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RAZISKAVA ODZIVANJA NA IZZIVE, VIRE IN SREDSTVA POMOČI TER PROCESE PRILAGAJANJA PRI ZDOMCIH

ANALYSIS OF CHALLENGES, RESOURCES AND ADJUSTMENT IN EXPATRIATES

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Postavim piko. Izgubim in pridobim hkrati.
Vdahnem hvaležnost.
Moj pogled za vedno spremenjen.
## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 1</th>
<th>General introduction</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2</td>
<td>Expatriate family adjustment: An overview of empirical evidence on challenges and resources</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3</td>
<td>Adjustment and well-being of newcomer expatriates: A study on perception of move and family functioning</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4</td>
<td>Social support, adjustment, and psychological distress of help-seeking expatriates</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5</td>
<td>In search of the recognition of expatriate complexity: Interpretative phenomenological analysis of psychotherapy experience</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 6</td>
<td>A newly awakened sense of self: Expatriates’ experience of relational family therapy</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 7</td>
<td>General discussion</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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English abstract 217
Nederlandstalige samenvatting 223
Povzetek v slovenskem jeziku 229
Raziskava odzivanja na izzive, vire in sredstva pomoči ter procese prilagajanja pri zdomcih (Daljši povzetek v slovenskem jeziku) 235
Data Storage Fact Sheets 263
Expatriates are individuals who left their home country in order to live and work in another country on a non-permanent basis (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001). The relocation is usually associated with various challenges and increased stress accompanied by intensive learning about the new environment and the new work situation, a process known as adjustment (Haslberger & Brewster, 2008; Truman, Sharar, & Pompe, 2012). Initial stress linked to the relocation triggers coping responses resulting in better adjustment and increased subjective well-being (Black & Stevens, 1989; Haslberger, Brewster, & Hippler, 2013). However, failure to successfully adjust to new environment may result in psychological distress for expatriates (Bushong, 2013; Osland, 2000). The current dissertation aimed to bring better understanding of challenges and resources impacting the level of expatriate adjustment. In this introductory chapter, we will start with the definition of expatriates, challenges, resources and adjustment, approaching it from the acculturation, work-family and stress literature. We conclude the first chapter with the specific research objectives of this doctoral dissertation, while providing an overview of the chapters of the dissertation.
Expatriates

*Expatriates* are defined as individuals who move to another country, change a place of residence and have a specific goal to work in the new environment (Andresen, Bergdolt, Margenfeld, & Dickmann, 2014) or as assignees across a range of assignment types involving international relocation (e.g., long-term, short-term, and extended business travel assignments) (McNulty, 2015). Research on international work experience has documented several types of expatriates, of which the most important are (1) corporate expatriates, who are sent to an international assignment by their company (Takeuchi, 2010), (2) self-initiated expatriates, who take their own initiative and rely on their own finances to move abroad for work (Doherty, Richardson, & Thorn, 2013), (3) flexpatriates, who are employees on brief international assignments, leaving their family and personal life behind, (4) short-term assignees, who are employees on international assignments that are longer than business trips yet shorter than typical corporate expatriate assignments (usually less than one year), and (5) international business travellers, who are employees on multiple short international business trips to various locations without accompanying family members (Shaffer, Kraimer, Chen, & Bolino, 2012).

Emerging research points to various forms of non-traditional expatriates, such as female breadwinners, single parents, semi-retirees, lesbians and gays, split families, single expatriates, and blended families, who are also engaged in business expatriation and have distinct circumstances (McNulty, 2014).

The common characteristic of these different types of expatriates is that rather than being linked to the local culture, they take on a global mindset and become part of an international, cross-cultural social environment, which fosters the development of multiculturalism in the expatriate’s identity (Mao & Shen, 2015). They belong to an expatriate community with the other third country expatriates and compatriots (i.e.,
home country nationals working in the same host country) (Johnson, Kristof-Brown, Van Vianen, De Pater, & Klein, 2003).

**Expatriate Adjustment**

Deriving from the acculturation literature and expatriate adjustment models, it has been recognized that the process of *expatriate adjustment* in the host country has a significant impact on the success of an international work experience (Black, Mendenhall, & Oddou, 1991). The widely used Black and Stephens’ adjustment model distinguishes three dimensions of cross-cultural adjustment; (1) adjustment to the general environment involving perceived adjustment in everyday life (e.g., living conditions in general), (2) interaction adjustment involving the expatriate’s interaction with host country nationals (e.g., speaking with host country nationals), and (3) work adjustment relating to the expatriate’s adjustment to new job tasks, environment, and roles (e.g., performance standards and expectations) (Black & Stephens, 1989). Based on this model, expatriates are considered adjusted to a foreign culture when they experience familiarity and psychological comfort or absence of stress on the three dimensions of expatriate experience (Black & Stephens, 1989). This static perspective has long been the main stream in the research agendas on expatriate adjustment, thereby neglecting the time dimension and the variability of adjustment over time. Recent attempts have, however, acknowledged the time dimension which characterizes the process of adjustment (see e.g., Firth, Chen, Kirkman, & Kim, 2014) as well as the notion that adjustment processes are specific on each dimension (Hippler, Brewster, & Haslberger, 2015).

Other authors have offered different definitions of expatriate adjustment. For example, Shaffer and Harrison (2001) defined personal adjustment as identity reformation where personal and social roles are redefined as attachment and routines established in one’s home countries are broken, thereby adding a link between culture and personality changes in the context of expatriate adjustment. Haslberger and
Brewster (2009) defined individual adjustment as follows: “Expatriates shall be called adjusted to a facet if they are effective in dealings in the new environment (in their own eyes and in the eyes of their hosts), perceive themselves as adequately knowledgeable about the local environment, and feel neutral or positive emotions overall” (p. 387).

Overall, there is a growing body of research on expatriates, and *expatriate adjustment* has been the most studied and published theme on expatriates (McNulty & Selmer, 2017). This literature also revealed important challenges and resources which will be outlined in the following sections.

**Challenges and Resources of Expatriates**

Expatriate assignment is considered a big life event involving a variety of stressors and challenges (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Patterson, 1988), including a new job, a move abroad, a partner giving up a job, children attending a new school, long periods of separation from their loved ones, occupying a new residence, changing family routines, a change in financial status, cultural differences, role conflict, etc. (Bahn, 2015; Haslberger & Brewster, 2008; Hechanova, Beehr, & Christiansen, 2003; Patterson, 1988). Cultural novelty, lack of preparation and relocation (financial) support, loss of home, change of social environment, increased demands related to organizing life in a new location (i.e., fitting in schools, learning about local culture and language, daily hassles, a new work situation for expatriate employees), adjustment to work (expatriate employee), together with feelings of uncertainty, up-rooting and isolation are stressors that all family members need to face to a certain extent (e.g., Haslberger & Brewster, 2008; Lazarova, McNulty, & Semeniuk, 2015; Osland, 2000; Rosenbusch & Cseh, 2012). Particularly trailing partners are preoccupied with finding ways to organize family life, learning the culture and language of the host country, finding a job and can feel isolated and lost without outside professional identity (e.g., Brown, 2008; Cole, 2011; Lazarova et al., 2015; Rosenbusch & Cseh, 2012). Establishing social contacts with local nationals and other expatriates, getting familiar
with local culture and languages are necessary and important for expatriates and their family members (Black & Stephens, 1989).

Some of the stressors caused by adapting to life in a new environment may remain unresolved and become ongoing tensions (i.e., strains) (Patterson, 1988), resulting in increased psychosocial distress (Silbiger & Pines, 2014), depression (Magdol, 2002), increased alcohol and substance abuse (Anderzén & Arnetz, 1997), decreased physical and mental health, lower marriage satisfaction and readiness to re-assign (Lazarova et al., 2015), and worsening subjective work environment (Anderzén & Arnetz, 1999). Expatriates’ emotional complaints are linked to identity issues, uprooting, repeated goodbyes, losses, constant changes, and unresolved grief (Bushong, 2013). Furthermore, lack of a sense of stability may affect the psychological well-being of expatriates and their perception of safety and security in relationships in general (Gostečnik, 2017).

The confrontation with stressors and challenges are described to trigger expatriates’ application of resources and coping behaviours (Patterson, 1988). Previous research points to individual resources such as open-mindedness, emotional stability, high level of social initiative (e.g., Ali, Van der Zee, & Sanders, 2003; Van Erp, Van der Zee, Giebels, & Van Duijn, 2014; Weeks, Weeks, & Willis-Muller, 2010), that together with family resources (e.g., Ali et al., 2003; Caligiuri, 2000; Van der Zee, Ali, & Haaksma, 2007) act as resources for expatriates as well as for their family members. Good relationships within the family and beyond have been found to contribute to the subjective well-being of expatriates and their family members (e.g., Lazarova et al., 2015; Richardson, 2006). At the broader, social level, resources like maintaining contact with the extended family (Richardson, 2006), friends and former colleagues – with the use of social media and internet – help family members to overcome feelings of loneliness and isolation (e.g., Rosenbusch & Cseh, 2012; Shklovski, Kraut, & Cummings, 2006). Also, talking to other people when in need of emotional support and
asking for help with the everyday engagements was reported in one study to alleviate distress within expatriates (Caligiuri & Lazarova, 2002).

**Limitations of the Current Literature**

The overview of research on expatriate adjustment has offered some empirical knowledge about the challenges that are linked to the international work experience, and the resources that expatriates can use to better adjust to the host culture. However, the current research literature is also limited in several aspects. *First*, the expatriate research literature has been generally characterized by a predominant focus on individual expatriates, thereby neglecting other stakeholders, particularly expatriate family members (Lämsä, Heikkinen, Smith, & Tornikoski, 2017; Takeuchi, 2010), despite the fact that family members’ inability to adjust to foreign environments has been found as one of the most critical causes of expatriate failure (Fukuda & Chu, 1994; Haslberger & Brewster, 2008). Lack of research on the role of families in expatriate adjustment is somewhat surprising as expatriation demands major changes in family roles and living circumstances, and career decisions of expatriate workers are largely influenced by their family (and vice versa) (McNulty & Selmer, 2017). So a better understanding of the adjustment of individual expatriates requires the empirical study of *family-level variables* as well (McNulty & Selmer, 2017; Shockley, Shen, & Johnson, 2018). More specifically, more research is needed on the kind of *family characteristics* that may foster or inhibit the adjustment or well-being of expatriates.

*Second*, despite the wide acknowledgement that moving internationally for work is a difficult task that brings along various challenges (Silbiger & Pines, 2014; Truman et al., 2012) which can lead to psychological distress and poor adjustment, very little research attention has been paid to expatriates that actually look for help because of poor mental health. As empirical studies mainly used non-clinical samples of
expatriates, their findings cannot be generalized to the most vulnerable expatriates. Not much is known about how these expatriates try to deal with their emotional challenges, such as feelings of belonging, uprooting, and identity change (Bushong, 2013; Mao & Shen, 2015; Osland, 2000). Thus, research is needed on the subjective experience and psychological complexities of more psychologically distressed expatriates, and about how they attempt to seek support in the host country.

Third, and in line with the previous limitation is the fact that existing studies on support and resources for expatriates cannot sufficiently explain the specifics of social support needs of help-seeking expatriates and the kind of support that would be most helpful as a resource to improve their well-being. Furthermore, the research has shown diversified empirical evidence in identifying the role of a particular type of social support (emotional, instrumental) for expatriates’ successful adjustment. The reexamination of the impact of support on adjustment within samples of help-seeking expatriates is therefore called for. More research is needed to understand the support needs and the types of support for these expatriates, in order to provide the evidence and guidelines about how expatriates can be best assisted in their host country.

And fourth, regarding the methodology, most studies on expatriates rely on surveys to study challenges, resources, and adjustment within expatriates. Although these surveys contributed to the current evidence base on our topic of investigation, they say little about the expatriate experience and the meaning-making of experiences by expatriates. This is partly due to the fact that existing studies have been principally quantitative in nature. Research using qualitative methods, on the other hand, is primarily focused on the understanding of participants’ lived experience (Richardson, 1996; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009) and it is therefore more suitable and needed to gain in-depth knowledge on expatriate experience.

Research Objectives of the Dissertation
The current dissertation focuses on the challenges, resources, and adjustment of expatriates. We aimed to extend existing research on this topic by taking into account the limitations of the current research literature, as described above.

In the first part of the dissertation (Chapters 2 & 3) we aimed to take a family level perspective on expatriate adjustment by reviewing the literature on how expatriates and their family members adjust to living abroad, their key challenges and resources, and by empirically exploring the role of family functioning in the adjustment of expatriates.

In the second part of the dissertation (Chapters 4, 5, & 6) we aimed to focus on individual adjustment of help-seeking expatriates, exploring their challenges, resources, and their well-being. More specifically, social support and psychotherapy were studied as important resources for expatriates to overcome difficulties. We particularly aimed to investigate what type of social support is considered most beneficial for help-seeking expatriates (Chapter 4), and to explore psychotherapy as a resource for expatriates for dealing with their life situations in a more successful and enjoyable way. By using qualitative methods and focusing on psychotherapy, we aimed to complement the existing research on expatriates’ psychological distress with their subjective lived experience of psychotherapy and thus to provide useful clinical implications (Chapters 5 & 6).

**Chapter Overview**

In **Chapters 2 and 3** we intended to broaden the scope from an individual-level perspective on expatriate adjustment to a family-level perspective. In **Chapter 2**, we present a comprehensive overview of findings from research attempting to understand what happens with expatriates and their families while living abroad. More specifically, we provide a narrative review of the empirical research in the last 30 years (between 1988 and 2018) on adjustment of individual family members (expatriates, their partners, and children) and families as a whole, across different literatures (e.g., cultural
psychology, family psychology, stress literature). The key challenges (i.e., relocation difficulties, partner’s resistance and career concerns, children’s adjustment, family adjustment, cultural and language problems, etc.) of expatriation are discussed, as well as family members’ resources (i.e., personal/psychological resources such as open-mindedness, emotional stability, social initiative; family resources such as cohesion, flexibility, and adaptability; and social resources). Practical implications are provided, with a special focus on how families could be assisted during their adjustment process.

In Chapter 3, a family-level perspective was taken by studying family functioning as a resource for fostering expatriate adjustment and life satisfaction, and for alleviation of psychological distress (using the widely known ABCX model of family stress (Hill, 1958) to derive our predictions). We gathered data from a sample of 44 members of newcomer families in their first year after the relocation, and conducted an empirical investigation of the association of these expatriates’ perception of their move and their family functioning on the one hand and their individual adjustment, psychological distress, and satisfaction with life on the other hand. We hypothesized that a more positive perception of the move would be associated with better outcomes (i.e., successful adjustment, lower level of psychological distress and higher satisfaction with life). We also expected better/higher levels of family communication, family satisfaction, family cohesion, and family flexibility being associated with lower levels of psychological distress (depression, anxiety, stress), better adjustment (general, interaction and work adjustment), and higher satisfaction with life.

Chapter 4 reports on a cross-sectional survey study designed to explore the interrelations between social support needs, social support availability, adjustment and psychological distress within a sample of 97 help-seeking expatriates, who were in psychotherapy at the time of the study. It was hypothesized that lower levels of (general, interaction and work) adjustment will be associated with higher levels of psychological distress, and that higher levels of perceived social support availability
(socioemotional and instrumental support) will be associated with better general, interaction and work adjustment. Further, we expected that higher levels of perceived instrumental and socioemotional support availability will contribute to all three dimensions of adjustment, particularly for expatriates reporting high respective support needs.

In Chapters 5 and 6 we explored psychotherapy as a type of resource for expatriates experiencing psychological distress. In Chapter 5, we aimed to illuminate the lived experience of psychotherapy and the meaning that expatriates attributed to these experiences within their expatriate context. In this qualitative study, semi-structured interviews were utilized for the data collection from five participants and interpretative phenomenological analysis (Smith et al., 2009) was employed for data analysis and searching for master themes emerging from expatriates’ psychotherapy experience. In Chapter 6 we particularly explored expatriates’ lived experience of Relational Family Therapy (RFT) (Gostečnik, 2017) in providing clinical interventions for expatriates in need of support. The RFT model was found particularly suitable to study the lived experience of expatriates and their emotional challenges within many different areas of emotional functioning, because it covers the wholeness of individual’s existence on a systemic, interpersonal and intrapsychic level within their relational matrix. This study also used a qualitative method phenomenological interpretative analysis (Smith et al., 2009) to analyse the data from semi-structured interviews with five expatriate clients of relational family therapy.

Finally, Chapter 7 comprises a general discussion with an integrated overview of the main findings from the different studies. Implications for clinical practice as well as theoretical reflections are outlined. Limitations of the studies are discussed together with recommendations for future research.
It should be noted that the present dissertation consists of several papers, which have been published or have been submitted for publication. As each of the manuscripts should be able to stand on its own, the content of some of the chapters may partially overlap.
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CHAPTER 2

EXPATRIATE FAMILY ADJUSTMENT: AN OVERVIEW OF EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE ON CHALLENGES AND RESOURCES

Abstract
This chapter presents a comprehensive overview of findings from research attempting to understand what happens with expatriates and their families while living abroad. Our paper draws on research on adjustment of individual family members (expatriates, their partners, and children) and families as a whole, across different literatures (e.g., cultural psychology, family psychology, stress literature). The key challenges of expatriation are discussed, as well as family members’ resources. Our findings lead to the following conclusions: First, there is lack of systematic research as studies are either missing a theoretical background or largely neglect the multi-informant approach. A comprehensive theory of expatriate family adjustment integrating multiple theoretical perspectives, including the culture identity formation and the impact of home country and host country culture, is called upon. Second, the majority of studies paid little attention to define the concept of family or failed to take into account the cultural aspect of relocation. Third, there is a call for more longitudinal studies including all family members as adjustment is a process that unfolds over time and therefore cannot be sufficiently explained by cross-sectional studies. Suggestions for future research and practical implications are provided, with a special focus on how families could be assisted during their adjustment process.

Introduction

The vast research literature on expatriate adjustment has been long characterized by a predominant focus on individual adjustment of an expatriate employee (James, Hunsley, Navara, & Alles, 2004). Despite some recent research on successful outcomes of expatriate family adjustment and growing awareness that expatriate families need to receive special attention before and during the assignment, challenges of international assignments are still generally underestimated, both by organizations and families (Lazarova, McNulty, & Semeniuk, 2015). This is remarkable as family members’ inability to adjust to foreign environments has been noted as one of the most critical causes of expatriate failure (Fukuda & Chu, 1994; Haslberger & Brewster, 2008). Expatriate success has been the major focus of management perspective on expatriation, traditionally studying traditional corporate expatriates who were supported by the company. Stress and coping literature identified several stressors and hardships of expatriate life (Brown, 2008) and social capital theories tried to explain what kind of social support should be provided to expatriates in the host country (e.g., Copeland & Norell, 2002; Lauring & Selmer, 2010). Family systems theory was generally used as theoretical background to study adjustment of expatriate families and expatriate children (e.g., Rosenbusch & Cseh, 2012; Van der Zee, Ali, & Haaksma, 2007). In contrast, cultural theories explaining the process of family adjustment to a new environment are lacking. The expatriate family adjustment literature needs a comprehensive up-to-date general theory to incorporate different aspects of this very complex matter. The lack of an overview of findings resulting from different focuses taken in different domains of research on expatriate family adjustment provides a rationale for a narrative review of the research on this topic. More specifically, the aim of the current paper was to synthesize the contemporary research literature (family systems, family stress, cross-cultural adjustment, social support, identity theory, work-family literature) on expatriate family adjustment.
After conceptualizing the terms *expatriate*, *family* and *adjustment*, we outline the evidence on challenges and resources in the adjustment process of expatriates, partners, children, and an entire family system. Details will be provided about the major constructs studied, the methodology (designs of the studies), and the theoretical framework within which studies explored the expatriate experience of families. Major conclusions will be presented and implications for future research and practice will be discussed. We drew on empirical quantitative and qualitative studies published in English in peer-reviewed journals and listed in the Web of Science, Academic Search Complete and Google Scholar, in the last 30 years (between 1988 and 2018). In this paper we also refer to some theoretical articles and reviews, particularly when outlining definitions and discussing theoretical backgrounds of the reviewed studies. A narrative literature review as a type of a review article has been chosen because it allows the literature coverage and flexibility to deal with a wide range of issues (i.e., challenges and resources of expatriate family members) within a given comprehensive topic (i.e., expatriate family adjustment) (Collins & Fauser, 2005). The contributions of our narrative review consist of conclusions derived from a holistic interpretation of the current state of the literature on expatriate family adjustment and are based on the synthesis of the empirical studies that have focused on this topic.

**Conceptualization of Expatriate Family Adjustment**

In the context of international work experience, acculturation is a dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members and which involves various forms of mutual accommodation (Berry, 2005). The outcome of acculturation is a longer-term psychological and sociocultural *adjustment*, in other words, relatively stable changes that take place in an individual or a group in response to external demands (Berry, 2005). The acculturation literature identifies different types of global workers, such as sojourners, immigrants, refugees, expatriates, etc. (Sam & Berry, 2006). To clarify the
distinction between different types of cultural groups, Berry and colleagues (2011) proposed the following criteria: a) migration, b) voluntariness, and c) foreseen permanence. For expatriates, the profile includes migration, voluntariness, and no foreseen permanence. Moreover, expatriates differentiate themselves on average by a high educational level, and if not self-initiated, by support from their organization.

Expatriates were further defined as individuals who move to another country, change a place of residence and have a specific goal to work in the new environment (Andresen, Bergdolt, Margenfeld, & Dickmann, 2014); or as assignees across a range of assignment types involving international relocation (e.g., long-term, short-term, and extended business travel assignments) (McNulty, 2015). In the work-family literature, family is any combination of two life partners, with or without children (Caligiuri, Hyland, Joshi, & Bross, 1998); or as two committed partners, where a partner refers to both spouses and significant others and it refers to a traditional expatriate situation where one partner works and one is unemployed (Lazarova, Westman, & Shaffer, 2010). McNulty (2014) provided the following comprehensive definition of an expatriate family: “married, de-facto, live-in, or long-term partners of the opposite or same sex, with or without children, with family members that reside in one or many locations; and legally separated or divorced (single) adults with children, with family members that reside in one or many locations” (p. 5). This definition includes non-traditional types of expatriates which is a new field of enquiry evolving in recent research. It differs from traditional expatriates regarding their family composition (step, single parent, split, overseas adoption, multigenerational), family challenges (special needs or gifted children), family status (single expatriates, accompanying family members besides children), sexual orientation, and gender (McNulty & Hutchings, 2016).

Black and Stephens (1989) defined adjustment as a degree of fit or psychological comfort and familiarity that individuals feel with different aspects of the
foreign culture. Shaffer and Harrison (2001) described personal adjustment as identity reformation where personal and social roles are redefined when attachment and routines established in one’s home countries are broken, thereby adding a link between culture and personality changes in the context of expatriate adjustment. Haslberger and Brewster (2009) defined adjustment as follows: “Expatriates shall be called adjusted to a facet if they are effective in dealings in the new environment (in their own eyes and in the eyes of their hosts), perceive themselves as adequately knowledgeable about the local environment, and feel neutral or positive emotions overall” (p. 387). Adjustment has been understood as a process that involves managing change, new experiences, and new challenges. As a positive outcome it can enrich expatriates’ lives (Kempen, Pangert, Hattrup, Mueller, & Joens, 2015), however, failure to successfully deal with the challenges can result in mental health consequences (Brown, 2008). The underlying stressors are expatriate’s adjustment to a new job together with a move abroad, a partner giving up a job, children attending a new school, long periods of separation from their loved ones, occupying a new residence, changing family routines, a change in financial status, cultural differences, role conflict, etc. (Bahn, 2015; Haslberger & Brewster, 2008; Hechanova, Beehr, & Christiansen, 2003; Patterson, 1988). Some of the stressors caused by adapting to life in a new environment may remain unresolved and become ongoing tensions (i.e., strains) (Patterson, 1988), resulting in increased psychosocial distress (Silbiger & Pines, 2014), depression (Magdol, 2002), increased alcohol and substance abuse (Anderzén & Arnetz, 1997), decreased physical and mental health, lower marriage satisfaction and readiness to re-assign (Lazarova et al., 2015), and worsening subjective work environment (Anderzén & Arnetz, 1999). Their emotional complaints are linked to identity issues, uprooting, repeated goodbyes, losses, constant changes, and unresolved grief (Bushong, 2013).

Confrontation with stressors and challenges described above will trigger the expatriates’ application of resources and coping behaviours (Patterson, 1988). Previous
studies found several individual characteristics that modify the stress response and foster the expatriate’s adjustment to a foreign environment, such as internal locus of control, self-esteem, education, good command of languages, past foreign experience, cultural intelligence, communication ability, extraversion, agreeableness, emotional stability, and open-mindedness (e.g., Ali, Van der Zee, & Sanders, 2003; Caligiuri, 2000; Copeland, 2004; Hechanova et al., 2003; Holopainen & Bjorkman, 2005; Lin, Chen, & Song, 2012).

Not much empirical research, however, has focused on how families of expatriate workers—both individual members and family as a whole—deal with stress and challenges of expatriate assignments, and which resources impact their adjustment. This is surprising for multiple reasons: First, according to the 2016 Global mobility trends survey which included respondents from 163 global companies representing over 11 million employees, 73% of expatriates were accompanied by a partner and 52% of expatriates who accepted overseas assignment took their children with them (Brookfield Global Relocation Services, 2016). Second, family members’ inability to adjust to a foreign assignment has been identified as one of the most critical causes of expatriate failure (Haslberger & Brewster, 2008; Lazarova et al., 2010). Finally, it has been argued, that an expatriate assignment is often seen as offering to a family and its members an opportunity to enrich their cultural and general life (e.g., new international experiences, educational possibilities) (Dickmann, Doherty, Mills, & Brewster, 2008; Kempen et al., 2015; Richardson, 2006; Suutari & Brewster, 2000).

Taken together, the literature on expatriate family adjustment shows that career decisions of expatriate workers are influenced by their family (and vice versa) and that understanding the challenges and the processes of adjustment of individual family members in determining the outcome of an expatriate family experience is therefore critical (McNulty & Selmer, 2017; Shockley, Shen, & Johnson, 2018).
In the following sections we will summarize the main empirical findings about the specific challenges and application of resources of expatriate workers’ trailing partners, children/adolescents, and families as a whole. In line with the aim of the current paper, the inclusion of studies in each section was based on their unit of interest (i.e., partners, children/adolescents and family as a whole). The unit of measurement in most studies was the individual. In the partners section, the informants were partners themselves or expatriate employees reporting about their partner; in the children/adolescent section – the informants were children reporting about themselves and expatriate employees/partners reporting about their children. In the family section informants were expatriates, partners and children. In other words, the measures were administered to individual informants, and they measured individuals’ perception of themselves and their families/relationships.

**Trailing Partner**

**Crossover effects.** Within the HR framework, the most frequently reported reason for a failure in an international assignment (when defined as a premature return) was found an inability or an unwillingness of a partner to adapt to the foreign environment (Haslberger & Brewster, 2008; Punnett, 1997), together with a trailing partner’s career concerns (Lazarova et al., 2015). Similarly, Black and Stephens (1989; a cross-sectional study; 220 expatriate managers and 157 expatriate spouses; assigned in Asia), showed that partner’s positive opinion about the overseas assignment is predictive of their own adjustment, which is in its turn, highly correlated with the adjustment of expatriate managers.

Many studies have indeed shown significant crossover effects among partners (e.g., Black & Gregersen, 1991; Forster, 1997). Van der Zee, Ali and Salomé (2005) conducted a cross-sectional empirical study in the Netherlands with a sample of expatriate partners from 21 home countries and found a crossover of stressors from the expatriate to their partner’s subjective well-being, and a crossover of the expatriates’
emotional distress to their partner’s distress and vice-versa. Based on the work-family and cross-cultural adjustment literature, Takeuchi, Yun and Tesluk (2002) empirically tested and confirmed a crossover and spillover model of expatriate’s adjustment (cross-sectional study including 215 Japanese expatriates assigned in the midwestern United States, 169 spouses, and their superiors). Spillover effects related to the impact of expatriate attitudes in a particular domain (e.g., work) on other domains (e.g., home), whereas crossover effects related to the impact of expatriate attitudes on partner’s attitudes and vice versa. They found evidence for the reciprocal crossover effects between the cross-cultural adjustment of the expatriate worker and their partner. More specifically, a negative or a positive synergy between both partners had a significant impact on their cross-cultural adjustment (i.e., failure of one partner to adjust affected the other’s adjustment, causing a downward spiral of losses that could result in premature termination of the international assignment). Still in the framework of work-family interface, and integrating social capital and social networks theories, Lauring and Selmer (2010) conducted a systematic ethnographic field study using observation and semi-structured interviews with Danish expatriate partners in a compound in Saudi Arabia. They found that partners who feel well adjusted to the general environment in the host culture can have a positive influence on expatriates as they can support them with information on how to use transportation services, or in their social interaction, or even further the expatriates’ careers and repatriation opportunities by using different social strategies.

**Specific challenges.** Lack of preparation, relocation, and cultural novelty induce quite some stress for partners (Forster, 1997; a qualitative study with U.K. expatriate partners; Shaffer & Harrison, 2001). Some studies documented that expatriate partners have to link up more with the local culture as compared to the expatriate employee or their children (Ali et al., 2003; a study with 247 expatriate spouses from 29 different countries, the majority from the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, the
Netherlands). Therefore, the adjustment challenges for partners are not only considered as different, but also greater (Punnet, 1997). According to a field study of 45 male expatriate accompanying partners in the Asia Pacific region conducted by Cole (2012), particularly male trailing partners feel isolated due to a small peer group; they clearly need assistance with establishing personal support network by joining a peer group in a host country. Partners often feel lost in a sense that they do not have an outside professional identity or a specific clarification of their family identity (Rosenbusch & Cseh, 2012). A lot of partners see their employment status change and lose their career because of a move which causes disturbance within home and lowers the interactional adjustment (i.e., interaction with the host–country nationals) (Cole, 2011; Shaffer & Harrison, 2001). In case where both partners pursue their careers in the host country, women seem to experience more work-personal life conflict than men (Mäkelä, Lämsä, Heikkinen, & Tanskanen, 2017). Brown (2008) in a cross-sectional study in London, the United Kingdom, used a public sample of expatriate couples and found that dominant stressors of partners of expatriates were reduced self, local pressures, and isolation. More specifically, partners (as well as expatriates) reported to be stressed by spending insufficient time together, not having close friends to confide in, by concerns over children and family, and by feelings of uncertainty about their future after the current expatriate assignment. Similarly, an interesting study by Lazarova and colleagues (2015) highlighted the most common causes of expatriate failure were partner’s career concerns, partner’s resistance to move and marital breakdown. The latter has only recently been addressed in the research literature, although relationship issues appear to be a big challenge for expatriate couples which may result in expatriate divorce (McNulty, 2015). McNulty (2015) conducted a qualitative exploratory case-based study using data from 13 face-to-face interviews and 25 online survey participants. She found that expatriate marriages end in divorce because of two main reasons; either there has been a core issue in the marriage before expatriation (e.g.,
alcoholism), or one or both spouses are negatively influenced by expatriate culture to such an extent that it induces polarization behaviour that is counter to how they would behave in their own culture (e.g., infidelity). In either case, findings showed that the outcomes of expatriate divorce were significant and may involve bankruptcy, homelessness, depression, alienation from children, even suicide. Taken together, the expatriate literature points to a more difficult situation of a trailing partner as compared to an expatriate employee (Cole, 2011). However, the literature also revealed some factors that may foster partners’ adjustment.

**Resources.** The first category of resources consists of partners’ individual characteristics. Intercultural personality traits – emotional stability, social initiative, and open-mindedness- were found to be important resources for expatriate partners (and the expatriate employees’) psychological and sociocultural adjustment (Ali et al., 2003; Van Erp, Van der Zee, Giebels, & Van Duijn, 2014). Intercultural personality traits as coping resources for expatriate couples’ adjustment were explored by Van Erp and colleagues (2014), in a cross-sectional study with a sample of 98 Dutch expatriate couples (196 expatriates), and a longitudinal analysis of 45 couples from 43 different countries. They found the so-called compensation effect, whereby a partner’s lack of intercultural personality traits (as listed above) was compensated for by the other partner’s higher levels of those traits. High motivation, favourable opinion about the overseas assignment, previous expatriate experience, pre-move visit, cross cultural training and/or language training, host country language proficiency, social efficacy, self-efficacy and certainty about the duration of assignment proved to be positively related to partner’s adjustment (Black & Stephens, 1989; Copeland, 2004; Shaffer & Harrison, 2001).

The second category of resources includes identity reestablishment and feelings of psychological security. For example, drawing upon identity theory and the expatriate literature, Shaffer and Harrison (2001) studied spouse adjustment using a mixed method
design with a sample of 211 expatriate couples in 37 countries and six continents. Findings showed that cross-cultural adjustment depends to some extent on whether partners can re-establish their identity in the new culture, including their individual/personal base of identity (i.e., language fluency), interpersonal/social base of identity (i.e., having preschool aged children), and environmental/situational base of identity (i.e., culture novelty and favourability of living conditions). Similar findings—on professional identity and social status—were reported by Copeland (2004). Herleman, Britt and Hashima (2008) found that a partner’s sense of comfort and psychological security in specific locations they regularly visit, a concept coming from Japanese culture called *Ibasho*, proved to be an important predictor of their adjustment and well-being. This study was conducted in Belgium and used a mixed method design with sample of 104 expatriate wives mainly coming from the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom.

Thirdly, and at the more social level, company assistance prior and during expatriation, support from families, and support (e.g., network size, breadth of support, depth of support) from host country nationals, but also contacts with other expatriate partners, and time with old friends as well as new acquaintances were found to be essential to partners’ adjustment (Ali et al., 2003; Caligiuri & Lazarova, 2002; Copeland, 2004; De Cieri, Dowling, & Taylor, 1991; Shaffer & Harrison, 2001). Copeland and Norell (2002) studied the role of social support within the framework of social support theory with 194 trailing partners (American women residing in 17 host countries in Europe, Asia, the Middle East, Latin America) and found that better adjusted women had participated in the decision to relocate, experienced fewer losses in friendships, had more functions of social support adequately met and could rely on the support from local rather than long-distance providers, and they were coming from families with higher cohesion. Further empirical evidence showed that family cohesion and adaptability (i.e., the ability to change and adapt to new environments while at the
same time remaining closely tied to each other), open communication among partners (Ali et al., 2003), satisfaction with family relationships and extended family support (De Cieri et al., 1991; Shaffer & Harrison, 2001) facilitate partner’s adjustment. In a qualitative study Gupta, Banerjee and Gaur (2012) used the grounded theory methodology with 26 Indian trailing partners accompanying their partners on assignments in four continents (Asia, Europe, North America, and Australia). Findings of this study corroborated previous research such that the level of trailing partners’ adjustment was greatly impacted by cultural novelty, support from family, peers and the organisation, and their personality. Moreover, they found that expatriates’ perceived gender-role ideology and marital obligations towards their partners played a significant role.

Children and Adolescents

Third culture kids (TCKs). Pollock and Van Reken (2009) have introduced the following description of a TCK: “A Third Culture Kid is a person who has spent a significant part of his or her development years outside the parent’s culture. The TCK builds relationships to all of the cultures, while not having full ownership in any. Although elements from each culture are assimilated into the TCK’s life experience, the sense of belonging is in relationship to others of similar background.” (Pollock & Van Reken 2009, p.13). The identity formation of TCKs and their cultural and intellectual development is taking place in the third culture, particularly in the international environment in the host country (first culture is understood as parents’ culture and the second culture is a host culture). TCKs share more common experience to other TCKs than to their peers who grew up in their home or host cultures (Bonebright, 2010). Among difficulties, such as struggling with a sense of belonging and disruption of identity formation, having lived in different cultures also provided TCKs with skills to handle change, to be more open and accepting to different cultures and to successfully handle these differences. Bonebright (2010) in her review also pointed out the potential
that adult TCKs can bring to HR looking for business expatriates. Besides being used to frequent travel and changes as part of an international mobile lifestyle and having good education and language skills, they also have experience of adjusting to a new work and life situation in a new location.

Selmer and Lam (2004) conducted a survey study with British expatriate adolescents (63 respondents living in Hong Kong, mean age 14 years), local Hong Kong adolescents ethnic Chinese (a sample of 103 adolescents, mean age 17 years), and a sample of British adolescents living in the United Kingdom with 88 respondents. They showed that British expatriate adolescents had distinct characteristics in terms of their perceptions of being international as well as their international mobility preferences and consequences. Moore and Barker (2012) were interested in cultural identity of third culture individuals and employed a biographical phenomenology or life story interviewing as a qualitative data collection method with a sample of 19 individuals between 18-44 years of age from six nationalities from 23 countries in all continents with varied intercultural experiences age. They found that TCKs possessed multiple identities or multicultural identity, they lacked clear sense of belonging but are competent intercultural communicators and perceive their experience as mainly beneficial.

Crossover effects. Expatriate’s work satisfaction has been found to positively affect children’s adjustment (Van der Zee et al., 2007). Further, the research has documented that effective adjustment of adolescents might lead an expatriate family to stay abroad longer than originally planned (Weeks, Weeks, & Willis-Muller, 2010). However, little is known about the extent that demands faced by children have on their parents’ adjustment. It has been noted that crossover effects of family stress to children need to be acknowledged and talked about within the family (Lazarova et al., 2015).

Specific challenges. Depending on their own age, children have to face additional challenges and these may have significant effects on the moving family as a
whole. One of these challenges, described by Rosenbusch and Cseh (2012) is children’s confusion about their role (specifically gender role expectations), as a result of being raised in different cultures. Other challenges for young children are linked to loss of their home and their social network, change of schools, making of new friends, and learning a new language (Lazarova et al., 2015; McLachlan, 2008; Pollari & Bullock, 1988). Feelings of uncertainty, a sense of belonging to a culture and identity loss have been frequently reported (Ali, 2003; Moore & Barker, 2012; Rosenbusch & Cseh, 2012). Emotional instability and an ambivalent attachment style were identified to be important risk factors that made children more susceptible to adjustment problems (Ali, 2003; Van der Zee et al., 2007). In the framework of adolescent development theory and the concept of third culture kids, Weeks, Weeks and Willis-Muller (2010) used in-depth interviews to study the adjustment of expatriate 18 students age 14-19 of private international school in Shanghai, China, who were coming from the United States (the majority), Australia, Canada, Malaysia and Philippines. They found that expatriate children have unique challenges of adjustment to a foreign environment, among which were the disruption of identity formation process during their adolescence, concerns related to making friends, fitting in, and to be successful in school. One of the difficulties they tend to experience is that in their host culture they may stand out because of different look and usually they act differently than host country nationals. Lucier-Greer and colleagues (2015) explored normative and context risk factors and the role of relationships (family, informal networks, formal systems) as protective factors among adolescents from military families (a sample of 1036 adolescents between 11-18 years of age) located at four U.S. army installations, one of which was in Europe. They found that higher levels of cumulative risk experienced by adolescents were associated with more depressive symptoms, lower academic performance and lower persistence (Lucier-Greer, Arnold, Mancini, Ford, & Bryant, 2015). International move can disrupt adolescents’ identity formation process, which is characterized by a growth towards
more autonomy, becoming more independent from parents, and peers becoming new attachment figures.

**Resources.** At the individual level, being open-minded (i.e., understanding that cultures are different and that people around the world have different perspectives on a variety of issues) was reported by adolescents to be key to adjusting well (Weeks et al., 2010). Secure attachment, emotional stability, and high level of social initiative were found to foster children’s adjustment (Ali, 2003; Van der Zee et al., 2007). Because of having multiple experiences with different situations and people it is easier for them to interact with different people and to adapt to new situations (Moore & Barker, 2012).

In terms of family resources, Van der Zee and colleagues (2007) studied family characteristics such as family adaptability (i.e., the extent to which a family is flexible and able to change its functioning; Olson, Russel, & Sprenkle, 1984), family cohesion (i.e., the amount of emotional bonding between family members; Olson et al., 1984), and family communication (i.e., the tool through which families can create a shared sense of meaning, develop and orchestrate coping strategies, and maintain harmony and balance; McCubbin, Thompson, & McCubbin, 1996). To examine the determinants of effective coping with cultural transition, they used a survey with a sample of 104 expatriate children and adolescents from 21 different home countries (the majority from the Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland, Belgium; who lived in 37 different countries; the majority in the Netherlands, Singapore, France). They found that all three characteristics contributed to higher levels of intercultural adjustment of children, with family cohesion being the strongest predictor of both quality of life and sociocultural adjustment of expatriate children and adolescents. Traits and attachment styles were directly associated with better adjustment, and moreover, they also moderated the relationship between family and work-related factors and intercultural adjustment.

Family cohesion may also impact expatriate children’s ability to establish and maintain friendships with other children in the host country (Caligiuri et al., 1998). In
the early stage of a relocation to an unfamiliar environment, family members need to rely primarily on each other. The emotional support from parents and siblings and good discussion with parents about the move, where parents show sensitivity to children’s specific needs in the host country, were found as important facilitators in the adjustment process of children and teenagers (Ali, 2003; De Leon & McPartlin, 1995; Lazarova et al., 2015; Weeks et al., 2010).

Another important social resource for children and adolescents is the support they receive from friends, primarily at school (Weeks et al., 2010). Teenagers don’t seem to be bothered by the fact that they are often isolated from the host culture (Weeks et al., 2010), however, they really seem to need friendships with peers who speak their mother tongue. Overall, some evidence shows that family support and informal networks buffer against depressive symptoms with adolescents and their academic performance as well as persistence were higher (Lucier-Greer et al., 2015).

**Family as a whole**

Expatriation demands major changes in family roles and living circumstances. Takeuchi (2010) and Lämsä and colleagues (2017) underscored the importance of considering the family and its members as stakeholders of a company to examine family’s expectations with regard to company support. Our overview of empirical evidence of the research on expatriate family adjustment showed that there is a limited number of studies that explored expatriate family as a unit and included all family members as informants. Below we discuss the studies that examined family level variables or explicitly focused on family adjustment (see e.g., Caligiuri et al., 1998; Lazarova et al., 2015; McLachlan, 2008; Rosebusch & Cseh, 2012). Lazarova and colleagues (2015) conducted a large study using a convenience sampling approach with 656 expatriates, expatriate spouses and teenage children coming from 51 home countries and assigned in 77 countries using work-life balance, family systems, and crossover theory to explore family narratives on international mobility. Findings
showed that a successful movable family should be adventurous, have a sense of humour and good communication where all members ‘pull in the same direction’ and all members are treated as important in family decisions, family members need to make an effort to socialise outside of the family and all the members should be committed to the move. Family members may have different needs that also surface at different times, and some tensions linked to the strains of moving, nevertheless, these stressful events may also bring family together. On the other hand, there is the need to perform, to be brave and to keep going, although at times it is barely manageable. Further, this study pointed to the changing face of expatriate family including both parents and children.

