with life for expatriate spouses. The sample consists of European diplomatic spouses, residing all over the world.

Design/methodology/approach – This is a quantitative study. The sample consists of European diplomatic spouses, residing all over the world. The sample consists of 268 participants: 231 females and 44 males.

Findings – The findings of this study reveal that there was a significant relationship between adjustment and emotional and instrumental support as well as satisfaction with life. Furthermore, a multiple regression was performed to predict the level of satisfaction with life. Both adjustment and emotional support were statistically significant and they explained nearly 50 percent of the variability in participant's satisfaction with life.

Research limitations/implications – The limitations of the paper include, for example, method bias, language and geographic location.

Practical implications – Foreign Ministries within the European Union (EU) will be in a better position to improve their expatriate programs and policies. Furthermore, this study indicated that the well-being of diplomatic spouses can be enhanced by considering how social support is provided, the level of adjustment and satisfaction with life.

Social implications – This study highlights the importance for diplomatic spouses to belonging to various groups, and group membership serves as a means to gain access to social networks. Therefore, being part of support groups of other expatriate spouses can aid cross-cultural adjustment.

Originality/value – Little is known about diplomatic spouses. This paper will be an important first step in examining the relationship between adjustment, social support and satisfaction with life for the spouses of diplomats working for the Foreign Ministries within the EU and European Economic Area.

Keywords Human resources, Spouse, Expatriate, International management

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

A workforce of expatriates is frequently cited as a competitive necessity in today's global environment. Thus, expatriate assignments have become a familiar trend in multi-national and global firms (Crown, 2018). Expatriates have been defined as employees who work and live temporarily in a host location and can be relocated on the company's behalf or be self-initiated expatriates who applied for a particular position abroad or work in the host country (McNulty, 2015). While some expatriates only take up one assignment in their career, there are others, such as diplomats, whose career revolves around working in the global arena. These expatriates accept one assignment after the other and stay no longer than three to five years in each country (Brandt and Buck, 2005). It could be argued therefore that diplomats fall under the termination introduced by Gonzalez-Loureiro *et al.* (2015) as being propatriates. Propatriates are defined as professional expatriates as their carriers evolve around relocation every few years. In addition to mandatory a relocation routine, diplomats face additional relocation challenges, for example, as demonstrated in the Russian spy poisoning scandal in which the diplomat's European Union (EU) and the European Economic Area (EEA) nations collectively expelled more than 100 diplomats, with Russia subsequently doing the same (*The Economist*, 2018).

Although the diplomatic profession is among the oldest in the expatriation field, there is scant research to draw from (Fliege *et al.*, 2016; Groeneveld, 2008; Davoine *et al.*, 2013). That said,



Foster (2000) has raised concerns and questioned the psychological ability of continuous relocation from one country to another with regular intervals, time away from family and friends, and never laying down roots. Furthermore, researchers such as Caligiuri *et al.* (1998), Haslberger and Brewster (2008) and Shaffer and Harrison (2001) have argued that social and emotional costs occur, especially for families, when employment, support systems and local networks are repeatedly disrupted as a result of international relocation. A study by Fliege *et al.* (2016) on German diplomats indicated that compared to the general population, diplomats report worse health-related quality of life. That is, diplomats appear to be more vulnerable to the downsides of international mobility. These results demonstrated that perceived job demands and perceived general stress also had main effects on diplomats' health-related quality of life. Of note, most diplomats relocate with their spouses and families (Groeneveld, 2008). Within the expatriate spouse research, results have indicated that the spouse and family adjustment is a critical factor in the overall international assignment success (Andreason, 2008; Cole, 2011; McNulty, 2015). As a result, several studies have emerged in recent years addressing issues such as social support (Copeland and Norell, 2002), dual careers (Groeneveld, 2008), parental demands (Takeuchi *et al.*, 2002) and identity re-construction (Shaffer and Harrison, 2001).

The diplomatic profession was once considered to have high social status with privileges beyond those experienced by traditional expatriates (Galtung and Holmboe Ruge, 1965; Groeneveld, 2008). Loyalty to the profession was considered to be unquestionable, and spouses, who were most often females, regarded their position as important and one that could influence their husband's career. There are signs that this perception has changed, however, with a younger generation entering the Foreign Service (Groeneveld, 2008). With apparent changes in society and the rise of dual-career couples, Davoine *et al.* (2013) conducted a dramaturgical analysis of diplomatic and consular spouses' roles during assignments. The results identified roles such as partner representation, psychological or professional support, collection and transmission of information, representation of the home country at events, developing links with and within the home country's local expatriate community, administrative support, supervision of local staff and, finally, service house supervision. For these reasons, the Foreign Service can be expected to face the same challenges as other global companies concerning recruiting and retaining talented employees. These results also indicate that many spouses are highly involved in the diplomatic career of their spouse while not being an employee as such of the Foreign Service. This is perhaps not surprising, as spouses of diplomats face a number of legal and institutional barriers when looking for work. For instance, spouses might be faced with losing their diplomatic immunity by gaining work, and some cannot obtain local work authorization in the host location (EUFASA, 2014). While there is a wealth of research on "traditional" expatriates and spouses, a gap in the research remains regarding individuals who experience living abroad as "standard" and not just as a temporary assignment. This paper, building on prior research on diplomats and their spouses, examines the relationship between adjustment, social support and satisfaction with life for spouses of diplomats working for the Foreign Ministries within the EU and EEA.

