

UNDERSTANDING THE EXPATRIATE SPOUSE: TAKING STOCK AND CREATING AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

BASIC RESEARCH QUESTION

What do we know about 'expatriate spouses'? What do we need to know about 'expatriate spouses'?

KEY PAPER(S)

Shamseer, L., Moher, D., Clarke, M., Ghersi, D., Liberati, A., Petticrew, M., ... Stewart, L. A. (2015). Preferred reporting items for systematic review and meta-analysis protocols (PRISMA-P) 2015: elaboration and explanation. *BMJ*, 350.

Tranfield, D., Denyer, D., & Smart, P. (2003). Towards a Methodology for Developing Evidence-Informed Management Knowledge by Means of Systematic Review. *British Journal of Management*, 14, 207–222.

Andreason, A. W. (2008). Expatriate Adjustment of spouses and expatriate managers: An integrative research review. *International Journal of Management*, 25(2), 382.

MOTIVATION/ PUZZLE

In the current milieu of global mobility, international integration, and interconnectedness, the literature on expatriation is a growing area of research. The success of expatriate assignments depends very much on the successful adjustment of the spouse as the spouse can be an influential source of either stress or support for the expatriate. Given the importance of the spouse in the expatriate assignment, it is surprising to note that a comprehensive literature on expatriate spouses does not currently exist. As articles examining the concept of expatriate spouse are fragmented, an effort to consolidate the literature is pertinent.

THREE CORE ASPECTS OF ANY EMPIRICAL RESEARCH PROJECT

THE IDEA

As a step to specifically advance understanding of the expatriate spouse phenomenon, a systematic literature review was performed using an adapted version of PRISMA-P 2015 methodological approach, complemented with the criteria suggested by management scholars (eg. Tranfield, Denyer, & Smart, 2003). As PRISMA-P originates from the health care field, some of the terminologies used in the guideline, such as 'patients and medical interventions', are not applicable for the field of business. As such, the PRISMA guidelines were complemented with the criteria suggested by Tranfield and colleagues (2003) as well as additional recommendations exemplified in previous IJMR publications (Jones & Gatrell, 2014; Keupp, Palmie, & Gassmann, 2012; López-Duarte, Vidal-Suárez, & González-Díaz, 2016; Nolan & Garavan, 2016).

THE DATA

The SLR was limited to double-blinded peer-reviewed journals that publish on topics from the expatriation field. Additionally, only journals that are ranked '2' and above for the ABS 2015 and 'B' and above for ABDC (2016) were included (*with the exception of Journal of Global Mobility due to its strong focus on expatriation). This journal selection criterion was chosen due to the high impact factor and assurance of knowledge validation. Moreover, in search of relevant studies, the SLR was circumscribed to articles published from over the last twenty years, from 1996 to 2016. Only publications in the English language were included and both conceptual and empirical (qualitative and quantitative) studies were sought. The final sample consists of 77 papers.

THE TOOLS

To ensure comprehensive discoverability, the review search was done via a two-step process. First, a list of journals was created from the articles generated via the initial search using Ex Libris Primo. Within this list, journals were chosen based on the journal selection criteria (Table 1). The second search step was then undertaken to engage with a native interface; a search was done within each journal through a database (eg. Business Source Complete, Science Direct and JSTOR). Each article was then checked to ensure that the final sample conforms to systematic review protocol.

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TWO KEY QUESTIONS

WHAT'S NEW

The germane literature was examined via an integrated approach of a thematic analysis; the SLR categorises the literature around the central theme of spousal adjustment, with three levels of analysis - (1) spousal intra-individual level, (2) spousal-expatriate level, and (3) spousal-organisational level. As moving the field forward requires the incorporation of the full range of themes and perspectives, the levels of analysis encompassing dominant themes were developed into a conceptual framework.

SO WHAT

The SLR provides a more focused understanding of the expatriate spouse literature which has broad implications for theory development within the literature itself as well as under the umbrella of expatriation. The conceptual framework showcases the full range of themes and perspectives that have emerged through the analysis; providing a more holistic understanding of the expatriate spouse. The development of a research agenda then proposes future research directions that can provide important and significant contribution to expatriation research for knowledge creation and integration.

ONE BOTTOM LINE

THE CONTRIBUTION

1. The SLR highlights the state of the field in terms of its theoretical contribution; articles mostly focus on explanatory-based and understanding-based theoretical contributions. Notwithstanding their value, they hold a key underlying assumption of the expatriate spouse as a homogeneous group. There is a need to further conceptualise the expatriate spouse phenomenon as the expatriate spouse is in fact a heterogeneous group.
2. Based on the review and conceptual framework presented, the paper draws attention to several knowledge acumens and provides future research avenues to encourage more thorough analysis of this increasingly important area of scholarly interest.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Scope:

International Human Resource Management field: Expatriation field - Business expatriates and their spouses

Risks:

The latest version of a review on expatriates and their spouses was published in 2008. Another review may be published within this decade; though, there is currently no known source.

Target Journal:

International Journal of Management Reviews (ABDC – A)