Indeed, there is a growing body of research on non-traditional family forms, such as women as breadwinners, single parents, step families, same sex families with dual careers and children (McNulty & Selmer, 2017). McNulty (2014) reported on a case study with a sample of four female western expatriates living in Singapore, China, Brussels, and North Carolina – a single parent, overseas adoption, split family and lesbian assignees in their breadwinner roles. Fischlmayr and Puchmüller (2016) used social capital theory as a theoretical base for their study on the experiences of 25 female international business travellers living in dual-career families from four Western and non-Western countries on four different continents. The analysis of the interviews showed both similar and different experiences (i.e., childcare and support networks, and social acceptance), and understanding of integrating family and career life as female non-traditional expatriates across cultures.

An expatriate assignment offers opportunities for families: relocating may bring the family closer, especially if the host country is marked by limited social resources and strong cultural differences (Copeland & Norell, 2002). De Cieri et al. (1991) found that a large proportion of women commented that their relationships with their children had become closer through the relocation, because they had similar challenges. It was
documented that the expatriate experience usually starts with great excitement and positive expectations (Osland, 2000; Punnett, 1997). In an interesting qualitative study by Osland (2000), expatriates reported that the stage of leaving home and crossing the physical and cultural threshold of a foreign land lasts about six months and is characterized by strangeness, difficulties, ups and downs, by the feelings of uncertainty (questioning their own identity, their values, and their understanding of everyday life), a sense of uneasy responsibility for uprooting their family with no guarantee that every family member will adjust to the new culture, and by intense, accelerated learning. After their return home expatriates reported being proud of succeeding difficult work challenges, making it ‘on their own’, feeling ‘special’, and taking pride in their ability to acculturate and adapt to change.

**Spillover effects.** Caligiuri and colleagues (1998) were the first to report on spillover effects between family life and work adjustment: if expatriates are well adjusted to working in the host country, their positive feelings will spill over to their family and facilitate family’s cross-cultural adjustment. This study used family systems theory as theoretical background and collected data from 110 families (mostly coming from Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom) on global assignments in 26 different countries. Some other studies confirmed a positive spillover of adjustment to expatriate’s partners and children (Ali, 2003; Trompetter, Bussin, & Nienaber, 2016). Van der Zee and colleagues (2005) reported a negative spillover of expatriates’ home demands to their work roles. Shaffer and Harrison (1998) showed that expatriates with greater family responsibilities paid increasingly more attention to non-work factors in making their withdrawal decisions.

**Specific challenges.** Rosenbusch and Cseh (2012) used family systems theory and expatriate adjustment as theoretical knowledge base to study cross-cultural adjustment of expatriate families in a multinational organization based in the United States. They recruited a sample of 15 expatriate families (111 expatriates, 15 spouses
and seven adolescent children) and applied a case study with mixed method approach. Cultural, relational and psychological stressors had the highest impact on the cross-cultural adjustment, among which cultural stress seemed to be the greatest. Overcoming cultural differences, grasping the art of a new language and being understood by host country nationals were found big challenges in the adjustment process of expatriate families. Challenging were also physical health (i.e., weight gain), physical stress, feelings of loneliness, struggle to maintain a sense of stability and comfort within the family unit, attempts to make new friends and to keep in touch with old ones (Rosenbusch & Cseh, 2012). Emotional distress (i.e., anxiety or depression) may result from expatriate family’s unsuccessful attempts of adjustment (Rosenbusch & Cseh, 2012). A relocation takes extra toll on marriage and it has been argued that expatriate divorce increases stress and psychological trauma as it involves separation and custody disputes across geographical boundaries (McNulty, 2015). Extreme novelty, stress of a new environment, and expatriate’s lack of knowledge about how to obtain social reinforcement in the new culture, often compels expatriate families to seek professional help (Osland, 2000) and family counselling (Lazarova et al., 2015). It has been noted that special attention needs to be given to non-traditional family structures, such as status reversal marriage (i.e., females as breadwinners), single parents, split families and gay partnerships (McNulty, 2014).

**Resources.** A few studies focused on family characteristics/dynamics that may foster or inhibit adjustment of its individual members or the family as a whole. Having a sense of adventure, good and open communication, commitment to the move of all family members, trying to socialize outside the family unit were all found to facilitate family adjustment (Lazarova et al., 2015). Rosenbusch & Cseh (2012) showed that of the six components of family flexibility, the components of roles, rules, leadership and assertiveness had the most impact on cross-cultural adjustment of expatriate families. More specifically, families experienced lack of role differentiation and were in need of
specific clarification of family identity. Partners reported feelings of loss outside the professional identity due to career interruption. Leadership within the family seemed to be a core issue during the move, as family members found that part of their responsibility was to assist other family members in adjusting to a new environment. Sharing their opinions with one another (assertiveness) and staying connected as a family was important for family members. Families with a supportive climate, good family communication, and a positive perception of the international assignment experienced more successful adjustment (Caligiuri et al., 1998; Copeland & Norell, 2002). Also, family members’ satisfaction with their family relationships has been shown to be significantly associated with psychological adjustment to relocation and satisfaction with life throughout the expatriation (De Cieri et al., 1991; Richardson, 2006 – informants were expatriates). In particular, healthy relationships between partners were found critical for a successful expatriate family (Lazarova et al., 2015).

The second category of family resources are external to the family. Help from the company in dealing with financial concerns related to the move and life in a new country, and good organizational and practical support, including providing contacts in the new country are all important support systems for adjustment of an expatriate family (Lazarova et al., 2015). Active involvement within a church, school, youth organization, employing organization, health or welfare organization in the host country helps family members to adjust quicker to a new location (Cornille, 1993). Schools (most often international ones) can offer support for families by encouraging dialogue among families and the school and facilitate parent-adolescent communication during relocation (McLachlan, 2008 – a qualitative study with 45 families at an international school in southern England).

A long-distance family support is crucial during assignment-imposed separation (Richardson, 2006; Starr & Curie, 2009 – both empirical studies drew from expatriates as informants), and different forms of electronic communication allow family members
to stay connected with their extended family and friends (Rosenbusch & Cseh, 2012). The internet and social media are increasingly providing a new form of social communication with family and friends and thus enable emotional support provision from them (Haslberger & Brewster, 2008), and which were also found to be reasonably good predictors of levels of perceived social support, loneliness and depressive states of adult expatriates shortly after their residential move (Shklovski, Kraut, & Cummings, 2006).

Conclusions and Implications

Summary of Findings

Based on the empirical evidence from the studies included in our review, the following conclusions can be made about the challenges and stressors that come along with living as an expatriate family. Cultural novelty, lack of preparation and relocation (financial) support, loss of home, change of social environment, increased demands related to organizing life in a new location (i.e., schooling system, learning about local culture and language, daily hassles, new work situation for expatriate employees), adjustment to work (expatriate employee), together with feelings of uncertainty, uprooting and isolation are stressors that all family members need to face to certain extent (e.g., Haslberger & Brewster, 2008; Lazarova et al., 2015; Osland, 2000; Rosenbusch & Cseh, 2012).

However, there are some differences among family members, too. Children and adolescents are most concerned by fitting into new schools and making new friends and not so much by learning the local language and creating social networks outside school (e.g., Weeks et al., 2010). Trailing partners, on the other hand, are preoccupied with finding ways to organize family life, learning the culture and language of the host country, finding a job, and can feel isolated and lost without outside professional identity (e.g., Brown, 2008; Cole, 2011; Lazarova et al., 2015; Rosenbusch & Cseh, 2012).
Establishing social contacts with local nationals and other expatriates, getting familiar with local culture and languages are necessary and important for the whole family (Black & Stephens, 1989). International experience can bring family members together, which is an important positive outcome of expatriation, however, family as a whole may also feel isolated and lonely (e.g., De Cieri et al., 1991; Rosenbusch & Cseh, 2012). Taken together, during their adjustment process, expatriate families are confronted with the following challenges: children’s education, partners’ resistance and career issues, location difficulties, cultural adjustment, language issues, and support for other family members.

Our narrative review also documents the process by which individuals and families cope with the challenges and stressors described above (i.e., their coping resources). Personal/psychological resources such as open-mindedness, emotional stability, high level of social initiative (e.g., Ali et al., 2003; Van Erp et al., 2014; Weeks et al., 2010) together with family resources such as flexibility, adaptability and cohesion (e.g., Ali et al., 2003; Caligiuri, 2000; Van der Zee et al., 2007) act as resources for expatriates as well as for their family members. Good relationships within the family and beyond contribute to the subjective well-being of expatriates and their family members (e.g., Lazarova et al., 2015; Richardson, 2006). Turning to more social-level resources, maintaining contact with the extended family (Richardson, 2006), friends and former colleagues—with the use of social media and internet—helps family members to overcome feelings of loneliness and isolation (e.g., Rosenbusch & Cseh, 2012; Shklovski et al., 2006). Talking to other people when in need of emotional support and asking for help with the everyday engagements alleviates distress with expatriates (Caligiuri & Lazarova, 2002). Social support networks play an important role in the adjustment process—although expatriates, partners and children may use different ways to integrate socially. For children, good integration at their school is crucial (Weeks et al., 2010), for partners support from host country nationals (e.g.,
Copeland & Norell, 2002; Shaffer & Harrison, 2001), and for expatriates and partners organizational support and company assistance are important (e.g., Ali et al., 2003; Cole, 2011, 2012, Lazarova et al., 2015).

The third conclusion concerns reciprocal influence between family members in terms of stressors, application of resources, and adjustment. Crossover effects (for instance of stressors, subjective well-being, emotional distress) between partners have been documented in the literature (e.g., Lauring & Selmer, 2010; Takeuchi et al., 2002; Van der Zee et al., 2005). Also, family situation and work adjustment of expatriate employees are strongly related (Caligiuri et al., 1998). Finally, crossover effects for all family members, including children, need to be taken into account when relocating with children (Lazarova et al., 2015).

The fourth conclusion concerns the methodological characteristics of the studies included in our review. At the level of study designs, we can conclude that there is a growing body of qualitative studies attempting to provide insights into the subjective experience of expatriate family members, or studies using both quantitative and qualitative methods (see e.g., Fischlmayr & Puchmüller, 2016; Lauring & Selmer, 2010; Lazarova et al., 2015; McNulty, 2015). Qualitative studies mostly used interviews to gather data from expatriates to understand their expatriate complexity. The research on expatriate families, expatriate children and TCKs, is still evolving and such qualitative designs are helpful for better understanding the lived experience of these emerging expatriate (sub)groups. While most studies used methodological perspectives of cross-cultural psychology, cultural psychology perspectives are barely presented in the area of expatriate family adjustment. Research including empirical ethnographic field studies that incorporate the lived experience of a host country culture is scarce (see e.g., Lauring & Selmer, 2010 as an important exception). Finally, the majority of quantitative studies used cross-sectional designs, and longitudinal study designs are hardly applied.
Concerning the *samples and geographical location* we can conclude that the majority of studies used samples with English speaking expatriates, mainly coming from the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia. The exceptions used samples from Asia (e.g., Japan, India), and Europe (mostly from Western Europe). There is a huge gap of studies with populations from Central, Southern and Eastern Europe, Africa, Latin America and most of the Asia. In addition, studies on expatriate family adjustment using samples speaking other languages than English, are lacking.

Fifth, at the level of the *theoretical background*, it can be concluded that family systems theories, cross-cultural adjustment and expatriate literature and social support network theory prevail as the knowledge base for the research. Another observation is that management theories have studied adjustment through the lens of success – for a company and also for the expatriate and expatriate family. The successful assignment presents less costs for the organization. Cultural perspectives, on the other hand, remain largely unaddressed (see Rosenbusch & Cseh, 2012; Shaffer & Harrison, 2001, for notable exceptions).

Sixth, and also at the conceptual level is the observation that the majority of studies failed to explain the *definition of a family* used in the study (see Caligiuri et al., 1998; Lazarova et al., 2010; McNulty, 2014, for exceptions). It is understood that they involve parents and children, however, the traditional family definition is no longer useful because of the changing family constellations. The most comprehensive family definition was proposed by McNulty (2014) who also included non-traditional family forms such as long-term partners of opposite sex, single adults with children, and families of which members may reside in different locations. There is a huge gap in the research about self-initiated expatriate families. The majority of studies used the term *spouse* or *wife* to refer to a partner accompanying (usually) male expatriates on assignment. For our review we therefore decided to use the term *trailing partner* to
refer to a significant person in an expatriate life that accompanies them on international assignment.

Taken together, the majority of the empirical research used quantitative methods studying expatriates in a given context, the focus in the existing research is predominately on challenges and hardships of expatriate life whereby the positive experiences of expatriation have been largely neglected. During the last decade the research agendas are also shifting from company based western male expatriates to new forms of expatriation and new types of non-traditional families.

**Directions for Future Research**

Based on the findings of our review, we can conclude that despite the fact that research on expatriate family adjustment is growing (Caligiuri et al., 1998; Lazarova et al., 2015; McNulty, 2014; Rosenbusch & Cseh, 2012), the available empirical evidence is limited. Our review identifies the following avenues for future research.

First, the neglected area remains adjustment of expatriate children and adolescents, which cannot be explained by current adult-focused theories as children have different challenges than their parents (Shaffer & Harrison, 2001). The existent TCK literature tends to rely upon the work of Pollock and Van Reken (2009). More research is needed about identity formation and challenges that come along with living abroad, and particularly about resources that they can apply while growing up in the international environment. Namely, their culturally mobile upbringing defines them as being the very essence of multicultural individuals in a global society (Moore & Barker, 2012). With many new forms of non-traditional expatriate families, TCKs’ profiles are also changing into even more globally oriented and independent. This is very important as TCKs have a great potential to become future expatriates and can be in advantage in the world labour market due to their specific international experiences (Bonebright, 2010). The literature on TCKs needs an all-inclusive definition to explain the specifics of the identity formation of TCKs, taking into account the characteristics of different
cultures and also the influence of parents’ culture. Furthermore, different types of families and also multicultural families need to be considered when studying the international experience of young people.

Second, more research is needed on the reciprocal influence between all family members (e.g., impact of expatriates on partners; impact of children on parents and vice versa). Since families living in a foreign country often become closer and need to rely on their own resources (Copeland & Norell, 2002; De Cieri et al., 1991), their role to support each other to overcome potential crises may be even more important than in their home country (in which community/social sources of support are more available).

Third, so far studies on expatriate adjustment have mostly been overly restrictive in their focus and only a limited number of variables were investigated (Takeuchi, 2010). Therefore, future research should broaden its scope to different stress variables (e.g., chronic strains, daily hassles) as well as to different outcome variables (e.g., short term crisis, long term adjustment). Further research should include the adaptation to changing family roles, to map relationships among forms of adjustment and to offer a systematic way to group adjustment antecedents (Lazarova et al., 2010). Recently published articles on expatriate family experience (e.g., Lazarova et al., 2015; McNulty, 2015) call for more research on topics that do not focus on expatriate success but rather give in-depth insight into experience of expatriation for a family. Additionally, with the increased globalisation, studies on expatriation could learn more from migration studies to improve conceptual refinements of concepts of expatriation and to deepen the knowledge base and provide relevant practical advice for different types of expatriates (Andresen et al., 2014).

Fourth, many studies examining expatriate family adjustment lack a theoretical background or invoke the stressor-stress-strain perspective (Bhaskar-Shrinivas, Harrison, Shaffer, & Luk, 2005), or the work-family literature as their underlying theoretical basis (see Caligiuri et al., 1998; Lazarova et al., 2015; Rosenbusch & Cseh,
2012; Takeuchi, 2010; Van der Zee et al., 2007, as important exceptions). Studies on expatriate families, however, could integrate family psychology literature, family systems theory, and family stress models, positive psychology, and in particular, cultural psychology and cultural identity formation. A different culture and language barriers in the host country may be a challenging experience for expatriates, their partners and children involving the need to restructure, develop, and adapt in response to the requirements of the new environment. Capturing the cultural experience of the expatriate family would add to the existing knowledge where currently family and its members seem to be the sole generators of their adjustment process. More research interest is needed to better understand the interface between expatriate family adjustment and cultural aspects of relocation, and specifically, into the identity change of expatriate family members and family as a whole.

Fifth, on the methodological level, there is a need for longitudinal designs that examine adjustment as a long-term process rather than a momentary event (Haslberger & Brewster, 2009). Most of the studies included in the current review were cross-sectional in nature and cannot inform us about the directionality of potential causal relationships between the variables under study. Qualitative designs including ethnographic field studies in different parts of the world and different cultures will be particularly useful to further our understanding of family members’ perception of their experience and meaning making during international assignments. So far cultural psychologists have not taken much interest in the research field. However, the understanding of expatriate family adjustment could be largely enriched and refined by cultural psychology’s specific concept of culture, its interest in thick descriptions and its preference for qualitative/hermeneutic approaches. More qualitative studies are needed also to provide insights and understanding of expatriate experience, particularly for non-traditional family compositions. For example, qualitative method interpretative phenomenological analysis (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009) could provide insights
into the expatriates’ subjective lived experience as this method is suitable to gain rich understandings of topics with little theoretical and empirical evidence. Further, quantitative studies should include large samples of homogenous groups of expatriates and aim to explain different constructs and processes related to expatriate family adjustment. More mixed methods research designs are called for to gain more knowledge on the breadth and depth of the expatriate family experience of adjustment. Replication of findings with larger and more diverse samples (e.g., across countries of location of assignments) is also needed (Herleman et al., 2008). Particularly, scholars should try to study different cultures in different parts of the world, as opposed to using mostly English-speaking samples from western countries.

Sixth, our recommendation points to the necessity of studies using a multi-informant approach where all family members – expatriates, trailing partners and children/adolescents – report on the variables of interest. The impression from the existing research is that such approach with large samples of expatriate families is difficult to apply (Takeuchi, 2010). One plausible explanation could be that expatriate families are probably very difficult to recruit for research because of increased stress and lack of time after the move. Also, there is no particular spot where they report to when they come to live in a host country. Therefore, more research effort and perhaps collaboration with scholars in different countries and cultures should be enhanced to produce studies across different cultures.

Seventh, many studies have looked into the relationship between personality and cross-cultural adjustment, however, very few focused on partners’ and children’s personality traits (see Ali et al., 2003 and Van der Zee et al., 2007, for exceptions). Furthermore, we need more studies to focus on the positive side of expatriation for a family and how to address motives for international life.

Eighth, there is a call for more research on new family forms and non-traditional family structures, blended families with step-parents and half-siblings from prior
relationships, single parents and status reversal marriages (McNulty, 2014), the emerging self-initiated expatriate families, and dual-careers families.

Ninth, as research points to the fact that an expatriate assignment may affect the psychological well-being of the family system as a whole as well as each individual family member, attention should be given to the development of *clinical interventions* with the expatriate population. Feelings of alienation, uprooting, constant changes and goodbyes are common complaints expatriates which expatriates can address in psychological counselling (Bushong, 2013). Specifics of multicultural counselling combined with family therapy could be useful professional support for families during their adjustment process. Findings of this narrative review therefore point to the need for future research on relational and family processes (i.e., dynamics, interactions and stories) that influence the decision to move back or to prolong the stay.

Finally, there is a call for *more research* and more publishing on expatriate family adjustment. As mentioned above, expatriate families may be a difficult sample to recruit for the research. Further, one might argue that there is more research on expatriate families actually conducted than it appears in peer-reviewed journals.

**Practical Implications**

Based on our narrative review on expatriate family adjustment, some practical and clinical implications can be outlined. For example, families could benefit from pre-departure cross-cultural and language training (Copeland, 2004; Punnett, 1997). During this training, the specifics of the host culture, past foreign expatriate experience, language skills, intercultural competences, and personal resources of the whole family could be targeted (Shaffer, Harrison, Gregersen, Black, & Ferzandi, 2006; Van Erp et al., 2014). The preparation part should also not overlook the importance of family members’ *perception* of and *motives* for the international relocation (Dickmann et al., 2008; Suutari & Brewster, 2000). Companies sending families on international assignments should be encouraged to include all family members in the pre-departure
training (Shaffer & Harrison, 2001) where their different roles and expectations should be taken into account. Family counselling could forewarn of the upcoming changes and clarify family roles and family functioning, and could alleviate problems (Lazarova et al., 2010; Rosenbusch & Cseh, 2012). Additionally, more emphasis should be put on explaining the motives and positive aspects of the relocation.

The preparation before the move and the actual process of adjustment may be highly influenced by the nature of the host culture. Particularly, it should be acknowledged that there is a difference if the host country is multicultural with different sub-cultures (e.g., the United States, big cities, such as London, Brussels, etc.) or monocultural (e.g., Japan). In cases where expatriate parents belong to one (the same) culture, they may not be completely aware that their children growing up as TCKs have different challenges. Therefore, it is of huge importance that parents receive counselling about how to support children during their most crucial developmental years, taking into account their identity formation and their developmental needs. While parents may be struggling with homesickness and planning their eventual return to their home country, for children the move may provoke additional stress as they may perceive it as adjusting to a new culture. TCKs belong to a ‘third culture’ which is placeless, and their restlessness and feeling uprooted may lead them to change places over and over again. TCKs feel best among other people with similar experiences which parents may find hard to understand and accept. In short, TCKs are different from their parents in terms of their cultural identity and families need to be educated and supported to deal with this challenge.

The possibility and availability of psychological support (e.g., family counselling) in the new location should be discussed with the family. Partners could specifically focus on how to use their time and resources when abroad (Lauring & Selmer, 2010). Direct communication and support between the company and trailing partner could facilitate adjustment of the whole family, as it is usually trailing partners
who have to deal more with hassles of relocation (Lazarova et al., 2015). Children and teenagers could be prepared for the international assignment through video information about the life in the new school and friendships abroad (Weeks et al., 2010). Further, family members who are moving abroad and host country nationals should be put in contact before the departure so that hosts in the host countries could play an active role in the preparation activities.

Even with the most thorough pre-departure training families cannot avoid experiencing some degree of adjustment stress shortly after the relocation, and therefore some follow-up on the adjustment process after the move is warranted. For example, host country nationals could be considered to assist newcomer expatriate families with learning about the host culture and local customs in the new location (Osland, 2000). In particular human resources management could add value by providing adjustment assistance within the expatriate communities. For example, by supporting the development of friendships in the new environment (i.e., community groups, workplaces and online social media) (Bahn, 2015). Furthermore, employer provided career assistance and consideration of roles and responsibilities of both partners is needed for expatriate partners who plan to continue their career in the host country (Cole, 2011; Lazarova et al., 2015; Mäkelä et al., 2017). To be able to offer clear guidelines on how children facing many relocations in their life can obtain some degree of sense of stability when their family moves on international assignments, more research is needed on the nature of adjustment of children and teenagers.

In sum, our narrative review provides a summary of contemporary findings on expatriate family adjustment, including identification of challenges as well as personal, family, and community resources that foster adjustment of family members. Notably, clear conceptualization of expatriate family or expatriate family adjustment is needed. A general theory of expatriate family adjustment is called upon that would in a comprehensive way integrate multiple theoretical perspectives on expatriate family
adjustment; work-family literature, adjustment and expatriate literature, stress and positive psychology, cultural and cross-cultural psychology, social theories, work transitions, family functioning, family relations, different types of families, and communication. Further, studies should not neglect culture identity formation of children and the impact of both home country and host country cultures. In particular, research using cultural psychology perspective is needed to enrich the understanding of expatriate family experience. Finally, more research should focus on shedding light on positive outcomes and opportunities of expatriate families.

Our narrative review represents an important contribution to expatriate family adjustment literature. It may serve as an important source of knowledge for experts in the field of expatriate family adjustment and related fields of research, such as cultural, cross-cultural psychology, family and organizational psychology. Because of its broad scope it can be accessible to broader audience, such as HR experts, teachers in international schools, clinicians working with expatriates, and of course present and future expatriate families.
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CHAPTER 3

ADJUSTMENT AND WELL-BEING OF NEWCOMER EXPATRIATES: A STUDY ON PERCEPTION OF MOVE AND FAMILY FUNCTIONING

Abstract

This study aimed to explore the associations between newcomer expatriates’ perception of move and family functioning on the one hand, and their level of adjustment, psychological distress and life satisfaction. We expected that perceiving the move as more manageable and less difficult, better family functioning (i.e., family communication, family satisfaction, balanced cohesion, and balanced flexibility), as well as the interplay of both, would be associated with better individual adjustment (general, interaction and work adjustment), less psychological distress (i.e., depression, anxiety and stress), and more life satisfaction. Findings showed that expatriates who perceived their move as less difficult, were (1) better adjusted to their general living conditions in Belgium; (2) they experienced less psychological distress, particularly, they were less anxious and less stressed, and (3) they were more satisfied with their life. Examination of the family functioning variables revealed that better family cohesion was associated with more successful general adjustment. On the other hand, higher family flexibility related to less satisfaction with life. Finally, better communication in the family related to higher levels of anxiety whereas expatriates who were satisfied with their family, were less anxious. No interaction effects were found between perception of move and our family functioning variables.
Introduction

Expatriates are individuals who left their home country in order to live and work in another country on a non-permanent basis (Ward, Bochner & Furnham, 2001). Rather than being linked to local culture, expatriates take on a global mindset and become part of an international, cross-cultural social environment (Mao & Shen, 2015). This relocation, however, is usually associated with various challenges and stressors, accompanied by intensive learning about the new environment and the new work situation, a process known adjustment (Haslberger & Brewster, 2008; Truman, Sharar, & Pompe, 2012). Some of these challenges are the start of a new job, a move abroad, a partner giving up a job, children attending a new school, long periods of separation from their loved ones, occupying a new residence, changing family routines, a change in financial status, cultural differences, role conflict, etc. (Bahn, 2015; Haslberger & Brewster, 2008; Hechanova, Beehr, & Christiansen, 2003; Patterson, 1988). Failure of managing these changes, challenges and stressors, may compromise expatriate adjustment, which refers to the degree of familiarity and psychological comfort, or absence of stress that expatriates feel on the three dimensions of expatriate experience (i.e., general adjustment, interaction adjustment, and work adjustment) (Black & Stephens, 1989). Adjustment failure may then eventually result in deteriorating well-being and mental health and increased psychological distress. Indeed, research shows that expatriates may experience an increase of physical and mental health problems within the first few months after the relocation (Grant-Vallone & Ensher, 2001).

The existing empirical evidence, however, shows considerable variability in the adjustment outcomes and well-being in expatriates (McNulty & Selmer, 2017). Given this observation, studies have been conducted on risk and protective factors for expatriates, trying to explain why some of them adjust better than others. Research revealed several stressors (i.e., risk factors) that all expatriates face to certain extent: cultural novelty, lack of preparation and relocation (financial) support, loss of home,
change of social environment, increased demands related to organizing life in a new location, together with feelings of uncertainty, up-rooting, and isolation (e.g., Haslberger & Brewster, 2008; Lazarova, McNulty, & Semeniuk, 2015; Osland, 2000; Rosenbusch & Cseh, 2012).

Previous studies also document important resources (i.e., protective factors), that may help expatriates to successfully deal with the challenges mentioned above. For instance, individual characteristics found to foster expatriate’s adjustment to a foreign environment, are internal locus of control, self-esteem, education, good command of languages, past foreign experience, cultural intelligence, communication ability, extraversion, agreeableness, emotional stability, and open-mindedness (e.g., Ali, Van der Zee, & Sanders, 2003; Caligiuri, 2000; Copeland, 2004; Hechanova et al., 2003; Holopainen & Björkman, 2005; Lin, Chen, & Song, 2012). At the broader, social level, resources like maintaining contact with the extended family (Richardson, 2006), friends and former colleagues – with the use of social media and internet – help family members to overcome feelings of loneliness and isolation (e.g., Rosenbusch & Cseh, 2012; Shklovski, Kraut, & Cummings, 2006). By the same token, it was found that talking to other people when in need of emotional support and asking for help with the everyday engagements alleviates distress with expatriates (Caligiuri & Lazarova, 2002).

Finally, expatriates have the so-called intrafamilial resources -assets possessed by the expatriate’s family-, that may facilitate adjustment. In particular the supportive climate within the family received quite some empirical investigation, revealing that families where family members experience high level of support, tend to experience less physical stress and better cross-cultural adjustment (Rosenbusch & Cseh, 2012; Van der Bank & Rothmann, 2006). Also, commitment to the move of all family members, trying to socialize outside the family unit, and having a sense of adventure proved to be important (Lazarova et al., 2015; Rosenbusch & Cseh, 2012).
Despite the growing evidence on predictors of (mal)adjustment in expatriates, important limitations characterize the current research literature on this matter. First, except from the studies mentioned above, most studies took an individual perspective on adjustment of the expatriate employee (James, Hunsley, Navara, & Alles, 2004). This resulted in a lack of sufficient knowledge on family resources in explaining individual adjustment (see e.g., Caligiuri, Hyland, Joshi, & Bross, 1998; Lazarova et al., 2015; Rosebusch & Cseh, 2012, for important exceptions). So a better understanding of the adjustment of individual expatriates requires further empirical study of the kind of family characteristics that may foster or inhibit the adjustment or psychological distress of expatriates (McNulty & Selmer, 2017; Shockley, Shen, & Johnson, 2018). Second, most of the studies that have examined the family’s impact on the cross-cultural adjustment process are lacking a theoretical background (see Filipič Sterle, Fontaine, De Mol, & Verhofstadt, 2018a), so the selection of the types and roles of the variables (predictor vs. outcome) within studies, as well as the interpretation of the results is rather arbitrary.

Therefore, the aim of the current study was to further examine family resources, in particular family characteristics, as a factor fostering adjustment and alleviating psychological distress, in expatriates in their first year after the relocation, using the widely known ABCX model of family stress (Hill, 1958; Fig. 1). This model states that a stressor (‘a’) interacts with the family members’ crisis-meeting resources (‘b’) and their perception (‘c’) of the event, and that this interaction brings about the amount of crisis or maladjustment (‘x’) in each family member (Weber, 2011). Crisis-meeting resources are defined in this model as factors that, by their presence and activation, prevent the individual family member from crisis or, by their absence, evoke distress and crisis. The perception of the event is defined in this model as the degree to which individual family members perceive the stressor as manageable or uncontrollable.
Based on this logic we derived the prediction that expatriates’ perception of their move as more manageable and less difficult, better family functioning, as well as the interplay between both, would be associated with better individual adjustment and less crisis.

Indicators of expatriates’ individual adjustment used in the current study were general, interaction, and work adjustment. General adjustment refers to the degree of familiarity with functioning in the host culture, such as health care, housing conditions, costs of living, etc. (Black & Stephens, 1989). Interaction adjustment refers to social interactions and communication with other people in the host culture and with building new social networks (Black & Stephens, 1989). Work adjustment refers to expatriates’ adjustment to a new work situation with co-workers, and new work tasks and roles (Black & Stephens, 1989). Indicators of crisis used in the current study were expatriates experienced level of distress, including their level of depression, anxiety, and stress. According to previous research, some of the stressors caused by adjusting to a new environment may remain unresolved and become ongoing tensions (i.e., strains) (Patterson, 1988), resulting in increased psychosocial distress (Silbiger & Pines, 2014), depression (Magdol, 2002), increased alcohol and substance abuse (Anderzén & Arnetz, 1997), decreased physical and mental health, lower marriage satisfaction.
(Lazarova et al., 2015), and worsening subjective work environment (Anderzén & Arnetz, 1999). In order to also assess more positive outcomes, and capture a variety of outcomes, a measure of life satisfaction was also included.

*Family functioning* was conceptualized in the current study as the emotional and structural characteristics of an expatriate’s family and was assessed on four dimensions: *Family communication* refers to positive communication skills used in the family system, *family satisfaction* indicates the degree of family members’ satisfaction with different aspects of their family, *family cohesion* describes the emotional bonding that family members have toward one another, and *family flexibility* refers to the quality and expression of leadership and organization, and relationships rules and negotiations in the family (Olson, Gorall, & Tiesel, 2005).

The examination of the role of the expatriates’ perception of move and its interaction with family functioning variables is also warranted (Lämsä, Heikkinen, Smith, & Tornikoski, 2017; Takeuchi, 2010). Individuals’ perception of their move has the potential to greatly influence how stressful and how successful the actual relocation becomes (Caligiuri et al., 1998). For example, family members that perceive their move as a more manageable one, spend less energy on their anxieties and more energy on using the resources that lead to a successful adjustment (Wiggins-Frame & Shehan, 1994). On the other hand, families with positive family characteristics may eventually become maladjusted because their members struggle with a positive perception of the move in the first place.

So, it is expected that perceiving the move as more manageable and less difficult, and better family functioning (i.e., clear family communication, higher family satisfaction, more family cohesion, and more family flexibility), as well as the interplay between both, would be associated with better individual adjustment (i.e., general, interaction and work adjustment), less psychological distress (i.e., depression, anxiety, stress), and more life satisfaction in newcomer expatriates.
Method

Participants

Participants in our study (n=44) were expatriates who have recently (i.e., less than one year before) moved to Belgium and had a family. The majority of participating expatriates were women (61%). The mean age of the participants was 40.9 years (SD=6.3, range=27 to 58 years) and the average duration of their stay in Belgium was 2.8 months (SD=1.8, range=1 to 11 months). Ninety-five percent of the participants were married. Fifty-five percent had two children, 16% had one child, 14% did not yet have children, 9% had three children and 2% had four children.

The majority of expatriates – 73% – had a university degree, 14% had an academic degree, followed by 11% who had finished college degree. The big part of the respondents – 68% moved to Belgium because of a work assignment of their own or their partner. Thirty-nine percent of participants came to work for the European institutions and agencies, followed by the international organisations or governments (11%), with 25% percent who were unemployed (e.g., trailing spouses). Expatriate participants were coming from 29 countries of origin and were categorized in three regional groups: Western Europe (e.g. Spain, UK, France, Germany, Italy, etc.) (46%), Eastern Europe (e.g., Slovenia, Croatia, Romania, etc.) (25%), and non-European countries (e.g., USA, Switzerland, Brazil, South Africa, etc.) (27%). As for the languages of the host country, Belgium, the newcomers seem to know better French than Dutch language. However, only 18% of the newcomer expatriates were advanced or fluent in French and 7% in Dutch language.

Procedure

This study is part of a larger longitudinal study on expatriate adjustment. For this study, only the first measurement -shortly after the relocation- was included.
Expatriates who have just moved to Belgium and had a family were invited to take part in the study immediately after their relocation. The invitations to participate in the study were distributed through international organisations (e.g., European Commission, European and international schools, social clubs for expatriates), through personal contacts of the researchers to the expatriates in Belgium with the request to distribute the invitation to any newcomer family they may know – applying snowball sampling. All expatriates that were invited to participate, must have recently moved to Belgium, and they needed to speak English. For each family, one adult member completed the survey. They were given a code and took an online survey including the measures described below. The study was approved by the ethical committee of the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences of Ghent University, Belgium and the National Medical Ethics Committee of the Republic of Slovenia. Informed consent was obtained from all participants.

**Measures**

*Family functioning.* The Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale (FACES IV) (Olson et al., 2005) was used to assess family functioning. The FACES IV is based on the Circumplex Model of Marital and Family Systems (Olson, Sprenkle, & Russell, 1979) which conceptualizes family functioning upon three dimensions: cohesion, flexibility, and communication. The following subscales of the FACES IV were used: family communication, family satisfaction, balanced cohesion, and balanced flexibility (Olson et al., 2005). The *Family Communication* subscale assesses the positive communication skills utilized in the couple or family system (ten items, e.g., “Family members are very good listeners.”). The *Family Satisfaction* scale assesses participants’ degree of satisfaction with different aspects of their family (ten items, e.g., “The way problems are discussed.”). The *Balanced cohesion* subscale assesses the emotional bonding that family members have toward one another (seven items, e.g., “Family members feel very close to each other.”). The *Balanced flexibility* subscale
assesses the quality and expression of leadership and organization, role relationships, and relationships rules and negotiations (seven items, e.g., “My family is able to adjust to change when necessary.”). In the current study, participants were required to indicate their responses by means of a 5-point Likert rating scale (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree). Subscale scores were computed by summing the scores for the relevant items. In our study Cronbach’s alphas were .85 for family communication, .91 for family satisfaction, .77 for balanced cohesion, and .62 for balanced flexibility.

**Perception of move.** The family perception of move was measured by the following single item: “Please indicate how difficult / challenging your move to Belgium has been“. Participants were required to indicate their responses by means of a 5-point Likert rating scale (1=not at all difficult to 5=extremely difficult).

**Adjustment.** Black and Steven’s cross-cultural adjustment scale (Black & Stephens, 1989) was used to assess the adjustment of newcomer expatriates to life in Belgium. This widely used 14-item scale has demonstrated high reliability across multiple samples (Black & Gregersen, 1991; Black & Stevens, 1989) and it has been validated and widely used in studies on cultural adjustment (e.g., Harrison & Shaffer, 2005; Liu & Shaffer, 2005; Selmer, 2002). Respondents were asked to indicate how unadjusted or adjusted they currently felt to their life in Belgium by means of a 7-point Likert rating scale (1=completely unadjusted to 7=completely adjusted). The General adjustment subscale measures perceived adjustment in everyday life (seven items; e.g., “living conditions in general”). The Interaction adjustment subscale measures the expatriate’s interaction with host country nationals (four items; e.g., “interacting with Belgians on a day-to-day basis”). The Work adjustment subscale measures expatriate’s adjustment to new job tasks, environment, and roles (three items; e.g., “performance standards and expectations”). Subscale scores were computed by averaging item scores, with higher scores indicating higher levels of adjustment. In our study Cronbach’s
**alphas** were .92 for general adjustment, .94 for interaction adjustment, and .89 for work adjustment.

**Psychological distress (depression, anxiety and stress).** Participants’ level of psychological distress was assessed by the DASS-21 (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995) which measures the severity of the core symptoms of depression, anxiety and stress. The *Depression* subscale assesses the symptoms of dysphoria, hopelessness, devaluation of life, self-deprecation, lack of interest or involvement, anhedonia and inertia (seven items, e.g., “I felt that I had nothing to look forward to”). The *Anxiety* subscale assesses autonomic arousal, skeletal muscle effects, situational anxiety, and subjective experience of anxious affect (seven items, e.g., “I felt scared without any good reason”). The *Stress* subscale is sensitive to levels of chronic non-specific arousal and assesses difficulty relaxing, nervous arousal, and being easily upset/agitated, irritable/over-reactive and impatient (seven items, e.g., “I tend to over-react to situations”). Participants were required to indicate the presence of a symptom since their move to Belgium by means of a 4-point severity/frequency Likert scale (1=Did not apply to me at all to 4=Applied to me very much or most of the time). Subscale scores were computed by averaging the scores for the relevant items. The three subscales of the DASS-21 were highly correlated in the current study (i.e., correlations ranging from $r = .88$ to $r = .93; p < .01$). The total DASS-21 score has been previously documented as an index for general psychological distress (Henry & Crawford, 2005). The Cronbach’s *alphas* were .90, .76, .83, .80 for overall DASS-21 score, depression, anxiety, stress, respectively.

**Satisfaction with life.** Participants’ level of satisfaction with different life areas was measured by Quality of Life Scale (Cummings, 1995), particularly in our study we used the *Satisfaction* subscale. The scale consists of seven items (e.g., “How satisfied are you with your health?”). Participants were required to respond to the scale items by means of 5-point Likert scale (1=delighted to 5=mostly dissatisfied), where higher
scores indicated lower satisfaction with different life domains. The scores were computed by averaging the scores to the relevant items. The Cronbach’s alpha in our study was .82.

**Results**

**Descriptive statistics**

In Table 1, we report the means, standard deviations, and Pearson’s correlations for our primary variables of perception of move, family functioning, cross-cultural adjustment, psychological distress, and satisfaction with life.

**Correlations**

Pearson correlation analysis revealed a significant positive correlation between expatriates’ age and their perception of move ($r = .35; p < .05$) indicating that older expatriates perceived their move as a more difficult one. Perception of move negatively correlated to the general adjustment ($r = -.35; p < .05$), but positively to the overall score of psychological distress, to the anxiety subscale, and to the stress subscale ($r = .38; p < .05; r = .46; p < .01; r = .31; p < .05$, respectively). Expatriates who perceived the move as more difficult and challenging, reported to feel less adjusted to the living conditions in Belgium, and to experience higher overall psychological distress, to be more worried and anxious, and more stressed in their initial stage after the relocation.

Participants’ time in Belgium showed a negative significant correlation with the family communication ($r = -.50; p < .01$), showing that expatriate families who were in Belgium for a longer time, reported to have poorer family communication. Further, there was a positive correlation between the time in Belgium and satisfaction with life ($r = .36; p < .05$) indicating that expatriates who have been living in Belgium for more months, were less satisfied with their life in the new country.
Family communication positively and significantly correlated to other areas of family functioning – satisfaction, balanced cohesion and balanced flexibility ($r = .40; p < .01$; $r = .57; p < .01$; and $r = .35; p < .05$, respectively). Balanced family cohesion furthermore showed a significant positive correlation to balanced flexibility ($r = .42; p < .01$), but also to general adjustment ($r = .36; p < .05$). Balanced flexibility negatively correlated with depression ($r = -.36; p < .05$). Family satisfaction only significantly correlated to balanced cohesion ($r = .33; p < .05$), showing that families that were more bonded were also more satisfied with their family life. Family satisfaction did not correlate to any other variables. The overview of the correlations including family functioning variables therefore revealed that family members that enjoy better communication in the family, also feel closer to the other family members, have better leadership and organisation in the family, and are overall more satisfied with their family. Furthermore, the closer the family members feel to each other, the more successfully adjusted they are to the new environment, and in particular to the living conditions in Belgium. Family members perceiving clear leadership in their family experience lower levels of depression.

General adjustment was significantly positively correlated with interaction adjustment ($r = .52; p < .01$) and work adjustment ($r = .33; p < .05$). Work adjustment negatively correlated to depression ($r = -.34; p < .05$) showing that expatriates who felt better adjusted to their work situation, reported to be less depressed.

The total score of psychological distress strongly and significantly positively correlated to the other three subscales – depression, anxiety, and stress (all $r \geq .88; p < .01$), and also to the satisfaction with life ($r = .50; p < .01$). Depression, anxiety and stress subscales also positively significantly correlated with each other (all $r \geq .66; p < .01$). Expatriates who reported to be more psychologically distressed, showed higher levels of depression, anxiety and stress. Stress and depression subscales showed the highest association ($r = .76; p < .01$).
Life satisfaction was significantly and positively correlated to participants’ overall score of psychological distress ($r = .50; p < .01$); and depression, anxiety and stress subscales ($r = .45; p < .01$; $r = .46; p < .01$; $r = .42; p < .01$, respectively), meaning that expatriates who experience more psychological distress, depression, anxiety and stress, are also less satisfied with their current life.
Table 1
Means (M), Standard Deviations (SD), and Pearson Correlations of Perception of Move, Family Functioning (Family Communication, Family Satisfaction, Balanced Cohesion, Balanced Flexibility), Cross-cultural Adjustment (General, Interaction and Work adjustment), Psychological Distress (Overall, Depression, Anxiety, Stress), and Satisfaction with Life (N = 44)

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*p < .05; ** p < .01
Value of perception of move and family functioning in explaining adjustment, psychological distress and life satisfaction

Hierarchical multiple regression analysis was used to test whether participants’ self-reported level of cross-cultural adjustment, psychological distress, and life satisfaction could be predicted from the participants’ perception of move and family functioning. Separate regressions were carried out for each of the outcome variables: cross-cultural adjustment (general, interaction and work adjustment), psychological distress (total score, depression, anxiety and stress), and life satisfaction. To control for possible effects of the participants’ gender (men coded as 1, women coded as 2) and time in Belgium, these variables were entered in the first step. In the second step, participants’ perception of move was entered. On the third step, the four subscales of the family functioning measure were entered (i.e., family communication, family satisfaction, balanced cohesion, and balanced flexibility). On the fourth step, the cross-product terms of the perception of move and the four areas of family functioning were entered. To reduce the effects of multicollinearity, continuous variables were centred (Holmbeck, 1997, 2002). Prior to each regression analysis, collinearity diagnostics were performed using the variance inflation factors (VIF) as criteria. No multicollinearity was evident, because the VIF for the predictors ranged between 1.07 and 2.07 (<10) (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003). As the regression analysis revealed that the addition of the interaction terms on the fourth step did not add significantly to $R^2$ and that none of the interactions was found to be significant, the interaction terms were left out of further analyses and below we report on the model including the main effects of predictors entered at step 1, 2, and 3.