2. Theoretical background and hypotheses

2.1 Cross-cultural adjustment and social support

Research has indicated that spousal adjustment is an important factor in the overall success of an international assignment (Copeland and Norell, 2002; Takeuchi *et al.*, 2002; Pruetipibultham, 2012). Recent surveys have indicated that the two main reasons for failed assignments are spouse dissatisfaction and the spouse's inability to adapt (Lazarova *et al.*, 2010). Furthermore, Ong and Ward (2005) have argued that for spousal adjustment to occur, several requirements must be met. For instance, the opportunity for spouses to foster a sense of identity and self-worth through the continuation of their careers, as well as support in the form of social networks, either maintained from previous locations or created anew for the duration of the overseas assignment (Ong and Ward, 2005).

Gupta *et al.* (2012) have, however, argued that organizations should invest increased effort in understanding spouse adjustment and the consequences of poor spousal adjustment. While some studies have found that a spouse may have to manage a greater amount of stress to adjust to the foreign culture (Konopaske *et al.*, 2005; Andreason, 2008), a more holistic understanding of which factors lead to adjustment is still lacking (Gonzalez-Loureiro *et al.*, 2015).

Previous research has also demonstrated that for most people, the first six months are key in establishing patterns for adjustment (Draine and Hall, 2000). The specific period in this regard varies and depends on several factors, including the host nation's language, previous international experience, training in cross-cultural adaptation, the family's ability to adjust and the culture's novelty (Black *et al.*, 1991). It has been argued that not everyone progresses through the process sequentially (Torbiörn, 1982; Ward *et al.*, 1998), and there is on-going debate as to whether the process operates continuously or stops at a certain point (Ward *et al.*, 1998). Despite there being numerous models and theories, limited consensus remains as to what constitutes individual adjustment. The concept has been described, interpreted and measured in varying ways and from numerous perspectives. For example, adjustment has been examined in terms of health-related variables (Babiker *et al.*, 1980), perceptual variables such as perceptual maturity (Yoshikawa, 1988), relational variables such as feelings of acceptance (Brislin, 1981), the quality of relationships with host nationals (Deshpande and Viswesvaran, 1992) and more recently, regarding single parents (McNulty, 2015).

Psychological adjustment has been defined as the individual experience within a new society or the degree of psychological comfort and familiarity perceived within a new environment (Black, 1988; Black and Mendenhall, 1990, 1991; Feldman and Tompson, 1993; Sappinen, 1993; Schneider and Asakawa, 1995; Selmer, 2002). Sociocultural adaptation, on the other hand, is situated within the behavioral domain and refers to the ability to "fit in" or execute effective interactions in new cultural surroundings. Psychological and sociocultural adjustments are argued to be conceptually related but empirically distinct as these concepts are derived from different theoretical functions (Bhaskar-Shrinivas *et al.*, 2005). The present study explores sociocultural adjustment, hereafter referred to as adjustment, and the spouse's ability to fit in to the new cultural setting, as measured by the degree of difficulty experienced in managing everyday situations. In this vein, Black and Stephens (1989, 1991) developed a questionnaire for measuring adjustment for expatriates and spouses. Although sociocultural adjustment has been criticized, it is still the most frequently cited scale when measuring adjustment for this specific group (Chen *et al.*, 2011; Haslberger *et al.*, 2014; Davis *et al.*, 2015; Guðmundsdóttir, 2015; Lin *et al.*, 2012; Peltokorpi and Froese, 2012; Salamin and Davoine, 2015; Vijayakumar and Cunningham, 2016; Zhou and Qin, 2014).

It has been argued that it is more difficult for spouses to adjust than for expatriates, as the latter group is thought to have more frequent interactions with the local culture (Bauer and Taylor, 2001). Furthermore, authors such as Brown (2008) have argued that intercultural communication skills can reduce personal stress for both expatriate and spouse. The dominant stressors that have been identified are isolation from family and friends and the loss of contacts when moving to a new location. Sociocultural adjustment is theoretically based on cultural learning theory and is believed to highlight social behavior and practical social skills underlying attitudinal factors (Black and Mendenhall, 1991; Klineberg and Hull, 1979). Many researchers have highlighted several key factors influencing adjustment. For instance, McNulty (2012) found that both professional and social support to spouses was lacking and as a result suggested spouses would be provided with realistic overview of what to expect both prior and during the assignment. This could be facilitated through coaching, counseling or by reading material and thus facilitating increased adjustment.

On a similar note, Chen and Shaffer (2018) proposed that cross-cultural training can ease adjustment by providing spouses with cultural behavioral norms that facilitate adjustment.

They also found that problem- and emotion-focused coping strategies influenced spouse adjustment. They further argue that the spouses should be included in the selection process, and the findings of Van Erp *et al.* (2011) highlight the importance of rethinking the assignments overseas as family relocation not only expatriate relocation. Researchers such as Caligiuri *et al.*, 1998) as well as Van Erp *et al.* (2014) argued that spouse adjustment can positively affect expatriate's adjustment and performance, but spouse adjustment can, on the other hand, significantly influence expatriate premature return and psychological withdrawal (Foster, 1997; Takeuchi *et al.*, 2002). McNulty (2015) and Teague (2015) have further argued that this may further lead to marriage dissatisfaction and divorce.