When predicting participants’ general cross-cultural adjustment, the gender and time in Belgium accounted for 5% of the variance, $F(2, 37) = 0.90$, $ns$ (see Table 2). The variable entered on the second step of the model (i.e., participants’ perception of
FAMILY FUNCTIONING, ADJUSTMENT, WELL-BEING

move) accounted for an additional 11% of the variance, and made a significant contribution to the model, $F(1, 36) = 4.66$, $p < .05$. The family functioning variables entered on the third step accounted for an additional 16% of the variance, $F(4, 32) = 1.90$, ns. Findings for the final model (step 3) indicated that the variables perception of move and balanced cohesion contributed significantly to general adjustment, with a more difficult perception of move corresponding with lower levels of general adjustment, $t = -2.53$, $p < .05$, $\beta = -0.39$, and higher levels of balanced cohesion corresponding to higher levels of general adjustment, $t = 2.09$, $p < .05$, $\beta = 0.41$. Neither communication, satisfaction nor balanced flexibility contributed significantly to general adjustment ($t = .20$, ns, $t = -1.08$, ns, and $t = .10$, ns, respectively). Overall, the model was found to be marginally significant, $F(7, 32) = 2.13$, $p < .10$, and accounted for 32% of the variance in general cross-cultural adjustment.

When predicting participants’ interaction cross-cultural adjustment, gender and time in Belgium accounted for 4% of the variance, $F(2, 37) = .74$, ns. (see Table 2). The variable entered on the second step of the model (i.e., participants’ perception of move) accounted for 0% of the variance, $F(1, 36) = 0.001$, ns. The family functioning variables entered on the third step accounted for an additional 6% of the variance, $F(4, 32) = .55$, ns. Findings for the final model (step 3) indicated that perception of move ($t = -0.21$, ns) and the family functioning variables did not contribute significantly to interaction adjustment (communication $t = -0.06$, ns; satisfaction $t = -1.06$, ns; balanced cohesion $t = 1.15$, ns; and balanced flexibility $t = -0.21$, ns). Overall, the model was found to be nonsignificant, $F(7, 32) = .51$, and accounted for 10% of the variance in the interaction adjustment.

When predicting participants’ work cross-cultural adjustment, gender and time in Belgium accounted for 5% of the variance, $F(2, 33) = 0.95$, ns (see Table 2). The perception of move which was entered on the second step of the model, did not account for additional variance, $F(1, 32) = 0.01$, ns. The family functioning variables entered
on the third step accounted for 14% of additional variance, $F(4, 28) = 1.24, \text{ ns.}$ Findings for the final model (step 3) indicated that gender ($t = -1.79, p < .10, \beta = -.32$) and family satisfaction ($t = -1.86, p < .10, \beta = -.35$) contributed marginally significantly to work adjustment, with men reporting higher levels of work adjustment than women, and with lower levels of family satisfaction corresponding with higher levels of work adjustment. The perception of move ($t = -0.54, \text{ ns}$) and other areas of family functioning (communication, $t = 0.59, \text{ ns}$; balanced cohesion $t = 1.14, \text{ ns}$; and balanced flexibility $t = -1.12, \text{ ns}$) did not contribute significantly to work adjustment. Overall, the model was found to be nonsignificant, $F(7, 28) = .98$, and accounted for 20% of the variance in cross-cultural adjustment.
Table 2
Summary of Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analyses to Predict Cross-cultural Adjustment (General, Interaction and Work Adjustment) from Perception of Move and Family Functioning. Standardized betas from the last step in the analyses are displayed.

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Note. N = 44

*p < .10, *p < .05, **p < .01

When predicting participants’ total score of psychological distress, gender and time in Belgium accounted for 19% of the variance $F (2, 37) = 4.31, p < .05$. Adding participants’ perception of move scores on the second step of the model accounted for an additional 14% of the variance, $F (1, 36) = 7.68, p < .01$. The variables of family functioning entered on the third step accounted for an additional 8% of the variance, $F (4, 32) = 1.13$. Findings for the final model (step 3) indicated that the time in Belgium variable ($t = 2.37, p < .05, \beta = .38$), contributed significantly to the model, with expatriates who were in Belgium for a longer time, reporting higher levels of
psychological distress. Gender contributed marginally significantly to the model ($t = 1.87, p < .10, \beta = .26$), with women reporting higher levels of psychological distress. The perception of move also significantly contributed psychological distress ($t = 2.46, p < .05, \beta = .35$) such that a more difficult perception of move was associated with higher levels of psychological distress. The variables of family functioning did not contribute significantly to the model (communication $t = 1.15, \text{ns}$; satisfaction $t = -1.68, \text{ns}$; balanced cohesion $t = -0.38, \text{ns}$; and balanced flexibility $t = -0.76, \text{ns}$). Overall, the model was found to be significant, $F(7, 32) = 3.23, p < .05$, and accounted for 41% of the variance in the total score of psychological distress.

When predicting participants’ score of depression, gender and time in Belgium accounted for 11% of the variance $F(2, 37) = 2.36, \text{ns}$. Adding participants’ perception of move scores on the second step of the model accounted for an additional 6% of the variance, $F(1, 36) = 2.77, \text{ns}$. The variables of family functioning entered on the third step accounted to 11% of the variance, $F(4, 32) = 1.22, \text{ns}$. Findings for the final model (step 3) indicated that time in Belgium marginally significantly contributed to depression ($t = 1.82, p < .10, \beta = .32$) (see Table 3), suggesting that a longer time of living in Belgium was associated with more depression. Perception of move ($t = 1.45, \text{ns}$) nor family functioning contributed significantly to the model (communication $t = 1.03, \text{ns}$; satisfaction $t = -0.46, \text{ns}$; balanced cohesion $t = -0.95, \text{ns}$; balanced flexibility $t = -1.31, \text{ns}$). Overall, the model was found to be nonsignificant, $F(7, 32) = 1.83$, and accounted for 29% of the variance of depression.

When predicting participants’ anxiety, gender and time in Belgium accounted for 13% of the variance, and made a marginally significant contribution to the regression model $F(2, 37) = 2.80, p < .10$ (see Table 3). Adding participants’ perception of move scores on the second step of the model accounted for an additional 21% of the variance, $F(1, 36) = 11.44, p < .01$. Adding the family functioning variables on the third step to the model contributed to an additional 15% of variance $F(4, 32) =$
2.38, $p < .10$. Findings for the final model (step 3) indicated that a longer time in Belgium and a more negative perception of the move were significantly associated with higher anxiety levels ($t = 3.09, p < .001, \beta = .46$, and $t = 3.07, p < .01, \beta = .40$, respectively). Better family communication was significantly positively associated with higher levels of anxiety ($t = 2.20, p < .05, \beta = .40$) and higher levels of family satisfaction were associated with lower levels of anxiety ($t = -2.56, p < .05, \beta = -.36$). In contrast, balanced cohesion and balanced flexibility did not contribute significantly to anxiety (balanced cohesion, $t = 0.32, \text{ns}$; balanced flexibility, $t = -0.55, \text{ns}$). Overall, the model was found to be significant, $F (7, 32) = 4.43, p < .01$, and accounted for 49% of the variance of anxiety.

When predicting participants’ stress, gender and time in Belgium accounted for 22% of the variance, and made a significant contribution to the regression model $F (2, 37) = 5.06, p < .05$ (see Table 3). Adding participants’ perception of move scores on the second step of the model accounted for an additional 9% of the variance, $F (1, 36) = 4.84, p < .05$. Adding the family functioning variables to the model accounted for an additional 7% of variance, $F (4, 32) = 0.84, \text{ns}$. Findings for the final model (step 3) indicated that gender and perception of move contributed significantly to the model, with women reporting higher levels of stress ($t = 2.24, p < .05 \beta = .32$) and with perceiving the move as a more difficult being associated with higher levels of stress ($t = 2.05, p < .05, \beta = .30$). None of the family variables contributed significantly to stress (communication $t = 0.06, \text{ns}$; satisfaction $t = -1.42, \text{ns}$; balanced cohesion $t = -0.35, \text{ns}$, and balanced flexibility $t = -0.21$). Overall, the model was found to be significant, $F (7, 32) = 2.73, p < .05$, and accounted for 37% of the variance of stress.
### Table 3
*Summary of Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analyses to predict Psychological distress (Total Score, Depression, Anxiety and Stress) from Perception of Move and Family Functioning. Standardized betas from the last step in the analyses are displayed.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterion variable</th>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>ΔR²</th>
<th>F for ΔR²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Psychological Distress (total score)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>4.31*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Time in Belgium</td>
<td>.38*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Perception of move</td>
<td>.35*</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>7.68**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Family functioning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Family Communication</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Family Satisfaction</td>
<td>-.26</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Balanced Cohesion</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Balanced Flexibility</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R² total = .41, F (7,32) = 3.23*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>2.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Time in Belgium</td>
<td>.32*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Perception of move</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>2.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Family functioning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Family Communication</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Family Satisfaction</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Balanced Cohesion</td>
<td>-.19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Balanced Flexibility</td>
<td>-.24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R² total = .29, F (7,32) = 1.83</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>2.80°</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Time in Belgium</td>
<td>.46**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Perception of move</td>
<td>.40**</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>11.44**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Family functioning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Family Communication</td>
<td>.40*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Family Satisfaction</td>
<td>-.36*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Balanced Cohesion</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Balanced Flexibility</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R² total = .49, F (7,32) = 4.43**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.32*</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>5.06*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Time in Belgium</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Perception of move</td>
<td>.30*</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>4.84*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Family functioning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Family Communication</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Family Satisfaction</td>
<td>-.22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Balanced Cohesion</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Balanced Flexibility</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R² total = .37, F (7,32) = 2.73*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: N = 44
°p < .10, *p < .05, **p < .01

When predicting participants’ life satisfaction, gender and time in Belgium accounted for 12% of the variance, and made a marginally significant contribution to the regression model $F (2, 37) = 2.61, p < .10$ (see Table 4). Entering participants’
perception of move scores on the second step of the model accounted for an additional 5% of the variance, $F(1, 36) = 1.99$, ns. Adding the family functioning variables to the model accounted for an additional 17% of variance, $F(4, 32) = 2.02$ and made no significant contribution to the model. Findings for the final model (step 3) indicated that the longer the participants have been living in Belgium, the less satisfied they were with their life, $t = 2.96$, $p < .01$, $\beta = .50$. Perception of move contributed marginally significantly to the model ($t = 1.91$, $p < .10$, $\beta = .29$) showing that a more difficult perception of move was associated with lower levels of satisfaction with life. Balanced cohesion contributed marginally significantly to the model ($t = -1.96$, $p < .10$, $\beta = -.38$), with higher levels of balanced cohesion associated with higher levels of satisfaction with life. Balanced flexibility contributed significantly to life satisfaction ($t = 2.20$, $p < .05$, $\beta = .38$), whereby higher levels of balanced flexibility were associated with lower levels of satisfaction of life. Overall, the model was found to be significant, $F(7, 32) = 2.32$, $p < .01$, and accounted for 34% of the variance in satisfaction with life.

**Table 4**

*Summary of Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analyses to predict Quality of Life from Perception of Move and Family Functioning. Standardized betas from the last step in the analyses are displayed.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterion variable</th>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>$\Delta R^2$</th>
<th>$F$ for $\Delta R^2$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with Life</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>2.61°</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Time in Belgium</td>
<td>.50**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Perception of move</td>
<td>.29°</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>1.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Family functioning</td>
<td></td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>2.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Family Communication</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Family Satisfaction</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Balanced Cohesion</td>
<td>-.38°</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Balanced Flexibility</td>
<td>.38*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$R^2$ total $= .34$, $F(7,32) = 2.32^*$

*Note. N = 44
°$p < .10$, *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$
Discussion

The present study aimed to investigate to what extent newcomer expatriates’ perception of their move and their family functioning is associated with their level of individual adjustment, psychological distress, and life satisfaction. Family functioning as a potential resource for the adjustment of expatriates was included in our study because the family may have an important impact on career decisions of expatriate workers (and vice versa) and therefore the examination of the role of good family functioning in determining the successful adjustment of individual family members is critical (McNulty & Selmer, 2017; Shockley et al., 2018). Based on the ABCX model we expected that perceiving the move as more manageable and less difficult and better family functioning, as well as interplay of both, would be associated with better individual adjustment (general, interaction and work domains of adjustment), less psychological distress (i.e., depression, anxiety and stress), and more life satisfaction. The results were partially in line with our expectations and can be summarized as follows.

Hierarchical multiple regression analysis revealed that the perception of the move as more manageable (i.e., less difficult) was associated with higher level of adjustment of newcomer expatriates to the general living conditions in Belgium (i.e., general adjustment). Perceiving the move as more manageable and less difficult was also associated with lower levels of overall psychological distress, and particularly with less worries and anxieties and being less stressed. This finding is in line with a previous study pointing to the role of perception of move in predicting outcomes of relocation such that when expatriates perceive their move as more positive, their adjustment is easier and they spend less energy on overcoming their anxieties (Caligiuri et al., 1998; Wiggins-Frame & Shehan, 1994). There was also a trend towards expatriates who saw their move as more manageable being more satisfied with their life, but more research is needed to confirm this finding. The importance of the perception of move as a factor
that may influence the adjustment and emotional well-being of expatriates after the relocation, has so far been neglected in research agendas (for important exceptions, see Caligiuri et al., 1998, Wiggins-Frame & Shehan, 1994). The findings of the current study, however, provide empirical evidence for the potentially important role of this subjective factor determining some dimensions of expatriates’ adjustment as well as several well-being outcomes.

The investigation of the role of family resources (i.e., family functioning) in the adjustment (i.e., general, interaction and work adjustment), psychological distress (i.e., depression, anxiety and stress) and life satisfaction revealed some important associations. Of all the outcome variables, family communication was only related to expatriates’ self-reported anxiety such that better family communication was associated with higher levels of anxiety in newcomer expatriates. At first sight this finding may seem counterintuitive. However, expatriation is a big life event that particularly in the short term can result in a radical shift in family roles and living circumstances. Family members need to re-establish the elements of their individual functioning, and also their functioning on a family level, rather than just replicate the elements of their lives before the expatriation (Lämsä et al., 2017). The changes in the family as well as the recent relocation may provoke some anxiety in expatriates (Lazarova et al., 2015), while the communication in the family is actually good. On the other hand, it can also mean that when expatriates experience higher levels of anxiety, they rely more on good family communication, in order to deal with their anxiety and worries.

In terms of family satisfaction, we found that expatriates’ greater satisfaction with their family was associated to lower levels of anxiety. This finding seems logical and it is also in line with the family adjustment literature emphasising the important role of family resources for expatriate successful adjustment (Lämsä et al., 2017; Haslberger & Brewster, 2008; Takeuchi, 2010). Lower family satisfaction was also associated with higher work adjustment; however, this result was only marginally significant. There
was thus a trend (warranting replication) towards expatriates who were less satisfied with the family life, being better adjusted in the work domain. This may suggest that expatriates being less satisfied with their family life, are more committed to or focused more on their work situation, resulting in better work adjustment. Work related issues indeed play a central role in the early stage of expatriation (Dickmann et al., 2008; Selmer & Lauring, 2011) and the expatriates’ motivation to engage in their assignments seems to reflect the initial levels of work adjustment (Firth, Chen, Kirkman, & Kim, 2014). However, the results could also be interpreted the other way around. More specifically, their high investment in and motivation for work could indeed result in expatriates’ better work adjustment, resulting in its turn in less satisfaction with their family life.

Our results also showed that a closer bond between the family members (i.e., higher family cohesion) was associated with better adjustment to the living conditions in Belgium (i.e. general adjustment) and (marginally) significantly related to higher levels of satisfaction with different life domains such as health, ownerships, and financial situation. These findings somehow corroborate previous research documenting that expatriates belonging to a family with higher cohesion, tend to adjust to a new environment better and also experience less stress (Rosenbusch & Cseh, 2012; Van der Bank & Rothmann, 2006). Expatriates living in families with greater flexibility (i.e., with good leadership and organisation in the family, and clear relationship roles) were found to be less satisfied with their current life situation. This finding seems counter-intuitive, as one would expect a positive association between greater family flexibility and life satisfaction. No other family functioning variables were found to be related to the outcome variables in our study. So, in sum, family functioning variables proved to be –at least partially- relevant for each of our outcomes (psychological distress, life satisfaction, as well as adjustment) under study. For each of the separate family characteristics, however, differential effects were found, depending on the outcome.
under study. As some of the findings were a bit counter-intuitive and marginally significant, further research on intrafamilial resources is definitely needed.

A plausible explanation as to why some associations between our family functioning variables found in our research seem not logical at first sight (i.e., better family communication associated with higher level of anxiety, or greater family flexibility associated with to lower life satisfaction) could be the following. Constant changes and challenges shortly after the relocation demand the adjustment of expatriates’ behaviour and also feelings. This is a very dynamic process which changes from day to day, it doesn’t necessarily run smoothly and linearly. Therefore, the empirical evidence on predictors of adjustment has failed to produce consistent findings (Hippler, Brewster & Haslberger, 2015; Mendenhall, Macomber, Gregersen, & Cutright, 1998). Given the short duration of stay in the new country of our sample, the rapid and changeable nature of the dynamic process of adjustment in our respondents may explain its somewhat unpredicted associations with the family functioning predictors.

In line with our predictions, we also tested whether the interplay between the perception of move as more manageable (less difficult) and better family functioning, would have a positive impact on adjustment, psychological distress and life satisfaction. However, our analysis did not reveal any significant interaction effects between those variables. The latter is in line with a recently conducted study applying the ABCX-model to individuals adjusting to the stressor of pediatric cancer, where better family functioning and perception of the stressor (i.e. pediatric cancer) as more manageable was related to individual outcomes of distress and quality of life, but with the interplay neither being significant (Van Schoors, De Paepe, Norga, Cosijns, Morren, Vercruyssen, Goubert, & Verhofstadt, 2019).

Our study further showed that time in Belgium was associated with expatriates’ overall level of psychological distress and their level of anxiety. A marginally
significant association was also found with depression. Specifically, expatriates who have lived in Belgium for a longer period, experienced more psychological problems, were more anxious and there was a trend towards them also being more depressed. Furthermore, and in line with these findings was the result that the longer expatriates stayed in Belgium, the less satisfied they were with different domains of their new expatriate life. It has to be noted here that the average stay of expatriates was only just below three months (ranging from one month to 11 months), with their adjustment to the new environment theoretically being in its most intensive phase (Hippler et al., 2015). Our sample of newcomer expatriates still had many months to go before they would reach the adjustment peak – according to the adjustment literature this should happen after 2-5 years or even later (Bhaskar-Shrinivas, Harrison, Shaffer, & Luk, 2005: Hippler et al., 2015). The current findings can also be indicative of the so-called pile-up of stressors, known from the stress literature (Patterson, 1988), when shortly after the initial crisis expatriates may experience more challenges. However, according to the vast adjustment literature one can assume that expatriate adjustment as well as psychological distress and life satisfaction will improve over time (Hippler et al., 2015). Also, family stress models assume that a stress-pile up shortly after the crisis would also trigger more resources, that could eventually lead to a more successful adjustment, less psychological distress and more satisfaction with life (see the double ABCX model; McCubbin & Patterson, 1983).

Expatriates’ gender had a marginally significant impact on work adjustment and overall psychological distress, and a significant impact on stress. Specifically, there was a trend towards men being better adjusted to their work situation than women, whereas women tended to experience more overall psychological distress. Women were also found to be more stressed than men. The finding that women seem to experience higher levels of psychological distress is consistent with the expatriate adjustment and multicultural psychology literature (e.g., Jackson, 2006; Wiggins-Frame & Shehan,
1994), and also with the general psychology literature (Thomsen, Mehlsen, Viidik, Sommerlund, & Zachariae, 2005).

In sum, our findings showed that expatriates who saw their move as a manageable rather than an uncontrollable, were better adjusted to their general living conditions in Belgium, and experienced less psychological distress, particularly, they were less anxious and less stressed in the early stage after the relocation. Examination of the family functioning variables and their role in outcomes revealed that better family cohesion was associated with a more successful general adjustment. On the other hand, higher family flexibility was associated with lower life satisfaction, and better communication in the family related to higher levels of anxiety. However, expatriates that were satisfied with their family, were less anxious. The current findings do provide evidence for our main effect predictions, thereby empirically supporting theoretical notions from the ABCX-model, but questioning some assumptions within the model as well. In particular the interplay of perception and resources in predicting outcomes was not found in our study, as no interaction effects were found between perception of move and the family functioning variables.

Other findings

Overall, the family functioning variables were closely linked to one another, meaning that the better the communication in the family, the higher satisfaction with family life, the closer the emotional bonds between the family members, and the better family leadership and organisation in the family.

Our examination of the associations among the outcome variables (i.e., the three domains of adjustment, psychological distress and life satisfaction) revealed the following. Expatriates who were better adjusted to their new work environment, were less depressed, thereby corroborating previous findings (Rosenbusch & Cseh, 2012). This seems logical in light of the following: According to the expatriate literature, work/career opportunities are one of the most common reasons why expatriates decide
on expatriate experience (Dickmann et al., 2008; Selmer & Lauring, 2011). The majority (68%) of the expatriates in our sample moved because of new career opportunities in the new country, so one can assume that it is important for them to successfully adjust to their new job situation. As a result of successful work adjustment, expatriates may then be more positive about their life, and therefore less depressed. Furthermore, psychological distress and satisfaction with different domains of life were also significantly linked – the better satisfaction with life, the less psychological distress or vice versa. The associations between the outcome indicators in our study corroborate findings in the expatriate literature, documenting that expatriates are not just adjusted or unadjusted, it is also important how they manage emotionally, and how is their subjective psychological distress (Hippler, Haslberger, & Brewster, 2017).

Our study further showed that longer time in Belgium was associated with poorer family communication, suggesting that a longer stay affected family functioning in a negative way. This finding can mean that immediately after the relocation the expatriates’ family communication was better and then perhaps as a result of stress-pile-up resulted in more conflict and discussion in the family. Considering the age, it was found that older expatriates perceived the relocation as a more difficult one. The empirical evidence on the link between the perception of move and the age of expatriates is largely lacking, therefore we cannot directly compare this finding to previous research. However, in a recent study it has been documented that older expatriates experienced more psychological distress, and struggled more with the interaction adjustment (Filipič Sterle, Vervoort, & Verhofstadt, 2018b).

Strengths and Limitations

The present study has a number of strengths. First, this is the first study that examined the role of the perception of move and family functioning variables in predicting the outcomes of the relocation – cross-cultural adjustment, psychological distress and life satisfaction. Particularly the variable of psychological distress as an
outcome variable within expatriates has so far received little attention in the research (Hippler, Caligiuri, Johnson, & Baytalskaya, 2014). Second, our study used a theoretical model of family stress (i.e., ABCX model) which takes into account the variability of the outcomes of adjustment. In our study we therefore used multiple outcome indicators – cross-cultural adjustment, psychological distress and life satisfaction. Third, we included different variables (i.e., perception of move and family functioning) to test their association with adjustment outcomes and psychological well-being (i.e., different facets of adjustment, different aspects of psychological distress and life satisfaction), therefore more fine-grained conclusions can be drawn about which specific type of resource (i.e., perception of move and family functioning variables) is most helpful in fostering successful outcomes in expatriates – that is, successful general, interaction, and work adjustment; alleviation of psychological distress - depression, anxiety and stress; and enhancing life satisfaction. Another strength of the current study relates to the time of measurement which was shortly after the relocation (between one and 11 months after the relocation) which allowed us to tap into a very intense phase of adjustment and emotional functioning of newcomer expatriates.

In addition to the various strengths of the current study, important limitations should be noted, each of which points to directions for future research. First, our sample was rather small and mainly consisted of women with the majority of participants having a high educational status (i.e., university or academic degree). Replication of these findings with larger and more heterogeneous samples will be important. Employing a larger sample would also allow to examine differences across cultures. Second, given the cross-sectional design of our study at the very early stage of the relocation, changes (i.e., development in time) of the variables of perception of move and family functioning could not be tested. Studies with a longitudinal design are needed to provide better understanding of the development of resources and their impact on the adjustment outcomes. Third, applying a multi informant approach where
all family members would report on the family functioning variables would be useful to learn more about the role of family variables as a resource. Fourth, it will be important to supplement the current survey findings with research using alternative methods of assessing the perception of move, adjustment domains and psychological distress. In particular, qualitative research methods and investigation of the meaning-making of the expatriates’ experience may provide a more in-depth understanding of expatriates’ family and emotional functioning in the new country (e.g., specific stressors, specific family resources, emotional responses) (Filipič Sterle et al., 2018a). Finally, it is important to note that the temporal order of the processes under investigation cannot be tested in the present data. The possibility exists that higher levels of life satisfaction and lower levels of psychological distress lead to a more positive perception of the move, rather than the other way around. The usual recommended caution should therefore be exercised in inferring causality from our results, as the issue of causal ordering needs to be resolved in future research.
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CHAPTER 4

SOCIAL SUPPORT, ADJUSTMENT, AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS OF HELP-SEEKING EXPATRIATES

Abstract

The present study aimed to explore the interrelations between support processes, adjustment, and psychological distress within a sample of help-seeking expatriates. Specifically, we examined (1) the association between expatriates’ cross-cultural adjustment (i.e., work, interaction and general adjustment) and levels of psychological distress (i.e., depression, anxiety and stress), (2) the association between expatriates’ perceptions of socioemotional and instrumental support availability and their level of cross-cultural adjustment, and (3) the moderating role of expatriates’ socioemotional and instrumental support needs in the latter association. Findings showed that lower levels of expatriates’ work adjustment were associated with higher levels of psychological distress. Further, perceived availability of socioemotional support was positively linked to expatriates’ interaction and work adjustment. Finally, instrumental support needs moderated the relationship between instrumental support availability and general adjustment such that higher levels of instrumental support availability were associated with better general adjustment, but only for expatriates reporting high needs for instrumental support. Our study represents a novel contribution to the expatriate literature by shedding light on expatriates’ vulnerability for psychological distress and understanding the type of social support that is considered most beneficial for help-seeking expatriates. Suggestions are made for clinical interventions for expatriates in need of support.

CHAPTER 4

Introduction

There is a growing acknowledgement in the research literature that international work can be a challenging and stressful experience and that psychological support in the host country may alleviate distress for expatriates and facilitate their initial transition (Lazarova, McNulty, & Semeniuk, 2015; Rosenbusch & Cseh, 2012). However, there is little or no research available that investigates expatriate adjustment and social support when things get really difficult for them and they are in need for help. Examination of the type of social support for expatriates who are experiencing some psychological distress is particularly important because it can provide the evidence of how expatriates can be best assisted in their host country. The current study aimed to contribute to the current research literature by studying cross-cultural adjustment, support needs, and support availability, in a sample of expatriates seeking psychotherapy and experiencing heightened levels of psychological distress (e.g., depression, anxiety and stress). More specifically, we examined: (1) the association between expatriates’ cross-cultural adjustment (i.e., work, interaction and general adjustment) and levels of psychological distress (i.e., depression, anxiety and stress); (2) the association between expatriates’ perceptions of socioemotional and instrumental support availability and their level of cross-cultural adjustment; and (3) the moderating role of expatriates’ socioemotional and instrumental support needs in the latter association. We drew upon theoretical perspectives on expatriate adjustment (Bhaskar-Shrinivas, Harrison, Shaffer, & Luk, 2005; Black, Mendenhall, & Oddou, 1991; Black & Stephens, 1989; Filipič Sterle, Fontaine, De Mol, & Verhofstadt, 2018a; Haslberger, Brewster, & Hippler, 2013; Hippler, Brewster, & Haslberger, 2015; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001), the stress and coping literature (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Patterson, 1988; Seyle, 1978), social support theories with attention to social support availability and social support needs (Cutrona & Russell, 1990; Melrose, Brown, & Wood, 2015; McGinley, 2008; Ong & Ward, 2005; Podsadlowski, Vauclair, Spiess, & Stroppa,
2013; Rafaeli & Gleason, 2009; Selmer, 1999), as well as literature on clinical interventions for the globally mobile (Bushong, 2013; Filipič Sterle, Verhofstadt, Bell, & De Mol, 2018b).

**Expatriate Adjustment and Psychological Distress**

An *expatriate* is generally defined as a person who lives or works outside his or her own home country on a non-permanent basis (Andreason, 2003; Ward et al., 2001). Apart from most studied company-based expatriates (Gonzalez-Loureiro, Kiessling, & Dabic, 2015), expatriates are also highly skilled professionals or knowledge workers who actively and voluntarily pursue employment opportunities abroad and tend to maintain a degree of flexibility and freedom in their career choice, work location and family-work balance (Adams & van de Vijver, 2015; McNulty, 2013, 2014). Recent research has offered a multidimensional approach to define different types and dimensions of international work experience (Baruch, Dickmann, Altman, & Bournois, 2013), including alternative or non-traditional expatriates pursuing global careers (see e.g., McNulty, 2015). A common characteristic of these expatriates is that rather than being linked to local culture, they take on a global mindset and become part of an international, cross-cultural social environment (Mao & Shen, 2015).

When expatriates move to a foreign country, they start to learn about the host culture and make efforts to find successful ways of functioning in a host country. This process is called cross-cultural adjustment and according to the conceptualization proposed by Black and Stephens (1989) it consists of three facets of adjustment. A degree of familiarity with functioning in the host culture, such as health care, housing conditions, costs of living, etc., describes expatriates’ level of overall adjustment to living in the new culture, called general adjustment (Black & Stephens, 1989). Work adjustment relates to expatriates’ adjustment to a new work situation with co-workers and new work tasks and work roles (Black & Stephens, 1989) which expatriates may experience as a result of new career opportunities (Dickmann, Doherty, Mills, &
Interaction adjustment is a process associated with social interactions and communication with other people in the host culture and with building new social networks (Black & Stephens, 1989). Based on this Black and Stephen’s conceptualization of expatriate adjustment, expatriates are considered adjusted to a foreign culture when they experience familiarity and psychological comfort or absence of stress on the three dimensions of expatriate experience (Black & Stephens, 1989). Differentiation between the three dimensions of adjustment is important as it allows the examination of factors that predict the adjustment processes on each of the three dimensions.

Within the expatriate adjustment literature, it has been recognized that the process of adjustment in the host country has a significant impact on the success of an international work experience (Black et al., 1991). The static perspective has long been the main stream in the research agendas on expatriate adjustment, thereby neglecting the time dimension and the variability of adjustment over time. Some recent research, however, documents the importance of considering the aspect of time when looking at the process of adjustment (see e.g., Firth, Chen, Kirkman, & Kim, 2014), and to consider the specifics of adjustment processes on the three dimensions described above (Hippler et al., 2015).

Adjustment issues are indeed central in expatriates’ lives as international work experience involves multiple changes and new experiences and challenges (Truman, Sharar & Pompe, 2012). In accordance with the adjustment theoretical models and the stress literature, an expatriate experience constitutes a major life event involving a variety of specific stressors (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Patterson, 1988), such as starting a new job, moving abroad, a partner giving up a job, children attending a new school, occupying a new residence, change of family routines and financial status, cultural differences (Haslberger & Brewster, 2008; Patterson, 1988), long periods of separation from loved ones (Bahn, 2015), and disruption of an expatriate’s social
Social Support and Coping

Expatriates may rely on intrapersonal and interpersonal resources to cope with stressors and challenges and to overcome culture shock, as stated in the stress literature (Patterson, 1988). Emerging evidence points at the key role of interpersonal variables, more specifically social support (Adelman, 1988; Fontaine, 1986). Empirical findings show that increased social support contributes to better adjustment of expatriates (Adelman, 1988; Attaca & Berry, 2002; Aycan, 1997; Black & Gregersen, 1991; Caligiuri & Lazarova, 2002; Fontaine, 1986). The research literature on social support support system (Fontaine, 1986). The attempt to reduce initial stress triggers coping responses which result in better adjustment and increased subjective well-being (Black & Stevens, 1989; Haslberger et al., 2013).

Failure of managing change and stress may compromise expatriate adjustment, thus resulting in deteriorating mental health and well-being. For example, some empirical evidence points at the deleterious psychological correlates of expatriation, including heightened psychological distress (Anderzén & Arnetz, 1999; Forster, 1997; Foyle, Beer, & Watson, 1998; Silbiger & Pines, 2014; Truman et al. 2012), decreased mental well-being, a worse subjective work environment (Anderzén & Arnetz, 1999), more alcohol and substance abuse (Anderzén & Arnetz, 1997; Truman et al., 2012), externalizing problems, such as attention deficit, hyperactivity, impulse control (Truman et al., 2012), and increased depression (Magdol, 2002; Truman et al., 2012). Acknowledging adjustment as a process that happens on different dimensions - general life, interaction with locals, and work (Black & Stevens, 1989), and adjustment being specific on each dimension (Haslberger et al., 2013), the current study aimed to contribute to the understanding of the association between the three dimensions of adjustment and psychological distress. Our first hypothesis was formed as follows:

Hypothesis 1: Lower levels of (general, interaction and work) adjustment will be associated with higher levels of psychological distress.
in the expatriate context identifies socioemotional support and instrumental support (Caligiuri & Lazarova, 2002). Socioemotional support can alleviate negative feelings and facilitate expatriate adjustment through emotional support networks in the host country (Farh, Bartol, Shapiro, & Shin, 2010). It provides expatriates with feelings of belonging and psychological security and thus addresses their needs to affiliate, for contact, sharing, companionship and friendship (Caligiuri & Lazarova, 2002). Instrumental support can also ease stressful situations by fulfilling specific needs (Caligiuri & Lazarova, 2002). Examples of such needs are help with the children, help with works in a new home, etc. (Ong & Ward, 2005). Moreover, instrumental support can increase feelings of connectedness and acceptance by the local community, therefore increase the interaction adjustment (Shumaker & Brownell, 1984). In attempts to identify the role of a particular type of social support for expatriates’ successful adjustment, the research has shown diversified empirical evidence. In particular, some studies have pointed at the key role of instrumental support (McGinley, 2008; Ong & Ward, 2005; Selmer, 1999), whereas other studies suggested socioemotional support being more important for successful adjustment (Farh et al., 2010; Podsiadlowski et al., 2013). However, these studies used samples of expatriates who were not seeking psychological help. Our study aimed to fill this research gap by exploring the impact of social support on the three dimensions of adjustment within a sample of expatriates seeking psychotherapy. As such, it should allow a reexamination of the positive impact of social support on adjustment, as described in research using non-clinical samples of expatriates.

Hypothesis 2: Higher levels of perceived social support availability (socioemotional and instrumental support) will be associated with better general, interaction and work adjustment.

Further, emerging evidence in the general support literature documents that support provision is only helpful when it matches the recipient’s subjective need for a
specific level/type of support (Cutrona & Russell, 1990; Melrose et al., 2015; Podsiadlowski et al., 2013; Rafaeli & Gleason, 2009), and that social support interventions may only be helpful if the individuals are in need of that particular type of support but not when these needs are already being met or are not at stake (Melrose et al., 2015). Matching and mismatching support have been found to differentially impact outcomes. For instance, when a particular type of support matches one’s support needs it may be helpful for recipient. Mismatched support (support that is not needed or provided too early), on the other hand, may have an undermining effect on the recipients’ sense of autonomy, competence and self-esteem, or may signal that they cannot cope with the situation independently (Rafaeli & Gleason, 2009). Further, mismatched support can also aggravate feelings of indebtedness and violate the sense of reciprocity (i.e., recipients feel indebted to other people offering the support) and may also imply increased and potentially unwanted attention to strains and hardships of their life (Rafaeli & Gleason, 2009). Based on the above reasoning, our third hypothesis was formed as follows:

Hypothesis 3: Higher levels of perceived instrumental and socioemotional support availability will contribute to all three dimensions of adjustment, particularly for expatriates reporting high respective support needs.

Method

Participants

Participants were solicited by the help of mental health professionals (i.e., psychologists and psychotherapists) working in Brussels (Belgium). A total of 31 psychotherapists who offer psychotherapy treatment to expatriates were contacted either by person, e-mail or telephone and were requested to inform their clients about the present research. Of these, 16 psychotherapists agreed to talk to their expatriate clients and invite them to take part in the current study. The main reasons for
psychotherapists to refuse participation was lack of time, clients’ non-compliance with their psychotherapy approach, and in some cases no particular reason was provided. Inclusion criteria were: a) being an expatriate living in Brussels or the surrounding areas, b) seeing a psychotherapist at the time of the study, c) having reached adult age (i.e., 18+), and d) sufficient fluency in English in order to fill out the questionnaires. Of 353 expatriates eligible to participate, 214 agreed to take part. Missing values analyses (i.e., more than 25% of the items of a given questionnaire not answered) indicated that complete data were available for 97 participants. No information was available on reasons for not participating.

Participants in our study shared the characteristic that they were actual clients in psychotherapy, thus representing a sample of expatriates seeking professional help. The majority of participating expatriates were female ($N=78; 80\%$). The mean age of the participants was 40.1 years ($SD=9.1$, $range=19$ years to 70 years) and the average duration of their stay in Belgium was 8.7 years ($SD=7.4$, $range=0$ to 42 years). Forty-four percent of the expatriates were married ($n=43$), 31% were single ($n=30$), 12% were cohabiting with their partner ($n=12$); 6% were divorced ($n=6$); for 7% ($n=6$) of the participants, no data on their relationship status was available. The majority of expatriates – 69% – had a university degree ($n=67$), 14% finished college ($n=13$), followed by 9% who had an academic degree ($n=9$), 6% finished high school ($n=6$), and 1% finished primary school ($n=1$). No data was available for 1% of the participants ($n=1$). Seventy-one percent of the participants had an open-ended work contract ($n=69$). About half (52%) of the sample was working for the European institutions ($n=50$). The majority of respondents – 69% initially moved to Belgium because of a work assignment ($n=67$), whereas 28% followed their spouses as trailing partners ($n=27$). Expatriate participants were coming from 26 countries of origin and were categorized in three regional groups: Western Europe (e.g. UK, France, Germany, Italy, etc.) (57%, $n=56$), Eastern Europe (e.g., Slovenia, Hungary, Estonia, Romania, etc.) (32%, $n=31$),
and non-European countries (e.g., USA, Australia, Brazil, Turkey, etc.) (10%, n=9). More specifically, participants came from Slovenia (13%; n=12), UK (11%; n=10), Ireland (9%; n=7), Germany (10%; n=9), Sweden and Poland (5%; n=5 each), Romania, Hungary and Italy (4%; n=4 each), Finland, Estonia, France, and USA (3%; n=3 each), Australia, Austria, The Netherlands, Portugal, and Turkey (2%; n=2 each). The remainder of the participants (13%; n=15) came from other, mostly European countries. Sixty-six percent of the respondents of our clinical sample had not been given a DSM diagnosis by their treating doctors (n=61). Thirty percent were diagnosed by a doctor or a psychiatrist (n=28), 12% as suffering from depression (n=11).

Measure

**Cross-cultural adjustment.** Black and Steven’s cross-cultural adjustment scale was used to assess participants’ adjustment to life in Belgium (Black & Stephens, 1989). This widely used 14-item scale has demonstrated high reliability across multiple samples (Black & Gregersen, 1991; Black & Stevens, 1989). Respondents were asked to indicate how unadjusted or adjusted they currently felt to their life in Belgium by means of a 7-point Likert rating scale (1=completely unadjusted to 7=completely adjusted). The General adjustment subscale measures perceived adjustment in everyday life (seven items; e.g., “living conditions in general”). The Interaction adjustment subscale measures the expatriate’s interaction with host country nationals (four items; e.g., “interacting with Belgians on a day-to-day basis”). The Work adjustment subscale measures expatriate’s adjustment to new job tasks, environment, and roles (three items; e.g., “performance standards and expectations”). Subscale scores were computed by averaging item scores, with higher scores indicating higher levels of adjustment. In our study Cronbach’s alphas were .89 for general adjustment, .93 for interaction adjustment, and .93 for work adjustment.
Psychological distress (depression, anxiety and stress). Participants’ level of psychological distress was assessed by the DASS-21 (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995) which measures the severity of the core symptoms of depression, anxiety and stress. The Depression subscale assesses the symptoms of dysphoria, hopelessness, devaluation of life, self-deprecation, lack of interest or involvement, anhedonia and inertia (seven items, e.g., “I felt that I had nothing to look forward to”). The Anxiety subscale assesses autonomic arousal, skeletal muscle effects, situational anxiety, and subjective experience of anxious affect (seven items, e.g., “I felt scared without any good reason”). The Stress subscale is sensitive to levels of chronic non-specific arousal and assesses difficulty relaxing, nervous arousal, and being easily upset/agitated, irritable/over-reactive and impatient (seven items, e.g., “I tend to over-react to situations”). In the current study, participants were required to indicate the presence of a symptom over the last two weeks by means of a 4-point severity/frequency Likert scale (1=Did not apply to me at all to 4=Applied to me very much or most of the time). Subscale scores were computed by averaging the scores for the relevant items. As the three subscales of the DASS-21 were highly correlated in the current study (i.e., correlations ranging from $r = .67$ to $r = .70$; $p < .01$), we used the total DASS-21 score. The total DASS-21 score has been previously documented as an index for general psychological distress (Henry & Crawford, 2005). The Cronbach’s alphas were the following: depression subscale $\alpha = .92$, anxiety subscale $\alpha = .73$, stress subscale $\alpha = .84$, overall DASS-21 scale $\alpha = .93$.

Perceived availability of support. The Index of Sojourner Social Support was used to measure expatriates’ perception of the availability of supportive behaviours that serve particular types of functions (i.e., expatriate’s perception of people who could provide specific helpful behaviours for them in the new country) (Ong & Ward, 2005). This 18-item scale consists of two subscales: Socioemotional support defined as provision of feelings of belonging and psychological security that buffer against
negative feelings (e.g., friendship, companionship) (nine items; e.g., “Comfort you whenever you feel homesick”) and Instrumental support defined as the creation of a supporting environment with provision of necessary resources that can ease stressful situations (e.g., help with children, help with works in the new home, etc.), (nine items; e.g., “Provide necessary information to help you orient you to your new surroundings”). Respondents were asked to indicate whether they knew people who would provide each of the specific helping behaviors for them in the host county. Items were rated using 5-point Likert scales ranging from 1=No one would do this to 5=Many would do this. Subscale scores were computed by summing scores for all items included in a specific subscale, with higher scores indicating higher levels of perceived availability of social support. The alpha reliabilities for the perceived availability of sojourner support were high (α = .96 for socioemotional support, and α = .95 for instrumental support).

Support Needs. In order to measure participants’ needs for support, we used two subscales of the Brief COPE. This 28-item questionnaire is a widely used instrument to assess 14 different coping strategies that individuals tend to use when trying to face stress or dealing with problems (Carver, 1997). For the current study, only the Seeking emotional support and the Seeking instrumental support subscales were used. The Seeking emotional support subscale refers to an individual’s tendency to seek emotional support from others (two items; e.g., “getting comfort and understanding from someone”). The Seeking instrumental support refers to an individual’s tendency to seek instrumental support from others (two items, e.g., ”getting help and advice from other people about what to do”). Respondents indicated the ways they had been dealing with problems and stress since they have lived in Belgium by means of a 4-point Likert scale (1=I haven’t been doing this at all to 4=I have been doing this a lot). Subscale scores were computed by summing scores for all items included the respective subscale, with higher scores indicating more support seeking (i.e. attempts to get their support needs met). In our study the Cronbach’s alphas were
.85 for the Seeking emotional support subscale and .85 for the Seeking instrumental support subscale.

**Procedure**

Eligible clients who expressed interest to participate in this study were offered an information letter and a confidential internet survey login code by their treating psychotherapist. Completion of the online survey took about 30-45 minutes. The survey was administered in English. The study was approved by the ethical committee of the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences of Ghent University, Belgium, and the National Medical Ethics Committee of the Republic of Slovenia.

**Statistical Analyses**

A hierarchical regression analysis (using SPSS 23.0) was conducted to examine the contribution of participants’ general, interaction and work adjustment in explaining psychological distress. Participants gender (men coded as 0, women coded as 1) and age were entered in step 1 to control for the effects of these socio-demographic variables upon psychological distress. In the second step, the number of months expatriates were living in Belgium was entered. In the third step, participants’ general, interaction and work adjustment were entered.

A series of 6 hierarchical regression analyses was conducted to examine the contribution of participants’ level of socioemotional/instrumental support availability in explaining adjustment and the moderating role of emotional/instrumental support needs. As with the previous analysis, participants gender (men coded as 0, women coded as 1) and age were entered in step 1; the number of months expatriates were living in Belgium was entered in step 2. To test for support needs as a moderator, it is necessary to enter the cross-product terms of support needs and availability in a separate block (step 4) in a hierarchical regression analysis, following the entry of support needs and availability as first-order terms (step 3). To reduce the effects of multicollinearity,
continuous variables were centered (Holmbeck, 2002). Analyses were run separately for socioemotional and instrumental support availability and respective support needs in explaining either general, interaction or work adjustment. In case of significant interaction effects of support availability with support needs, additional moderation analyses were performed to interpret the interaction effect – i.e., whether the association between the predictor variable (socioemotional/instrumental support availability) and outcome variable (general/interaction /work adjustment) was significant at high or low (or both) levels of the moderator variable (emotional/instrumental support needs). Moderation analyses followed the procedure outlined by Holmbeck (1997, 2002). This procedure does not categorize participants into two groups but allows, by manipulating the 0 point of the moderator, to examine conditional effects of the continuous moderator variable upon the outcome. To this end, two steps were performed. First, two new conditional continuous moderator variables were computed by (1) subtracting 1 SD from the centred moderator variable (to compute high levels of socioemotional/instrumental support needs) and (2) adding 1 SD to the centred moderator variable (to compute low levels of socioemotional/instrumental support needs). Second, two additional regression analyses were performed - incorporating each of these new conditional continuous moderator variables - to test the significance for high and low values of the conditional moderator variable. Variance-inflation factors were acceptable (all VIF ≤ 2.8), suggesting that there was no problem of multicollinearity.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Mean scores, standard deviations, and correlation coefficients for all measures are presented in Table 1. The average duration of stay was 8.7 years (SD = 7.4 years). 25% of the sample had a stay equal to or shorter than 3.4 years, 25% higher than 3.4
years and equal or shorter than 6.4 years, 25% higher than 6.4 years and equal or shorter than 10.9 years, and 25% equal to or shorter than 42.9 years.

According to the DASS-21 severity ratings (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995), the current sample reported severe levels of psychological distress (i.e. depression, anxiety and stress) (M = 35.6, SD = 23.1 for overall DASS-21 score), as compared to the cut-off value of 32-38 described as indicating a severe degree of psychological distress.
Table 1  
Means (M), Standard Deviations (SD), and Pearson Correlations of General, Interaction and Work Adjustment, Psychological Distress, Socioemotional and Instrumental Support Availability, and Emotional and Instrumental Support Needs (N = 97)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Range</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. General adjustment</td>
<td>4.43</td>
<td>5.95</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Interaction adjustment</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.62</td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>.45**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Work adjustment</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5.67</td>
<td>1.41</td>
<td>.31**</td>
<td>.24*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Psychological distress</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>35.63</td>
<td>23.09</td>
<td>-.30**</td>
<td>-.19</td>
<td>-.53**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Socioemotional support availability</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>24.56</td>
<td>8.90</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.34**</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>-.24*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Instrumental support availability</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>25.41</td>
<td>8.28</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.28*</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>-.16</td>
<td>.69**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Emotional support needs</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5.34</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.25*</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.41**</td>
<td>.44**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Instrumental support needs</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5.65</td>
<td>1.66</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>-.17</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.31**</td>
<td>.43**</td>
<td>.70**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Duration of stay</td>
<td>0-42</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>.31**</td>
<td>.39**</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>-.28**</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05; **p < .01
Correlations

Pearson correlation analysis revealed that expatriates’ general and work adjustment were significantly negatively correlated with psychological distress ($r = -.30; p < .01$ and $r = -.53; p < .01$, respectively) indicating that the expatriates who were not adjusted well to their everyday life in Belgium and their work environment reported experiencing higher levels of psychological distress. The association between interaction adjustment and psychological distress showed a low negative correlation but did not reach significance. Age and the duration of participants’ stay in Belgium were found to be highly correlated ($r = .65; p < .0001$). Some weak significant correlations were found between participants’ age and work adjustment, their psychological distress, and emotional support needs (all $r \leq .26; p < .05$). The duration of stay was significantly negatively correlated with psychological distress ($r = -.28; p < .01$), indicating that expatriates who have lived in Belgium for a longer duration experience lower levels of psychological distress. Furthermore, a positive correlation was found between duration of expatriates’ stay in Belgium and general ($r = .31; p < .01$) and interaction adjustment ($r = .39; p < .01$). Participants’ levels of both emotional and instrumental support availability on the one hand and support needs on the other hand were significantly and positively correlated with each other (all $r \geq .31; p < .01$). Further, the three cross-cultural adjustment subscales were all significantly correlated with each other (all $r \geq .24; p < .05$); There was a strong positive correlation between our measures of socioemotional and instrumental support availability ($r = .69; p < .01$). By the same token, our measures of emotional and instrumental support needs were strongly and positively linked ($r = .70; p < .01$). There were no sex differences, except for emotional support needs ($t(92) = 2.24; p < .05$) which were found to be higher in women ($M = 5.5$) than in men ($M = 4.5$).
Value of Expatriate Adjustment in Explaining Psychological Distress (Hypothesis 1)

A hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to examine the unique and potentially distinctive contribution of participants’ general, interaction and work adjustment in explaining psychological distress. A summary of this analysis is presented in Table 2. Participants gender (men coded as 0, women coded as 1) and age were entered in step 1 to control for the effects of these socio-demographic variables upon psychological distress. In the second step, the number of months expatriates were living in Belgium was entered. In the third step, participants’ general, interaction and work adjustment were entered simultaneously. The variance-inflation factors of this analysis were acceptable (range 1.21-2.78), suggesting that there was no problem of multicollinearity. Findings for the final model (step 3) indicated no significant effects for participants’ gender, age or time in Belgium (all $|\beta|$’s $\leq .09$, ns). In line with our expectations, expatriate adjustment contributed significantly to psychological distress, yet, inspection of Beta Coefficients indicated that this was only the case for work adjustment; i.e., lower levels of work adjustment were associated with higher levels of psychological distress ($\beta = -.47; t = -4.5; p < .0001$). No significant contribution was observed for general and interaction adjustment (both $|\beta|$’s $\leq .17$, ns).

Table 2
Hierarchical Regression Analysis Explaining Psychological Distress. Standardized betas from the last step in the analyses are displayed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterion variable</th>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>$\Delta R^2$</th>
<th>$F$ for $\Delta R^2$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Psychological distress</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>.08*</td>
<td>.05*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Time in Belgium</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>General adjustment</td>
<td>-.17</td>
<td>.25**</td>
<td>.28**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Interaction adjustment</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Work adjustment</td>
<td>-.47**</td>
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</table>

*p $< .05$; **p $< .0001$
Value of Support Availability in Explaining Adjustment (Hypothesis 2) and the Moderating Role of Support Needs (Hypothesis 3)

A series of hierarchical regression analyses was conducted to examine the contribution of participants’ level of socioemotional/instrumental support availability in explaining adjustment and the moderating role of emotional/instrumental support needs. Analyses were run separately for socioemotional and instrumental support availability and support needs in explaining either general, interaction or work adjustment. Summaries of the analyses with emotional support and instrumental support are presented in Table 3 and Table 4, respectively. As noted, moderation analyses were performed in line with the recommendations of Holmbeck (1997, 2002). To reduce the effects of multicollinearity, continuous variables were centred (Holmbeck, 1997, 2002). In the present study, 4 blocks of independent variables were entered hierarchically in each linear regression: (1) participants gender and age, (2) time in Belgium, (3) (socioemotional or instrumental) support availability and needs, and (4) the cross-product terms of the respective type of available support and support needs. The variance-inflation factors of all 6 regression analyses were acceptable (range 1.07-2.29), suggesting that there was no problem of multicollinearity. Below, we first report on the analyses with socioemotional support and then report on the analyses with instrumental support.

Socioemotional support. Moderation analyses with expatriates’ socioemotional support availability and emotional support needs as independent variables and either general, interaction or work adjustment as dependent variable revealed that, for all three regression analyses, socioemotional support availability had a positive contribution in explaining expatriate adjustment. Analyses indicated that socioemotional support availability was significant in explaining interaction ($\beta = .25, p < .05$) and work adjustment ($\beta = .28, p < .05$) but failed to reach significance for general adjustment ($\beta =
Furthermore, there was also a significant positive contribution of time as expatriate in Belgium upon general ($\beta = .36, p < .05$) and interaction adjustment ($\beta = .58, p < .001$), with longer time in Belgium being associated with higher general and interaction adjustment. Age contributed significantly negatively to interaction adjustment ($\beta = -.27, p < .05$). No moderation effect was found for emotional support needs upon the three dimensions of adjustment in understanding the role of socioemotional support availability.
Table 3
Moderation Analysis Explaining General, Interaction and Work Adjustment by Socioemotional Support Availability and Emotional Support Needs. Standardized betas from the last step in the analyses are displayed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterion variable</th>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>∆R²</th>
<th>F for ∆R²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Gender</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>.36*</td>
<td>.07*</td>
<td>.08*</td>
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<tr>
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<td>.10</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Socioemotional support availability x emotional support needs</td>
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<td>.11</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Interaction Adjustment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>.00</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>.20*</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Socioemotional support availability x emotional support needs</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Work Adjustment</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>.09*</td>
<td>.07*</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Socioemotional support availability x emotional support needs</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05; **p < .001

**Instrumental support.** Similar moderation analyses as reported above but with instrumental support availability and instrumental support needs revealed, similar to the analyses with socioemotional support, a significant positive contribution of time as expatriate in Belgium upon general and interaction adjustment (both $\beta \geq .36, p < .05$) and a significant negative effect of age upon interaction adjustment ($\beta = -.34, p < .05$). Interestingly, analyses also revealed a significant interaction effect for instrumental support availability x instrumental support needs upon general adjustment ($\beta = .23, p < .05$). To illustrate the pattern reflected in the statistically significant interaction term, we
plotted regression lines for high (+1 SD above the mean) and low (-1 SD below the mean) values of the moderator variable (see e.g. Holmbeck, 1997, 2002) (see Figure 1). Significance tests for both slopes indicated that higher levels of instrumental support availability were associated with higher levels of general adjustment, but only for participants who also reported to have high needs for instrumental support ($\beta = 1.55$, $p < .005$). The opposite pattern was observed for those who reported low levels of needs for instrumental support; i.e., higher levels of instrumental support availability were associated with worse general adjustment. While this latter pattern failed to reach significance ($\beta = -1.14$, $p = .06$), the observed interaction shows that, depending upon whether participants reported to have a high need for instrumental support or low need, the impact of instrumental support availability upon general adjustment is opposite to each other. A similar instrumental support availability x instrumental support needs effect was observed for interaction adjustment, but failed to reach significance ($\beta = -.18$, $p = .07$).
Table 4
Moderation Analysis Explaining General, Interaction and Work Adjustment by Instrumental Support Availability and Instrumental Support Needs. Standardized betas from the last step in the analyses are displayed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterion variable</th>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>ΔR²</th>
<th>F for ΔR²</th>
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<td>.02</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Gender</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Time in Belgium</td>
<td>.36*</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.08*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Instrumental support availability</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Instrumental support needs</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Instrumental support availability x instrumental support needs</td>
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<td>.05*</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Interaction Adjustment</td>
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<td>Gender</td>
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<td>Time in Belgium</td>
<td>.62**</td>
<td>.23**</td>
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<td>Instrumental support availability x instrumental support needs</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.26</td>
</tr>
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<td>Work Adjustment</td>
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<td>.22</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.07</td>
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<td>Time in Belgium</td>
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<td>Instrumental support needs</td>
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<td>Instrumental support availability x instrumental support needs</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.09</td>
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</table>

*p < .05; **p < .001
Figure 1. Regression lines for the relationship between the instrumental support availability and general adjustment as moderated by the instrumental support needs. Standardized Beta’s ($\beta$) are shown.

$\beta = -1.14, p = .06$  
$\beta = 1.55, p < .005$

Discussion

Summary of Findings

The present study aimed to examine the interrelations between support processes, adjustment, and psychological distress in a help-seeking sample of expatriates living in Brussels. Our results were partially in line with our expectations and can be summarized as follows. First, findings indicated that expatriate adjustment was associated significantly to psychological distress, yet, this was only the case for work adjustment. More specifically, lower levels of expatriates’ work adjustment were associated with higher levels of psychological distress (i.e., depression, anxiety and stress). No significant link to psychological distress was observed for expatriates’ general and interaction adjustment. Second, our analyses exploring the role of social support in expatriates’ adjustment revealed that perceived availability of socioemotional support had a positive association to interaction and work adjustment. Thus, participating expatriates who reported to know more people who could comfort them when feeling homesick or listen to their feelings of loneliness, or share good and bad
times with them, felt better adjusted to their work situation and to interacting with Belgian nationals. This was not the case, however, for general adjustment (i.e., life in the new living conditions in general). Third, findings showed that higher levels of perceived instrumental support availability were associated with better general adjustment, but only for expatriates reporting high needs for instrumental support. In other words, the match between the degree of instrumental support expatriates perceived to be available and the amount of instrumental support they tended to seek when dealing with their situation appeared more important for their adjustment to everyday living conditions in the new country (i.e., general adjustment) than the mere availability of instrumental support.

Our findings indicating a negative association between cross-cultural work adjustment and psychological distress, but not between general/interaction adjustment and psychological distress, cannot be directly compared to existing findings as no research on expatriates thus far has been conducted with help-seeking samples to examine this association. However, our findings might be interpreted in light of previous studies showing that work and career issues are central in expatriates’ lives. For example, work/career opportunities are one of the most common reasons why expatriates decide on expatriate experience (Dickmann et al., 2008; Selmer & Lauring, 2011) and expatriates often have high status jobs (Silbiger & Pines, 2014). Furthermore, high perceived work importance was found to aggravate the impact of stress on burn out (Silbiger & Pines, 2014). Accordingly, this may explain why psychological distress was associated with work adjustment but not with general and interaction adjustment.

It has been argued, however, that the process of work adjustment might be more straightforward or even easier than in other domains of adjustment (Hippler et al., 2015). But what happens when this is not the case? Our study findings show that this doesn’t hold for the expatriates who already experience psychological distress. Previous findings have shown that poor work adjustment can lead to personal costs (Firth et al.,
As the average duration of stay in the host country in our study was 8.7 years it may be assumed that by such length of stay expatriates should already reach a level of successful adjustment. Indeed, according to recent conceptualizations, the adjustment for company sponsored expatriates should reach its peak after 2-5 years (Hippler et al., 2015) or slightly later (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005). However, the adjustment processes may run differently and at different pace on respective adjustment domains. Our results suggest that this may indeed be the case as work adjustment for our sample was associated with higher psychological distress whereas such an association was not found in general and interaction domains of adjustment and psychological distress. This means that longer-term expatriates - which was the case in our sample - may experience more fluctuations within their adjustment process, and perhaps reach more ‘downs’ and ‘highs’ points of their adjustment curve, the latter not completely corresponding to the adjustment curves that the literature has presented so far (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005; Black & Mendenhall, 1990).

Our study also documents a positive association between perceived availability of socioemotional support on the one hand and interaction and work adjustment on the other hand. This points to the importance for expatriates to feel comforted and helped with their specific emotional needs in order to open up and relate to locals (cf. interaction adjustment) or even co-workers (cf. work adjustment), who in turn can then become important sources of support (Aycan, 1997; Podsiadlowski et al., 2013). These findings corroborate previous studies emphasizing that perceived availability of quality rather than quantity of social interactions and support is crucial for expatriates’ mental health (McGinley, 2008). For help-seeking expatriates, psychotherapy offers the opportunity to discuss specific psychological challenges such as identity issues, questions of belonging, homesickness, rootlessness, repeated goodbyes, and unresolved grief (Bushong, 2013). By receiving socioemotional support from their therapists, and also colleagues, friends and family, they could thus be able to assess their life
expectations and to adjust their beliefs in order to see their current expatriate situation in a more positive way. The perceived availability of socioemotional support may make them feel more confident to reach out and to learn new people and connect and interact with them in their immediate environment (Szabo, Ward, & Jose, 2016).

It is important, however, that clinicians working with expatriates have additional training in understanding the nature of the complexity of expatriate lifestyle and the specific challenges that are part of expatriate life (i.e., uprooting, constant changes, and repeated goodbyes). Having their own expatriate experience seems to be an asset for psychotherapists (Bushong, 2013). This supports the finding of our study, that receiving adequate socioemotional support is associated with their better (interaction and work) adjustment which in turn can help them to accept the hardships of their work situation and increase work adjustment. That, as a consequence, would ease their psychological distress, as supported in our first hypothesis.

Our moderation analysis indicated that perceived availability of instrumental support fosters general adjustment (e.g., food, shopping, health care, transport, etc.), particularly for those expatriates who are in need for this kind of support. The role of instrumental support for expatriate adjustment has previously been recognized in the research (McGinley, 2008; Selmer, 1999). It is also in accordance with contemporary social support research and intervention literature (Melrose et al., 2015; Rafaeli & Gleason, 2009) documenting the importance of support provision matching the recipient’s need for a specific type of support. Providing sufficient and matching instrumental social support to expatriates’ needs seems to be key. What does that truly mean for the expatriates already experiencing psychological distress? A foreign environment may feel overwhelming to expatriates due to the novelty and host country languages and culture, even when instrumental support is available. As exciting as it can be to live in a foreign culture, one has to have a “compass” as to how to use all the potentially available instrumental support. Namely, one of the reasons for such a
paradox may be that expatriates don’t particularly know how to actually use the available support (Rosenbusch, Cerny II, & Earnest, 2015). On the other hand, expatriates with previous international work experience or longer-term expatriates-which was the case in our study- may be in a better position as they may be more skilled in recognizing their own needs for the particular type of support. This is also due to their lifestyle full of changes and adjustments (Bushong, 2013), as they may have learned what works well for them and as a result, they are more conscious of their particular needs. The optimal matching theory therefore provides a plausible explanation for the moderating role of social support needs in understanding the impact of perceived support availability (Cutrona & Russell, 1990). Specifically, mismatched support could compromise feelings of autonomy, competence and feelings of independence and self-sufficiency (Rafaeli & Gleason, 2009), all being very important in supporting expatriate complexity and the associated psychological challenges that it entails (Bushong, 2013; Filipič Sterle et al., 2018b). In other words, as the results of our study suggest, being more aware of expatriates’ own needs and the kind of help they would need, such as asking for advice and support from other people (cf. instrumental support), may help them to make an effort to meet them. While socioemotional support availability was found to have a positive association with expatriate work and interaction adjustment, no moderation effect was found for emotional support needs. Although it is unclear why this is the case, one tentative explanation is that emotional support needs (i.e., the need for a human contact, comfort, identity issues, homesickness, uprootlessness, etc. (Bushong, 2013) were already addressed during psychotherapy. However, further research is needed to replicate the present findings and/or explore alternative explanations.

Of further interest, our study revealed that the duration of stay in Belgium and gender impacted some of the variables included in the present study. Specifically, expatriates who have lived in Belgium for a longer period, were better adjusted to the
life in Belgium in general and had better interaction with Belgian locals. This finding supports previous findings that difficulties in socio-cultural adjustment generally decrease over time (Ward, Okura, Kennedy, & Kojima, 1998). Further, age contributed significantly negatively to the interaction adjustment suggesting that younger expatriates showed better interaction adjustment with locals than older expatriates. Interestingly, apart from emotional support needs being higher in women, no additional gender differences were found for the remainder of the support variables. Despite the growing body of evidence documenting that women tend to be better adapted than men overall, and significantly so in the interaction adjustment (Haslberger, 2010), our study has not supported these findings. Previous studies have also argued that there might be some differences in how men and women experience expatriate experiences. For instance, in cultures with sex-role expectations that are very different from the home culture, women may find opportunities for social interaction to be limited (Fontaine, 1986). The latter might have been less a problem in the current sample as the majority of study participants were coming from other European countries and living in Brussels—which is a very international environment. The finding that women showed a greater need for emotional support than men is in line with the consensus in the general and multicultural literature, documenting that seeking emotional support is a particularly important coping strategy for women when dealing with problems (Jackson, 2006; Madhyastha, Latha, & Kamath, 2014). Furthermore, in most cultural contexts women are taught to rely on other people, particularly for emotional support (Jackson, 2006).

**Strengths and Limitations**

The present study has a number of strengths. First, this is the first study that examined expatriate adjustment, psychological distress and perceived social support availability and needs within a sample of help-seeking expatriates who showed severe levels of psychological distress and who were all undergoing psychotherapy treatment at the time of the study. As such, the present study sheds light on the processes that
make some expatriates particularly vulnerable for psychological problems. Second, our study used different theoretical models from acculturation and expatriate adjustment literature, linking it to coping and stress models and specifically, the clinical interventions literature for the globally mobile. Third, by using a multi-dimensional conceptualization and measurement of our study variables, more fine-grained conclusions can be drawn about which specific type of support (i.e., socioemotional vs. instrumental support) is most helpful in fostering adjustment within particular life domains (e.g., general life conditions, interaction with locals, and work situation).

Another strength of the current study relates to the cultural diversity of the sample (i.e., participants were coming from 26 different countries of origin), enhancing the generalizability of our findings across cultures.

In addition to the various strengths of the current study, some limitations should be noted, each of which points to directions for future research. First, because of the lack of previous research using samples of help-seeking expatriates, the current findings cannot be fully compared to existing findings derived from other samples of expatriates.

Second, our sample was rather small and mainly consisted of women with the majority of participants having a high educational status (i.e., university or academic degree) \( (N=76) \). Replication of these findings with larger and more heterogeneous samples will be important. Employing a larger sample would also allow to examine differences across cultures. On the other hand, given the heterogeneity of our sample with a high variation of age of expatriates (i.e., ranging from 19 to 70 years) and a broader definition of expatriates (i.e., also including trailing partners), findings should be interpreted with caution. More research is needed to see whether findings hold for different ‘subgroups’ of expatriates and more homogeneous samples of expatriates, or whether there are substantial differences. Third, while it is likely that a certain number of participants who moved to Belgium years ago as trailing partners have found themselves a job, this was not explicitly checked in our study. Forth, it should be noted
that the temporal order of the processes under investigation cannot be tested. The possibility exists that psychological problems in expatriates lead to lower levels of adjustment, rather than the other way around. Caution should therefore be exercised in inferring causality from our results. Given the cross-sectional design of our study, changes of adjustment levels on different domains, at different times could not be tested therefore we are limited to the conclusion that work and psychological distress are significantly linked, even after the average stay of more than eight years. Fifth, the level of adjustment within our sample of help-seeking expatriates was moderate (i.e., their responses ranged between “adjusted a little” and “generally adjusted” for all three levels of adjustment). Further research will be needed using samples that are less well-adjusted. As a fruitful avenue for future research it is suggested to include comparative samples with expatriates who are not seeking psychological help to examine the differences in coping strategies. Finally, it will be important to supplement the current survey findings with research using alternative methods of assessing support, adjustment and distress. In particular, qualitative research methods may provide a more in-depth understanding of expatriates’ experiences (e.g., specific stressors, specific sources of support) (Filipič Sterle et al., 2018b).

**Conclusion**

The current study is the first study using a sample of help-seeking expatriates to explore the association between perceived social support, psychological distress, and adjustment. Findings suggest that expatriates’ successful work adjustment is important as it is linked to psychological distress. Available emotional support from different sources fosters expatriates’ interaction and work adjustment. And finally, expatriates are better adjusted in everyday living conditions when provided with instrumental support matching their needs. It is therefore of key importance that adequate professional support is offered to expatriates who already show increased level of
psychological distress, such as stress, anxiety, depression that can lead to potential burn-out. Access to psychological counselling can be a good way to alleviate distress and put emotional support into function. Additionally, making new connections and integration of expatriates in a new environment to use other kinds of support, particularly to be able to ask other people for help, should receive more focus.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank all the psychotherapists for their help with recruiting participants. There are no conflicts of interest that may arise as a result of the research presented in this article.
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Expatriates experiencing emotional distress and a call for globally oriented psychotherapy receive an increased focus in the research agendas. That one can better understand how expatriates may be helped in times of distress, the insight in their actual psychotherapy experience may serve as a valuable avenue. The aim of this qualitative study was to illuminate the lived experience of psychotherapy and the meaning that expatriates attributed to these experiences within their expatriate context. Semi-structured interviews were utilized for the data collection and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was employed for data analysis. The following themes emerged from the expatriates’ narratives about their psychotherapy experience: ‘The recognition of the expatriate complexity’, ‘Personal growth vs Dependency’, ‘Endurance vs Change’, ‘The globally minded therapist’, and ‘Language makes or breaks’. The overall common psychotherapy experience was expatriates’ considerable need to get the recognition of their expatriate complexity in a global context. Findings are discussed in relation to the existing expatriate and multicultural counselling literature taking into account the importance of cultural aspects in mental health treatment. The current study presents a unique and important contribution in the field of expatriate mental health as it highlights the psychotherapy experience that can be valuable for professionals in various settings offering psychological support.

**Introduction**

*At the beginning opening up. Not that I had the problem opening up to her. I think it was more about opening up to myself. Saying things that I sometimes had the belief or courage to fake. I actually globalized them. Concerns... Really. Terrible...

Sometimes. That was quite scary. It was quite uncomfortable.*

*(Sonia, 43 years)*

Sonia is an expatriate. While growing up, her family moved to six countries on three different continents. She had lived in the host country for five years before she sought professional help. Her presenting problem was not directly linked to expatriation. However, her life abroad has affected her emotional well-being in a significant way.

Like Sonia, other expatriates also experience a certain amount of psychological distress. Empirical evidence has shown increased stress and emotional challenges for expatriates (Silbiger & Pines, 2014; Truman, Sharar, & Pompe, 2012). In the attempt to overcome difficulties, some expatriates seek professional help. Psychotherapy is such a place where expatriates can hope to develop coping mechanisms for dealing with their life situations in a more successful and enjoyable way (Filipič Sterle, Vervoort, & Verhofstadt, 2018b; Lazarova, McNulty, & Semeniuk, 2015). However, little is known about how expatriates actually seek help in the host country and about their psychotherapy experience. This is partly due to the fact that existing studies have been principally quantitative in nature. In general, the research using qualitative methods is primarily focused on the understanding of participants’ lived experience (Richardson, 1996; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Therefore, qualitative research tends to be particularly suitable in studies where the complexity, ambiguity and lack of prior theory and research define the area of interest (Richardson, 1996). The current study utilized a qualitative, phenomenological approach with the aim to (a) gain a comprehensive and detailed portrayal of expatriates’ experiences of psychotherapy, and (b) complement the
existing research on expatriates’ emotional distress with their subjective lived experience of psychotherapy. In the following sections the major features of our investigation are presented.

**Expatriates’ Emotional Distress**

With the increasing globalization, a blend of people, cultures and languages continuously encourages global work talent to learn their successful ways of functioning in a multicultural and multilingual environment. A contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members involves various forms of mutual accommodation, leading to longer-term psychological and sociocultural adaptations between both groups, known as acculturation (Berry, 2005). Expatriates are individuals who left their home country in order to live and work in another country on a non-permanent basis (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001). They are generally highly skilled workers with limited need to adjust to a local culture but rather maintaining a degree of flexibility and freedom in their career choice, work location and family-work balance, and they usually belong to upper-middle to upper class of the host society (Adams & van de Vijver, 2015; McNulty, 2013, 2014). Research on international work experience has documented several types of expatriates, such as corporate expatriates, who are sent to an international assignment by their company (Takeuchi, 2010), self-initiated expatriates, who take their own initiative and rely on their own finances to move abroad for work (Doherty, Richardson, & Thorn, 2013), flexpatriates (i.e., employees on brief international assignments, leaving their family and personal life behind), short-term assignees (i.e., employees on international assignments that are longer than business trips yet shorter than typical corporate expatriate assignments; usually less than one year), and international business travelers (i.e., employees on multiple short international business trips to various locations without accompanying family members; Shaffer, Kraimer, Chen, & Bolino, 2012). Emerging research points to various forms of non-traditional expatriates, such as female breadwinners, single parents, semi-retirees,
lesbians and gays, split families, single expatriates, and blended families, who are also engaged in business expatriation and have distinct circumstances that standard global mobility policies typically do not address (McNulty, 2014). International work experience and accompanied lifestyle impact expatriates’ identity so that they become more multicultural with a global mindset (Altweck & Marshall, 2015; Gonzalez-Loureiro, Kiessling, & Dabic, 2015; Mao & Shen, 2015). Expatriates tend to perceive their experiences as mainly beneficial, they appear competent in intercultural communication, but they lack a clear sense of belonging (Moore & Barker, 2012).

Some recent qualitative studies have contributed to the understanding of the phenomenology of the expatriate experience (e.g., Lazarova et al., 2015; Siljanen & Lämsä, 2009). McNulty (2015a), in her study with non-traditional expatriates (i.e., single parents, overseas adoption, split family and lesbian assignees), called upon further research to understand expatriate complexity and specifics of non-traditional expatriates, and also to broaden the traditional model to study expatriates. In another study, the same author (McNulty, 2015b) focused on the considerable causes and consequences of expatriate divorce including bankruptcy, homelessness, depression, psychophysiological illness, alienation from children, and suicide.

Indeed, the acculturation process involves various cultural and psychological changes that may lead to a culture conflict and acculturative stress, potentially resulting in emotional distress (Berry, 2005; Silbiger & Pines, 2014; Truman et al., 2012). Lack of successful adjustment to a new environment may result in increased stress and worsening of mental health for expatriates (Filipič Sterle, Fontaine, De Mol, & Verhofstadt, 2018a). Compared to domestic population expatriates seem to be at greater risk for internalizing problems (e.g., depression, anxiety, sleep issues, traumatic stress, and suicide), and externalizing problems (e.g., attention deficit, hyperactivity, and impulse control; Truman et al., 2012). More specifically, empirical evidence documented elevated psychological distress (Anderzén & Arnetz, 1999; Foyle, Beer &
Watson, 1998; Silbiger & Pines, 2014), decreased mental well-being and worse subjective work environment (Anderzén & Arnetz, 1999), depression (Magdol, 2002), and increase of alcohol and substance abuse (Anderzén & Arnetz, 1997; Truman et al., 2012). Feelings of alienation, homesickness, and uprooting have also been reported (Bushong, 2013).

Expatriates and Psychotherapy

When experiencing emotional distress, expatriates can turn to mental health professionals in the host country for help with the adjustment challenges associated with their work, schooling and interactions with locals (Nelson-Jones, 2002). As our world is becoming increasingly multicultural, considering cultural aspects in psychotherapy is indispensable. Both therapists and clients are part of their own cultural system to which they have attributed their own meaning (Sue & Sue, 2003). Further, it has been shown that psychotherapists’ personal experiences of expatriation and / or familiarity with the specifics of expatriate way of life can greatly contribute to the effectiveness of clinical interventions (Bushong, 2013). However, these specific features, for example, the importance of the cultural and linguistic context, constant changes and adjustments, their approach to seeking help, response to frequent goodbyes, etc., may not always be visible and obvious (Bushong, 2013). Therefore, psychotherapists need to pay special attention to the emotional challenges particular to expatriates in order to provide a safe and empathic space in therapy, and to be able to show the understanding of significance of their expatriate situation (Mortimer, 2010).

Besides developing multicultural skills, knowledge and understanding of different cultural issues, psychotherapists need to take into account the nature of the expatriate experience (Qureshi & Collazos, 2011). In the multicultural counselling literature, the authors Owen, Leach, Tao and Rodolfa (2011) introduced a distinction between a multicultural competence and a multicultural orientation of a psychotherapist. Multicultural competence is understood as the ability of a therapist to
effectively implement his or her multicultural awareness and knowledge while conducting psychotherapy. Multicultural orientation, on the other hand, particularly refers to the “way of being” with the client and is associated with a psychotherapist’s values about the importance of cultural factors in the lives of psychotherapists as well as clients. Clients who perceive their therapists as being oriented towards cultural issues, experience them as more credible and feel more comfortable in the therapeutic process, which confirms that psychotherapists’ multicultural awareness and knowledge positively impacts the psychological well-being of clients (Owen et al., 2011). In other words, clients’ trust that their therapist is attuned with and willing to focus on multicultural issues positively impacts the working alliance and real relationship with the psychotherapist, regardless if cultural issues are explicitly brought up and discussed in the therapy or not.

Putting together the empirical evidence on expatriate experience (e.g., Lazarova et al., 2015; McNulty, 2015a; Siljanen & Lämsä, 2009), on the existence and nature of expatriates’ emotional distress (e.g., Silbiger & Pines, 2014; Truman et al., 2012), and studies focusing on factors contributing to successful interventions with expatriates (e.g., a psychotherapist’s multicultural orientation, cultural dimensions of psychotherapy, and psychotherapists’ personal experience of expatriation; Bushong, 2013; Mortimer, 2010; Owen et al., 2011; Qureshi & Collazos, 2011), our study aimed to explore the lived psychotherapy experience as reported by expatriate clients. In this way the current study brings the perspective of subjective experience of expatriate clients to the existing knowledge of expatriate well-being, with the particular aim to better understand their expatriate context and how they can be best helped when emotionally distressed. To the best of our knowledge, the actual psychotherapy experience of expatriates in the host country has not yet been investigated.

**Method**
Research Design and Sampling

We employed the qualitative research method interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA; Smith et al., 2009) for the data collection and the data analysis. The key concepts of IPA are based on phenomenology, hermeneutics, symbolic interactionism, and ideography (Smith et al., 2009). As a phenomenological approach, IPA focusses on the exploration of experience in its own terms rather than attempting to reduce it to predefined or overly abstract categories (Smith et al., 2009). IPA is an interpretative method and it is strongly influenced by symbolic interactionism and the hermeneutic tradition, acknowledging that direct access to the other people’s world can be reached through a cautious process of interpretation in which the researcher’s own views, and personal background are necessarily implicated (Smith & Osborn, 2003). It employs double hermeneutics where a researcher tries to make sense of a participant trying to make sense of his or her experiences (Smith et al., 2009). When a researcher is interpreting the data, he or she also considers the socio-cultural context of the participant (and of course also his or her own lifeworld). The in-depth interpretation of the participants’ lived experiences is therefore made through the contextualization of these lived experiences in their socio-cultural context. In its idiographic nature, IPA is concerned with the particular, with revealing particular experiential phenomena of each of the individuals involved, and how this phenomenon has been understood from the perspective of particular people, in a particular context (Smith et al., 2009). This study was inductive as the aim of the study was not to test a previously established hypothesis, and interrogative in its nature as it aims to contribute to the existing research (Smith, 2003; Smith et al., 2009).

IPA as experiential approach seemed particularly appropriate to explore the phenomenon of a lived psychotherapy experience of expatriate clients as it is designed to gain rich understandings of topics with little theoretical and empirical evidence to contribute to a given knowledge ground (Moustakas, 1994). This method has been
found to be a useful method in previous clinical psychology research (e.g., Rizq, 2012; Williams, McManus, Muse, & Williams, 2011). Further, IPA is well suited for the current study, as it presupposes the active role of participants in the construction and meaningfulness of experiences (Smith et al., 2009). Finally, the type of the research problem in our study was best suited for this method because of the importance to understand several individuals’ common or shared experiences of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). The following phenomenon explored in our study was identified: How did expatriates experience psychotherapy? Further, what did this experience mean to them? It has to be noted that the context-specific setting of the research study was expatriation.

Purposive sampling with a small number of participants was used to explore the phenomenon of psychotherapy experience, particularly focusing on the distinct narratives of the individual while attempting to balance them with what was shared across a particular group (Smith, 2003). Participants were expatriates who came to Brussels because of work. They were recruited in a psychotherapeutic centre that offers psychotherapy to expatriates in different languages. Every client who saw the therapist for the first intake session during the time of the data collection, regardless of their gender, and who met the inclusion criteria, was invited to take part in the study. The inclusion criteria were: being an expatriate (working or studying), adult age (18+), good enough knowledge of English to be able to be interviewed in English. Based on meeting these criteria, nine clients were invited to take part in the study during their first intake session. Five clients agreed to participate, all women, and there were no drop outs. All five clients completed at least 12 sessions of psychotherapy and were interviewed about their experience of psychotherapy. Within the sample, the diversity of the cultural origin of the participants is indicated, so the homogeneity of our sample regards the expatriate-cultural-context. Participants were all coming from European countries, they all had expatriated for work or study, and their decision for expatriation had been made
voluntarily. Some characteristics of the participants are shown in Table 1. The average age of participants was 33 years. Participants had been living in the host country for an average of seven years. In line with the guidelines for publication of qualitative research studies (Elliot, Fisher, & Rennie, 1999), some relevant information about the participants for understanding the expatriate context of the study is described, however, personal information of the participants is not revealed, and de-identification was used to report the results. Prior to the first psychotherapy session, clients were informed about the aims of the study and signed informed consent forms. The study was approved by the ethical committee of the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences of Ghent University, Belgium and the National Medical Ethics Committee of the Republic of Slovenia.

**Table 1**

*Characteristics of Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of participants</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Range 19-41 years. Mean 33 years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration of stay</td>
<td>Range 1-12 years. Mean 7 years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>female (all)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Data Collection**

The interviews. To construct the interview protocol, we first conducted a pilot study with one expatriate client using the two broad questions that served as stepping stones. More specific questions were added during this pilot interview. Prompts and probes such as validation of the therapeutic relationship and the therapist, being understood, and evaluation of specific moments in therapy were developed for funnelling in the future interviews. The first author developed the interview questions. The third author conducted semi-structured interviews with study participants after they
had completed 12 session of psychotherapy to collect the data about their experiences of psychotherapy. Participants were asked the following two broad questions: “What have you experienced during psychotherapy?” “What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experience of psychotherapy?” During the five interviews, the two broad questions were always the same, so were the above-mentioned prompts and probes, however, some more specific prompts and probes continued to develop during each interview with the aim to gain more in-depth understanding of clients’ experiences. Gathering the data evolved into structural description of the experiences with the ultimate goal to provide the common lived experiences of psychotherapy of all expatriate participants. The interviews were conducted in English. The average duration of the interviews was one hour, and they were audio-recorded. A Transcriber AG software was used to make verbatim transcriptions of all five interviews.

Data Analysis

In qualitative research, the researchers are involved and play an active role within the research (Golafshani, 2003). Moreover, the credibility of qualitative research depends on the ability and effort of the researcher (Golafshani, 2003). Therefore, we conducted the auto-analysis to evaluate the meaning of psychotherapy and our own expatriation context.

Following the IPA protocol, the first author first analysed the interviews case by case (Smith et al., 2009). For each interview, we applied—in a rigorous way—the following steps of analysis of the data. First, we read and re-read the transcripts several times. Next, we gave initial codes to the data. In the following step, we identified and developed the emergent themes based on the data coding. In order to identify the emergent themes, we interpreted parts of the text in relation to the whole and the whole in relation to parts. The next step involved searching for connections across the emergent themes. We identified the patterns between the emergent themes to construct
the master themes. Further, we evaluated and re-evaluated the emerging master themes, until the final master themes were found. We then conducted the analysis of all the remaining four transcripts, and thus repeated the whole process of the analysis. During the next stage we aimed to search for the patterns across the cases, and to interpret them. In line with the hermeneutic stance of IPA we took a double hermeneutic position by interpreting the sense the participants gave to their experiences of psychotherapy.

Researcher triangulation was employed to enhance the trustworthiness of the study and thus improve the reliability and validity of the research findings (Golafshani, 2003). The first author, who did the initial analysis, discussed the themes with the other researchers. This was done in attempt to increase researchers’ truthfulness of a proposition of a given phenomenon. Finally, the second author discussed the analysis with the other authors in order to clarify the themes and the interpretations.

Results

The findings of this study describe the common experiences of all participants. Specifically, the prevalent psychotherapy experience—as reported by the interviewed clients— was the difficulty to take the decision to seek help. It challenged the part of their identity that was strong, independent and, in their particular sense, perceived as stable. However, the feeling of being accepted in their expatriate complexity enabled them to take to the path of personal growth which involved exploring potential change. The importance of receiving the recognition of expatriate complexity was the main meaningful common experience of all interviewed expatriate clients. Specifically, five themes emerged from the data which were reorganized in two master themes: ‘The ambivalent nature of safeness of therapeutic space’, and ‘The actuality of global context’. The themes are presented in Table 2. The related subordinate themes are described under the master themes and illustrated by excerpts from the interviews.
**Table 2**

*Summary of Themes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Master themes</th>
<th>Subordinate themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The ambivalent nature of therapeutic space</td>
<td>The recognition of the expatriate complexity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal growth vs Dependency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Endurance vs Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The actuality of global context</td>
<td>The globally minded therapist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Language makes or breaks</td>
</tr>
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**The Ambivalent Nature of Safeness of Therapeutic Space**

This master theme emerged as a result of clients’ overall experience of psychotherapy, from the beginning of seeking help and throughout the whole psychotherapy process. The overall feeling of safeness was related to their more particular experiences, and it functioned as a reflection of clients’ sensitivity to the therapeutic frame, including the therapeutic relationship, feelings and sensations that emerged during psychotherapy, the physical setting of a therapeutic place, practical agreements, and ethical practice. However, there was also an associated feeling of ambivalence. This master theme consists of three subordinate themes: ‘The recognition of the expatriate complexity’, ‘Personal growth vs Dependency’, and ‘Endurance vs Change’.