As mentioned previously, diplomatic spouses face a myriad of issues when moving to a new location. Living outside their country of origin and moving to a new location every few years, spouses experience significant disruption to their social support networks, career, income, role and self-esteem. Regarding the first disruption, Shumaker and Brownell (1984, p. 13) defined social support as "an exchange of resources between at least two individuals perceived by the provider or the recipient to be intended to enhance the well-being of the recipient." Developing spouses' social supports can be achieved through the presence of several factors, such as the expatriate, the assigning Ministry for Foreign Affairs/assigning company's human resource department, and locals in the host culture. In addition, stress reduction and positive health outcomes, including both physical and psychological well-being, have also been identified as outcomes of appropriate social support (Andrews *et al.*, 1978; Argyle, 1992; Dean and Ensel, 1982). Drawing on Ong and Ward's (2005) research examining social support, there are two social support domains: socio-emotional and instrumental support. Socio-emotional support represents assertions or displays of love, care, concern and sympathy. Furthermore, this domain represents belongingness to a social group that provides company through a variety of activities. Ramos *et al.* (2017) suggested that organizations could increase well-being of spouses by getting them actively involved in the expatriation process, participate in the decision and more importantly receive all the relevant information in relation to the relocation first hand. Copeland and Norell (2002) also suggested organizations would benefit from providing relocation assistance that is tailored to the respective family life and needs (e.g. house finding, school for children, activities, shopping, etc.). However, while these services are used by organizations, the Foreign Service has generally not exploited their services as they have been reluctant to provide information on diplomatic relocations and these kinds of services are quite costly as well.

Instrumental support concerns concrete aid in the form of financial help, required services or material resources. The latter domain further relates to the communication of opinions or facts relevant to a person's current difficulties and can be represented in actions such as advice or feedback. A study by Ong and Ward (2005) revealed that emotional support was more frequently provided by people overseas, i.e. not only by family and friends at home but also from people from third countries who could be considered fellow expatriate spouses. Notably, the authors found that instrumental support was ultimately more critical to expatriates' psychological adaptation. Researchers such as Herleman *et al.* (2008) and Kupka and Cathro (2007) have argued that during a global assignment, a critical affecting factor of adjustment for expatriate spouses is social support. While many publications offer theoretical debates and models for considering and examining the influence of social support on expatriates and spouses (e.g. Adelman, 1988; Caligiuri and Lazarova, 2002; Fontaine, 1996), the present study focuses on specific groups of diplomatic spouses who relocate more often due to their spouse's profession.

Given the above-mentioned arguments concerning cross-cultural adjustment and social support, the following hypothesis is posited for diplomatic spouses:

- H1. There is a positive relationship between adjustment and (a) emotional support and (b) instrumental support.

2.2 Satisfaction with life

Satisfaction with life is an extensively investigated topic in understanding the psychological happiness of different populations and has been defined as a “global assessment of a person’s quality of life according to the individual chosen criteria” (Shin and Johnson, 1978; Vohra and Adair, 2000). Researchers have emphasized that happiness is composed of three related components: positive affect, an absence of negative affect and satisfaction with life as a whole (Argyle *et al.*, 1989). It is not only what people have, but it is also how they judge their achievements, that determines satisfaction with life (Kavaler, 1998). Previous research has examined satisfaction with life of specific sub-groups such as women, children and the elderly, as well as their relationships with various conducts of mental and physical health (Alston and Dudley, 1973, Alston *et al.*, 1974; Palmore and Luikart, 1972; Horley, 1984; Inglehart, 1990; Kavaler, 1998; Bruno and Stutzer, 2002). There have been a number of factors found to influence individual perception of satisfaction with life. Evans and Kelly (2004) found a positive relationship between family structure and satisfaction with life. Diener *et al.* (2003) found a positive relationship between cultural background and satisfaction with life. As mentioned above, relationships are found to be important aspects of life for expatriate and spouses’ lives. Social capital theory (Hauberer, 2011) has indicated that relationships is a form of social capital that plays an important role in individual’s well-being (Cole *et al.*, 2009; Requena, 2003). While the expatriate is often offered increased financial means as well as social networks, the spouse on the other hand seldom have a job upon arrival in the new country and they lack the immediate network. In the study by Shaffer and Harrison (2001), spouses reported feeling unequal to the expatriate experiencing social isolation and greater financial, social and emotional dependency on the expatriate. Furthermore, from the power-dependence perspective (Emerson, 1962), higher level of dependency and vulnerability can lead to a stronger reaction to interpersonal interactions such as conflict (Rusbult and Van Lange, 2003).

Only a few studies have investigated the relationship between expatriate, family, spouse satisfaction and intention to terminate the foreign assignment, and which reported a negative relationship between the two variables (Shaffer and Harrison, 1998; Takeuchi *et al.*, 2002), and even fewer studies have investigated the relationship between adjustment and satisfaction with life. In their study, Herleman *et al.* (2008) examined the relationship between stress and satisfaction, adjustment and support among expatriate spouses. The study participants were mostly Americans residing in Belgium. The results indicated that social support was positively correlated with personal and interaction adjustment, while social support was negatively correlated with depression. Social support was found to have no significant relationship with perceived stress, general adjustment and satisfaction. However, overall, a lack of social support and close social relationships are documented to have far-reaching implications. In contrast, greater amounts of autonomous behaviors and lower levels of stress have been associated with social connectedness and support (Uchino *et al.*, 1996).