**The recognition of the expatriate complexity.** The interviewed clients experienced psychotherapy as a space where they could show their own weakness and
just be who they were, without being judged. In the whole process of self-evaluation during the psychotherapy processes, clients expressed the need to receive the recognition of their situation, embracing the wholeness of their expatriate life. In other words, they appreciated that the therapist understood them in their current situation in the expatriate context, and that the therapist valued their efforts to do well in the new country.

My therapist often said that she really admired the way that I managed to fit into this new life here. That even if I still have problems, I did a really good job. That I shouldn't worry. That everything would sort itself out. I really liked that somebody said this to me. I guess it is that that I am proud of. What I have done and how I have lived my life here. That was something that really stayed with me. (Participant 3, age 19)

This illustrates how important it was for the expatriates to receive the support from the therapist within the context of their expatriate complexity. Being told that they were doing well helped the clients to accept their own situation, which gave them more trust that they can overcome their current problems. The phenomenon of being recognized in their life situation facilitated the process of acceptance of clients’ own insights. It gave them the feeling that they could go back to the feeling of being “normal.”

Clients also talked about having ambivalent feelings when contemplating psychotherapy. As an expatriate, one is given an opportunity to have a good life and an international career. One shouldn’t complain nor feel weak or have problems (Lazarova et al., 2015).

Just the fact that I had somehow to admit to myself and people around me that I needed therapy was a bit hard. I think there is a bit of stigma attached to it. It
was comforting and stressed at the same time. It was not something that I found easy to do. It took me a long time to look for help and to admit that I needed help. In Europe people associate that with the fact that there is something wrong with you so yeah, it was a big thing for me to go to therapy.

(Participant 2, age 30)

Accepting the fact that they needed professional help meant the recognition of their limitations, vulnerability and imperfection. Overcoming the subjective feeling of stigma was therefore experienced as an additional challenge for expatriate clients in their process of seeking the recognition of expatriate complexity.

**Personal growth vs dependency.** The interviewed clients spoke about their innermost process that they experienced during psychotherapy which was somehow linked to their perception of how their expatriate life should look like. Similar to the previous subordinate theme, they reported ambivalent feelings about going to therapy and actually doing it.

*I can’t emphasize how hard it was to actually. Especially when I was shopping around to see the therapists. It was like opening a Pandora’s box. Each time. It was horrible. But I think I proved that I needed to do it.*

(Participant 2, age 30)

This illustrates that the process to overcome this ambivalence was not always straightforward for the interviewed clients. Before committing to a personal growth within psychotherapy this client reports that she had to gather enough trust and courage to start this journey. However, the outcome was positive, as throughout the therapy, she realized that she needed this kind of help.

Besides, it was essential for the clients to have a feeling of uniqueness—that some things could be expressed and understood only in the actual therapeutic setting.
That itself, however, in their view could potentially lead to dependency. Their narratives revealed those ambivalent feelings both in relation to experiencing the therapist and the therapeutic setting. For example, secrecy and confidentiality were important for the clients because they assured their feelings of privacy and safeness during psychotherapy sessions.

_I liked the fact that it was a calm room. The double doors are helpful in the sense that—it is silly—but if there is somebody outside that door, they won’t be listening to what you are saying. It’s just what mattered then._

(Participant 2, age 30)

This theme informs us about the dynamics between being willing to make oneself vulnerable and to commit to psychotherapy and therefore experience personal growth, and, on the other hand experiencing the feeling of dependency emerging in the process of psychotherapy.

**Endurance vs change.** Clients expressed the need to be reassured that their decision for expatriation was the right one. Further, they reported feeling accepted in their resistance to change a great deal regarding their expatriate situation and that they were able to discuss this complexity during psychotherapy and explore their vulnerabilities. However, it was important for them to be able to share their disagreements and their complaints about their demanding and sometimes boring jobs, weather conditions, occasionally very stressful life, feelings of alienation and uprooting, financial problems, etc., despite well paid jobs and interesting international career.

_There were days when I was really very down, and I went to therapy and I could continue my day afterwards. Because there were moments when I was really so depressed. We talked a lot and for me it was very comforting to just talk about it and to understand and analyse all the changes and how to cope with them. This is what we did ... Not big things but very important._
This illustrates how important it was for them that the therapist understood and accepted this complexity. This means that they could take the time in therapy to embrace what they have experienced as expatriates without feeling pressured that any big changes were needed to be done regarding their current life situation.

**The Actuality of Global Context**

The multicultural and multilingual aspects of identity are very important components in expatriates’ lives. This was reflected also in the narratives of the participants. Clients talked about getting the recognition of complexity in the international, global context—in the context of foreigner / expatriate talking to another foreigner / expatriate (i.e., the psychotherapist) in the host country—in the common international, global work experience. Further, sharing and mutually valuing the global work experience enabled clients to openly discuss and to accept some key components of expatriate life (e.g., the need of command of different languages and successfully managing cultural differences in the process of acculturation). Within this theme, two main aspects of global complexity are discussed that have been organized in two subordinate themes: ‘The globally minded therapist’, and ‘Language makes or breaks’.

**The globally minded therapist.** The interviewed clients were all well acquainted with the multicultural environment as they worked in and belonged to the international environment. In that respect, clients felt that the cultural context of the therapist and themselves did not have such a significance as the overall, global international context.

*And that I can do it with a foreigner! You know people ask me - is it not strange that you do this with a foreigner? No! This was actually a nice experience for me.*
The felt sense that the therapist was aware of and felt comfortable with the complexity of global context, had, in the perception of clients, a positive effect on the therapeutic relationship. It gave the clients the feeling of belonging and connection. Particularly, they felt proud that they could connect and even do therapy with a foreigner. These parts of their expatriate complexity were reflected in the way how they made meaning about the impact of cultural background during their psychotherapy experience. Therapist’s multicultural competencies rooted in global work experience were greatly acknowledged in clients’ narratives.

**Language makes or breaks.** The most commonly used language in expatriates’ working and social life in the host country is English. For the interviewed clients, it was very important that their therapist understood the language dimension of their expatriate complexity. Knowing the local language can hugely foster expatriate interactions with locals, or, on the other hand, leave them feel even more alienated.

*I have lived here for seven years but I still don’t feel very familiar with the city.*

*There are language barriers. So, all the information about what is happening around the city, movies, festivals ... it doesn’t flush into me like in my country.*

*(Participant 1, age 35)*

Speaking foreign languages is very important for expatriates who work in the international environment; in fact, it may be the factor which decides whether they will succeed or fail. The language dimension was perceived as an important factor that can influence to what extent expatriate feel ‘at home’ with the local environment. The client is talking about the language barriers—if an expatriate is not able to linguistically grasp what is going on in his or her environment, it is difficult to entirely adjust to the new environment.
On the other hand, being able to communicate in foreign languages, and even do psychotherapy in one of them, can be a source of feeling pride, success, advancement, feeling closer to the local environment.

_A lot of friends asked me if I didn’t feel awkward to do therapy in English. I must say I didn’t at all. Of course, sometimes I need to think a little bit more, maybe searching for words to really describe what I want to say. So, English felt fine._

_(Participant 5, age 40)_

The participant is talking about being able to do therapy in English which is obviously not her mother tongue, and the proud that she is taking from it. In the international nature of the global world, language can open a lot of doors or act like a hindrance to advance in the expatriate way of life.

**Discussion**

The aim of the current study was to explore the psychotherapy experiences of expatriate clients and the meaning that they attributed to their experiences. Moreover, and in line with the IPA method, the authors made an attempt to make meaning of clients’ experiences and interpret the analysed data. The interviewed clients were expatriates with global work experience.

Two master themes; ‘The ambivalent nature of safeness of therapeutic space’ and ‘The actuality of global context’, and five sub-ordinate themes were found as a result of this qualitative study. Findings are discussed generally across the themes, starting with the overall common experience shared by all interviewed clients. Clients reported feeling safe during psychotherapy, as a reflection of the insights that clients received in psychotherapy and of the psychotherapist’s understanding of the complexity of their expatriate situation, which confirmed previous research on counselling
expatriate clients (Mortimer, 2010). This feeling was enhanced by the overall awareness that the therapist was also an expatriate and therefore shared the similar, global context linked to expatriate work and life. The therapist’s own experience with expatriation facilitated clients’ feelings of being understood and accepted.

As such, high significance of receiving the recognition of the expatriate complexity and valuating global context in psychotherapy can be observed as a surprising finding. Due to the non-existing literature on expatriate experience of psychotherapy, this finding cannot be directly compared to other findings of expatriate studies, however, the phenomenon of similarity between therapist and client has been observed in previous research. For example, Herman (1998) showed that modality similarity between therapists and clients has a positive effect on the effectiveness of psychotherapy outcomes. Owen and colleagues (2011) showed that clients’ perception of their psychotherapists as being more oriented toward cultural issues, may result in seeing the therapist as more credible and in gaining a sense of comfort in the therapeutic process.

On the other hand, it has been shown that struggling with complexity in the world can lead to depressed affect, rumination, and multiple other negative psychological and physical health outcomes (Andrews & Thompson, 2009). Increased stress and deteriorated emotional well-being have also been noted (e.g. Silbiger & Pines, 2014; Truman et al., 2012), therefore one could argue that these complaints would also be reflected in the psychotherapy experience and linked to the attempts to diminish emotional suffering. However, clients did not report on their experience about how they experienced dealing with their problems in psychotherapy, but rather about how they felt in therapy which was closely linked to their expatriate identity. As expatriates become more globally minded (Gonzalez-Loureiro et al., 2015; Mao & Shen, 2015), they may undergo self-assessment and self-questioning about their changing identity (Bushong, 2013).
A certain degree of ambivalence was reported by clients which was disclosed also in contemplating their decision to start psychotherapy. Ambivalence in psychotherapy is known from the general psychotherapy literature (Engle & Arkowitz, 2006). Expatriates usually take on an independent approach to their global work and life experience. According to the literature, people in individualistic cultures (similar to the cultures that our participants belonged to) tend to function independently of others and are more self-sufficient (Owusu-Bempah, 2001). Starting psychotherapy may thus have provoked mixed feelings of safeness and dangerousness of a therapeutic space. As much as psychotherapy was a helpful experience due to the recognition of insights, it could at times have been perceived as a dangerous place because it was the only place where these insights could be explored. The findings of our study complement the literature on counselling the globally mobile, arguing that expatriates need to make constant effort to overcome challenges of expatriate life, struggle with their identity and make their life more enjoyable (Bushong, 2013).

As discussed in the sub-ordinate theme ‘Endurance vs change’, the need to make important changes in their life has not been expressed in clients’ narratives. Deciding on an international work experience might have been a challenging choice for them. Therefore, it was even more important for them to receive the recognition that they were doing well within their expatriate complexity, or, more specifically, in the context of cultural diversity and an international environment. Clients did not choose psychotherapy in order to make big changes in life regarding their expatriate experience, but rather to retain the life that they have had. This is not surprising as changing the wholeness of expatriate context after a long-term global work experience would be a challenging endeavor. For example, the particular feeling of not belonging entirely nor to their home country culture, nor to the host country culture, can only be entirely understood within the expatriate or global context (Bushong, 2013). Feelings of identity are compromised and as much as international experience may be interesting
and valuable for expatriates, the feeling of being uprooted seems to persist throughout their life (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009).

Indeed, the second master theme ‘The actuality of global context’ corroborated the importance of the international, global dimension of expatriate life (Altweck & Marshall, 2015). Overall, the findings of the current study confirmed the existence of specific characteristics of the expatriate complexity, a multicultural framework of functioning, and a global mind set of expatriate clients (Gonzalez-Loureiro et al., 2015). Participants also reported on cultural issues, such as language components, stigma associated with the particular geographic area (cf. stigma attached to seeking psychological help in Europe, as mentioned by one of the participants), or expatriates’ attitude to choosing people or saying goodbyes (Bushong, 2013). Similarly, Bushong (2013) also discusses the expatriates’ attempts to diminish their disturbing feelings, such as sadness, disappointment over constant changes and relocations, and frequent goodbyes as a reflection of high fluctuation of expatriates. More specifically, expatriates may avert saying goodbyes and deepening the relationships in order to save themselves from recurrent pain of loss and disconnection. Struggling to achieve to be what and who they were supposed to be (i.e., an expatriate with a growing career and exciting life with many international connections and opportunities, and coping with everything in a successful manner; Lazarova et al., 2015) could lead to a discrepancy between the real and the ideal image of their own functioning as expatriates.

In relation to the cultural and language dimension of expatriate experience, it has to be noted that the psychotherapist, the interviewer and the clients all belonged to the international environment, they were all members of the expatriate community in the host country. It is perhaps not surprising then that the subordinate theme ‘Language makes or breaks’ appeared in clients’ narratives as thoughts about cultural and language differences and people from various backgrounds frequently engage expatriates’ minds (Christodoulidi, 2010). The multicultural orientation of the therapist and his or her
acknowledgement of the complexity of expatriate experience was notably valued by the clients, thus documenting the distinction between multicultural orientation and multicultural competence (Owen et al., 2011). More specifically, they perceived their psychotherapist as being knowledgeable and open to cultural differences between them and their psychotherapist, valuing multilingualism and respecting language and previous cultural experiences. Moreover, and in line with previous research, participants in our study greatly appreciated the ability of the psychotherapist to understand client’s culture and the impact of culture on client’s identity together with having specific knowledge of a client’s culture and possessing skills in dealing with cultural dynamics (Chang & Berk, 2009; Moleiro, Freire, & Tomsic, 2013).

Overall, the findings of our study contribute to the understanding of the meaning that expatriates with a global mind-set attribute to their psychotherapy experience. Expatriates tend to feel equally alienated from their home and host culture. Receiving the recognition of the up-rootedness and lack of sense of belonging as parts of their expatriate complexity, addressed their confusion about where they felt at home. Therefore, the finding documenting their need to be recognized in their expatriate complexity and the connection to a therapist with a global mind-set can be used to outline clinical interventions for expatriates. Furthermore, in a way this finding also supports the advantage of the previous expatriate experience of a therapist, who also needs to respect the multicultural and multilingual dimension of expatriate life, so closely linked to their identity (Bushong, 2013). In other words, the clients can learn and take to the path of personal growth with someone who has taken this path before. A globally minded therapist with rich experience can give the recognition of the expatriate complexity to clients with international work experience.

Our study focused on the lived psychotherapy experience of expatriate clients with the aim to understand better how they can be helped. The adequate counselling for the globally mobile remains a challenge for many mental health professionals. Although
the presenting problems of expatriates may be similar to domestic population (e.g., depression, anxiety, personality problems, etc.), work with expatriate clients requires a deeper understanding and a lot of trust to offer the safe place where they can explore their changed identity and expatriation.

**Strengths and Limitations**

The current study has a number of strengths. First, our study aimed to shed light on specific emotional challenges accompanied with expatriate experience. Recent literature has shown the importance to identify these challenges (e.g., McNulty, 2013), however, our study has expanded the understanding of the actual experience of treatment of emotional distress. Second, our study used a sample of expatriates who stay in the host country on a longer-term basis, and therefore attempted to contribute to the knowledge of non-traditional and less studied expatriates. Third, this is the first study that explored the nature of expatriate experience of psychotherapy. Seeking psychotherapy to a certain extent still persists as a stigma, or a sign of weakness. Therefore, pointing to the importance of diminishing this stigma is another contribution of our study. This study represents a unique and valuable contribution by reporting on the lived psychotherapy experiences of expatriate clients and the meanings that they attributed to their experience. These findings can be extrapolated to similar situations, such as multicultural and multilingualistic counselling to immigrants, international students and other people with global work experience, and of course for the expatriate clients in different parts of the world.

Aside from the strengths, some limitations of the study need to be mentioned. First, the participants were all women. It would be interesting to learn about psychotherapy experience with a mixed-gender sample. Also, the current research could benefit from studying the psychotherapy experience with different types of expatriates. Second, in our study we did not focus on particular therapeutic relationships in a
particular psychotherapy in relation to cultural and linguistic background. Future research then could benefit from studies that would look into the actual process of how the real relationship and working alliance are formed in the context of a particular culture. In particular, it would be of great interest to study stigma attached to seeking treatment in the context of different cultures and expatriate experience.
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CHAPTER 6

A NEWLY AWAKENED SENSE OF SELF: EXPATRIATES’ EXPERIENCE OF RELATIONAL FAMILY THERAPY

Abstract

This study explored expatriates’ subjective lived experience of relational family therapy and aimed to get insights into the complexity of being an expatriate. Phenomenological interpretative analysis was employed to analyse the data from semi-structured interviews with expatriate clients of RFT. The following themes were found regarding their experience: ‘The importance of being recognised as a full person’; ‘A new dimension of closeness by created distance’; ‘A release of defence mechanisms’, and ‘Expatriates’ reconnection to their own self’ that emerged as an outcome of being able to talk about their new experiences. The findings showed that therapist’s active engagement in the mutual growth enabled clients to feel accepted, and to embrace the change in their own expatriate complexity. Research findings and clinical implications are discussed in light of the current literature on family therapy and expatriate mental health.

Introduction

Exciting as an international life can be, expatriates sometimes find themselves in a vulnerable position and need professional help (Bushong, 2013; Osland, 2000). Psychotherapy may be a kind of new resource called upon by expatriates if things get tough for them when away from home (Filipič Sterle, Fontaine, De Mol, & Verhofstadt, 2018a). However, little is known about their actual experience of psychotherapy (Filipič Sterle, Vervoort, & Verhofstadt, 2018c). With the aim to contribute to contemporary clinical practice, our study investigated the expatriates’ subjective lived experience of relational family therapy (RFT) in the host country (Gostečnik, 2013, 2017; Gostečnik, Repič Slavič, Pate, & Cvetek, 2017). The fundamental premise of the relational family model is the re-creation of a client’s self that is based on the relationship between a client and a therapist (Gostečnik, 2017). The therapist using the RFT model works with a client towards creating a new path, and a new transformational experience (Gostečnik et al., 2017). In a similar vein, seeking new experiences and transformation (Milstein, 2005; Osland, 2000) and the desire for professional and personal growth (Dickmann, Doherty, Mills, & Brewster, 2008) are the main motives for expatriation. RFT covers the wholeness of people’s existence on a systemic, interpersonal and intrapsychic level within their relational matrix. It was therefore found particularly suitable to study the lived experience of expatriates, and their emotional challenges within many different areas of emotional functioning, such as feelings of belonging, uprooting, and identity change (Bushong, 2013; Mao & Shen, 2015; Osland, 2000). While the long neglected emotional and social hardships of expatriation have recently received some research attention (see e.g., Lazarova, McNulty, & Semeniuk, 2015; McNulty 2015), more studies are needed to further the sense making process of expatriation and its association with personal growth (Milstein, 2005).
Expatriates

Expatriates are individuals who live or work outside their home country on a non-permanent basis (Andresen, Bergdolt, Margenfeld, & Dickmann, 2014). By moving to a foreign country, they leave behind an established life together with social support networks and family (Osland, 2000). During expatriation they take on a global mindset and become part of an international, cross-cultural environment, which fosters the development of multiculturalism in their identity (Mao & Shen, 2015; Osland, 2000). This may result in them feeling at ease anywhere but belonging nowhere (Osland, 2000). In particular, feelings of homesickness, uprooting, alienation and isolation have been reported (Bushong, 2013; Filipič Sterle, Verhofstadt, Bell, & De Mol, 2018b). Studies on expatriate mental health showed that the increased stress may result in internalizing (e.g., depression, anxiety, sleep complaints), and externalizing (e.g., attention deficit, hyperactivity) problems (Truman, Sharar, & Pompe, 2012). If not addressed properly and treated accurately, these can result in mental health deterioration (Truman et al., 2012). Inevitably, starting a new life in a host country, necessitates expatriates to build a social and emotional support network from bottom up (Wang & Kanungo, 2004). For the reason that people have an embedded need to relate and to belong to other people (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Gostečnik, 2017), expatriates are challenged on basic psychological needs of human functioning, i.e., having meaningful relationships, a sense of belonging, and connectedness. The unfamiliarity with the new environment, together with expatriates’ lack of knowledge about how to obtain social reinforcement in the host country, may compel them to seek help to pursue new relational experiences and self-transformation (Marmarosh, 2014; Milstein, 2005; Osland, 2000).

The Relational Family Therapy Model
The relational family therapy (RFT) model founded by Christian Gostečnik (Gostečnik, 2017) integrates the relational model developed by Mitchell (2000, 2002), the interpersonal model (Cummings & Davies, 2010), systems theory (Scharff & Scharff, 2006, 2014) and psycho-organic dynamics (Fishbane, 2013; Poulton, 2013; Schore, 2003; Siegel, 2010, 2011). RFT model incorporates intrapsychic, interpersonal, and systemic levels of human functioning (Gostečnik, 2017). Normally, the therapist working with the RFT model includes family members in the therapeutic process. However, it has been shown that the RFT model is also effective in individual settings (see e.g., Repič Slavič & Gostečnik, 2017). How expatriates experience RFT has not yet been explored.

RFT understands developing a personality as a very complex process which happens in a psycho-organic space where children seek out others and learn about the relationships. They learn how to be close to the other people, how to attach to them and how to gain their approval and validation (Gostečnik, 2017; Repič Slavič & Gostečnik, 2017). In their early experience children learn about themselves, their sensations, how to be in their bodies, and about the bodily sensations which arise from mother’s gentleness. It is the mother’s body and her psycho-organic structure that enables a child to develop their own internal psycho-organic structure as mothers are deeply imprinted in all fibres of a child’s existence (Siegel, 2011; Stern, 2010). These early interactions and relationships with significant others create the relational matrices and thus determine our personality in many ways, including the way we relate to other people and find a partner with whom we can potentially resolve the dysfunctional patterns (Gostečnik, 2017; Mitchell, 2002; Poulton, 2013; Siegel, 2011).

The actual affective experience of the therapeutic relationship is the very foundation of the RFT model (Gostečnik, 2013, 2017). The newly co-created therapeutic relationship provides the basis for change and upon which the individual can begin to build a different experience of a relationship, and thus actually start to
In other words, it is through the relationship that the transformation occurs (Gostečnik et al., 2017). The transformational moments carry hope and possibility for growth and reprocessing certain aspects of the self and our relationship to the world (Bollas, 1987). A new and different environment is needed for an individual in order to identify and develop their self and personality (Gostečnik, 2017). If this is not possible, the hopes and expectations are placed upon a new job, moving to a foreign place, a vacation, a new relationship, and other fast solutions to turn distress into something more agreeable, more hopeful. However, these attempts may also be a demand for transformational experience, perhaps even a deep yearning for resolutions of distressing past relationships (Gostečnik et al., 2017).

**The Practice of RFT**

RFT attempts to modify the experience of self, which had previously been hidden, but is then newly awakened in the individual (Gostečnik, 2017). Various forms of physical sensations felt by a therapist provide crucial information, the process known as therapeutic countertransference. This is subconscious process reminiscent of the fundamental right hemisphere communication between mother and child (Schore, 2003). In particular, RFT involves a collective growth of both a therapist and a client. The therapist becomes an instrument for the affects, that are familiar to him/her, or those that have not yet been processed (e.g., anxiety, sadness, fear, anger), and also for affects that are in collective or dynamic opposition with those of the clients (Gostečnik, 2013, 2017). Since affects are somatically based, a sensitive and attuned therapist is virtually always able to detect them in their body by being sensitive to physical sensations that are gathered from a client (Rothschild, 2006, 2010; Schore, 2003).

**The therapeutic frame of RFT.** A sense of security is achieved by a professional therapeutic relationship, therapist’s boundaries, predictability and control
of the therapeutic frame, and non-self-disclosure (Gostečnik, 2017). Sessions are devoted exclusively to clients. After one cycle of therapy which consists of 12 weekly sessions of 50 minutes, clients experience significant changes, such as more competent affect regulation, increased self-esteem and improvement of overall functioning (Cvetek, 2010; Gostečnik, 2017). The RFT model assumes that, in addition to the novel experiences that occur in the therapeutic relationship, changes also take place primarily beyond the confines of this relationship and the therapy room.

Purpose of the Current Study

Despite some research on expatriate experience (see e.g., Lazarova et al., 2015; McNulty 2015) and some limited research on expatriates’ mental health (e.g., Filipič Sterle et al., 2018c; Truman et al., 2012), little is known about the experience of clinical interventions offered to expatriates in their host country. Our study aimed to contribute to the current literature and clinical practice by focusing on expatriates’ psychotherapy experience and meaning making of this experience. We attempted to capture how it is to be an expatriate and to live in the expatriate complexity, while being in a RFT process of personal growth and transformation in the host country. More specifically, we aimed to answer the following research question: ‘How can being in a therapeutic process of RFT help expatriates to understand the complexities of being an expatriate?’

In-depth semi-structured interviews were used to address the above research question. Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009) was employed for data collection and data analysis. This qualitative and experiential approach seemed appropriate to explore the phenomenon of expatriates’ lived psychotherapy experiences and how they give meaning to their personal and social world. This method is designed to gain rich understandings of topics with little theoretical and empirical evidence, and to contribute to a given knowledge ground (Moustakas, 1994; Smith et al., 2009).


**Method**

**Participants**

In line with IPA (Smith et al., 2009) purposive sampling was used to explore the phenomenon of expatriates’ psychotherapy experience. Five participants were recruited in the counselling centre for expatriate clients in Brussels, Belgium, where the psychotherapist using the RFT model worked. At the time of data collection, every participant who met the inclusion criteria was invited to take part in the research. The main inclusion criteria were the following: the participants were aged over 18, they were expatriates, and they had a good command of the English language. The mean age of participants was 33 years, they were all women. Participants came from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds and had been living in Brussels, Belgium for an average of 9.2 years. According to the relational family therapy format, all the participants had received 12 weekly sessions of psychotherapy at the time of data collection. Following general guidelines in qualitative research (Elliott, Fischer & Rennie, 1999), only minimal information is given about participants’ identities. For reasons of confidentiality, pseudonyms are used when providing quotes from the study participants.

**Data Collection and Data Analysis**

**The interviews.** After 12 50-minutes sessions of psychotherapy, a semi-structured interview was conducted with each participant. Two broad questions were posed: “*How have you experienced RFT?*”; “*What kind of impressions, sensations, thoughts, or changes have typically marked your experience of psychotherapy?*” To gain a more in-depth understanding of clients’ experiences, prompts such as ‘therapeutic relationship’, ‘the therapist’, and ‘physical sensations’ were used for funnelling in the interviewing. The questions in the interviews served as a guidance and were applied in order to explore the lived experience of expatriate clients undergoing RFT. The interviewer was
a psychotherapist who was well acquainted with the specifics of expatriate life; however, she was not familiar with the RFT model. The interviews were conducted in English, they lasted approximately 50 minutes and were audio-recorded. Before data collection, clients were informed about the aims of the study and signed an informed consent. The study was approved by the ethical committee of Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences of Ghent University, Belgium, and the National Medical Ethics Committee of the Republic of Slovenia.

Verbatim transcriptions were made of all five interviews. The first author, an expatriate and a qualitative researcher, analysed the data after having conducted the auto-analysis to evaluate the meaning of psychotherapy and the meaning of expatriation. The interviews were first analysed case by case, followed by a search for patterns across cases and interpreting them according to the IPA method (Smith et al., 2009). In line with the hermeneutic stance, the analysts aimed to make sense of the clients’ attempts of meaning making of their experience of psychotherapy. The researcher triangulation was employed in the discussion of the emerging themes by the first, the second and the fourth author to enhance the trustworthiness of the study. The reliability and validity of the research findings was improved by discussion of all authors about the final results of the study (Golafsani, 2003).

Results

Four themes emerged from the data analysis and are presented below using the quotes of the participants.

Theme 1: The importance for expatriates of being recognised as a full person

The interviewed participants reported feeling accepted by the therapist and valued as full persons. All of them mentioned the therapist’s gentle disposition and calm demeanour, and the trust that they had in her. The trustworthiness (‘I trusted her completely’, Sara) was achieved by creating a nice and accepting atmosphere that
facilitated the participants to feel safe with the therapist and in the therapeutic setting. They highlighted the therapist’s nurturing approach and special care for the therapeutic relationship. These reflected also in undivided attention to them during the sessions. ‘She wasn’t desperately taking notes. Which I found great because she was actually listening to what I was saying’, clarified Lucy, as she further described her experience with the therapist:

She is a very soft person. She is very calm and very accepting. I felt very comfortable around her. She transmits a sort of serenity and I had the feeling that ... you know ... things will be okay. Just take a deep breath kind of thing. In a way it was almost that she was for the moment my mother. You know. When a child is crying and the mum comes and gives you a hug and says: It is okay, you will be fine. It was kind of like that.

This illustrates how important it was for the clients to feel that there was somebody who cared about them in the host country. It resembled a feeling of a ‘home’, or a ‘mother’ which was there and then. Expatriates’ lives often involve constant changes and instability; therefore, to have a meaningful relationship in the new environment is very important for their (emotional) well-being. This disposition fostered the clients to reconnect to their own feelings and thoughts and to just be themselves rather than trying to ‘fit in’. ‘Fitting in’ is difficult for expatriates with their own unique cultural and expatriate complexity. Participants felt that the therapist displayed the openness and curiosity to get to know them the way they were in their current situation. This enabled them space and freedom to reconnect to themselves and feel as a full person in their current reality – as an expatriate in the host country.

**Theme 2: A new dimension of closeness by created distance**

This theme represents how participants attempted to categorize their experience of the relationship with the therapist and to make sense of what kind of a relationship
they had or they should have had with their therapist. The therapeutic relationship was a unique experience for them and it marked a new category of relating, a new dimension of a close relationship. This dimension was unlike any other, for example friendship. Expatriates mentioned closeness that was achieved by creating more distance and the effect that it had on the overall experience of the therapy experience. For example, Kim explained:

*There it is just you and your therapist and she is trying to help you so that you understand your problems. It felt like you go into a certain space and you feel the connection with the therapist and she tries to turn me back to me. So that I would be the one who is asking myself and also answering to myself. That is much different than talking to friends.*

This corroborates the importance for expatriates to have the space to explore their own complexity. They felt that the therapist understood and enabled the professional distance. Agnes explained: ‘I didn’t feel I had to lead the conversation myself. She was kind, nice and so I didn’t feel threatened or afraid or scared.’ In therapy, expatriates could talk about what bothered them and they could focus on whatever they wanted and what was relevant to them.

**Theme 3: A release of defence mechanisms**

The narratives in this theme disclose participants’ bodily sensations that were linked to the release of defence mechanisms during the therapy. ‘The therapy process was very physical overall’, said Sara, as she further explained:

*I really felt it in my upper body and in my chest and in my heart. At the beginning I had these feelings like somebody stabbed me with a knife. I must say I’m much better now. I don’t have that pain anymore.*
The clients reported on slowing down, having less pain, and feeling better overall that emerged from being able to vent their emotions. Agnes talked about the changes that she noticed after the sessions:

*Sometimes after therapy I walked to my home with a different manner. A bit more ... independent. You know really this feeling of independence.*

In their narratives, participants couldn’t pinpoint what exactly happened that led them feeling calmer and stronger, and how their emotions and emotional states were regulated during the therapy. Kim commented ‘*I don’t know how she did it. But I slowed myself down*’. This is how Lucy elaborated on her experience of somatic narratives:

*There are a few things that I felt physical about. First, it was the stress that I felt before going. I would start feeling anxious and fidgety. When I would arrive, I would feel very agitated. I would speak very quickly. I would say a lot of things, feel a lot of things. But by the time I left I was feeling calm and just better with myself overall. I was much more relaxed. And I felt that I had somehow slowed down.*

Aiming to connect to themselves in the present moment and to observe what was happening in their body, the process known as embedded relational mindfulness (Ogden & Goldstein, 2017), has made the participants aware of the changes on the physical level. Emotions are imprinted in the body, therefore listening to the bodily sensations and pain and trying to comfort the body discomfort or pain, can bring the emotional relief (Rothschild, 2010; Schore, 2003). This illustrates that the therapist facilitated this process by focusing on their current situation and giving them the recognition of their expatriate complexity as the disturbing emotions from the past were being resolved.

**Theme 4: Expatriates’ reconnection to their own self**
All participants talked about their experience of therapy as one that helped them get in touch with themselves again and to work on themselves in a different way.

*I think therapy has awakened a lot of demons and angles in me. I definitely got to know myself much better in therapy. And when she would sort of react, she would show me myself.* (Lucy)

Participants reported on the uniqueness and novelty of their psychotherapy experience – this was related to how they experienced the new relationship (with the therapist), but also to their appreciation to be able to talk about new life experiences. ‘*I was not forced to talk about one thing or another but these fresh experiences that were inside me that I wanted to share*’, disclosed Kim. Sharing these new experiences and associated emotions in the expatriate context meant that the therapy and their current expatriate situation were closely linked to each other. ‘*This new experience of being abroad was part of the therapeutic experience and vice versa*’ (Agnes). They felt free to feel what they felt and could understand their own reasoning, from their own current inner perspective, independently of their own past or any expectations. They could reconnect to themselves and feel their own self. They felt that they had more control of their life situation, that they could be who they were, that they could initiate actions, and execute them. As Kim exemplified: ‘*When she talked to me, she calmed me down and I felt more relaxed, safer, more able to look into the future that I can make it. That I can deal with the situations.*’ In other words, the sense of agency could be felt again (David, Moore, & Obhi, 2015).

**Discussion**

Our study explored expatriates’ subjective lived experience of relational family therapy in their host country. As described above, our findings showed the following themes: (1) the importance for expatriates of being recognised as a full person; (2) a new dimension of closeness was created by distance; (3) the release of the defence
mechanisms during psychotherapy took place; and (4) participants reconnected to their own self by talking about their new experiences within the expatriate complexity.

Based on the participants’ narratives, some important associations with the RFT model may be observed. The significance of the therapeutic relationship and the therapist’s role – as perceived by the participants in our study – corroborates the fundamental premise of relational family therapy, where the understanding of the relationship with others and the therapist are the most significant therapeutic phenomena that enable the experience of change (Gostečnik, 2017, Gostečnik, Repič Slavič, & Cvetek, 2009). According to the RFT model, the change happens through a therapeutic relationship which is based on the transference-countertransference dynamic and the regulation of psycho-organic states (Gostečnik, 2017). Working with the embodiment of the mind, learning about how they felt in their body and what that meant, was important part of their psychotherapy experience. Working with the implicit enabled access to the parts of the self and deep emotions that would not be accessible through using the words only (Ogden & Goldstein, 2017).

Participants perceived their therapist like a ‘mother’, who was there and then and offered the feeling of ‘home’ there and then (i.e., in the host country), and who awaited them when they returned ‘home’ (i.e., to the next session). The therapist understood their need for connection and was able to give them the space to grow. From the standpoint of the relational family model the therapist tries to regulate those conflicts as a mother might (Gostečnik et al., 2017). The fourth theme in our findings, entitled ‘Expatriates’ reconnection to their own self’ ties in with the RFT therapist’s general goal to introduce a fundamental change in the client’s perception of the actual present, that is, the participants’ expatriate complexity (Filipič Sterle et al., 2018b). In other words, the therapist’s positive disposition and the determination, that they deserve a new life in the new country, enabled the expatriates to feel the sense of agency again. This was of great importance to them as alienation is a very common feeling associated
with expatriation (Bushong, 2013; Osland, 2000). Being able to experience closeness and connection to another person in a foreign country addressed their intrinsic need for relating and connectedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Expatriates are challenged to reach the balance between their home and host culture – how much of their home culture they can maintain and how much of the host culture they need to adjust to (Berry, 2005). But in therapy they could embrace this new experience without having to abandon their home culture, their home or their family. To have somebody in the host country who would care for them (as a mother would), enabled the participants to feel safe. In other words, clients felt that the therapist gave them the permission to feel bad in their current expatriate situation. They felt comforted by the therapist whose message was: ‘Don’t worry, things will be okay’ (as mother might say).

Bearing in mind the expatriation context of the participants in our study and linking our findings to the empirical evidence on expatriate adjustment and the theoretical underpinnings of the RFT model, the main contributions of our study are the following: First, our findings corroborate previous qualitative studies documenting that the mere relocation to another country is not sufficient for a significant psychological change (Osland, 2000). In order to make meaningful changes, one needs to engage in a profound internal process of resolving the past and creating a new, fresh path (Gostečnik, 2017). A new path that will bring them to themselves, disregarding the current location. The therapeutic relationship where the therapist is able to show empathy, perseverance, encouragement, and respect, together with clear boundaries (Repič Slavič & Gostečnik, 2017) and the therapist’s clear recognition of the expatriate complexity, enable clients to deal with their difficulties of being uprooted and alienated and eventually help them to calm down (Bushong, 2013; Filipič Sterle et al., 2018b). When people feel understood, they are able to feel accepted, and loved (Rothschild, 2006, 2010; Schore, 2003). Only by feeling accepted and supported (just as a mother
might accept and support them), with clearly respected boundaries, they are able to embrace their current (expatriate) situation and move on.

The second contribution of the current study is related to the therapist’s role, particularly to the creation of safeness and feeling of ‘home’. As documented in the literature on globally mobile, the therapist’s own personal experiences of being an expatriate is an asset for successful clinical intervention (Bushong, 2013). The results of our study corroborated these previous findings, and showed a deeper understanding about how clients actually perceived their therapist and the meaning that they attributed to this experience. They felt that they could trust their therapist because they felt that the therapist understood and recognised their expatriate complexity (Filipič Sterle et al., 2018b). However, according to the RFT model, the mutual need for growth is essential in RFT (Gostečnik et al., 2017), therefore the change in therapy can only happen with the therapist who is willing to grow with a client. Through the process of transference and countertransference and right hemisphere communication – as explained by the RFT model (Gostečnik, 2017) – the participants in our study felt that the therapist was able to understand them for the reason that the therapist has successfully completed the similar process in their own expatriate context. Further, the therapist was able to help them because she was already consolidated in the host country, meaning that she had already done all the steps, she went through the transformation herself and therefore she was strong enough to help them. Even though the RFT therapist would not self-disclose (Repič Slavič & Gostečnik, 2017), clients could feel her position was based on the right hemispheric communication (Gostečnik, 2017). The participants in our study felt that they had the space to explore their new path, and their fresh experiences. This path is their own profound change. It is based on the participants’ feelings of being ‘mothered’ by the therapist. Participants felt that they came ‘home’ when they went to a therapy session. The concept of home is very important for the globally mobile, because they tend to feel at ease anywhere, but nowhere at home (Osland, 2000). The key difference
of experiencing ‘home’ for the expatriates is the fact that they feel at home in the foreign country, which is different than their past experience in their home country. This feeling has a potential to address their identity, which is becoming more globally oriented (Mao & Shen, 2015), meaning that they can potentially feel at home also in the foreign country.

The third contribution of the current study is linked to seeking new experiences, as associated with leaving the known behind and pursuing a new path. It seems to be in human nature to search for a new path that is believed to lead them to a higher-level experience (Siegel, 2010). Only the path that leads through the unknown, unsafe, and beyond the comfort zone, has the potential to bring along the change. The yearning that leads people through pain and insecurity is in fact the yearning for a new experience, for a transformation that might have never happened had they not left home, and their safe and predictable environment. Going away may be an opportunity to search for oneself, as reflected in the need for a profound change. One needs to find oneself first before one can calm down. The road to a ‘Promised Land’ leads to one’s deepest core and reconnecting to oneself.

Strengths and limitations

The qualitative design as well as the clinical sample used in the current study enabled us to tap into the subjective psychotherapy experience of expatriate clients in their host country, thereby contributing to the limited research on expatriate mental health. Our findings pointed to important issues for mental health professionals working with expatriates. For example, having their own experience as an expatriate can help clinicians working with expatriates (Bushoung, 2013). Moreover, our study has shown that clinicians need to pay special attention to cultural and relational aspects of the expatriate complexity. Because of their mobile lifestyle, expatriates may develop high resilience, but they may nevertheless remain very sensitive in the area of relating and questioning their own sense of agency.
The current study also has some limitations. All the participants came from European countries and therefore their home cultures were somewhat similar. Replication of a similar study with participants from more different cultural backgrounds should be helpful to extend our understanding expatriates’ experience of psychotherapy. Our study was based on the psychotherapy experiences of expatriates being in RFT. More qualitative studies with different psychotherapy models would be useful to further our understanding of what meaning expatriates attribute to their process of self-growth.

**Conclusion**

Findings of our study showed that change and creation of new a path within the expatriate complexity is not ensured by the mere relocation. Rather, it takes a journey inward to find a ‘Promised Land’. In a foreign country, the feeling of ‘home’ comes along with the feeling of acceptance like a ‘mother’ would accept a child, and through a relationship with a therapist which is more personal because that enables clients to feel safe (like at home). On the other hand, having space and professional distance is important as it warrants expatriates to explore what and where their home actually is.
References


The current doctoral dissertation was designed to investigate the challenges, resources and adjustment in expatriates. In this final chapter, we briefly summarize our research objectives and we present an integrated overview of the most important findings. Following that, we present some theoretical reflections and elaborate on possible implications for clinical practice with expatriates. Finally, we discuss the strengths and limitations of the studies we conducted, and make some suggestions for future research.

**Research objectives**

The principal aim of the present dissertation was to examine the challenges that expatriates face during their adjustment process, and the resources they may use during their stay in the host country to facilitate their adjustment and alleviate their psychological distress. Our research objectives were outlined based on the limitations of the current empirical base on our topic of investigation, that is, a lack of research on family-level variables, a lack of studies on well-being and adjustment of clinical and help-seeking samples of expatriates, a lack of studies on resources (including social support and psychotherapy) for the latter groups, and a lack of studies on the subjective experience of being and living as an expatriate.
In the first part of the dissertation (Chapters 2 & 3) we aimed to take a family level perspective on expatriate adjustment by reviewing the literature on how expatriates and their family members adjust to living abroad, their key challenges and resources, and by empirically exploring the role of family functioning in the adjustment of expatriates.

In the second part of the dissertation (Chapters 4, 5, & 6) we aimed to focus on individual adjustment of help-seeking expatriates, exploring their challenges, resources, and their well-being. More specifically, social support and psychotherapy were studied as important resources for expatriates to overcome difficulties. We particularly aimed to investigate what type of social support is considered most beneficial for help-seeking expatriates (Chapter 4), and to explore psychotherapy as a resource for expatriates for dealing with their life situations in a more successful and enjoyable way. By using qualitative methods and focusing on psychotherapy, we aimed to complement the existing research on expatriates’ psychological distress with their subjective lived experience of psychotherapy and thus to provide useful clinical implications (Chapters 5 & 6).

**Overview of the Main Findings**

**Chapter 2 – Expatriate Family Adjustment: An Overview of Empirical Evidence on Challenges and Resources**

Chapter 2 consisted of a comprehensive literature overview of findings from research attempting to understand what happens with expatriates and their families while living in the host country. The review draws on research on adjustment of individual family members (expatriates, their partners, and children) and families as a whole, across different literatures (e.g., cultural psychology, family psychology, and stress literature). The key challenges of expatriation are discussed, as well as family members’ resources.
The following challenges accompanying expatriate family members were identified: cultural novelty, lack of preparation and relocation (financial) support, loss of home, change of social environment, increased demands related to organizing life in a new location (i.e., schooling system, learning about local culture and language, daily hassles, new work situation for expatriate employees), adjustment to work (expatriate employee), finding a job, feeling isolated and lost without outside professional identity (trailing partner), fitting into new schools and making new friends (children), together with feelings of uncertainty, up-rooting and isolation (e.g., Brown, 2008; Cole, 2011; Haslberger & Brewster, 2008; Lazarova, McNulty, & Semeniuk, 2015; Osland, 2000; Rosenbusch & Cseh, 2012; Weeks, Weeks, & Willis-Muller, 2010).

Our narrative review also documented the following resources of expatriates: personal resources such as open-mindedness, emotional stability, high level of social initiative (e.g., Ali, Van der Zee, & Sanders, 2003; Van Erp, Van der Zee, Giebels, & Van Duijn, 2014; Weeks et al., 2010), family resources such as flexibility, adaptability, cohesion and communication (e.g., Ali et al., 2003; Caligiuri, 2000; Lazarova et al., 2015; Van der Zee, Ali, & Haaksma, 2007), as well as community resources such as maintaining contact with friends and former colleagues (Rosenbusch & Cseh, 2012), and turning to other people for emotional and instrumental support (Caligiuri & Lazarova, 2002).

The contribution of this study consists of outlining important directions for future research in the field of expatriate individual and family adjustment. More specifically, we concluded that there is lack of systematic research as studies are either missing a theoretical background or largely neglect the multi-informant approach. A comprehensive theory of expatriate family adjustment integrating multiple theoretical perspectives, including the culture identity formation and the impact of home country and host country culture, is called upon. Second, the majority of studies paid little attention to define the concept of family or failed to take into account the cultural aspect.
of relocation. Third, there is a call for more longitudinal studies including all family members as adjustment is a process that unfolds over time and therefore cannot be sufficiently explained by cross-sectional studies. Suggestions for future research and practical implications are provided, with a special focus on how families could be assisted during their adjustment process.

Chapter 3 - Adjustment and Well-being of Newcomer Expatriates: A study on Perception of Move and Family Functioning

In this empirical study we examined the role of perception of move and characteristics of family functioning as a resource for fostering individual expatriate adjustment, for alleviation of psychological distress, and enhancing the satisfaction with life. We used a sample of 44 newcomer expatriates who had a family and have recently moved to Belgium (the average of the time after the relocation was nearly three months). We applied the ABCX theoretical model of family stress (Hill, 1958). Based on this model, we hypothesized that a more positive perception of the move would be associated with better outcomes (i.e., successful adjustment, lower level of psychological distress and higher satisfaction with life). We also expected better/higher levels of family communication, family satisfaction, family cohesion, and family flexibility being associated with better adjustment (general, interaction and work adjustment), with lower levels of psychological distress (depression, anxiety, stress), and higher satisfaction with life. According to the ABCX model, we were also interested in the interplay between the perception of move and family functioning in predicting the above-mentioned outcome variables. Hierarchical multiple regression analyses were used to test our predictions.

Our findings showed that expatriates who saw their move as more manageable and less uncontrollable, were better adjusted to their general living conditions in Belgium, and experienced less psychological distress, particularly, they were less anxious and less stressed in the early stage after their relocation. There was also a trend
towards expatriates who saw their move as more manageable being more satisfied with their life, but more research is needed to confirm this finding. Examination of the family functioning variables and their role in outcomes revealed that better family cohesion was associated with a more successful general adjustment and there was also a positive trend between family cohesion and life satisfaction. On the other hand, higher family flexibility was associated with lower life satisfaction, and better communication in the family related to higher levels of anxiety. Lower family satisfaction tended to be related to higher work adjustment. However, expatriates that were satisfied with their family, were less anxious. The findings of this study provided evidence for our main effect predictions, thereby empirically supporting theoretical notions from the ABCX-model, but questioning some assumptions within the model as well. In particular the interplay of perception of move and resources in predicting outcomes was not found in our study, as there were no interaction effects between perception of move and the family functioning variables.

By taking into account a broad diversity of the outcomes in expatriates our research made an important contribution to the contemporary literature on expatriate adjustment, which still struggles to provide a comprehensive theory of adjustment (McNulty & Selmer, 2017). First, it shed more light on family characteristics that may foster or inhibit individual expatriate adjustment, a topic in need of more investigation. Second, our predictions were based on a theoretical framework, thereby contributing to the empirical base largely lacking theoretical underpinnings for the selection and interpretation of their results. Finally, we included different variables (i.e., perception of move and family functioning) to test their association with adjustment outcomes and psychological well-being (i.e., different facets of adjustment, different aspects of psychological distress, and life satisfaction), therefore more fine-grained conclusions can be drawn about which specific type of a resource (i.e., family functioning variables) is most helpful in fostering successful outcomes in expatriates – that is, successful
general, interaction, and work adjustment; alleviation of psychological distress - depression, anxiety and stress; and enhancing life satisfaction.

Chapter 4 - Social Support, Adjustment, and Psychological Distress of Help-seeking Expatriates

In this empirical study, we explored the interrelations between social support needs, social support availability, adjustment and psychological distress within a sample of 97 help-seeking expatriates in Brussels, Belgium, who were living in the host country for the average duration of 8.7 years. Specifically, we examined (1) the association between expatriates’ adjustment (i.e., work, interaction and general adjustment) and levels of psychological distress (i.e., depression, anxiety and stress), (2) the association between expatriates’ perceptions of socioemotional and instrumental support availability and their level of adjustment, and (3) the moderating role of expatriates’ socioemotional and instrumental support needs in the latter association. Hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to test our predictions.

Findings indicated that expatriate adjustment was associated significantly to psychological distress, yet, this was only the case for work adjustment. More specifically, lower levels of expatriates’ work adjustment were associated with higher levels of psychological distress (i.e., depression, anxiety and stress). No significant link to psychological distress was observed for expatriates’ general and interaction adjustment. Second, the analyses exploring the role of social support in expatriates’ adjustment revealed that perceived availability of socioemotional support had a positive association to interaction and work adjustment. This was not the case, however, for general adjustment (i.e., life in the new living conditions in general). Third, findings showed that higher levels of perceived instrumental support availability were associated with better general adjustment, but only for expatriates reporting high needs for instrumental support. In other words, the match between the degree of instrumental support expatriates perceived to be available and the amount of instrumental support
they tended to seek when dealing with their situation appeared more important for their adjustment to everyday living conditions in the new country (i.e., general adjustment) than the mere availability of instrumental support.

This study shed light on expatriates’ vulnerability for psychological distress and understanding the type of social support that is most beneficial for help-seeking expatriates. As such it directly deals with the limitations of existing studies limiting their focus to samples of non-clinical and non-help seeking expatriates.

Chapter 5 - In Search of the Recognition of Expatriate Complexity: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Psychotherapy Experience

Following one of the major aims of this dissertation, this study explored the experience of psychotherapy as a kind of new resource called upon by expatriates if things get tough for them when away from home. In this qualitative study we explored the lived psychotherapy experience of five expatriate clients, and the meaning that expatriates attributed to these experiences within their expatriate context. It has been noted in the literature, that expatriates who experienced psychological distress, can turn to mental health professionals in the host country for help with the adjustment challenges associated with their work, schooling and interactions with locals (Nelson-Jones, 2002). However, no research so far has tapped into studying the psychotherapy experience of expatriate clients. In this study we drew on the empirical evidence of expatriate experience (e.g., Lazarova et al., 2015; McNulty, 2015; Siljanen & Lämsä, 2009), on the existence and nature of expatriates’ emotional distress (e.g., Silbiger & Pines, 2014; Truman, Sharar, & Pompe, 2012), and studies focusing on factors contributing to successful interventions with expatriates (e.g., psychotherapist’s multicultural orientation, cultural dimensions of psychotherapy, and psychotherapists’ personal experience of expatriation, Bushong, 2013; Mortimer, 2010; Qureshi & Collazos, 2011; Owen, Leach, Tao, & Rodolfa, 2011).
Semi-structured interviews were utilized for the data collection and the qualitative method Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009) was employed to analyse the data. As a result of the data analysis based on the five interviews of the expatriate clients, the following themes emerged from the expatriates’ narratives about their psychotherapy experience: ‘The recognition of the expatriate complexity’, ‘Personal growth vs Dependency’, ‘Endurance vs Change’, ‘The globally minded therapist’, and ‘Language makes or breaks’. The overall common psychotherapy experience was expatriates’ considerable need to get the recognition of their expatriate complexity in a global context. Further, our findings also confirmed previous findings that psychotherapists’ personal experiences of expatriation and / or familiarity with the specifics of expatriate way of life can greatly contribute to the effectiveness of clinical interventions (Bushong, 2013).

This study brings the perspective of subjective psychotherapy experience of expatriates to the existing knowledge of expatriate well-being, thereby allowing a better understanding of their expatriate context and how they can be best helped when emotionally distressed. Highlighting the psychotherapy experience of help-seeking expatriates in a host country is a unique and important contribution of this study in the field of expatriate mental health.

**Chapter 6 - A Newly Awakened Sense of Self: Expatriates’ Experience of Relational Family Therapy**

Still pursuing one of the major aims of this dissertation – studying psychotherapy as a resource for the expatriates in psychological distress, and with the aim of contributing to contemporary clinical practice, our second qualitative study investigated the expatriates’ subjective lived experience of relational family therapy (RFT) (Gostečnik, 2013, 2017; Gostečnik, Repič Slavič, Pate, & Cvetek, 2017), and thereby enhanced our insights into the complexity of being an expatriate.
The fundamental premise of the relational family model is the re-creation of a client’s self that is based on the relationship between a client and a therapist (Gostečnik, 2017). Relational family therapy covers the wholeness of people’s existence on a systemic, interpersonal and intrapsychic level within their relational matrix. It was therefore found particularly suitable to study the lived experience of expatriates, and their emotional challenges within many different areas of emotional functioning, such as feelings of belonging, uprooting, and identity change (Bushong, 2013; Mao & Shen, 2015; Osland, 2000).

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (Smith et al. 2009) was employed to collect and analyse the data from semi-structured interviews with five expatriate clients after they had completed 12 sessions of relational family therapy. The following themes emerged from the data analysis regarding the expatriate clients’ experience: ‘The importance for expatriates of being recognised as a full person’, ‘A new dimension of closeness by created distance’, ‘A release of the defence mechanisms’, and ‘Expatriates’ reconnection to their own self’. Findings showed that therapist’s active engagement in the mutual growth enabled clients to feel accepted, and to embrace the change in their own expatriate complexity. The significance of the therapeutic relationship and the therapist’s role - as perceived by the participants in our study - corroborates the fundamental premise of relational family therapy, where the understanding of the relationship with others and the therapist are the most significant therapeutic phenomena that enable the experience of change (Gostečnik, 2017, Gostečnik, Repič Slavič, & Cvetek, 2009). The therapist’s positive disposition and the determination, that they deserve a new life in the new country, enabled the expatriates to feel the sense of agency again. This was of great importance to them as alienation is a very common feeling associated with expatriation (Bushong, 2013; Osland, 2000). Being able to experience closeness and connection to another person in a foreign
country addressed their intrinsic need for relating and connectedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

A Summary View on the Challenges, Resources and Adjustment of Expatriates and Theoretical Reflections

Family level perspective on expatriate adjustment

In line with one of the major aims of the current dissertation, we were specifically interested in the role of family functioning as a resource for the successful outcomes of expatriation. Based on findings in Chapters 2 and 3, we have come to the following conclusions. First, family functioning was found in our own survey with newcomer expatriates as well as in some studies included in our literature overview to be an important resource for individual expatriate adjustment. Therefore, the characteristics of an expatriate’s family have potential to foster or undermine the positive outcomes of the relocation. Second, among family functioning variables, findings in both chapters highlighted the role of family cohesion (i.e., the emotional bonding that family members have towards one another) and family satisfaction (i.e., the degree of family members’ satisfaction with different aspects of the family) for the successful outcomes of the relocation. Particularly, in our empirical study presented in Chapter 3, family cohesion was found to be positively associated with general adjustment and there was also a trend towards a positive link with life satisfaction, thereby corroborating previous findings of family cohesion being an important resource for both sociocultural adjustment of expatriate children and adolescents and quality of life (Van der Zee et al., 2007). Our survey (Chapter 3) revealed that there was a trend towards higher family satisfaction being associated with lower work adjustment, but there was a positive link between family satisfaction and less anxiety, which coincides with previous findings (Chapter 2) on the positive association between family
satisfaction and other outcome variables, such as adjustment and satisfaction with life throughout (Richardson, 2006).

Third, our empirical investigation of family functioning as a resource (Chapter 3) also showed some unpredicted and even counter-intuitive findings. Particularly, previous research (as outlined in Chapter 2) has indicated a significant role of good family communication in expatriate outcomes, where all members ‘pull in the same direction’ and all members are treated as important in family decisions (Lazarova et al., 2015). Our research, however, did not support this finding. Rather, better family communication was found to be associated with more anxiety in newcomer expatriates. Further, family flexibility (i.e., the components of roles, rules, and leadership in the family) which was previously found to foster successful adjustment of expatriates (Rosenbusch & Cseh, 2012), was in our study associated with lower life satisfaction. These inconsistent and unpredicted findings will be further elaborated upon in the next section, particularly the importance of time and the variability of resources and outcomes of expatriation.

**Time dimension and variability in adjustment**

Our empirical study with newcomer expatriates – with an average duration of stay of just below three months- (Chapter 3) revealed that expatriates who stayed in their host country Belgium for longer time, experienced more psychological distress, in particular, they were more anxious and tended to be more depressed. Furthermore, they were also less satisfied with their life and had poorer family communication. In contrast, our empirical study with help-seeking expatriates (Chapter 4) with an average stay of 8.7 years, showed that expatriates who stayed in Belgium for longer time, experienced lower levels of psychological distress and had better general and interaction adjustment.

In conclusion, the findings of both of our empirical studies seem to support the idea (see also the review in Chapter 2) that expatriate adjustment as well as
psychological distress and life satisfaction will improve over time (Ward, Okura, Kennedy, & Kojima, 1998). Indeed, according to recent conceptualizations, the adjustment for company sponsored expatriates should reach its peak after two to five years (Hippler, Brewster, & Haslberger, 2015), or slightly later (Bhaskar-Shrinivas, Harrison, Shaffer, & Luk, 2005). Osland (2002) outlined that particularly the first six months of the expatriation are accompanied by difficulties, ups and downs, feelings of uncertainty, and accelerated learning. Our findings can also be interpreted in light of individual and family stress models, like the so-called double ABCX stress model (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983), which assumes a pile-up of stressors as well as resources over time, fostering more positive outcomes over time (see double ABCX model, McCubbin & Patterson, 1983).

However, findings in our research also showed some inconsistencies in the outcomes of the studied variables. This is in line with the expatriate adjustment literature which has also failed to produce consistent findings in this area of interest (Hippler et al., 2015; Mendenhall, Macomber, Gregersen, & Cutright, 1998). This is probably due to the idea that the adjustment is a very dynamic and changing process, therefore stressors, resources and outcomes are not linearly related (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005). Moreover, the high variability of stressors, resources and outcome variables should be taken into account with the aim to sufficiently explain how adjustment evolves over time. Longer-term expatriates may experience more fluctuations within their adjustment process, and perhaps reach more ‘down’ and ‘high’ points of their adjustment curve, the latter not completely corresponding to the adjustment curves that the literature has presented so far (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005; Black & Mendenhall, 1990).

Some of our inconsistent findings on the association between family functioning and our outcome variables (Chapter 3) may also be explained in light of this reasoning. For example, we found that better communication in the family related to higher levels
of anxiety, and expatriates who were satisfied with their family, were less anxious. This can be due to the above-mentioned dynamic process of adjustment that changes quickly in different variables (i.e., resources and outcome variables). Expatriates are not just adjusted or unadjusted, it is also important how they manage emotionally, and how is their subjective psychological distress (Hippler, Haslberger, & Brewster, 2017).

Challenges, social support and adjustment of help-seeking expatriates

The second important aim of this doctoral dissertation was the investigation of available resources for the help-seeking expatriates. We were particularly interested in the socioemotional and instrumental social support, and in psychotherapy – specifically relational family therapy.

Taken together, our findings showed that in help-seeking expatriates (1) lower levels of expatriates’ work adjustment were associated with higher levels of psychological distress; (2) perceived availability of socioemotional support was positively linked to expatriates’ interaction and work adjustment; and (3) instrumental support needs moderated the relationship between instrumental support availability and general adjustment such that higher levels of instrumental support availability were associated with better general adjustment, but only for expatriates reporting high needs for instrumental support.

Particularly the link between work adjustment and psychological distress has been found important in our research, as two of our studies revealed this association (Chapters 3 & 4). Although the association between work adjustment and psychological distress found in Chapter 4 cannot be directly compared to existing findings as no research on expatriates thus far has been conducted with help-seeking samples to examine this association, it aligns with findings from our study with newcomers (Chapter 3) and a previous study with a non-clinical sample (Rosenbusch & Cseh, 2012). Namely, our examination of the associations among the outcome variables (i.e.,
the three domains of adjustment, psychological distress) also revealed that expatriates who were better adjusted to their new work environment, were less depressed.

These findings might be interpreted in light of previous studies showing that work and career issues are central in expatriates’ lives. According to the expatriate literature, work/career opportunities are one of the most common reasons why expatriates decide on expatriate experience (Dickmann, Doherty, Mills, & Brewster, 2008; Selmer & Lauring, 2011). High perceived work importance was also found to aggravate the impact of stress on burn out (Silbiger & Pines, 2014). The majority of the expatriates in our study (Chapter 3) moved because of new career opportunities in the new country, so it can be assumed that it is important for them to successfully adjust to their new job situation. As a result of successful work adjustment, expatriates may then be more positive about their life, and therefore less depressed. The latter association was also found in our study with newcomers where psychological distress and satisfaction with different domains of life were significantly linked – the better satisfaction with life, the less psychological distress or vice versa. Accordingly, this may explain why less psychological distress was associated with better work adjustment but not with general and interaction adjustment in our study with help-seeking expatriates (Chapter 4).

Our empirical study with help-seeking expatriates (Chapter 4) revealed a positive association between perceived availability of socioemotional support on the one hand and interaction and work adjustment on the other hand. This points to the importance for expatriates to feel comforted and helped with their specific emotional needs in order to open up and relate to locals (cf. interaction adjustment) or even co-workers (cf. work adjustment), who in turn can then become important sources of support (Aycan, 1997; Podsialdowski et al., 2013). These findings also corroborated previous studies emphasizing that perceived availability of quality rather than quantity of social interactions and support is crucial for expatriates’ mental health (McGinley,
2008). For help-seeking expatriates, psychotherapy offers the opportunity to discuss specific psychological challenges and also development of coping strategies in the new country. By receiving socioemotional support from their therapists, and also colleagues, friends and family, they could thus be able to assess their life expectations and to adjust their beliefs in order to see their current expatriate situation in a more positive way. The perceived availability of socioemotional support may make them feel more confident to reach out and to meet new people and connect and interact with them in their immediate environment (Szabo, Ward, & Jose, 2016).

The other finding of our study exploring the role of social support as a resource for the successful expatriate adjustment (Chapter 4) indicated that perceived availability of instrumental support fostered general adjustment in help-seeking expatriates who were in need for this kind of support. Providing sufficient and matching social support can be linked to the theme ‘Personal growth vs dependency’, reflecting their needs to be autonomous, competent and successful in the new country, whereas mismatched support could potentially compromise their feelings of independence.

**Psychotherapy experience and psychotherapy as a resource**

Part of the second major aim of this dissertation was the investigation of the experience of a lived experience of psychotherapy, and particularly the relational family therapy model as a resource for expatriates in the host country, and the meaning that expatriates attributed to these experiences within their expatriate context.

The following themes emerged from the data analysis of the two qualitative studies that explored the expatriate experience: ‘The recognition of the expatriate complexity’, ‘Personal growth vs dependency’, ‘Endurance vs change’, ‘The globally minded therapist’, ‘Language makes or breaks’ (Chapter 5); and ‘The importance of expatriates of being recognised as a full person’, ‘A new dimension of closeness by created distance’, ‘A release of defence mechanisms’, and ‘Expatriates’ reconnection to their own self’ (Chapter 6). Particularly the themes ‘The recognition of the expatriate
complexity’ (Chapter 5) and ‘The importance of expatriates of being recognised as a full person’ (Chapter 6), seem congruent with the finding from our study with help-seeking expatriates (Chapter 4), that expatriates who perceived to have more socioemotional support, were better adjusted to interacting with host nationals, and to their work situation. Specifically, (Chapter 5) they reported to experience psychotherapy as a space where they could show their own weakness and just be who they were, without being judged (and thus receive socioemotional support in psychotherapy). They expressed the need to receive the recognition of their situation, embracing the wholeness of their expatriate life. They appreciated that the therapist understood them in their current situation in the expatriate context, and that the therapist valued their efforts to do well in the new country. Further, expatriates reported (Chapter 6) that in psychotherapy, they were able to reconnect to their own feelings and thoughts and just be themselves rather than trying to ‘fit in’. ‘Fitting in’ is difficult for expatriates with their own unique cultural and expatriate complexity.

Moreover, perceived availability of socioemotional support being positively associated to interaction adjustment (as found in Chapter 4), also reflected in the theme ‘Language makes or breaks’ (Chapter 5), documenting the important role of the knowledge of the local country, which is congruent with our findings in Chapter 2 that good command of the local language can hugely foster expatriate interactions with locals, or, on the other hand, leave them feel even more alienated.

Further, the theme ‘Endurance vs change’ found in Chapter 5 may also be linked to other findings in our dissertation. In this theme expatriates expressed the need to be reassured that their decision for expatriation was the right one, without being pressured that any big changes were needed to be done regarding their current life situation. Pursuing new career opportunities is a one of the main motives for the expatriation (Dickmann et al., 2008) (as discussed in Chapters 2, 3, & 4), therefore expatriates’ work situation and their adjustment to work are important for expatriates. In our study with
the help-seeking expatriates (Chapter 4) we also found that expatriates who were better adjusted to work, were less psychologically distressed thereby confirming the importance of the work domain of the expatriation.

Our qualitative study about the psychotherapy experience of the relational family therapy (Chapter 6) revealed the importance for expatriates of feeling close and connected to other people. Expatriates reported on their subjective experience and meaning-making of their experience of close relationships (e.g., the therapeutic relationship), and made attempts to understand different forms of relating - as presented in the theme ‘A new dimension of closeness by created distance’. Indeed, as people have an embedded need to relate and to belong to other people (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Gostečnik, 2017), expatriates are challenged on basic psychological needs of human functioning, i.e., having meaningful relationships, a sense of belonging, and connectedness.

Still focusing on the important relationships, our study with the newcomer expatriates (Chapter 3), showed that expatriates with better cohesion in their family, were better adjusted to the general living conditions in Belgium, and that expatriates who were more satisfied with their family, were less anxious. This is also congruent with our findings in Chapter 2 stating that expatriates with families often seek professional help and family counselling because of extreme novelty and stress (Lazarova et al., 2015; Osland, 2000).

In a similar vein, findings of our qualitative studies about the psychotherapy experience complement the literature on counselling the globally mobile, arguing that expatriates need to make constant effort to overcome challenges of expatriate life, struggle with their identity and make their life more enjoyable (Bushong, 2013). Previous research on expatriate mental health (also discussed in Chapters 2 & 3) showed that the increased stress may result in internalizing (e.g., depression, anxiety, sleep complaints), and externalizing (e.g., attention deficit, hyperactivity) problems
(Truman et al., 2012). If not addressed properly and treated accurately, these can result in mental health deterioration (Truman et al., 2012). Findings in our empirical studies (Chapters 3 & 4) also supported the existence of some level of psychological distress of expatriates and some important associations. Study with help-seeking expatriates (Chapter 4) showed that increased psychological distress was associated with lower work adjustment, and study with newcomer expatriates (Chapter 3) showed that increased psychological distress, particularly anxiety and stress, were associated with their perception of move as difficult rather than manageable. Particularly the theme ‘A release of defence mechanisms’ (Chapter 6) reports on expatriates’ bodily sensations and some symptoms of anxiety, thereby supporting the importance of addressing mental health problems and provide clinical interventions for expatriates.

Overall, findings of our qualitative studies that focused on psychotherapy experience make an important contribution to the understanding of the meaning that expatriates with a global mind-set attribute to their psychotherapy experience. Expatriates tend to feel equally alienated from their home and host culture. Receiving the recognition of the up-rootedness and lack of sense of belonging as parts of their expatriate complexity, seemed very important for expatriates as it addressed their confusion about where they felt at home.

**Clinical Implications**

In the current doctoral project, the samples of newcomer expatriate family members and help-seeking expatriates were used to explore the challenges, resources and adjustment in the early stage of the relocation, and after a few years when expatriates were seeking psychological support because of their psychological distress.

Overall, findings of the empirical study with the newcomer expatriates (Chapter 3) outlined the importance of positive perception of move and to a certain extent also good family functioning for diverse outcomes, including adjustment, psychological distress and satisfaction with life. Expatriates who saw their move as a manageable
rather than an uncontrollable, were better adjusted to their general living conditions in Belgium, and experienced less psychological distress, particularly, they were less anxious and less stressed in the early stage after the relocation. This underlines the importance of the role of the subjective appraisal of the relocation (i.e., stressor), that can be addressed in professional help for expatriates. In family counselling, for example, expatriates can discuss their individual perceptions of the move, and they could also be assisted in the re-establishment of the elements of their individual functioning, and also their functioning on a family level, rather than just replicating the elements of their lives before the expatriation (Lämsä, Heikkinen, Smith, & Tornikoski, 2017). Additionally, specific psychological challenges can also be addressed such as identity issues, questions of belonging, homesickness, rootlessness, repeated goodbyes, and unresolved grief (Bushong, 2013). Moreover, expatriates could be assisted in their psychological preparation to this big life event already prior to the relocation in their host country and could therefore be better prepared to face the challenges after the actual relocation, thereby preventing them to consider the move as unsurmountable when facing all these challenges.

Our findings pointed to the importance of family functioning in expatriate outcomes (Chapter 3), by showing that: better family cohesion was associated with a more successful general adjustment, higher family flexibility was linked to lower satisfaction with life, better communication in the family was related to higher levels of anxiety, and expatriates that were more satisfied with their family, were less anxious. While the positive effect of family cohesion found in the current investigation has some theoretical underpinnings in relation to the previous literature (Rosenbusch & Cseh, 2012; Van der Bank & Rothmann, 2006), other findings may be somewhat less congruent. The characteristics of family functioning, such as relationships, leadership, cohesion and different roles in the family could also be discussed in family counselling. This could forewarn of the upcoming changes and clarify family roles and family
functioning, and could alleviate problems (Lazarova, Westman, & Shaffer, 2010; Rosenbusch & Cseh, 2012). Additionally, more emphasis should be put on explaining the motives and positive aspects of relocation.

As already mentioned, adjustment is a very dynamic process which changes often and with no clear foreseen path (Hippler et al., 2017). This should be taken into account in clinical interventions with newcomer expatriates as well. Our recommendation deriving from these results therefore points to the importance of the accessibility of socioemotional help in order to prevent the worsening of mental health and potential development of the adjustment crisis in time (Caligiuri & Lazarova, 2002), that should be accessible and available from the very initial stage of expatriation. Further, it is important to be aware of the challenges and hardships of the expatriate life and to understand the expatriate complexity, and what kind of resources should be encouraged that could potentially help the expatriates to adjust better and experience less psychological distress.

Our study with help-seeking expatriates, who had been living in Belgium already for a few years and were experiencing some psychological distress, showed that higher level of work adjustment was associated with less psychological distress whereas such an association was not found between other domains of adjustment (i.e., general and interaction) and psychological distress. Similarly, our study with newcomer expatriates showed that expatriates with higher work adjustment were less depressed. Mental health professionals should therefore not underestimate the importance of work domain in expatriate life. In clinical interventions much attention should be put on finding the meaning in the current work situation and improve the adjustment to work. In case where not much can be changed, the focus of interventions should be to help expatriates leave with the limitations and build the change slowly and gradually.

Further, socioemotional support was found to be positively linked to expatriates’ interaction and work adjustment. Help-seeking expatriates participating in our studies
had the opportunity to receive socioemotional support from their therapists. Then, in psychotherapy they could discuss their personal emotional challenges and assess their life expectations, and adjust their beliefs in order to see their current expatriate situation in a more positive way. The perceived availability of socioemotional support may make them feel more confident to reach out and to learn new people and connect and interact with them in their immediate environment (Szabo, Ward, & Jose, 2016). In similar vein, there is a recommendation for clinicians working with global talent to take into account the importance of working on concepts of self-efficacy and developing social support networks.

However, the adequate counselling for the globally mobile has been and remains a challenge for many mental health professionals. Although the presenting problems of expatriates may be similar to domestic population (e.g., depression, anxiety, personality problems, etc.), work with expatriate clients requires a deeper understanding and a lot of trust to offer the safe place where they can explore their changed identity and expatriation. The two qualitative studies in the present dissertation focused on the lived psychotherapy experience of expatriate clients with the aim to better understand how they can be helped.

In regard to therapists’ assets, our recommendations go to enhancing and deepening the knowledge base of expatriates, and the challenges and resources that they face during their adjustment process. In other words, clinicians working with expatriates should have specific training in understanding the nature of the complexity of expatriate lifestyle and the specific challenges that are part of expatriate life (i.e., uprooting, constant changes, and repeated goodbyes).

One of the main findings of the expatriate psychotherapy experience highlighted the importance of receiving the recognition of expatriate complexity by their therapist. Expatriates tend to feel equally alienated from their home and host culture. Receiving the recognition of the up-rootedness and lack of sense of belonging as parts of their
expatriate complexity, addresses their confusion linked to their feeling about where they felt at home.

With regard to relational family approach that was used in the therapy with the expatriate clients, some valuable insights for clinical practice were derived from clients’ narratives. The significance of the therapeutic relationship and the therapist’s role -as perceived by the participants in our study- corroborates the fundamental premise of relational family therapy, where the understanding of the relationship with others and the therapist are the most significant therapeutic phenomena that enable the experience of change (Gostečnik, 2017, Gostečnik et al., 2009). Participants perceived their therapist like a ‘mother’, who was there and then and offered the feeling of ‘home’ there and then (i.e., in the host country), and who awaited them when they returned ‘home’ (i.e., to the next session). The therapist understood their need for connection and was able to give them the space to grow. From the standpoint of the relational family paradigm the therapist tries to regulate those conflicts as mother might (Gostečnik et al., 2017).

Furthermore, therapist’s own experience of expatriation may be particularly helpful for expatriate clients (Bushong, 2013). A positive effect of similarity between therapists and clients on the effectiveness of psychotherapy outcomes has been shown before (see e.g., Herman, 1998). Also, Owen and colleagues (2011) showed that clients’ perception of their psychotherapists as being more oriented toward cultural issues, may result in seeing the therapist as more credible and in gaining a sense of comfort in the therapeutic process. Furthermore, one can only learn and take to the path of personal growth with someone who has taken this path before. A globally minded therapist with rich personal and professional experience can give the recognition of expatriate complexity to clients with international work experience.

**Strengths**
This doctoral research project is the first to tap into the challenges (the relocation), resources (family functioning, social support, and psychotherapy) and adjustment (general, interaction and work) of expatriates. The present doctoral dissertation has a number of strengths. First, we approached the expatriate adjustment from the literature on cross-cultural, work-family interface, expatriate, family stress, and clinical interventions. As a first contribution, our research adds to the existing literature by taking a family level perspective on challenges, resources and adjustment with the newcomer expatriates. Second, using samples of most vulnerable expatriates enabled tapping into the emotional functioning of most vulnerable expatriates – expatriates who were in psychotherapy at the time of measurement. We explored their adjustment and psychological distress with a specific focus of what type of social support as a resource can be helpful for this group. As our pioneering work, we further explored expatriates’ subjective experience of being and living as an expatriate, and their psychotherapy experience of relational family model, thereby aiming to get further insights in the area of expatriate mental health, and enhancing knowledge for clinical practice with this specific population. Namely, the empirical evidence on expatriate mental health has been scarce (McNulty & Selmer, 2017), moreover, the research using samples of help-seeking expatriates in the host country is non-existent.

**Limitations and directions for future research**

Despite the accomplishments of this doctoral project illustrated in the previous sections, some important limitations should be noted. In each research chapter, specific limitations have already been outlined. Therefore, the following paragraphs will only address some general limitations in relation to this dissertation, each of which points to directions for future research. First, a limiting factor of this dissertation concerns our
sample characteristics. Although we used the under-represented samples in the expatriate research, namely, expatriate newcomers and help-seeking expatriate who were in psychotherapy at the time of measurement, our samples consisted mainly of white, European expatriates who were mildly or moderately distressed. Also, our first empirical study that explored the role of family functioning used a small sample of newcomer expatriates. Therefore, it is not clear to what extent our results generalize to other samples of expatriates in various parts of the world, or expatriates living in the host country that is culturally very different from Belgium. Further, in our research different forms of expatriates that have recently been introduced to expatriate literature, such as self-initiated expatriates, assigned expatriates, academic expatriates, sport expatriates, etc., were not clearly distinguished within our sample. Replication of these findings will be important with more diverse samples in different parts of Europe and the world that could bring new insights into understanding the challenge and resources of newcomer expatriates and expatriates in need of psychological support.

Second, on the methodological level, in this doctoral dissertation we used cross-sectional studies to examine the relations between the resources and outcome variables. Therefore, changes (i.e., development in time) of the variables of perception of move and family functioning could not be tested. More longitudinal studies are needed to deepen our knowledge and to provide evidence on the temporal and causal relations between the variables we have explored and the actual process of adjustment. These studies should include both newcomers and also expatriates who have been living abroad for a longer time. Further, there is a recommendation for using the multi-informant approach where all family members would be reporting on the variables of challenges, resources and outcome (i.e., adjustment), particularly children and adolescents, which are largely understudied populations in the expatriate research. Further, we did not apply a multi-methodological approach therefore stronger conclusions deriving from this research are limited. Across the different methodological
designs used in our empirical studies, we also mainly relied on self-report methods, both in our study with newcomer expatriates and help-seeking expatriates. These methods depend on participants, and therefore have the drawback that the accuracy of the reports cannot be determined. Furthermore, the two qualitative studies are based on the reports of subjective experience of therapy and their therapy probably differed from each other. Therefore, more studies are needed to gather more evidence-based insights into the psychotherapy experience and expatriate mental health. To further this avenue of research, it should be examined how different forms of expatriates actually experience their expatriation and what kind of distinct challenges their experience. Future research should therefore address these questions more systematically. More studies are needed to better understand the mindset of expatriates, the link between the expectations and perception of move prior the relocation.

A third recommendation for future research involves studying psychotherapy and psychotherapy experience. With the increased globalisation, the need for comprehensive understanding of the multicultural psychotherapy and the role of a therapist is also growing. As the world is becoming more digitalised and more services are available online, the potential area to explore is also the online psychological help for help-seeking expatriates. Particular attention should be paid to samples seeking couple and family psychotherapy in order to provide some clear guidelines for this clinical field.
References


GENERAL DISCUSSION


Expatriation is a major life event involving various challenges that expatriates face during their adjustment process, and the resources they may use during their stay in the host country to facilitate their adjustment and alleviate their psychological distress. Based on the limitations of the current literature on expatriate adjustment, in this doctoral dissertation we realized the following: (1) We reviewed the current research attempting to understand what happens with expatriates and their families while living abroad; (2) We explored the associations between expatriates’ perception of their move and family functioning on the one hand, and their level of adjustment (general, interaction and work), psychological distress (depression, anxiety, stress), and life satisfaction on the other hand, using a cross-sectional study with a sample of 44 newcomer expatriates who had a family; (3) We focused on the individual adjustment of help-seeking expatriates and empirically studied social support and psychotherapy as important resources for expatriates to overcome their difficulties. In our cross-sectional study with 97 help-seeking expatriates we investigated what type of social support (socioemotional and instrumental) would be most beneficial for them, and by applying an interpretative phenomenological analysis with a sample of five expatriate clients, we explored their subjective experience of psychotherapy, and particularly their experiences of the relational family therapy approach.

Summary of findings

Our comprehensive narrative review of findings from research on expatriate family adjustment led to the following conclusions: (1) there is lack of systematic research as studies are either missing a theoretical background or largely neglect the multi-informant approach; (2) the majority of studies paid little attention to define the concept of family or failed to take into account the cultural aspect of relocation; (3) there is a call for more longitudinal studies including all family members as adjustment
ENGLISH ABSTRACT

is a process that unfolds over time and therefore cannot be sufficiently explained by cross-sectional studies.

The results of our empirical investigation with the newcomer expatriates revealed that expatriates who perceived their move as less difficult, were (1) better adjusted to their general living conditions in Belgium; (2) they experienced less psychological distress, particularly, they were less anxious and less stressed, and (3) they were more satisfied with their life. Among the family functioning variables, (1) better family cohesion was associated with more successful general adjustment, (2) higher family flexibility related to less satisfaction with life, (3) better communication in the family related to higher levels of anxiety, whereas (4) expatriates who were satisfied with their family, were less anxious. No interaction effects were found between perception of move and the family functioning variables.

Findings of the cross-sectional study with help-seeking expatriates showed that (1) lower levels of expatriates’ work adjustment were associated with higher levels of psychological distress, (2) perceived availability of socioemotional support was positively linked to expatriates’ interaction and work adjustment, (3) instrumental support needs moderated the relationship between instrumental support availability and general adjustment such that higher levels of instrumental support availability were associated with better general adjustment, but only for expatriates reporting high needs for instrumental support.

The two qualitative studies that focused on psychotherapy, revealed the following five themes in relation to expatriates’ psychotherapy experience; ‘The recognition of the expatriate complexity’, ‘Personal growth vs. dependency’, ‘Endurance vs. change’, ‘The globally minded therapist’, ‘Language makes or breaks’; and the following four themes in relation to expatriates’ experience of relational family therapy: ‘The importance for expatriates of being recognised as a full person’, ‘A new dimension
of closeness by created distance’, ‘A release of defence mechanisms’, and ‘Expatriates’ reconnection to their own self’.

Conclusions

First, family functioning was found to be an important resource for individual expatriate adjustment as it has potential to foster or undermine the positive outcome of the relocation. Particularly, family cohesion and family satisfaction were found important for the successful outcomes of the relocation. Our research exploring family functioning variables also revealed some unpredicted and even counter-intuitive findings, which all call for further research. For example, the significant role of good family communication in expatriate successful outcomes reported in the literature was not supported in our research, rather better family communication was found to be associated with more anxiety in newcomer expatriates. By the same token, family flexibility was in our study associated with lower life satisfaction.

Second, the link between work adjustment and psychological distress was found important in our research, as two of our empirical studies revealed this association, thereby corroborating previous findings about the work situation playing a central role in expatriates’ lives. Furthermore, our study on social support as a resource with help-seeking expatriates, who were included in psychotherapy, revealed a positive association between perceived availability of socioemotional support on the one hand and interaction and work adjustment on the other hand. Also, instrumental support was found more helpful for general adjustment of help-seeking expatriates when they really needed this kind of social support.

Third, exploring psychotherapy as a resource showed that expatriates reported to experience psychotherapy as a space where they could show their own weakness and be who they were, without being judged (and thus receive socioemotional support in psychotherapy). They expressed their need to receive the recognition of their situation, and being able to embrace the wholeness of their expatriate life. They appreciated that
the therapist understood them in their current situation in the expatriate context, and that
the therapist valued their efforts to do well in the new country. They were able to
reconnect to their own feelings and thoughts and just be themselves rather than trying to
‘fit in’. Particularly our qualitative study about the psychotherapy experience of
relational family therapy revealed the importance of feeling close and connected to
other people for expatriates. Expatriates tend to feel equally alienated from their home
and host culture. Receiving the recognition of the up-rootedness and lack of sense of
belonging as parts of their expatriate complexity, seemed particularly important for
expatriates as it addressed their confusion about where they felt at home.

Clinical implications

Our findings have some implications for clinical interventions with expatriates. In family counselling, expatriates can discuss their individual perceptions of the move, and they could also be assisted in the re-establishment of the elements of their individual functioning, and also their functioning as a family. Specific psychological challenges such as identity issues, questions of belonging, homesickness, rootlessness, and the need for connectedness can also be addressed in clinical interventions. Expatriates could be assisted in their psychological preparation to this big life event already prior to the relocation to be better prepared for the challenges after the actual relocation. The significance of the therapeutic relationship and the therapist’s role found in our research corroborated the fundamental premise of relational family therapy, where the understanding of the relationship with others and with the therapist are the most significant therapeutic phenomena that enable the experience of change. Furthermore, a therapist’s own experience of expatriation and thereby the positive effect of similarity between therapists and clients on the effectiveness of psychotherapy may be particularly helpful for expatriate clients.
Directions for further research

Based on the findings of this doctoral project, the following suggestions for further research can be outlined. A comprehensive theory of expatriate family adjustment integrating multiple theoretical perspectives, including the culture identity formation and the impact of the home country and host country culture, is called upon. Replication of our findings would be important with more diverse samples in different parts of Europe and the world in order to foster our understanding of the challenges and resources of newcomer expatriates and expatriates in need of psychological support. More longitudinal studies are needed to deepen the knowledge of the temporal and causal relations between the variables we have explored and the actual process of adjustment. Applying a multi-informant approach could be applied where all family members would be reporting on the variables of challenges, resources and outcomes of the relocation. Finally, more qualitative studies are needed to better understand the mindset of expatriates, the link between the expectations and perception of move prior the relocation, and their meaning-making of their expatriation.