Furthermore, using a longitudinal data set, Lu (1999) analyzed an integrative model of happiness that incorporated personal factors such as demographics, extraversion, neuroticism and locus of control, and environmental factors such as life events and social support. The results indicated that social support predicted overall happiness. Moreover, Gallagher and Vella-Brodick (2008) examined the nature of the relationship between social support and well-being by analyzing the predictive value of social support on subjective well-being. Their findings indicated that social support had predictive value in explaining negative affect and satisfaction with life. In a similar vein, Lu’s (1999) longitudinal analysis of the relationship between environmental factors, i.e. life events and social support and personal factors in happiness revealed social support to be a stronger predictor of subjective well-being. Specifically, from all variables, only social support was significantly related to overall happiness.

In recent decades, the fact that a lack of social support and close social relationships can have far-reaching effects has been well documented. For instance, Baumeister and Leary (1995)

reviewed the evidence and demonstrated that people seem to have a fundamental need for close social relationships. Moreover, social connectedness and support have been associated with higher levels of autonomic activity and lower base levels of stress hormones (Uchino *et al.*, 1996). While we are unaware of any study that examines the relationship between adjustment and satisfaction with life for spouses and given the aforementioned arguments and based on social capital theory, the following hypotheses are proposed for diplomatic spouses:

H2. There is a positive relationship between adjustment and satisfaction with life.

H3. There is a positive relationship between (a) emotional support and (b) instrumental support and satisfaction with life.

Based on the literature review, the hypothesized model is illustrated in Figure 1.

3. Method

3.1 Participants

This is a quantitative study in which the intention is to examine the relationship between sociocultural adjustment, social support and satisfaction with life. To this end, the European Union Foreign Affairs Spouse, Partners, and Family Association (EUFASA) was contacted. The EUFASA has 24 member states: Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, the EU, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxemburg, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the UK. Each national association was contacted and offered the possibility to participate. Many agreed, and the initial questionnaire was sent these member states in July 2015. Most (84 percent) of the participants were female, while only 16 percent were male. Moreover, 23.7 percent of the respondents were 40 years or younger, 32.2 percent were aged between 41 and 50 years, and 44.1 percent were 51 or older. The participants came from a total of 33 countries, but the majority came from the Netherlands (17.4 percent), Austria (11.5 percent), Switzerland (11.5 percent), Belgium (8.5 percent) and Italy (7.4 percent). In total, the participants from these five countries represented more than 56 percent of the total sample. Over 60 percent of participants had children accompanying them on their assignment. Also, 74.9 percent of the

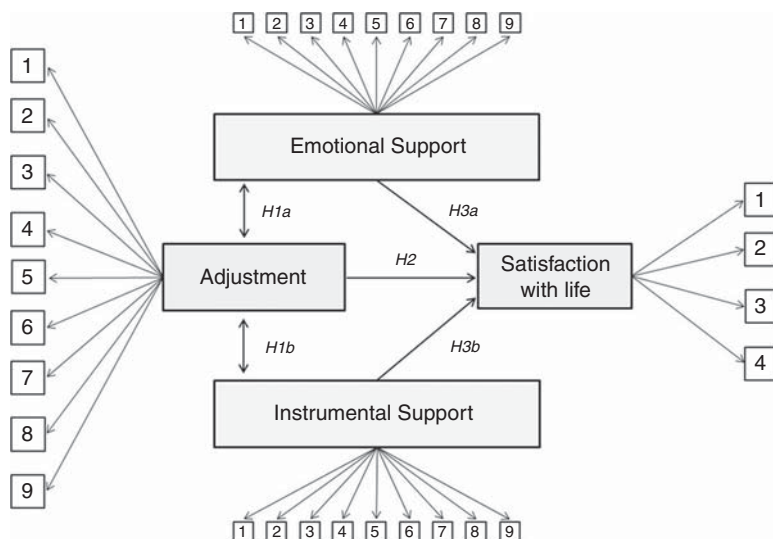


Figure 1.
The hypothesized model

respondents were employed before they were transferred on a post, whereas only 38.8 percent were currently employed. Almost all participants (95.2 percent) were married. Notably, only 6 percent had received cross-cultural training before they commenced their assignment.

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3.2 Instruments

Spousal adjustment was measured using a scale developed by Black and Stephens (1989). This scale has been widely used in conjunction with expatriate spouse populations. The questionnaire contains nine questions divided into two factors: interaction adjustment (three items) and general adjustment (six items). Items are measured on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (completely unadjusted) to 7 (completely adjusted). The present study also measured the level of social support using the Index of Sojourner Social Support developed by Ong and Ward (2005). Items are measured using a five-point scale ranging from 1 (no one would do this) to 5 (many would do this). The scale contains 18 questions divided into two factors: emotional support (nine items) and instrumental support (nine items). Satisfaction with life was measured using a scale developed by Diener *et al.* (1985), which consists of five brief statements. Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with each statement on a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Diener's Satisfaction with Life Scale was used to assess the participants' general satisfaction with life in the host country (Diener *et al.*, 1985; Pavot *et al.*, 1991). The original scale was modified slightly, with the words "in your host country" added to each question to prompt participants to answer the question specifically about their life in the current expatriate assignment.