Keywords: expatriates, expatriate family, challenges, resources, adjustment, psychological distress, satisfaction with life, family functioning, perception of move, social support, socioemotional support, instrumental social support, interpretative phenomenological analysis, psychotherapy experience, relational family therapy.
VERTREKKENDE VANUIT DE BEPERKINGEN IN DE BESTAANDE LITERATUUR ROND EXPATS
HETE WE HEBBEN WE BIDDEN INNEN IN DIET PROEFSCHRIFT HET VOLGENDE ONDERZOEKT: (1) WE HEBBEN DE
BESCHIKBARE WETENSCHAPPELIJKE EVIDENTIE ROND UITDAGINGEN EN HULPBRONNEN VOOR EXPATS
SAMENGEVAT IN EEN REVIEW GERICHT OP HET BETER BEGRIPEN VAN HET AANPASSINGSPROCES BIJ
EXPATS EN HUN GEZINNEN TIJDENS HUN VERBLIJF IN HET BUITENLAND; (2) WE ONDERZOEKTEN DE
ASSOCIATIES TUSSEN HOE EXPATS HUN VERHUIS NAAR HET BUITENLAND PERCIPIÆREN EN HUN
GEZINSFUNCTIONEREN ENERZIJDS EN HUN MATE VAN AANPASSING (ALGEMEEN, INTERACTIONEEL, EN
WERKGERELATEERD), PSYCHOLOGISCHE DISTRESS (DEPRESSIE, ANGST, STRESS), EN LEVENSSATISFACIE
ANDERZIJDS, EN DIT DOOR MIDDEL VAN EEN CROSS-SECTIONELE STUDIE BIJ 44 NIEUWKOMER EXPATS
DIE RECENT MET HUN GEZIN VERHUISD WAREN NAAR BELGIË; (3) WE BESTUDEERDEN DE
INDIVIDUËLE AANPASSING VAN HELP-SEEKING EXPATS DIE IN PSYCHOTHERAPIE WAREN EN
EXPLROERDEN DE ROL VAN SOCIALE STEUN EN PSYCHOTHERAPIE ALS BELANGRIJKE HULPBRONNEN OM
HUN PROBLEMEN HET HOOFD TE BIEDEN. IN EEN CROSS-SECTIONELE STUDIE (MET EEN STEEKPROEF
BESTAANDE UIT 97 HELP-SEEKING EXPATS) WERD ONDERZOKT WELK TYPE SOCIALE STEUN (SOCIAAL-
EMOTIONELE EN INSTRUMENTELE) HET MEEST HELPEND ZOU ZIJN VOOR HEN. AANVULLEND WERD
KWALITATIEF ONDERZOEK (INTERPRETATIEVE FENOMENOLOGISCHE ANALYSE) BIDDEN EEN STEEKPROEF
VAN VIJF EXPATS DOORGEVOERD, MET DE BEDOELING HUN SUBJECTIEVE ERVARING VAN
PSYCHOTHERAPIE IN KAART TE BRENGEN, EN IN HET BIJZONDER HUN ERVARINGEN MET DE RELATIONAL
FAMILY THERAPY BENOEDERING.

SAMIENBATING VAN DE VOORNAAMSTE BEVINDINGEN

ONZE REVIEW VAN EMPIRISCH ONDERZOEK NAAR DE AANPASSING VAN EXPATS EN HUN
GEZINNEN LEIDDE TOT DE VOLGENDE CONCLUSIES: (1) ER IS EEN GEBREK AAN NOG MEER
DOORGEDREVEN EN SYSTEMATISCH ONDERZOEK OMDAT STUDIES VAAK NIET GEBASEERD ZIJN OP EEN
THEORETISCH KADER EN ER IS EEN GEBREK AAN STUDIES DIE ALLE GEZINSLEDEN BEVRAGEN (MULTI-
INFORMANT BENOEDERING); (2) DE MEERDERHEID VAN DE STUDIES BLYKT ONVOLDOENDE AANDACHT

229
te besteden aan het definiëren van het begrip “family” en houdt onvoldoende rekening met culturele aspecten van expatriëren; (3) er is nood aan meer longitudinaal onderzoek omdat aanpassing bij expats een proces is dat zich over de tijd heen ontvouwt en daarom onvoldoende kan gecapteerd worden door middel van cross-sectionele studies.

De resultaten van onze empirische studies met nieuwkomer expats toonden aan dat expats die hun verhuis naar het buitenland als minder lastig perciepeerden, (1) beter aangepast waren aan hun algemene leefomstandigheden in België, (2) minder psychologische problemen ervaarden, met name waren ze minder angstig en minder gestrest, en (3) meer tevreden bleken te zijn met hun leven. Wat betreft het gezinsfunctioneren van expats (1) bleek een grotere cohesie binnen het gezin geassocieerd met een meer succesvolle algemene individuele aanpassing bij expats, (2) was grotere flexibiliteit van het gezinssysteem geassocieerd met minder levenssatisfactie, (3) ging betere communicatie in het gezin gepaard met hogere niveaus van angst bij individuele expats, terwijl (4) expats die tevreden waren met hun gezin, minder angst rapporteerden. Er werden geen interactie-effecten gevonden tussen de perceptie van de verhuis naar het buitenland en het gezinsfunctioneren.

Bevindingen van de cross-sectionele studie met help-seeking expats toonden aan dat (1) een mindere mate van werkgerelateerde aanpassing verbonden was met meer psychologische distress, (2) de waargenomen beschikbaarheid van socio-emotionele steun positief verband hield met de mate van interactionele en werkgerelateerde aanpassing, en (3) de nood aan instrumentele steun modereerde de relatie tussen de waargenomen beschikbaarheid van instrumentele steun en algemene aanpassing bij expats, zodat een grotere beschikbaarheid van instrumentele steun gelinkt was aan een betere algemene aanpassing, maar alleen voor expats die een grote behoefte aan instrumentele steun rapporteerden.

De twee kwalitatieve studies die focusten op expats die in psychotherapie waren legden volgende vijf thema’s bloot met betrekking tot hun psychotherapie ervaring: 'De

Conclusies

Ten eerste bleek het gezinsfunctioneren een belangrijke hulpbron te zijn voor individuele aanpassing bij expats, omdat het potentieel heeft om de positieve uitkomst van de verhuis naar het buitenland te bevorderen of te ondermijnen. Vooral gezinscohesie en tevredenheid met het gezinsfunctioneren werden belangrijk gevonden voor de succesvolle uitkomst van de relocatie. Ons onderzoek naar de rol van gezinsfunctioneren bij expats bracht ook een aantal onvoorspelbare en zelfs contra-intuïtieve bevindingen aan het licht, dewelke een hertoetsing van onze predicties in verder onderzoek noodzakelijk maken. Bijvoorbeeld, wij vonden geen evidentie in onze studies voor het in de literatuur beschreven belang van goede gezinscommunicatie in aanpassing bij expats. Integendeel, betere gezinscommunicatie bleek geassocieerd met meer angst in nieuwkomer expats.

Het verband tussen werkgerelateerde aanpassing en psychologische distress werd belangrijk bevonden in ons onderzoek, omdat twee van onze empirische studies deze associatie blootlegden, en daarmee convergeert dit resultaat met eerdere bevindingen over de centraliteit van de werksituatie in het leven van expats. Verder wees ons onderzoek op het belang van sociale steun als een hulpbron voor help-seeking expats, zoals bleek uit de positieve associatie tussen de waargenomen beschikbaarheid van socio-emotionele steun enerzijds en interactionele en werkaanpassing anderzijds. Ook werd instrumentele steun als helpend ervaren voor de algemene aanpassing van
help-seeking expats, en dit wanneer zij aangaven dit soort sociale steun echt nodig hebben.

Ten derde bleek uit onze analyse van de ervaringen van expats in psychotherapie dat ze aangaven psychotherapie te ervaren als een ruimte waarin ze hun eigen zwakte konden laten zien en konden zijn wie ze waren, zonder te worden beoordeeld (en dus sociaal-emotionele steun in psychotherapie te krijgen). Ze drukten hun behoefte uit om erkenning te krijgen van hun situatie, en om de totaliteit van hun leven als expat te omarmen. Ze waardeerden dat de therapeut hen begreep in hun huidige situatie, en dat de therapeut hun inspanningen op prijs stelde om het goed te doen in het nieuwe land. Ze waren in staat om opnieuw contact te maken met hun eigen gevoelens en gedachten en gewoon zichzelf te zijn in plaats van te proberen zich in te passen.

Vooral ons kwalitatief onderzoek naar de ervaring van Relational Family Therapy heeft aangetoond hoe belangrijk het is voor expats om zich hecht en verbonden te voelen met andere mensen. Expats voelen zich vaak even vervreemd van hun thuis- als hun gastecultuur. Het krijgen van erkenning van de up-rootedness en het gebrek aan gevoel van verbondenheid als onderdelen van hun “expatriate complexity” leek erg belangrijk voor expats omdat het hun verwarring benoemde over waar ze zich thuis voelden.

**Klinische implicaties**

Op basis van de bevindingen van ons onderzoek kunnen tevens enkele implicaties geformuleerd worden voor klinische interventies bij expats. In gezinsbegeleiding kunnen expats hun individuele percepties en beleving van de verhuis naar het buitenland bespreken en kunnen ze worden geholpen bij het herstellen van de elementen van hun individuele functioneren, en ook hun functioneren op gezinsniveau. Specifieke psychologische uitdagingen zoals identiteitskwesties, vraagstukken van verbondenheid, heimwee, “rootlessness”, en de behoefte aan verbondenheid kunnen
ook worden besproken en aangepakt in de hulpverlening. Expatriates kunnen worden geholpen bij hun psychologische voorbereiding op dit grote evenement voorafgaand aan de verhuizing om beter voorbereid te zijn op de uitdagingen na de daadwerkelijke verhuizing.

De betekenis van de therapeutische relatie en de rol van de therapeut in onze studie bevestigden het fundamentele uitgangspunt van Relational Family Therapy, waarbij het begrijpen van de relatie met anderen en de therapeut de belangrijkste therapeutische fenomenen zijn die de ervaring van verandering mogelijk maken. Bovendien kunnen de ervaringen van therapeuten met een expat achtergrond en dus een zekere similariteit tussen therapeuten en cliënten de effectiviteit van psychotherapie bevorderen.

**Aanwijzingen voor verder onderzoek**

Op basis van de bevindingen van dit doctoraatsonderzoek kunnen de volgende suggesties voor verder onderzoek worden geformuleerd. Er is nodig aan een meer omvattend theoretisch kader omtrent de aanpassing van expats en hun gezinnen, waarin meerdere theoretische perspectieven worden geïntegreerd, alsook belang gehecht wordt aan de formatie van culturele identiteit en de impact van de cultuur van het land van herkomst en het gastland. Replicatie van onze bevindingen met grotere en meer heterogene samples (uit verschillende delen van Europa en de wereld) is nodig willen we bijkomende inzichten krijgen in de uitdagingen en hulpbronnen van expats in het algemeen en expats die psychologische ondersteuning nodig hebben in het bijzonder. Tevens zijn meer longitudinale studies nodig om de temporele en causale relaties tussen de variabelen die we hebben onderzocht bloot te leggen. Ook een multi-informant benadering zou kunnen worden toegepast, en dit met de bedoeling alle gezinsleden te laten rapporteren over hun uitdagingen, hulpbronnen, en aanpassing(sproblemen). Ten slotte zijn meer kwalitatieve studies nodig om de mindset van expats nog beter te
NEDERLANDSTALIGE SAMENVATTING

begrijpen, het verband tussen de verwachtingen en de perceptie van de relocatie voorafgaand aan de verhuis naar het buitenland, en hun betekenisverlening aangaande het expat-zijn.

**Trefwoorden:** expats, expat gezinnen, uitdagingen, hulpbronnen, aanpassing, psychologische distress, levenssatisfactie, gezinsfunctioneren, sociale steun, interpretatieve fenomenologische analyse, psychotherapie, Relational Family Therapy
POVZETEK V SLOVENSKEM JEZIKU

Selitev v tujino zaradi dela velja za velik življenjski dogodek, ki vključuje različne izzive, s katerimi se zdomci soočajo v procesu prilagajanja na novo okolje, ter vire in sredstva pomoči, ki jih lahko uporabijo med svojim bivanjem v državi gostiteljici, da si olajšajo prilagajanje in ublažijo svojo morebitno duševno stisko. Na podlagi omejitev trenutne literature o prilagajanju zdomcev smo v tej doktorski disertaciji empirično raziskovali naslednje: (1) naredili smo pregled empiričnih raziskav, ki so poskušale razumeti, kaj doživljajo zdomci in njihove družine, medtem ko živijo v tujini; (2) raziskovali smo povezavo med njihovim subjektivnim dojemanjem preselitve in vidiki družinskega delovanja zdomcev na eni strani ter stopnjo prilagoditve (splošna prilagoditev, interakcijska prilagoditev in prilagoditev na delo), duševno stisko (depresija, anksioznost, stres) in zadovoljstvom z življenjem, pri čemer smo uporabili presečno študijo na vzorcu 44 novoprispelih zdomcev, ki so imeli družino; (3) osredotočili smo se na individualno prilagajanje zdomcev, ki so bili deležni psihoterapevtske pomoči, in empirično proučevali socialno podporo in psihoterapijo kot pomembna vira pomoči pri premagovanju njihovih prilagoditvenih težav. V svoji presečni študiji, v katero je bilo vključenih 97 zdomcev, ki so bili deležni psihoterapevtske pomoči, smo ugotavljali, katera vrsta socialne podpore (socialnoemocionalna oziroma instrumentalna) jim je bila najbolj v pomoč, z uporabo kvalitativne metode interpretativne fenomenološke analize pa smo na vzorcu petih zdomcev ugotavljali njihovo subjektivno izkušnjo s psihoterapijo, zlasti njihovo doživljanje relacijske družinske terapije kot terapevtskega pristopa.

Povzetek ugotovitev

Naš podrobni narativni pregled literature o prilagoditvi družine na življenje v tujini je privedel do naslednjih zaključkov: (1) primanjkuje sistematičnih raziskav, saj dosedanje študije bodisi niso imele zadostne teoretične osnove bodisi so v veliki meri zanemarjale metodo zbiranja podatkov o določenem pojavu s strani več ocenjevalcev;
(2) večina študij ni namenjala dovolj pozornosti opredelitvi pojma družine ali pa študije niso upoštevale kulturnega vidika preseljevanja; (3) potrebnih je več longitudinalnih študij, ki bi obenem vključevale vse družinske člane, saj je prilagajanje proces, ki se razvija skozi čas in je zato ni mogoče v zadostni meri razložiti s presečnimi študijami.

Ugotovitve naše empirične raziskave z novopriselimi zdomci so pokazale, da so bili zdomci, ki so dojemali svojo preselitev v tujino kot obvladljivo in ne preveč zahtevno, (1) bolje prilagojeni na splošne življenjske pogoje v Belgiji, (2) doživljali so manj duševne stiske, še zlasti so bili manj anksiozni in manj pod stresom, in (3) bili so bolj zadovoljni s svojim življenjem. Ugotovili smo, da je bila med pokazatelji, ki so se nanašali na lastnosti delovanja družine, (1) večja družinska povezanost povezana z uspešnejšo splošno prilagoditvijo, (2) večja fleksibilnost družine je bila povezana z manjšim zadovoljstvom z življenjem, (3) boljša komunikacija v družini je bila povezana z višjo stopnjo anksioznosti, medtem ko (4) so zdomci, ki so bili bolj zadovoljni s svojo družino, občutili manj anksioznosti. Učinkov interakcije med dojemanjem preselitve in vidiki delovanja družine v tej študiji nismo našli.

Ugotovitve presečne študije z zdomci, ki so bili deležni psihoterapevtske pomoči, so pokazale, da je bilo (1) manj uspešno prilagajanje na delo povezano z večjo duševno stisko, (2) da je bila zaznana razpoložljivost socialnoemocionalne podpore pozitivno povezana z interakcijsko prilagoditvijo in prilagoditvijo na delo in (3) da so imele potrbe zdomcev po instrumentalni podpori vpliv na pozitivno povezanost med razpoložljivostjo instrumentalne podpore in splošno prilagoditvijo, tako da so bile višje ravni razpoložljivosti instrumentalne podpore povezane z boljšo splošno prilagoditvijo, vendar le za tiste zdomce, ki so potrebovali instrumentalno podporo.

Kvalitativni študiji, ki sta se osredotočili na psihoterapijo kot vir pomoči za zdomce, sta razkrili naslednjih pet tem, ki so opredeljevali izkušnjo psihoterapije: 'Prepoznavanje zdomske kompleksnosti’, ’Osebna rast nasproti odvisnosti’, ’Vztrajanje nasproti spremembi’, ’Globalno misleči terapevt’ in ’Pomembnost poznavanja jezika’,
ter naslednje štiri teme v zvezi z izkušnjami zdomcev o relacijski družinski terapiji:
'Pomembnost za zdomce, da so prepoznani kot celovita oseba', 'Nova dimenzija bližine z ustvarjeno razdaljo', 'Sprostitev obrambnih mehanizmov' in 'Vnovična povezanost zdomcev samih seboj'.

Sklepi

*Prvič*,  ugotovitve so pokazale, da so nekateri vidiki družinskega delovanja pomemben vir pomoči za individualno prilagoditev zdomcev, saj lahko bodisi spodbudijo ali preprečijo pozitiven izid preselitve v tujino. Med vidiki delovanja družine sta bila za uspešen izid preselitve še posebej pomembna družinska povezanost in zadovoljstvo z družinskim delovanjem. Naša študija, ki je proučevala vpliv vidikov družinskega delovanja na izid preselitve, je razkrila tudi nekatere nepredvidene in celo presenetljive ugotovitve ter obenem veliko variabilnost rezultatov, kar narekuje nadaljnje testiranje naših predvidevanj (npr. dobra družinska komunikacija je bila v dosedanjih raziskavah prepoznana kot pozitiven učinek na izid preselitve, a naša raziskava tega ni podprla, saj smo ugotovili, da je bila boljša družinska komunikacija povezana z večjo anksioznostjo pri novoprispelih zdomcih, obenem pa je bila fleksibilnost družine v naši študiji povezana z nižjim življenjskim zadovoljstvom).

*Drugič*, povezava med prilagajanjem na delo in duševnimi stiskami se je v naši doktorski disertaciji izkazala za pomembno, saj sta dve naši empirični študiji pokazali, da so zdomci, ki so bili bolje prilagojeni na nove delovno okoliščine, doživljali manj duševne stiske. To je v skladu z dosedanjimi ugotovitvami, da ima novo delo v tujini osrednjo vlogo v življenju zdomcev. Poleg tega je naša študija o socialni podpori kot viru pomoči za zdomce, ki so bili deležni psihoterapevtske pomoči, pokazala pozitivno povezavo med zaznano razpoložljivostjo socialnoemocionalne podpore na eni strani ter interakcijo in prilagoditvijo na delo na drugi strani. Instrumentalna podpora pa je bila koristnejša za splošno prilagajanje tistih zdomcev, ki so dejansko potrebovali tovrstno pomoč.

237
Tretjič, raziskovanje psihoterapije kot sredstvo pomoči pri zdomcih je pokazalo, da so zdomci doživljali psihoterapijo kot prostor, kjer so lahko pokazali svoje slabosti in so bili lahko to, kar so, ne da bi imeli občutek, da jih kdo obsoja ali da bi se od njih kar koli posebej pričakovalo (na ta način so prejemali tudi socialnoemocionalno pomoč v obliki psihoterapije). Izrazili so potrebo po priznavanju svojega položaja s strani terapevta in po tem, da bi bili sprejeti v celovitosti svojega zdomskega življenja. Cenili so, da jih je terapevt razumel v njihovih trenutnih življenjskih in delovnih okoliščinah ter da jim je dal priznanje za njihova prizadevanja, da so uspeli v svojem zdomskem življenju. To je pripomoglo k temu, da so se lahko znova povezali s svojimi občutki in mislimi in so bili sami sebi dovolj, ne da bi se trudili prilegati novemu okolju na pričakovan način.

Še zlasti naša kvalitativna študija o izkušnji psihoterapije z relacijsko družinsko terapijo je pokazala, da je bilo za zdomce pomembno, da so čutili bližino in povezanost z drugimi ljudmi. Za zdomce je značilno, da se običajno počutijo enako odtujeni od svoje domače kot od gostiteljske kulture. Prejemanje priznanja s strani terapevta glede njihovega občutka izkoreninjenosti in pomanjkanj občutka pripadnosti kot delov njihove zdomske celovitosti se je za zdomce pokazalo kot zelo pomembno, saj je nagovarjalo njihovo zbeganost glede tega, kje je pravzaprav njihov dom.

**Priporočila glede klinične prakse**

Ugotovitve naših študij lahko pripomorejo k določenim priporočilom glede klinične prakse z zdomci. Družinsko svetovanje je priložnost za zdomce, da razmišljajo o svojem dojemanju preselitve ter da ob pomoči strokovnjaka lahko vnovič vzpostavijo elemente lastnega delovanja in tudi delovanja njihove družine. Posebni psihološki izzivi, kot so vprašanja identitete, vprašanja pripadnosti, domotožja, izkoreninjenosti in potrebe po povezanosti, so lahko obravnavani v obliki svetovalnega in psihoterapevtskega dela z zdomci. Priporočljivo je, da bi zdomci lahko prejemali pomoč pri psihološki pripravi na ta velik življenjski dogodek že pred selitvijo, da bi bili
bolje pripravljeni na izzive v državi gostiteljici. Ugotovitvi o pomenu terapevtskega odnosa in vloge terapevta v naši študiji sta potrdili temeljno izhodišče relacijske družinske terapije, kjer je razumevanje odnosa z drugimi in terapevtskega odnosa temelj, ki omogoča spremembe. Še več, terapevtova lastna zdomska izkušnja in podobnost med terapevtom in klienti se je pokazala kot pozitiven učinek na doživljanje in izid psihoterapije.

**Priporočila za nadaljnje raziskave**

Na podlagi ugotovitev naše doktorske disertacije lahko podamo naslednje predloge za nadaljnje raziskave. Potrebna je celostna teorija o prilagajanju zdomskih družin, ki bi vključevala več teoretskih perspektiv, vključno z oblikovanjem kulturne identitete in vplivom kulture domovine in države gostiteljice. Dobrodošla bi bila ponovitev naših raziskav na raznolikih vzorcih v različnih delih Evrope in po svetu, ki bi lahko prinesla nove poglede na razumevanje izzivov ter virov in sredstev pomoči za novoprispele zdomce in zdomce, ki potrebujejo psihoterapevtsko pomoč. Še posebej longitudinalne študije bi lahko prinesle pogobitev znanja in podale dokaze o časovnih in vzročnih odnosih med različnimi spremenljivkami, ki smo jih raziskovali v tem našem projektu, ter dejanskim procesom prilagajanja. Uporaba pristopa več ocenjevalcev, kjer bi vsi družinski člani poročali o določenih pokazateljih izzivov, virov pomoči in izidov preselitve, bi lahko doprinesla k bolj poglobljenemu vpogledu v dinamiko zdomstva in prilagajanja na novo okolje. Ne nazadnje, potrebujemo več kvalitativnih študij, da bi bolje razumeli miselnost zdomcev ter povezavo med njihovimi pričakovanji in dojemanjem preselitve že med samo pripravo na selitev v tujini ter kako zdomci sami vidijo svojo zdomsko izkušnjo in kakšen pomen ji pripisujejo.
Ključne besede: zdomci, zdomske družine, izzivi, viri in sredstva pomoči, prilagajanje, duševna stiska, zadovoljstvo z življenjem, delovanje družine, dojemanje preselitve, socialna podpora, socialnoemocionalna podpora, instrumentalna socialna podpora, interpretativna fenomenološka analiza, psihoterapevtska izkušnja, relacijska družinska terapija.
DALJŠI POVZETEK V SLOVENSKEM JEZIKU

Raziskava odzivanja na izzive, vire in sredstva pomoči ter procese prilagajanja pri zdomcih

Mojca Filipič Sterle

DOKTORSKA DISERTACIJA

Splošni uvod (prvo poglavje)

Zdomci so posamezniki, ki so zapustili svojo domovino z namenom, da bi začasno živeli in delali v drugi državi. Selitev v tujino zaradi dela je po navadi zaznamovana s številnimi izzivi in povečanim stresom, ki jih spremlja intenzivno učenje in spoznavanje novega življenjskega in delovnega okolja. Ta proces imenujemo prilagajanje.

Soočanje z začetnimi izzivi selitve v tujino zaradi dela v posamezniku izzove iskanje in vzpostavitev delovanja virov in sredstev pomoči, kar doprineset uspešnejši prilagoditvi in dobremu splošnemu počutju posameznikov. Po drugi strani pa neuspešno prilagajanje na novo okolje lahko pri zdomcih povzroči duševno stisko.

Cilj pričujoče disertacije je bolje razumeti izzive in vire in sredstva pomoči, ki vplivajo na raven prilagajanja na življenje in delo v tujini. V tem uvodnem poglavju bomo začeli z opredelitvijo zdomcev, izzivov, s katerimi se soočajo, virov in sredstev pomoči ter prilagajanja na novo okolje. Oprli se bomo na teoretične osnove s področja akulturacije, odnosa med delom in družino ter teorije stresa. Poglavitve bomo zaključili s predstavitvijo podrobnejših raziskovalnih ciljev te doktorske disertacije, pri čemer bomo podali pregled posameznih poglavij naše doktorske disertacije.
Zdomci

Zdomci so opredeljeni kot posamezniki, ki se odločijo za selitev v drugo državo s ciljem, da delajo v novih delovnih okoliščinah. Dosedanje raziskave s področja mednarodnih delovnih izkušenj so skušale opredeliti več vrst zdomcev, med katerimi so najpomembnejši: (1) zdomci, ki so napoteni na delo v tujini s strani svojega matičnega podjetja, (2) zdomci, ki se na delo v tujino podajo na lastno pobudo in za preselitev v tujino uporabljajo lastna finančna sredstva, (3) fleksibilni potniki, ki so zaposleni na kraških mednarodnih nalogah, pri čemer njihovi družinski člani ostanejo v domovini, (4) zdomci na kratkotrajnih mednarodnih nalogah (običajno manj kot eno leto) in (5) mednarodni poslovni potniki, ki delajo na več mednarodnih lokacijah in pogosto poslovno potujejo na različne lokacije brez spremljajočih družinskih članov. Predvsem v zadnjem času je vedno več raziskav, ki obravnavajo različne oblike netradicionalnih vrst zdomcev, ki aktivno delujejo na mednarodnem trgu dela, a imajo drugačne osebne okoliščine, npr. ženske, ki so dobile delo v tujini in kateri v tujino sledijo ostali družinski člani, enostarševske družine, delni upokojenci, istospolno usmerjeni ter enostarševske, razdružene, sestavljene in mešane družine.

Skupna značilnost različnih vrst zdomcev je, da niso toliko povezani s kulturo države gostiteljice, temveč postopoma začnejo razmišljati bolj globalno ter postanejo del mednarodnega in medkulturnega družbenega okolja, ki spodbuja razvoj dimenzije večkulturnosti v njihovi identiteti. Tej zdomski skupnosti pripadajo skupaj z drugimi zdomci iz različnih držav ter z rojaki iz domovine, ki živijo v isti državi gostiteljici.

Prilagajanje zdomcev

Na podlagi literature o akulturaciji in prilagajanju zdomcev vemo, da ima proces prilagajanja zdomcev v državi gostiteljici pomemben vpliv na uspešnost izida preselitve v tujino zaradi novih kariernih izzivov. Dobro poznani model avtorjev Black in Stephens (1989) o prilaganju zdomcev razlikuje tri dimenzije prilagoditve v
mednarodnem okolju: (1) *splošno prilagoditev*, ki se nanaša na prilagoditev delovanja zdomcev v vsakdanjem življenju (npr. organiziranje življenja na splošno), (2) *interakcijsko prilagoditev*, ki je povezana s socialnimi stiki v državi gostiteljici (npr. stiki in druženje z domačini) in (3) *prilagoditev na delo*, ki je povezana z novimi kariernimi izzivi in novim delovnim okoljem (npr. nove delovne naloge, vloge in standardi uspešnosti). Ta model predvideva, da so zdomci dobro prilagojeni na novo kulturno okolje takrat, ko se čutijo povezane z novim okoljem in čutijo psihološko udobje oziroma odsotnost stresa na zgornjih treh dimenzijah zdomske prilagoditve. V literaturi pa so poznane tudi druge definicije prilaganja zdomcev. Na primer avtorja Shaffer in Harrison (2001) opisujeta, da se prilagajanje zdomcev odraža na spremembi lastne identitete, kjer se morajo osebne in družbene vloge na novo opredeliti, saj se morajo načini navezanosti, delovanja in rutine, ki so bili vzpostavljeni v domovini, predragačiti. Tako opredeljevanje prilaganja zdomcev torej vključuje tudi kulturne in osebnostne spremembe.

Glavni tok raziskovalnih načrtov na področju prilagajanja zdomcev je bil večinoma osnovan na statičnem pogledu, pri čemer pa sta bila zapostavljena časovni vidik in spremenljivost različnih ravni prilagajanja v daljšem časovnem obdobju. V zadnjem času pa raziskave vendarle bolj vključujejo tudi časovno razsežnost, ki je značilna za proces prilagajanja, kot tudi dejstvo, da je proces prilagajanja lahko drugačen na različnih področjih prilaganja.

Literatura o življenju in delu zdomcev se v zadnjih letih poglablja in širi, pri čemer je prav prilagajanje zdomcev najbolj zastopana tema v raziskavah s tega področja. Dosedanja zdomska literatura je razkrila tudi pomembne izzive in sredstva pomoči, ki bodo opisani v naslednjih poglavjih.

**Izzivi ter viri in sredstva pomoči**

Selitev v tujino zaradi dela velja za velik življenjski dogodek, ki vključuje različne stresorje in izzive, vključno z novo zaposlitvijo, s samo selitvijo v tujino,
partnerjem, ki se odpoveduje delu v domovini, otroki, ki obiskujejo novo šolo, ločivijo od svojih najbližjih, navajanjem na novo prebivališče, spremembo družinskih rutin, spremembo finančnega stanja, medkulturnimi razlikami in morebitnimi konflikti vlog v družini. Nepoznano in tuje kulturno okolje, odsotnost priprave na selitev in premestitvene podpore, izguba doma, sprememba družbenega okolja, povečane zahteve na različnih področjih, npr. organizacija življenja v novem okolju, prilagajanje na delo, občutki negotovosti, osamljenost ipd., so izzivi, s katerimi se morajo pri selitvi v tujino zaradi dela v določeni meri soočati vsi družinski člani. Vzpostavitev novih socialnih stikov z domačini in drugimi zdomci ter seznanjanje z lokalno kulturo in jeziki je nujno in pomembno za vse družinske člane.

Nekateri stresorji, ki jih povzroča prilagajanje na življenje v novem okolju, lahko ostanejo nerazrešeni in se spremenijo v stalne napetosti, kar lahko vodi v večjo psihosocialno stisko, depresijo, povečano zlorabo alkohola, oslabljeno fizično in duševno zdravje ter manjše zadovoljstvo pri delu in v družini. Čustvene stisce zdomev so povezane z vprašanjem lastne identitete, občutki izkoreninjenosti, ponavljačimi se poslavljanji, izgubami, nenehnimi spremembami in nepojasnjeno žalostjo. Poleg tega lahko pomanjkanje občutka stabilnosti vpliva na psihološko blagostanje zdomev in njihovo dojemanje varnosti in odnosov na splošno.

Ti izzivi in stisce pri zdomcih sprožijo uporabo virov in sredstev pomoči, ki pri pomorejo k obvladovanju odzivanja na te izzive. Med viri pomoči dosedanje raziskave omenjajo pomembnost prisotnosti določenih osebnostnih lastnosti. Te so na primer odprtost, čustvena stabilnost in visoka stopnja družbene pobude. Nadalje so pomembni viri pomoči, ki izhajajo iz družine, npr. dobri odnosi v družini, ki pri pomorejo k boljšemu splošnemu počutju zdomev in njihovih družin. Ohranjanje stikov z družino v domovini ter s prijatelji in bivšimi sodelavci prispeva k premagovanju osamljenosti in občutkov izolacije. Obenem pa je veliko vredno, da
imajo zdomci, ki se soočajo s čustveno stisko, možnost pogovora in da lahko zaprosijo druge ljudi za pomoč.

**Omejitve obstoječe znanstvene literature**

Pregled raziskav s področja prilagajanja zdomcev ponuja empirična spoznanja o izzivih, ki so povezani z mednarodnimi delovnimi izkušnjami, in virih in sredstvih pomoči, ki jih zdomci lahko uporabijo za boljše prilagajanje v svojem novem okolju. Vendar pa ima obstoječa znanstvena literatura tudi določene pomanjkljivosti.

**Prvič**, dosedanje raziskave so se osredotočale na posamezne zdomce, pri tem pa zanemarjale vlogo in vpliv njihovih družinskih članov, čeprav je ravno družina tista, ki naj bi glede na nekatera dosedanja empirična dognanja imela največji vpliv na uspešno prilagoditev zdomcev oziroma na njihov neuspeh. Za boljše razumevanje individualnega prilagajanja zdomcev je zato potrebno empirično proučevanje pokazateljev na družinski ravni. Natančneje, potrebne so dodatne raziskave o tem, katere značilnosti družine spodbujajo oziroma ovirajo prilagajanje in psihološko blagostanje zdomcev.

**Drugič**, kljub splošnemu spoznanju, da je selitev v tujino zaradi dela zahtevna naloga, ki prinaša različne izzive, ki lahko vodijo v duševno stisko in uspešno prilagoditev, je bilo do sedaj zelo malo pozornosti namenjene zdomcem, ki so v državi gostiteljici poiskali psihoterapevtsko pomoč zaradi svojega oslabljenega duševnega zdravja. Ker so empirične študije večinoma uporabljale neklinične vzorce zdomcev, njihovih ugotovitev ni mogoče posplošiti na najbolj ranljive zdomce, torej tiste, ki so bili vključeni v psihoterapevtsko zdravljenje. Posledično je malo znanega o tem, kako se ti zdomci spoprijemajo s svojimi čustvenimi izzivi, kot so npr. pomanjkanje občutka pripadnosti in izkoreninjenosti ter spreminjanje lastne identitete. Zato so potrebne nadalje raziskave o subjektivnih izkušnjah in značilnostih delovanja zdomcev, ki
doživljajo določeno mero duševne stiske, ter o tem, kako doživljajo psihoterapevtsko pomoč v državi gostiteljici.

_Tretjič_, v skladu s prejšnjo omejitvijo obstoječe študije o pomoči in virih pomoči zdomecem ne morejo dovolj natančno pojasniti, kakšne so na primer njihove potrebe glede vrst socialne podpore, ki bi lahko najbolj prispevala k izboljšanju njihovega počutja. Še več, dosedanje raziskave so pokazale, da so empirični dokazi o vlogi določene vrste socialne podpore (socialnoemocionalna oziroma instrumentalna socialna podpora) za uspešno prilagajanje zdomecv zelo različni. Zato so potrebne dodatne raziskave, da bi razumeli, kakšno socialno pomoč potrebujejo zdomeci v njihovem novem okolju, kakšne so njihove potrebe glede socialne pomoči ter katera vrsta socialne pomoči je najučinkovitejša v njihovem novem okolju. Tako bi pridobili spoznanja in smernice o tem, kako je mogoče zdomecem v državi gostiteljici pomagati na najustreznejši in najučinkovitejši način.

_In četrtič_, v povezavi z metodologijo – večina dosedanjih študij o proučevanju izzivov, virov in sredstev pomoči in prilagajanja zdomecv je uporabljala vprašalnike. Čeprav so te raziskave prispevale k obstoječemu razumevanju našega področja raziskovanja, pa le malo dodajajo k razumevanju, kako zdomeci doživljajo svoje izkušnje ter kakšen pomen jim pripisujejo. Takšno stanje je deloma posledica dejstva, da so bile dosedanje študije predvsem kvantitativne narave. Kvalitativne metode lahko podajo boljšo sliko razumevanja izkušenj udeležencev in so zato primernejše in nujne za pridobivanje poglavljenega znanja o tem, kako zdomeci doživljajo svojo izkušnjo življenja in dela v tujini.

_Raziskovalni cilji disertacije_

Pričujoča doktorska disertacija se osredotoča na izzive, viro in sredstv pomoči in prilagajanje zdomecv. Namen naše raziskave je, upoštevajoč omenjene omejitve dosedanje literature s tega področja, razširiti in poglobiti obstoječa dognjanja o izzivih, virih in sredstvih pomoči in prilagajaniu zdomecv.
V prvem delu disertacije (drugo in tretje poglavje) osvetlimo vlogo vpliva delovanja družine na prilagajanje zdomcev. Predstavimo poglobljen pregled obstoječe literature s področja prilagajanja zdomskih družin in posameznih družinskih članov. Nadalje empirično raziskujemo vlogo vidikov delovanja družine na prilagajanje novoprispelih zdomcev.


**Prilagajanje zdomskih družin: pregled empiričnih dokazov o izzivih in virih ter sredstvih pomoči (drugo poglavje)**

V drugem poglavju predstavimo celovit pregled izsledkov dosedanjih raziskav, ki so poskušale pojasniti, kaj se dogaja z zdomci in njihovimi družinami, medtem ko živijo v tujini. Natančneje, naredili smo podroben narativni pregled empiričnih raziskav z različnih področij (npr. kulturna psihologija, družinska psihologija, raziskave stresa) v zadnjih 30 letih (tj. od leta 1988 do 2018) o prilagajanju zdomcev in ostalih družinskih članov – partnerjev in otrok. Predstavili smo ključne izzive (npr. težave pri selitvi, skrb za kariero partnerja, prilagoditev otrok, prilagoditev celotne družine, medkulturne in jezikovne težave) ter tudi vire in sredstva pomoči, ki zdomcem pomagajo v procesu...
prilagajanja (npr. osebnostni viri pomoči, kot so odprtost, čustvena stabilnost, socialna pobuda; družinski viri pomoči, kot sta povezanost in prilagodljivost; ter socialni viri pomoči).

Naš celoviti pregled dosedanje literature o obravnavani tematiki je privedel do naslednjih zaključkov. Prvič, sistematičnih raziskav je premalo, saj dosedanje študije bodisi niso imеле zadostne teoretične osnove bodisi so v veliki meri zanemarjale metodo zbiranja podatkov glede nekega pojava s strani več ocenjevalcev. Zdomska literatura potrebuje celovito teorijo o prilagajanju zdomskih družin, ki bi vključevala in združevala več teoretskih perspektiv, vključno s področjem oblikovanja kulturne identitete, ter pojasnila vpliv kulture domovine in države gostiteljice zdomskih družin. Drugič, večina študij ni namenila dovolj pozornosti opredelitvi pojma družine ali pa ni upoštevala kulturnega vidika preseljevanja. Tretjič, potrebne so longitudinalne študije, ki bi obenem vključevale vse družinske člane, saj je prilagajanje proces, ki se razvija skozi čas in ga zato ni mogoče dovolj razložiti s presečnimi študijami.

Povzetek ugotovitev glede izzivov in virov ter sredstev pomoči zdomskih družin

Na podlagi empiričnih dokazov študij, vključenih v naš pregled, lahko podamo naslednje ugotovitve o izzivih in stresorjih, ki spremljajo zdomsko življenje družine. Ti izzivi so naslednji: soočenje z novo kulturo, pomanjkanje priprave pred selitvijo, pomanjkanje finančne podpore, izguba doma, sprememba družbenega okolja, povečane zahteve, povezane z organizacijo življenja na novi lokaciji (npr. nov šolski sistem, spoznavanje lokalne kulture in jezika, vsakodnevne težave, novo delovno okolje), občutki negotovosti in izkoreninjenosti ter osamljenost. Ob tem je treba omeniti tudi določene ugotovljene razlike med družinskimi člani. Otroke in mladostniki najbolj skrbi vključevanje v nove šole in ustvarjanje novih poznanstev, ne pa toliko učenje lokalnega jezika in oblikovanje socialnih mrež zunaj šole. Posamezniki, ki so v tujino sledili partnerju, ki je v tujini dobil delo, sami pa so se morali odpovedati karieri v domovini, se po drugi strani ukvarjajo z iskanjem novih načinov organizacije.
družinskega življenja, z učenjem kulture in jezika države gostiteljice, z iskanjem nove zaposlitve ter se spopadajo z osamljenostjo in soočajo izgubo zunanjih profesionalnih identitete. Za celotno zdomsko družino je pomembno, da njeni družinski člani vzpostavijo socialne stike z lokalnimi skupnostmi in drugimi zdomci in da čim bolje spoznajo lokalno kulturo in usvojijo jezike okolja. Sama selitev v tujino in mednarodne izkušnje lahko družinske člane še dodatno povežejo med seboj, kar je pomemben pozitiven izid zdomstva, vendar pa se lahko družina kot celota počuti tudi osamljeno in odmaknjeno.

Naš pregled dosedanje literature podaja tudi opis virov in sredstev pomoči, ki jih posamezniki in družine lahko uporabljajo za spopadanje z opisanimi izzivi. To so na primer osebnostni viri pomoči, kot so odprtost, čustvena stabilnost, visoka stopnja družbene spodbude, ali pa družinskim viri, kot so fleksibilnost, prilagodljivost in povezanost družine. Dobri odnosi v družini in zunaj nje prispevajo k boljšemu počutju zdomcev njihovih družinskih članov. Socialni viri pomoči, kot so vzdrževanje stikov z razširjeno družino, s prijatelji in z nekdanjimi sodelavci, pomagajo premagati občutke osamljenosti zdomskih družin. Pogovor z drugimi ljudmi, ki potrebujejo čustveno podporo in dosegljivost pomoči pri vsakdanjem delu, tudi zmanjšuje čustvene stiske zdomcev. Za otroke je ključno uspešno vključevanje v šolo, za podporo partnerjev stiki z domačini, za zdomce na novem delovnem mestu pa podpora njihovega delodajalca. Izzivi, uporaba virov in sredstev pomoči ter prilagajanje pa imajo lahko tudi medsebojni vpliv med družinskim člani, na primer subjektivno psihološko blagostanje ali čustvena stiska enega družinskega člana lahko vpliva na druge družinske člane.

Naslednji zaključek se nanaša na metodološke značilnosti študij, ki so bile vključene v naš pregled. V zadnjem času se pojavlja vse več kvalitativnih študij, ki poskušajo osvetliti subjektivno izkušnjo družinskih članov, ki živijo v tujini, ter študije, ki uporabljajo tako kvantitativne kot kvalitativne metode. Kvalitativne študije s ciljem razumevanja kompleksnosti delovanja zdomcev za zbiranje podatkov večinoma
uporabljajo metodo intervjujev. Raziskave o zdomskih družinah in otrocih tretje kulture so še v povojih, zato lahko prav kvalitativni pristopi pripomorejo k boljšem razumevanju življenjskih izkušenj zdomcev. Ugotavljamo, da dosedanje študije niso v zadostni meri upoštevale vpliva kulture države gostiteljice, obenem pa so empirične etnografske področne študije zelo redke. Pri kvantitativnem pristopu je večina študij uporabila presečne modele, hkrati pa primanjkuje longitudinalnih študij.

Nazadnje podajamo še ugotovitev na vsebinski ravni – večina pregledanih študij ni pojasnila definicije družine, uporabljene v študiji. Tradicionalna opredelitev družine, ki vključuje starše in otroke, dandanes ni več uporabna zaradi spreminjajočih se družinskih oblik. Potrebna je natančnejša opredelitev zdomske družine, ki bi vključevala tudi netradicionalne družinske oblike, kot so zunajpartnerske zakonske zveze, enostarševske družine ter družine, katerih člani prebivajo na različnih lokacijah.