3.3 Procedure

The questionnaire's 31 items were subjected to a principal component analysis (PCA) conducted using SPSS. Prior to performing the PCA, the data's suitability for factor analysis was assessed. Inspection of the correlation matrix revealed the presence of many coefficient values of 0.3 and higher. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin value was 0.94, which exceeded the recommended value of 0.6 (Kaiser, 1970, 1974) and Bartlett's (1954) test of sphericity reached statistical significance, supporting the factorability of the correlation matrix. PCA revealed the presence of five components with eigenvalues exceeding 1, explaining 43.2, 13.7, 6.7, 5.7 and 3.5 percent of the variance, respectively. Note that an inspection of the scree plot revealed a clear break after the fourth component. Using Catell's (1966) scree test, the decision was made to retain four components for further investigation. The four-component solution explained 69.3 percent of the variance, with component one accounting for 43.2 percent, component two 13.7 percent, component three 6.7 percent and component four explaining 5.7 percent. The interpretation of the four components was in line with the questionnaires used and could thus be used to develop the hypothesized model. All factors demonstrated several strong loadings, and all variables loaded substantially on only one component. Descriptive statistics for each factor, the Cronbach's α s and correlation coefficients between factors are listed in Table I.

| | <i>n</i> | Mean | SD | Cronbach's α | Instrumental support | Adjustment | Emotional support | Satisfaction with life |
|------------------------|----------|------|------|---------------------|-------------------------|------------|----------------------|---------------------------|
| Instrumental support | 253 | 2.46 | 1.05 | 0.97 | 1 | | | |
| Adjustment | 255 | 5.42 | 1.05 | 0.86 | 0.29 | 1 | | |
| Emotional support | 260 | 2.15 | 0.96 | 0.95 | 0.72 | 0.31 | 1 | |
| Satisfaction with life | 269 | 4.97 | 1.29 | 0.87 | 0.39 | 0.45 | 0.43 | 1 |

Table I.
Descriptive statistics,
Cronbach's α and
correlation coefficient

Hierarchical multiple regression was used to control for age and gender. Those variables were entered at Step 1, explaining only 0.5 percent of the variance in satisfaction with life. After entry of the three control measures, instrumental support, emotional support and adjustment, at Step 2, the total variance explained by the model as a whole was 35 percent, $F(5, 262) = 28.40, p < 0.001$. The control measures explained an additional 34.7 percent of the variance in satisfaction with life, after controlling for age and gender. R^2 change = 0.247, F -change (3, 262) = 46.70 and $p < 0.001$. In the final model, only adjustment and emotional support were statistically significant, with adjustment recording a higher β value ($\beta = 0.39, p < 0.001$) than emotional support ($\beta = 0.28, p < 0.001$). Based on these findings, we concluded that age and gender do not have an effect in explaining the variance of satisfaction with life.

Traditional psychometric evaluations such as Cronbach's α revealed sufficient internal consistency for the hypothesized model. Note that it was important to conduct a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) – AMOS software and the Mplus software were used here – and the measurement model was developed using CFA.

Several goodness-of-fit indices have been designed to assess the fit between data and structure (Hu *et al.*, 1995; Shevlin *et al.*, 2000). In the present study, the following goodness-of-fit indices were used. First, a χ^2/df with a threshold set at values lower than 5. Second, the comparative fit index (CFI), which is an incremental fit index that measures relative improvement in the specified model's fit compared to the independence model. The threshold was set at values higher than 0.95 (Bentler, 1990). Moreover, the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) was used, which is one of the most informative criteria. This measure considers the error of approximation in the population and is sensitive to the number of estimated parameters. The threshold value was set at values lower than 0.05 (Steiger and Lind, 1980). Finally, standardized root mean residual (SRMR) was used, which is the square root of the discrepancy between the sample covariance matrix and the model covariance matrix. The threshold was set at values lower than 0.05 (Hu and Bentler, 1999).

4. Results

The first hypothesis proposed for diplomatic spouses is as follows:

- H1.* There is a positive relationship between adjustment and (a) emotional support and (b) instrumental support.

The relationship was investigated using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients. Preliminary analyses were performed to ensure that there were no violations of the assumptions of normality, linearity and homoscedasticity. According to Cohen's (1988) classification of strength of association, there was a medium positive relationship between adjustment and emotional support ($r = 0.314, n = 246, p < 0.0005$). The relationship between adjustment and instrumental support was also medium and positive ($r = 0.291, n = 241, p < 0.0005$). The relationship between these three variables is listed in Table II.

Emotional support and instrumental support had significant positive relationships with adjustment, indicating that when the level of these two variables is high, the level of adjustment is also high. Based on these findings, *H1* is supported.

Table II.
Correlation matrix
for three variables

| | Emotional support | Instrumental support |
|------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| Adjustment | 0.314** | 0.291** |

Note: **Correlation significant at the 0.01 level

The second hypothesis proposed for diplomatic spouses is:

H2. There is a positive relationship between adjustment and satisfaction with life.

The third hypothesis posited is:

H3. There is a positive relationship between (a) emotional support and (b) instrumental support and satisfaction with life.

It was necessary to conduct a CFA and structural model based on the structural equation model (SEM) technique to test these hypotheses. This method was appropriate since SEM applies a confirmatory approach to the analysis of structural theory. If goodness-of-fit is adequate, the model supports the plausibility of postulated relations among variables, and if not, such relations are rejected (Byrne, 2010; Kline, 2016). Findings from the CFA confirmed that the hypothesized model presented in the present research, and illustrated in Figure 1, is a four-structure model, as hypothesized. The four-factor CFA model, where “sup1” is instrumental support, “sup2” is emotional support, “adj” is adjustment and “sat” is satisfaction with life, is provided in Figure 2.

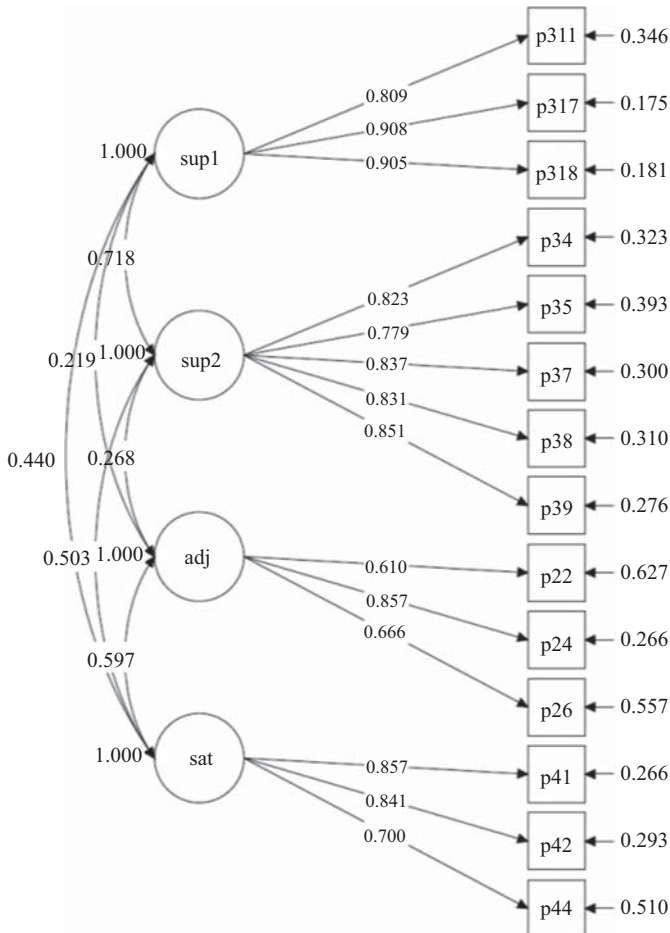


Figure 2.
Four-factor
CFA model

The goodness-of-fit indices were deemed satisfactory; the χ^2/df was 1.66, CFI was 0.98, RMSEA was 0.049 and SRMR was 0.036. The loadings of these items were also high and, in most cases, more than 0.7. The model fit information is listed in Table III.

The covariances between factors were also satisfactory. The covariance was higher than 0.7 in only one case, i.e. between instrumental support and emotional support, with a value of 0.72. An SEM was conducted based on the CFA measurement model to investigate the second and third hypotheses. The SEM is illustrated in Figure 3.

The goodness-of-fit indices were deemed satisfactory: the χ^2/df was 1.86, CFI was 0.98, RMSEA was 0.056 and SRMR was 0.037. The model fit information is listed in Table IV.

The R^2 was 0.49, which indicates that the model explains almost half of the variance regarding satisfaction with life. However, in the model based on the regression analysis, the R^2 was considerably lower at only 0.29. The loadings of the items were also high, with adjustment having the highest loading with 0.49, followed by emotional support with a loading of 0.27 and instrumental support with 0.14. Based on these results, the adjustment seems to be of the highest importance with its three items: housing conditions, shopping, and entertainment/recreation facilities. These findings support *H2* and *H3*.

Table III.
Model fit information
for four-factor model

| | Value | Threshold |
|---------|-------|-----------|
| CMIN/df | 1.659 | < 5 |
| RMSEA | 0.049 | < 0.05 |
| CFI | 0.979 | > 0.95 |
| SRMR | 0.036 | < 0.05 |

Figure 3.
SEM for satisfaction
with life

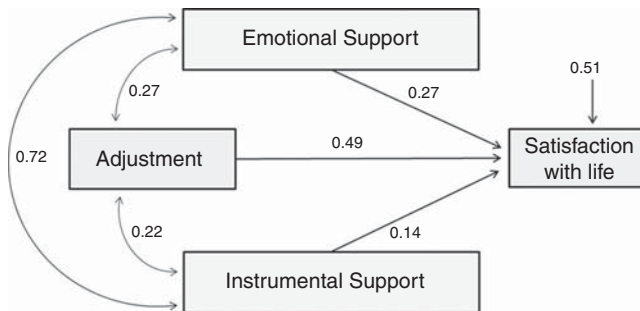


Table IV.
Model fit information
for the SEM model

| | Value | Threshold |
|---------|-------|-----------|
| CMIN/df | 1.664 | < 5 |
| RMSEA | 0.05 | < 0.05 |
| CFI | 0.979 | > 0.95 |
| SRMR | 0.036 | < 0.05 |
| R^2 | 0.492 | > 0.3 |