**Prilagajanje in psihološko blagostanje zdomcev: študija o dojemanju preselitve in delovanju družine (tretje poglavje)**

V tej empirični študiji smo proučevali, kako so zdomci dojemali preselitve in značilnosti delovanja družine kot vira in sredstva pomoči za uspešnejše individualno prilagajanje zdomcev, za zmanjšanje njihove duševne stiske ter povečanje zadovoljstva z življenjem. Uporabili smo vzorec 44 novoprispelih zdomcev, ki so imeli družino in so se v tujino (Belgijo) preselili pred kratkim (v povprečju pred malo manj kot tremi meseci). Kot teoretično osnovo smo uporabili poznani model ABCX (Hill, 1958). Izvedli smo empirično raziskavo o povezovanosti dojemanja preselitve in družinskega delovanja na eni strani ter ravnjo prilagoditve novoprispelih zdomcev, njihovega psihološkega delovanja in zadovoljstva z življenjem na drugi strani. Domnevali smo, da bo dojemanje preselitve kot obvladljive povezano z boljšimi rezultati (tj. uspešnejša raven prilagoditve, nižja raven duševne stiske in večje zadovoljstvo z življenjem). Pričakovali smo tudi, da bodo boljša/višja stopnja družinske komunikacije, zadovoljstvo z družino, povezanost družinskih članov
in fleksibilnost v družini povezani z nižjimi stopnjami duševne stiske (depresija, anksioznost, stres), boljšo prilagoditvijo (splošna prilagoditev, interakcijska prilagoditev in prilagoditev na delo) ter večjim zadovoljstvom z življenjem. V skladu z modelom ABCX nas je zanimalo tudi medsebojno vplivanje dojemanja preselitve in značilnosti delovanja družine pri napovedi navedenih pokazateljev izida preselitve. Za testiranje svojih napovedi smo uporabili hierarhično večkratno regresijsko analizo.

Rezultati so pokazali, da so bili zdomci, ki so svojo nedavno preselitev dojemali kot obvladljivo, bolje prilagojeni na nove splošne življenjske pogoje v Belgiji, doživljali so nižjo raven duševne stiske, predvsem so bili manj anksioznii in doživljali nižjo raven stresa. Obstajal je tudi trend, da so bili zdomci, ki so svojo preselitev dojemali kot obvladljivo, bolj zadovoljni s svojim življenjem, vendar so za potrditev te ugotovitve potrebne dodatne raziskave. Preverjanje vloge značilnosti družinskega delovanja je pokazalo, da je boljša povezanost v družini povezana z uspešnejšo splošno prilagoditvijo na novo življenje v tujini, prav tako pa je prišlo do pozitivnega trenda med družinsko povezanostjo in zadovoljstvom z življenjem. Po drugi strani pa je bila večja fleksibilnost v družini povezana z nižjim življenjskim zadovoljstvom, boljša komunikacija v družini pa je bila povezana z višjo mero anksioznosti. Manjše zadovoljstvo z družino je bilo povezano z uspešnejšo prilagoditvijo na novo delovno okolje. Vendar pa so bili zdomci, ki so bili bolj zadovoljni s svojo družino, manj zaskrbljeni. Ugotovitve te študije so potrdile naše napovedi glede pričakovanih glavnih učinkov, s čimer smo empirično podprli teoretične predpostavke teoretičnega modela ABCX, vendar pa so bili nekateri rezultati tudi nepričakovani. Zlasti medsebojnega vplivanja subjektivnega dojemanja preselitve in značilnosti družinskega delovanja kot vira pomoči pri napovedovanju rezultatov v naši študiji ni bilo mogoče najti.

Socialna podpora, prilagajanje in duševna stiska zdomcev, ki so deležni psihoterapevtske pomoči (četrto poglavje)
V tej empirični študiji smo raziskovali medsebojne povezave med razpoložljivostjo socialne podpore, potrebami socialne podpore, prilagajanjem in duševno stisko. Uporabili smo vzorec 97 zdomcev, ki so bili deležni psihoterapevtske pomoči v Bruslju v Belgiji, kjer so v povprečju živeli 8,7 leta. Cilj te študije je bil raziskati medsebojne odnose med procesi socialne podpore, prilagajanjem in duševnimi stiskami.

Natančneje, raziskovali smo (1) povezavo med prilagajanjem zdomcev (tj. splošno prilagoditvijo, interakcijsko prilagoditvijo in prilagoditvijo na delo) in prisotnostjo duševne stiske (tj. depresijo, anksioznostjo in stresom), (2) povezavo med percepcijo zdomcev o razpoložljivosti socialnoemocionalne in instrumentalne podpore ter njihovim prilagajanjem ter (3) ugotavljanje morebitnega posredovalnega učinka potreb zdomcev pri prejemanju socialnoemocionalne in instrumentalne podpore pri povezavi med razpoložljivostjo socialne podpore in prilagajanjem. Za preverjanje napovedi smo uporabili hierarhično večkratno regresijsko analizo.

Ugotovitve so pokazale, da je bilo prilagajanje zdomcev pomembno povezano z duševno stisko, vendar je to veljalo le za prilagoditev na novo delo. Natančneje, nižja raven prilagoditve zdomcev na novo delovno okolje je bila povezana z večjo duševno stisko (tj. depresijo, anksioznostjo in stresom). Med splošnim in interakcijskim prilagajanjem zdomcev na eni strani in med duševno stisko na drugi strani ni bilo pomembne povezave. Nadalje, analiza vloge socialne podpore pri prilagajanju izseljencev je pokazala, da je bila zaznana razpoložljivost socialnoemocionalne podpore pozitivno povezana z interakcijskim prilagajanjem in prilagoditvijo na delo, ne pa tudi s splošno prilagoditvijo. Naše ugotovitve so tudi pokazale, da so bile višje ravni zaznane razpoložljivosti instrumentalne podpore povezane z boljšo splošno prilagoditvijo, vendar le za tiste zdomce, ki so tudi potrebovali več instrumentalne podpore. Z drugimi besedami, skladnost med stopnjo zaznane razpoložljive socialne instrumentalne podpore zdomcev in količino instrumentalne podpore, ki so jo potrebovali pri
obravnavanju svojega položaja, je bila pomembnejša za prilagajanje na vsakodnevne življenjske pogoje v novi državi kot zgodj sama razpoložljivost instrumentalne podpore. Ta spoznanja so v skladu s sodobnimi raziskavami o nudenju socialne podpore, ki poudarjajo pomen kakovosti socialne podpore ter zagotavljanje podpore, ki ustreza potrebam prejemnika za določeno vrsto podpore. Neustrezna podpora oziroma nudena socialna podpora, ki ni v skladu s potrebami zdomcev po taki obliki pomoči, bi namreč lahko ogrozila njihov občutek neodvisnosti, kompetentnosti in samozadostnosti, kar so zelo pomembni elementi v okviru kompleksnosti zdomskega življenja in s tem povezanimi psihološkimi izzivi, ki jih zdomstvo prinaša.

Ta študija prinaša svež prispevek k zdomski literaturi, saj osvetljuje ranljivost zdomcev za duševno stisko in prinaša boljše razumevanje o tem, katera vrsta socialne podpore je koristnejša za tiste zdomce, ki so deležni psihoterapevtske pomoči. S tem neposredno dopolnjuje vrzel med obstoječimi raziskavami, ki se osredotočajo na neklinične vzorce zdomcev.

**V iskanju prepoznavanja zdomske kompleksnosti:**

**interpretativna fenomenološka analiza psihoterapevtske izkušnje**

*(peto poglavje)*

V skladu z enim od glavnih ciljev te disertacije smo v tej kvalitativni študiji raziskovali psihoterapijo kot vrsto novega vira pomoči, ki ga lahko zdomci uporabijo v državi gostiteljici, kadar doživljajo duševno stisko. Na vzorcu petih zdomcev smo se osredotočili na razumevanje doživete subjektivne psihoterapevtske izkušnje ter pomena, ki so ga zdomci pripisali svoji psihoterapevtski izkušnji v okviru svojega zdomskega načina življenja. Dosedanja literatura je zabeležila, da lahko zdomci, ki v državi gostiteljici doživljajo duševno stisko, poščejo strokovnjake za duševno zdravje za pomoč pri svojih izzivih prilagajanja bodisi v povezavi z njihovim delom, šolanjem ali interakcijo z domačini. Vendar pa proučevanje psihoterapevtske izkušnje zdomcev do sedaj še ni bilo empirično raziskano. Naša študija je nastala na podlagi ugotovitev
raziskav o izkušnjah zdomcev, o obstoju in naravi čustvene stiske zdomcev in študijah, ki so se osredotočale na dejavnike, ki prispevajo k uspešnim kliničnim intervencijam z zdomci (npr. multikulturen usmerjenost psihoterapevta, kulturne razsežnosti psihoterapije in psihoterapevtov).

Za zbiranje podatkov s pomočjo polstrukturiranih intervjujev in analizo podatkov smo uporabili kvalitativno metodo interpretativne fenomenološke analize (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Kot rezultat analize podatkov, ki temelji na naših petih intervjujih z zdomci, smo iz pripovedi izseljencev o svoji psihoterapevtski izkušnji izpeljali naslednje teme: 'Prepoznavanje zdomske kompleksnosti', 'Osebnostna rast nasproti odvisnosti', 'Vztrajanje nasproti spremembi', 'Globalno misleči terapevt' in 'Pomembnost poznavanja jezika'. Kot splošna skupna psihoterapevtska izkušnja, ki je izšla iz analize, je bila prepozdana znatna potreba zdomcev po prejetju prepoznavnosti svoje zdomske kompleksnosti s strani terapevta. Nadalje je naša študija pokazala tudi na pomen lastnih zdomskih izkušenj psihoterapevtov in njihovega poznavanja posebnosti zdomskega načina življenja. S tem so spoznanja v tej naši študiji doprinesla k literaturi o kliničnih intervencijah za zdomce, predvsem glede pozitivnega vpliva terapevtov osebne izkušnje na učinkovitost kliničnih intervencij z zdomci.

Ta študija je prispevala subjektiven pogled zdomcev o svoji psihoterapevtski izkušnji k obstoječim spoznanjem o psihološkemu blagostanju zdomcev, s čimer je pripomogla k boljšemu razumevanju zdomskega konteksta ter načina, kako je zdomcem mogoče učinkovito pomagati pri premagovanju njihove duševne stiske. Doprinos k razumevanju psihoterapevtske izkušnje zdomcev v državi gostiteljici je edinstven in pomemben prispevek te študije na področju raziskav duševnega zdravja zdomcev.

Na novo prebujeni občutek o sebi: izkušnje zdomcev o procesu relacijske družinske terapije (šesto poglavje)

Še vedno v skladu z enim od glavnihciljev te disertacije, tj. proučevanjem psihoterapije kot vira pomoči za zdomce v primeru duševne stiske, smo se v tej svoji
dalši kvalitativni študiji posvetili izkušnjam zdomcev o relacijski družinski terapiji, da bi s tem prispevali k sodobni klinični praksi in pridobili dodatne vpogledy v kompleksnost zdomske izkušnje.

Temeljna predpostavka modela relacijske družinske terapije avtorja Christiana Gostečnika (2017) je vnovična vzpostavitev posameznikovega jaza, ki temelji na odnosu med posameznikom in terapevtom. Relacijska družinska terapija obravnava celovitost posameznikovega obstoja na sistemski, medosebni in intrapsihični ravni znotraj njegove relacijske matrike. Ta pristop se je zato zdel še posebej primeren za proučevanje psihoterapevtskih izkušenj zdomcev in izzivov na različnih področjih njihovega čustvenega delovanja, kot so na primer občutek pripadnosti, izkoreninjenje in sprememba identitete.

V tej študiji smo uporabili kvalitativno metodo interpretativne fenomenološke analize. Podatke smo zbrali iz polstrukturiranih intervjujev s petimi zdomci, potem ko so opravili 12 srečanj s terapevtom relacijske družinske terapije. Na osnovi analize podatkov o psihoterapevtski izkušnji zdomcev so se oblikovale naslednje teme: 'Pomembnost za zdomce, da so prepoznani kot celovita oseba', 'Nova dimenzija bližine z ustvarjeno razdaljo', 'Sprostitev obrambnih mehanizmov' in 'Vnovična povezanost zdomcev samih s seboj'. Ugotovitve so pokazale, da je aktivna vključenost terapevta v vzajemno rast omogočila zdomcem, da so se počutili sprejete in da so laže sprejemali svojo lastno zdomsko kompleksnost. Pomen terapevtskega odnosa in vloge terapevta, kot so ga doživeli udeleženci v naši raziskavi, potrjuje temeljno izhodišče relacijske družinske terapije, kjer je razumevanje odnosa z drugimi in s terapevtom najpomembnejši terapevtski pojav, ki omogoča izkušnjo spremembe. Pozitivna naravnanost terapevta in odločenost, da si zaslužijo novo, drugačno življenje v državi gostiteljici, je omogočila zdomcem, da so znova doživeli občutek lastne zmožnosti. To je bilo za njih izredno pomembno, saj je odtujenost zelo pogost občutek, povezan z zdomstvom. Sposobnost zdomcev, da so doživeli bližino in povezavo z drugo osebo v
tuji državi, je nagovarjala njihovo notranjo potrebo po odnosih in povezanosti. Za zdomce je značilno, da se običajno počutijo enako odtujeni od svoje domače kot od gostiteljske kulture. Terapevtovo prepoznavanje občutkov izkoreninjenosti in pomanjkanja pripadnosti kot del njihove zdomske celovitosti je imelo pozitiven vpliv na zdomce, saj so bili slišani in razumljeni v svoji nejasnosti glede tega, kjer je pravzaprav njihov dom.

**Splošna diskusija - skupen povzetek ugotovitev glede izzivov, virov in sredstev pomoči in prilagajanja zdomcev ter teoretična razmišljanja**

(sedmo poglavje)

Pričujoča doktorska disertacija se je osredotočila na izzive, vire in sredstva pomoči in prilagajanje zdomcev. Namen naše raziskave je bil, upoštevajoč omenjene omejitve dosedanjo literature s tega področja, razširiti in poglobiti obstoječa dognanja o izzivih, virih in sredstvih pomoči in prilagajanju zdomcev.

**Vidik družinskega delovanja pri prilagajanju zdomcev**

V skladu z enim od glavnih ciljev te disertacije nas je posebej zanimalo, kakšno vlogo ima družina kot vir pomoči za uspešno prilagajanje zdomcev. Na podlagi ugotovitev v drugem in tretjem poglavju smo prišli do naslednjih zaključkov. Prvič, naša študija o novoprispelih zdomcih je pokazala, da je družinsko delovanje lahko pomemben vir pomoči pri individualnem prilagajanju zdomcev, kar pomeni, da imajo določene značilnosti družine zdomcev potencial za spodbujanje ali spodkopavanje pozitivnega izida preselitve. Drugič, med pokazatelji, ki delujejo na ravni družine, so za uspešen izid preselitve ugotovitev v drugem in tretjem poglavju naše disertacije poudarili vlogo družinske povezanosti (tj. čustvenih vezi med posameznimi družinski člani) in zadovoljstva z družino (tj. stopnjo zadovoljstva družinskih članov v različnimi vidiki delovanja družine). Še posebej naša empirična študija, ki je predstavljena v tretjem poglavju, je pokazala, da je bila družinska povezanost pozitivno povezana s
splošno prilagoditvijo, prav tako pa je bila zabeležena pozitivna povezava z zadovoljstvom z življenjem. Ta ugotovitev potrjuje doganja prejšnjih raziskav, ki so pokazale pozitiven vpliv družinske povezanosti na sociokulturno prilagajanje zdomskih otrok in mladostnikov ter na kakovost življenja. Podobno je tudi naša raziskava (tretje poglavje) pokazala, da je večje zadovoljstvo družine povezano z boljšo prilagoditvijo na delo in manjšo anksioznostjo, kar sovpadla z ugotovitvami prejšnjih raziskav (drugo poglavje) glede pozitivne povezave zadovoljstva z družino in drugih pokazateljev pozitivnih izidov preselitve, kot sta prilagajanje in splošno zadovoljstvo z življenjem. 

Tretjič, naša empirična raziskava o družinskem delovanju kot viru pomoči za zdomce (v tretjem poglavju) je pokazala tudi nekatere presenetljive in nepričakovane ugotovitve. Prejšnje raziskave s področja prilagajanja zdomskih družin (kot je opisano v drugem poglavju) so pokazale pomembno vlogo dobre družinske komunikacije za uspešno prilagajanje zdomcev, kjer so vsi člani namenjeni v isto smer in pri družinskih odločitvah obravnavani kot enako pomembni. Vendar pa naša raziskava ni podprla teh ugotovitev. Rezultati naše študije so namreč pokazali povezanost med boljšo družinsko komunikacijo in večjo aksioznostjo pri novoprispelih zdomcih. Poleg tega je bila fleksibilnost družine (tj. vloge, pravila in način vodenja v družini), ki je bila v prejšnjih raziskavah ugotovljena kot spodbudna pri uspešnem prilagajanju zdomcev, v naši študiji povezana z nižjo stopnjo zadovoljstva z življenjem. Nepredvidene in nepričakovane ugotovitve so podrobneje obravnavane v naslednjem razdelku, zlasti o pomenu časa in variabilnosti virov ter izidov preselitve.

Časovna dimenzija in spremenljivost pri prilagajanju

Naša empirična študija z novoprispelimi zdomci, ki so se v Belgijo v povprečju preselili pred malo manj kot tremi meseci (glej tretje poglavje), je pokazala, da so zdomci, ki so bivali v državi gostiteljici dlje časa, doživeli več duševnih stisk, še posebej anksioznosti in depresije. Obenem so bili manj zadovoljni s svojim življenjem in so imeli slabšo družinsko komunikacijo. V nasprotni s tem pa je naša empirična
študija z zdomci, ki so bili deležni psihoterapevtske pomoči (glej četrto poglavje) in ki so v Belgiji bivali povprečno 8,7 leta, pokazala, da so zdomci, ki so v tej državi živeli dlje časa, doživljali manj duševnih stisk in bili bolje prilagojeni na splošno življenje, obenem pa so bili tudi bolje prilagojeni v smislu stikov z domačini v državi gostiteljici.

Na podlagi obeh empiričnih študij (glej tudi naš pregled literature v drugem poglavju) lahko torej povzamemo, da te ugotovitve podpirajo tezo o tem, da naj bi se prilagoditev zdomcev, pa tudi duševna stiska in zadovoljstvo z življenjem sčasoma izboljšali. V skladu z nedavnimi predpostavkami naj bi prilagoditev zdomcev, ki jih na delo v tujino napotijo njihova podjetja, dosegla svoj vrh po dveh do petih letih bivanja v tujini. Posebej prvih šest mesecev po preselitvi naj bi zdomce spremljale težave, vzponi in padci, občutki negotovosti in pospešeno učenje na različnih področjih. Naše ugotovitve lahko razložimo tudi v luči individualnih in družinskih stresnih modelov, kot je t. i. dvojni stresni model ABCX (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983), ki predvideva kopičenje izzivov, pa tudi virov in sredstev pomoči, kar posledično spodbuja doseganje pozitivnejših izidov preselitve v nekem določenem obdobju.

Ugotovitve v naši raziskavi pa so pokazale tudi nekatere nedoslednosti glede vključenih pokazateljev izida preselitve. To je sicer skladno z literaturo o prilagajanju zdomcev, ki ga zaenkrat še tudi ni zagotovila doslednih ugotovitev. Možen razlog je v tem, da je prilagajanje zelo dinamičen proces, ki se nenehno spreminja, zato tudi izzivi, viri pomoči in rezultati med seboj niso linearno povezani. Obenem je treba upoštevati tudi veliko spremenljivost izzivov, virov in sredstev pomoči ter pokazateljev dobrega izida preselitve v tujino zaradi dela, da bi lahko v zadostni meri pojasnili ta proces nenehnih sprememb. Zdomci, ki v tujini živijo dlje časa, lahko v svojem procesu prilagajanja doživijo več nihanj in morda dosežejo tudi več padcev in vzponov na svoji prilagoditveni krivulji. Nekatere nedosledne ugotovitve o povezavi med družinskim delovanjem in našimi pokazatelji uspešnega izida preselitve (glej tretje poglavje) je mogoče pojasniti tudi v luči naslednje utemeljitve. Ugotovitve v naši študiji so na
primer pokazale povezanost med boljšo komunikacijo v družini in višjo stopnjo anksioznosti ter večjim zadovoljstvom z družinskim življenjem in nižjo stopnjo anksioznosti. To je lahko tudi posledica zgoraj omenjenega dinamičnega procesa prilagajanja, ki se hitro spreminja glede na različne pokazatelje (tj. vire in sredstva pomoči in pokazatelje izidov preselitve). Zdomci namreč niso zgolj bolj ali manj prilagojeni na novo okolje, pomembno sta tudi njihovo čustveno doživljanje in njihova morebitna duševna stiska.

**Izzivi, socialna podpora in prilagajanje zdomcev, ki so deležni psihoterapevtske pomoči**

Drugi pomemben cilj te doktorske disertacije je bil raziskati razpoložljive vire in sredstva pomoči za zdomce, predvsem vlogo socialnoemocionalne in instrumentalne socialne podpore. Skupne ugotovitve so pokazale, da je bila pri zdomcih, ki so bili deležni psihoterapevtske pomoči, (1) nižja stopnja prilagajanja na delo povezana z večjo duševno stisko, (2) zaznana razpoložljivost socialnoemocionalne podpore je bila pozitivno povezana z interakcijsko prilagoditvijo in prilagoditvijo na delo in (3) potreba po instrumentalni podpori je vplivala na razmerje med zaznano razpoložljivostjo instrumentalne podpore in splošno prilagoditvijo, tako da so bile višje ravni zaznane razpoložljivosti instrumentalne podpore povezane z boljšo splošno prilagoditvijo, vendar le pri tistih zdomcij, ki so poročali, da potrebujejo instrumentalno podporo. Zlasti povezava med prilagoditvijo na delo in duševno stisko se je v naši doktorski raziskavi izkazala za pomembno, saj sta dve naši raziskavi razkrili to povezavo (glej tretje in četrto poglavje). Čeprav povezave med prilagoditvijo na delo in duševno stisko (ugotovitev v četrtem poglavju) ni mogoče neposredno primerjati z obstoječimi ugotovitvami, saj doslej ni bilo opravljenih raziskav s kliničnimi vzorci zdomcev, ki bi proučevali to povezavo, pa je ta ugotovitev skladna z ugotovitvami naše študije z novopriselimi zdomci (glej tretje poglavje) in predhodnimi študijami, ki so uporable neklinične vzorce. Naše proučevanje povezav med pokazatelji izidov (tj. tremi področji

259
prilagoditve, duševnimi stiskami in zadovoljstvom z življenjem) je namreč pokazalo, da so zdomci, ki so bili bolje prilagojeni na svoje novo delovno okolje, manj depresivni. Te ugotovitve je mogoče razložiti v luči prejšnjih študij, ki so pokazale, da je področje dela in poklicnega vzpona osrednjega pomena v življenju zdomcev. Prav nove priložnosti za delo v mednarodnem okolju so eden najpogostejših razlogov za selitev v tujino. Večina zdomcev v naši študiji (glej tretje poglavje) se je prav tako preselila zaradi novih poslovnih priložnosti v tujini, zato lahko domnevamo, da je prilagoditev na novo delovno okolje osrednjega pomena. Zaradi uspešne prilagoditve na delo so lahko zdomci tudi bolj pozitivni glede svojega življenja in zato manj depresivni. Ta povezava je bila potrjena tudi v naši študiji z novoprispelimi zdomci, kjer so zdomci, ki so bili bolj zadovoljni z različnimi vidiki svojega življenja, doživljali manj duševnih stisk, in obratno.

Naša empirična študija z zdomci, ki so bili deležni psihoterapevtske pomoči (glej četrto poglavje), je pokazala pozitivno povezavo med zaznano razpoložljivostjo socialnoemocionalne podpore na eni strani ter interakcijsko prilagoditvijo in prilagoditvijo na delo na drugi strani. Te ugotovitve lahko povežemo s prejšnjimi študijami, ki so poudarile, da je ključnega pomena zaznana razpoložljivost kakovosti in ne količina socialnih interakcij in podpore. Za zdomce, ki so deležni psihoterapevtske pomoči, je prav psihoterapija priložnost za pogovor o posebnih psiholoških izzivih in tudi za razvoj strategij obvladovanja težav v novi državi. Ob prejemanju socialnoemocionalne podpore od svojih terapevtov, pa tudi od sodelavcev, prijateljev in družine, tako lahko razmislijo o svojih življenjskih pričakovanjih in prilagodijo svoja prepričanja, da bi izboljšali svoj odnos do svojega trenutnega položaja.

**Psihoterapevtska izkušnja in psihoterapija kot vir pomoči**

Del drugega glavnega cilja pričujoče disertacije je bil proučiti psihoterapevtsko izkušnjo, zlasti izkušnjo modela relacijske družinske terapije kot sredstva pomoči za
zdomce v državi gostiteljici, in pomen, ki so ga zdomci pripisali tem izkušnjam v svojem zdomskem kontekstu.

Naslednje teme so izšle iz analize podatkov dveh kvalitativnih študij, ki so raziskovale zdomsko psihoterapevtsko izkušnjo: 'Prepoznavanje zdomske kompleksnosti', 'Osebna rast nasproti odvisnosti', 'Vztrajanje nasproti spremembi', 'Globalno misleči terapevt', 'Pomembnost poznavanja jezika' (glej peto poglavje) ter 'Pomembnost za zdomce, da so prepoznani kot celovita oseba', 'Nova dimenzija bližine z ustvarjeno razdaljo', 'Sprostitev obrambnih mehanizmov' in 'Vnovična povezanost zdomcev samih s seboj' (glej šesto poglavje).

Zlasti temi 'Prepoznavanje zdomske kompleksnosti' (peto poglavje) in 'Pomembnost za zdomce, da so prepoznani kot celovita oseba' (šesto poglavje), se zdita skladni z ugotovitvijo naše presečne študije z zdomci, ki so bili deležni psihoterapevtske pomoči (četrto poglavje). V tej študiji se je pokazalo, da so bili zdomci, ki so zaznavali več razpoložljive socialnoemocionalne podpore (tj. v obliki psihoterapije), bolje prilagojeni na novo socialno okolje, imeli so več stikov z domačini in obenem so bili bolje prilagojeni na svoje novo delo. Natančneje pa so v okviru naše kvalitativne študije, predstavljene v petem poglavju, zdomci poročali, da so doživeli psihoterapijo kot prostor, kjer so lahko pokazali svoje slabosti brez straha, da bi bili obsojani. Izrazili so potrebo po prejemanju prepoznavanja svojega položaja, pri čemer so se lahko sprostili v celovitosti svojega zdomskega življenja. Cenili so, da jih je terapevt razumel v njihovih trenutnih okoliščinah zdomskega življenja in da jim je nudil podporo za njihova prizadevanja, da jim uspe v državi gostiteljici. To je pripomoglo k temu, da so se lahko znova povezali s svojimi občutki in mislimi in so bili sami sebi dovolj, ne da bi se trudili prilegati novem okolju na vnaprej določen in pričakovan način.

Poleg tega se je pozitivna povezava med zaznano razpoložljivostjo socialnoemocionalne podpore in interakcijskega prilagajanja (ugotovitev študije v
četrtem poglavju) odrazila tudi v temi 'Pomembnost poznavanja jezika’ (peto poglavje),
ki je zabeležila ključno vlogo poznavanja jezika države gostiteljice za dobro počutje in
delovanje v vsakodnevnem življenju, hkrati pa so tudi naše ugotovitve v drugem
poglavju potrdile pomembnost poznavanja lokalnega jezika, ki bodisi spodbuja razvoj
interakcije zdomcev z domačini bodisi se lahko zdomci zaradi nepoznavanja jezika
čutijo še bolj odtujene v državi gostiteljici.

Tudi temo 'Vztrajanje nasproti sprememi’ (glej peto poglavje) lahko
razumemo v povezavi z drugimi ugotovitvami naše disertacije. V tej temi so zdomci
izražali svojo potrebo po potrditvi, da je njihova odločitev za selitev v tujino prava, in
da ne bi čutili pritiska, da morajo narediti velike spremembe glede svojega trenutnega
življenjskega položaja. Prizadevanje za nove poklicne priložnosti je eden glavnih
motivov za selitev v tujino (kar je izpostavljeno v drugem, tretjem in četrtem poglavju),
zato sta delo in prilagoditev na delo za zdomce osrednjega pomena. V svoji študiji z
zdomci, ki so bili deležni psihoterapevtske pomoči (četrto poglavje), smo ugotovili tudi,
da so zdomci, ki so bili bolje prilagojeni na delo, doživljali manj duševnih stisk.

Naša kvalitativna študija o psihoterapevtski izkušnji relacijske družinske terapije
(glej šesto poglavje) je pokazala, kako pomembno je za zdomce, da se počutijo blizu in
povezani z drugimi ljudmi. Zdomci so poročali o svoji subjektivni izkušnji in
razmišljanju glede svojih izkušenj o bližnjih odnosih (kot je na primer terapevtski
odnos) in skušali razumeti različne oblike odnosov in povezovanja med ljudmi, kot je
predstavljeno v temi nova dimenzija bližine z ustvarjeno razdaljo. Ker imamo ljudje
potrebo po povezovanju z drugimi ljudmi in po pripadnosti drugim, se zdomci pogosto
soočajo s temeljnimi psihološkimi potrebami človekovega delovanja, torej povezanostjo
in pripadnostjo.

Še vedno z osredotočanjem na pomembne odnose je naša študija z
novoprispelimi zdomci (tretje poglavje) pokazala, da so bili zdomci, ki so izhajali iz
družine, kjer je vladala večja povezanost v družini, bolje prilagojeni splošnim
življenjskim pogojem v Belgiji, in da so zdomci, ki so bili bolj zadovoljni s svojo družino, doživljali manj anksioznosti.

Ugotovitve v naših kvalitativnih študijah o psihoterapevtski izkušnji dopolnjujejo literaturo o strokovni pomoči globalno mobilnim osebam. Zdomci si morajo namreč nenehno prizadevati, da bi premagali izzive svojega zdomskega življenja, se uspešno soočati s spremembo lastne identitete in se truditi, da bi bilo življenje prijetnejše in lažje. Dosedanjé raziskave o duševnem zdravju zdomcev v tujini (glej drugo in tretje poglavje) so pokazale, da lahko povečan stres vodi v depresijo, anksioznost, težave s spanjem, pomanjkanje pozornosti, hiperaktivnost, ipd. Če se zdomci ne posvetijo odpravljanju in premagovanju tovrstnih težav, se te lahko razvijejo v splošno poslabšanje duševnega zdravja. Tudi ugotovitve v naših empiričnih študijah (tretje in četrto poglavje) so podprle obstoj duševnih stisk pri zdomcih. Študija o zdomcih, ki so bili deležni psihoterapevtske pomoči (četrto poglavje), je pokazala, da je povečana duševna stiska povezana z nižjo prilagoditvijo pri delu, študija o novopriseljenceh zdomcih (tretje poglavje) pa je pokazala, da je povečana duševna stiska, zlasti v obliki anksioznosti in stresa, povezana z njihovim dojemanjem selitve v tujino kot težke in zahtevne. Še posebej tema 'Sprostitev obrambnih mehanizmov' (glej šesto poglavje) poroča o telesnih občutkih zdomcev in nekaterih simptomih anksioznosti, s čimer podpira pomembnost reševanja težav na področju duševnega zdravja in kliče po ustrezni strokovni pomoči za zdomce.

Ugotovitve naših dveh kvalitativnih študij, ki sta se osredotočali na izkušnje zdomcev s psihoterapijo, pomembno prispevajo k razumevanju pomena, ki ga zdomci s svojim globalnim načinom razmišljanja pripisujejo svoji psihoterapevtski izkušnji. Zdomci se običajno počutijo enako odtuji ena od svoje domače kot od gostiteljske kulture. Terapevto prepoznavanje njihove izkoreninjenosti in pomanjkanja občutka pripadnosti, ki sta del njihove zdomske kompleksnosti, je bilo za zdomce v naših
študijah zelo pomembno, saj je nagovarjalo njihovo nejasnost glede tega, kje je resnično njihov pravi dom.

**Priporočila glede klinične prakte**

V pričujoči doktorski disertaciji smo uporabili vzorce novoprispelih zdomcev in zdomcev, ki so bili deležni psihoterapevtske pomoči, da bi raziskovali izzive, vire in sredstva pomoči in prilagoditev kljubu po preselitvi ter po nekaj letih, ko so bili zdomci vključeni v psihoterapijo zaradi doživljanja duševne stiske.

Na splošno so izsledki prve empirične študije z novoprispelimi zdomci (tretje poglavje) poudarili pomen pozitivnega dojemanja selitve v tujino in do neke mere tudi dobrega družinskega delovanja na ugoden izid preselitve, vključno s prilagajanjem, duševno stisko in zadovoljstvom z življenjem. Zdomci, ki so svojo selitev v tujino razumeli kot obvladljivo in ne pretežko, so bili bolje prilagojeni na nove splošne življenjske pogoje v Belgiji in so doživljali manj duševne stiske, zlasti so bili manj anksioznji in manj pod stresom v zgodnji fazi po preselitvi. To kaže na pomen vloge subjektivne ocene selitve v tujino, ki jo je mogoče obravnavati v obliki družinskega svetovanja, kjer zdomci lahko naslovijo svoje lastne predstave in pričakovanja glede življenja v tujini, obenem pa so lahko deležni pomoči pri vnovični vzpostavitvi elementov individualnega delovanja, pa tudi delovanja na ravni svoje družine. V psihoterapevtskem procesu se lahko zdomci posvetijo tudi specifičnim psihološkim izzivom, kot so vprašanja identitete, vprašanja pripadnosti, domotožja, izkoreninjenosti, ponavljajočih se poslavljanj in nerazrešene žalosti. Priporočljivo je, da bi imeli zdomci dostop do strokovne pomoči pri svoji psihološki pripravi na ta velik življenjski dogodek že pred selitvijo v tujino in bi zato lahko bili bolje pripravljeni na izzive po dejanski preselitvi, s čimer bi si lahko ustvarili realnejšo sliko preselitve. V obliki družinskega svetovanja bi lahko razpravljali tudi o značilnostih delovanja družine, kot so odnosi, vodenje, povezanost in različne vloge v družini. S tem bi lahko pripravili zdomce na
prihajajoče spremembe in tako ublažili morebitne težave ob sami preselitvi. Obenem je priporočljivo tudi izpostaviti motive in pozitivne vidike selitve v tujino.

Dejstvo, da je prilagajanje zdomcev na novo okolje zelo dinamičen proces, ki se neprestano spreminja v nima jasno predvidene poti, je treba upoštevati v kliničnih intervencijah z novopriselimi zdomci. Naše priporočilo gre v smeri pomembnosti dostopnosti socialnoemocionalne pomoči za preprečitev poslabšanja duševnega zdravja zdomcev, ki naj bi bila dostopna že pred preselitvijo in v začetnem obdobju življenja v novem okolju. Poleg tega je pomembno, da se zavedamo, s kakšnimi izzivi in stiskami se zdomci srečujejo pri svojem delu in življenju v tujini, da razumemo njihovo kompleksnost, ter na katere vire in sredstva pomoči se je treba osredotočiti in jih graditi, da bi lahko zdomcem pomagali do uspešnejše prilagoditve in čim manjše duševne stiske. Naša študija z zdomci, ki so bili deležni psihoterapevtske pomoči in ki že nekaj let živijo v Belgiji, je pokazala, da je bila višja stopnja prilagoditve na delo povezana z nižjo duševno stisko, medtem ko takšne povezave ni bilo mogoče najti med drugimi področji prilagoditve (npr. splošno in interakcijsko prilagoditvijo) in duševno stisko. Podobno je naša študija z novopriselimi zdomci pokazala, da so zdomci, ki so bili uspešneje prilagojeni na svojo delo, manj depresivni. Strokovnjaki za duševno zdravje zato ne bi smeli podcenjevati pomena področja dela v življenju zdomcev. V kliničnih intervencijah je tako treba veliko pozornosti nameniti iskanju pomena in smisla v trenutnih delovnih razmerah in izboljšanju prilagoditve na delo. V primerih, ko večje spremembe niso mogoče, naj se psihoterapevtska pomoč osredotoča na pomoč zdomcem pri sprejemanju omejitve njihove zdomske situacije ter morebiten postopni razvoj sprememb.

Naša študija je pokazala, da je bila socialnoemocionalna podpora pozitivno povezana z interakcijsko prilagoditvijo in prilagoditvijo na delo zdomcev. Zdomci, ki so sodelovali v tej študiji in so bili deležni psihoterapevtske pomoči, so torej verjetno tovrstno pomoč prejemali od svojih terapevtov. Občutek, da jim je tovrstna podpora na
voljo in so je tudi deležni, je lahko doprinesel k zvišani samozavesti, da so laže
vzpostavili stike z domačini in z njimi več komunicirali. Podobno priporočamo, da
psihoterapevti, ki nudijo pomoč zdomcem, upoštevajo pomembnost področja dela za
zdomce in jim pomagajo pri razvijanju konceptov samoučinkovitosti in razvoja mrež
socialne podpore.

Vendar pa naj na tem mestu izpostavimo, da je ustrezna strokovna pomoč za
globalno delovno silo bila in še vedno ostaja izziv za številne strokovnjake s področja
duševnega zdravja. Čeprav so problemi zdomcev morda na videz podobni problemom
domače populacije (npr. depresija, anksioznost, osebnostni problemi), delo z zdomci
zahteva poglajljeno poznavanje in razumevanje njihove kompleksnosti. Natančneje
povedano, strokovnjaki, ki nudijo pomoč zdomcem, bi morali opraviti posebno
usposabljanje za razumevanje narave kompleksnosti življenja v tujini in posebnih
izzivov, ki spremljajo zdomsko življenje (npr. občutek izkoreninjenost, nenehne
spremembe in sprememba identitete).

Ena glavnih ugotovitev naše študije o psihoterapevtski izkušnji zdomcev je
pokazala pomembnost priznavanja kompleksnosti izseljencev s strani njihovega
terapevta. Zdomci se običajno počutijo enako odtuji en od svoje domače kot tudi
gostiteljske kulture. Vprašanja o lastnih koreninah in pomanjkanj občutka pripadnosti
kot del njihove izsiljene kompleksnosti lahko okrepijo občutek zmede glede tega, kje se
počutijo bolj doma.

Kar zadeva pristop relacijske družinske terapije, ki je bil uporabljen v terapiji z
zdomci, so nekatere naše ugotovitve potrdile povezanost z osnovnimi načeli relacijske
družinske terapije. Predvsem pomen in vloga terapevtskega odnosa in terapevta, kot so
ju doživeli udeleženci v naši raziskavi, potrjujeta temeljno izhodišče relacijske
družinske terapije, kjer sta razumevanje odnosa z drugimi in vloga terapevta
najpomembnejši izhodišči, ki omogočata izkušnjo spremembe. Udeleženci so npr.
svojega terapevta dojeli kot 'mamo', ki je bila prisotna v njihovem zdomskem
kontekstu v tujini, in na ta način so doživeli občutek 'doma' tudi v tujini. Terapevt je razumel njihovo potrebo po povezanosti in jim omogočil prostor za rast. Terapevtova lastna zdomska izkušnja lahko še posebej doprinese k pozitivni psihoterapevtski izkušnji zdomcev, hkrati pa ima podobnost med terapevti in klienti pozitivne učinke na učinkovitost rezultatov psihoterapije. Predvsem ozaveščenost psihoterapevtov glede pomembnosti kulturnih vidikov delovanja posameznika v določenem okolju lahko pri zdomcih vodi do tega, da doživijo svojega terapevta kot verodostojnega strokovnjaka, kar lahko pripelje do občutka udobja v terapevtskem procesu. Poleg tega zdomci lahko terapevtu, ki je že prehodil podobno pot življenja in dela v tujini, laže sledijo na poti lastne osebne rasti. Le tak terapevt, ki razmišlja na medkulturni in mednarodni ravni in ima bogate osebne in poklicne izkušnje, lahko zdomcem zagotovi prepoznavanje kompleksnosti zdomskega življenja.

**Priporočila za nadaljnje raziskave**

Na podlagi ugotovitev naše doktorske disertacije lahko podamo naslednje predloge za nadaljnje raziskave. Potrebna je celostna teorija o prilagajanju zdomskih družin, ki bi vključevala več teoretskih perspektiv, vključno z oblikovanjem kulturne identitete in vplivom kulture domovine in države gostiteljice. Dobrodošla bi bila ponovitev naših raziskav na raznolikih vzorcih v različnih delih Evrope in po svetu, ki bi lahko prinesla nove poglede na razumevanje izzivov ter virov in sredstev pomoči za novoprispele zdomce in zdomce, ki potrebujejo psihoterapevtsko pomoč. Še posebej longitudinalne študije bi lahko prinesle poglobitev znanja in podale dokaze o časovnih in vzročnih odnosih med različnimi sprememljivkami, ki smo jih raziskovali v tem našem projektu, ter dejanskim procesom prilagajanja. Uporaba pristopa več ocenjevalcev, kjer bi vsi družinski člani poročali o določenih pokazateljih izzivov, virov in sredstev pomoči in izidov preselitve, bi lahko doprinesla k bolj poglobljenemu
vpogledu v dinamiko zdomstva in prilagajanja na novo okolje. Ne nazadnje, potrebujemo več kvalitativnih študij, da bi bolje razumeli miselnost zdomcev ter povezavo med njihovimi pričakovanji in dojemanjem preselitve že med samo pripravo na selitev v tujini ter kako zdomci sami vidijo svojo zdomsko izkušnjo in kakšen pomen ji pripisujejo.

**Ključne besede:** zdomci, zdomske družine, izzivi, viri in sredstva pomoči, prilagajanje, duševna stiska, zadovoljstvo z življenjem, delovanje družine, dojemanje preselitve, socialna podpora, socialnoemocionalna podpora, instrumentalna socialna podpora, interpretativna fenomenološka analiza, psihoterapevtska izkušnja, relacijska družinska terapija.
DATA STORAGE FACT SHEETS

Data Storage Fact Sheet

Name/identifier study: Adjustment and Well-being of Newcomer Expatriates: A study on Perception of Move and Family Functioning (Chapter 3 PhD Mojca Filipič Sterle)

Author: Mojca Filipič Sterle

Date: 17th March 2019

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Name/identifier study: Social Support, Adjustment, and Psychological Distress of Help-seeking Expatriates (Chapter 4 PhD Mojca Filipič Sterle)

Author: Mojca Filipič Sterle

Date: 1st March 2019

1. Contact details

1a. Main researcher

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Name/identifier study: In Search of the Recognition of Expatriate Complexity: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Psychotherapy Experience (Chapter 5 PhD Mojca Filipič Sterle)

Author: Mojca Filipič Sterle

Date: 1st March 2019

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Name/identifier study: A Newly Awakened Sense of Self: A Qualitative Study on Expatriates’ Experience of Relational Family Therapy (Chapter 6 PhD Mojca Filipič Sterle).

Author: Mojca Filipič Sterle

Date: 1st March 2019

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