5. Discussion

The present research involves an analysis of survey data provided by spouses of diplomats employed by Foreign Ministries within the EU and the EEA. This study used a standardized questionnaire to examine the relationship between adjustment, social support and satisfaction with life. All proposed hypotheses are confirmed. First, this study demonstrates that there is a positive relationship between adjustment and both emotional and instrumental support for diplomatic spouses. This finding indicates that spouses who experience high levels of emotional and instrumental support are more likely to adjust well to their new local environment and life in the host location. These findings are also in line with studies by Caligiuri and Lazarova (2002), Herleman *et al.* (2008) and Kupka and Cathro (2007), which indicated that social support during a global assignment is potentially critical for adjustment to international assignments. In a similar vein, Kraimer *et al.* (2001) found that employer spousal support significantly correlated to general adjustment.

Furthermore, research has demonstrated that expatriation and recurring relocation can cause potentially significant problems for an individual's psychological well-being (Foyle *et al.*, 1998). One potential problem area is social and emotional costs, especially for families when employment support systems and local networks are disrupted (Caligiuri *et al.*, 1998; Haslberger and Brewster, 2008; Shaffer and Harrison, 2001). Additionally, other strains such as communication difficulties, isolation or unfamiliar social encounters can occur, particularly when international expatriates encounter cultures highly different from their own (Anderzén and Arnetz, 1997; Zheng and Berry, 1991). Foster (2000) has argued, for example, that it is rare that employees and their dependents are psychologically capable of continually relocating across regions, never laying down roots, remaining distanced from family and friends and adapting to a new culture every few years. The findings are important because Shaffer *et al.* (2001) found that employer spousal support can reduce assignment withdrawal symptoms and Konopaske *et al.* (2005) noted that it is vital to increase spousal willingness to accept long-term global assignments. In the context of costs associated with expatriate failures or early returns and the challenges related to the commitment and loyalty of the new generation entering the workforce, these findings provide an important indication that the Foreign Ministries in EU and EEA could benefit from considering the social support they provide to spouses. Based on hierarchical multiple regression authors did control for age and gender. As mentioned above, the findings showed that these controlled variables did only explain around 0.5 percent of the variance in satisfaction with life. Based on these findings it was concluded that age and gender did not have an effect in explaining the variance of satisfaction with life. One has to bear in mind that in our sample 84 percent of the participants were female. Therefore it is recommend to keep in mind the study by Selmer and Leung (2003a,b) indicating males and females act differently to an international assignment and that female spouses get more support from companies than males do. Furthermore, Davoine *et al.* (2013) found differences of the expatriate spouse role. On a similar note Collins and Bertone (2017) found that men experienced threats to their carrier/work identity, whereas women faced multiple threats to identities such as mother wife/partner, child, along with carrier and work identity. Finally, male spouses have been found to experience social isolation due to their small numbers and receiving little understanding of their changed circumstances and new role. This has been associated with the feeling of loss of status related to being the breadwinner (Harvey and Wiese, 1998; Cole, 2012).

The present research also demonstrates a positive relationship between adjustment and satisfaction with life for diplomatic spouses. This finding indicates that spouses who experience high levels of satisfaction with life also experience high levels of adjustment. Satisfaction with life is an indicator of subjective well-being, and although the concept has

been examined for various sub-groups, there is still a limited understanding about the relationships between adjustment and satisfaction with life for expatriate spouses in general. Moreover, the results of the present study are important from an environmental perspective. For instance, Veenhoven (1994) has argued that happiness reacts to life transitions, both positively and negatively. Therefore, this is an important indicator of how spouses experience life once they have moved to a new location. Diplomats and their spouses relocate every few years, and consequently, it is important that spouses experience their transition and life in a new environment as satisfying and fulfilling. The results of the present study further indicate that aspects related to adjustment, i.e. housing, shopping and entertainment are the most important. This finding is in line with a study by Davoine *et al.* (2013), which included a dramaturgical analysis of diplomatic and consular spouses' roles while on an assignment. Their results indicated, for example, that partner representation of the home country at events, developing links with and within the home country's local expatriate community, providing administrative support and supervising local staff and service house supervision are all considered part of the role of the diplomatic spouse.

Furthermore, this study's findings indicate a positive relationship between satisfaction with life and both emotional and instrumental support for diplomatic spouses. Specifically, when spouses experience high emotional and instrumental support, they also experience high levels of satisfaction with life. However, these findings are not consistent with a study by Herleman *et al.* (2008), which did not find a significant relationship between social support and satisfaction for expatriate spouses. Therefore, further investigation is needed into why this inconsistency exists. On the other hand, the present study's results are consistent with studies by Lu's (1999) and Gallagher and Vella-Brodrick's (2008), which also revealed a positive relationship between social support and happiness and well-being. Finally, the results of this study reveal that both adjustment and support account for 49 percent of the variance in satisfaction with life. Prior research has revealed that spousal adjustment is an important factor for overall international assignment success. Being able to navigate a new cultural setting has been found to be a part of the adjustment process, and a low ability to interact with and adjust to a new culture has been associated with both uncertainty and anxiety (Gudykunst, 2005). As Kim (2005) suggested, being able to adjust requires a combination of communication adaptability and interactional involvement, where assimilation and learning by doing are important. Emotional support, on the other hand, represents care, concern and sympathy, and belonging to a social group. The feeling of adjusting and receiving social support can thus be considered important because it explains a considerable part of how diplomatic spouses experience satisfaction with life.

Regarding practical implications, this study demonstrates that the well-being of diplomatic spouses can be enhanced by considering how social support is provided, their level of adjustment, and satisfaction with life. Emotional support can be provided by introducing spouses to social groups in the host location as well as local support or mentors who have resided in the same location, or by other means. The importance of adjustment can be addressed by offering training programs prior to departure or shortly after arrival. Equipping spouses with practical strategies and tactics to cope in the new environment might be beneficial and increase the likelihood of adjustment. Such training could also provide spouses with a realistic view of what to expect in the new location and thus, contribute to satisfaction with life in the host country. Since the present study also found instrumental support to be related to adjustment, it is recommended that the Foreign Ministries evaluate what type of assistance spouses deem valuable when relocating. For instance, the human resource manager (HRM) must develop a sense of the way in which social identities are forged partly as a result of belonging to various groups because group membership provides a means of gaining access to social networks. Thus, being part of support groups consisting of other expatriate spouses can aid cross-cultural adjustment.

As such, the HRM should create opportunities for expatriate spouses to join either formal or informal clubs and organizations such as charity groups, health clubs, and welcoming and support committees for expatriates. The transition into a new environment may further be eased through access to various venues to meet other people who share similar problems or interests (Punnett, 1997). Moreover, Harvey *et al.* (1999) have argued that before, during and after international relocation, mentoring can be used as a strategic tool to provide the required contextual, relevant and specific social support, creating a framework to make sense of the situation. In summary, spouses rely on their environment for their identity and require social support to lead emotionally, mentally and behaviorally healthy lives. As noted earlier diplomatic spouses face a number of legal and institutional barriers when looking for work such as losing their diplomatic immunity, by taking up work, some cannot obtain local work authorization and some loose financial support that is allocated to spouse. As a results, diplomatic spouses face even more challenges in relation to work than other expatriate spouses do who are working for companies or are self-initiated. As gender differences have been noted in prior research it is recommended that the Foreign Ministries focus on carrier identity in more detail and aim the social support at bolstering self-esteem though strengthening other positive identities.

5.1 *Limitations and future research*

Although this study contributes to the literature on cross-cultural adjustment for spouses, certain limitations must be considered. The first limitation concerns method bias, which has been discussed by Dillman *et al.* (2009), since the data were collected through self-report questionnaires. The second limitation relates to language; because the survey was conducted in English, it is possible that some of the respondents did not understand the questions correctly. Third, geographic location was not controlled for, which represents a limitation in relation to adjustment, as the spouses were residing in locations across the world. It is possible that spouses living in Asia or Africa have more difficulties adjusting than spouses who reside in proximity to their home or within central Europe. The fourth limitation also relates to adjustment. Black and Mendenhall (1990) have argued that adjustment should be expected to increase over time, but the present study only examined adjustment at one point in time, whereas potentially richer data could be gathered by employing a qualitative study and/or using a longitudinal approach.

That said, this study also contributes to existing knowledge about adjustment. A wealth of research is now available on expatriate adjustment, but far less is known about spousal adjustment and well-being during an assignment. Although this study has a narrow focus, as it only investigates diplomatic spouses, the findings are interesting because these spouses relocate more often than do the spouses often included in expatriate spousal research. Since emotional support was found to influence both adjustment and satisfaction with life, it would be of interest to further investigate what type of emotional support expatriate spouses most value. For instance, emotional support represents care, concern and sympathy, as well as belonging to a social group. Further investigation into what type of support is of value would be beneficial taking into consideration the gender aspect and increased number of male spouses entering the diplomatic core. For example, it would be of value to know whether such help as emotional support must be face-to-face or whether it could be offered online. Internet technologies enable engagement and interaction with the possibility of accessing social support in the form of blogs and social networking sites, which are now widely recognized and continue to advance. In this vein, studies have shown that technology-mediated social support has a positive influence on adjustment (Kralik *et al.*, 2006; Nardon *et al.*, 2015). Instrumental support, representing financial support and material resources, also contributes to adjustment and satisfaction with life. With more females and diversity within the diplomatic core, new challenges are presented. The diplomatic core has

been very male dominant where the spouse is female. Prior research has indicated that family members are affected more negatively by women's decision to work abroad than by men's decision to do the same (Tharenou, 2008) as well as female expatriates have been found to be more often single or have more career-oriented spouses (Hearn *et al.*, 2008) as a result, it would be worth to know how this translates into the diplomatic core. Furthermore, since many spouses must leave their jobs or place their careers on hold when they relocate (Mäkelä *et al.*, 2011), financial concerns are likely to arise. Dual careers within a relationship are now more common, but constant relocation and other restrictions being a part of the diplomatic core makes it more likely that diplomatic couples earn a living with one income instead of two. As a result, it would be of interest to investigate the sources of instrumental support that diplomatic spouses value. It might be that they value assistance regarding the relocation itself, or other financial support such as developing certain or new skills and abilities. Finally, from the research by Davoine *et al.* (2013) we know that diplomatic spouses are very much involved in the diplomatic career of their spouses. This calls for a further investigation on changes in the identity constructions of both expatriate and diplomatic spouses examining potential gender differences.

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