



**UTS Business School  
Management Discipline Group**

**How does Family Matter? Investigating the  
Experiences of Expatriates and their Families in  
International Assignments**

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**Doctor of Philosophy**

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## **CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP**

I, Quyen Thao Dang, declare that this thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Business School at the University of Technology Sydney.

This thesis is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis. This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution. This research is supported by the Australian Government Research Training Program and the joint scholarship between University of Technology Sydney and Vietnam International Education Development.

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## **GLOSSARY**

**Expatriate:** For the sampling purpose of this study, global assignees who had an assignment of one year or more, and were approached are specifically called expatriates.

**Global assignee:** Global assignee refers to a person who goes outside of their home country to work at another location. In this study, global assignee or international assignee is used to encompass all types of employees undertaking all types of international assignments including long-term expatriates, short-term expatriates, international business travelers, flexpatriates.

**Organizational expatriate:** A person who goes to work outside of his or her home country due to the requirements of their organizations.

**Self-initiated expatriate (SIE):** A person who goes to work outside of his or her home country at their own initiation.

**Expatriate family:** A family of an expatriate, which may include a spouse or partner of the expatriate with or without children.

**Expatriate spouse:** A spouse/partner of an expatriate

**Accompany (or accompanying) expatriate family:** An expatriate family who moves abroad together during the expatriate's international assignment

**Accompanied expatriate:** An expatriate who is accompanied by his or her family during international assignments

**Un-accompanying or split expatriate family (split family):** An expatriate family whose members (the expatriate and expatriate spouse) are split during the expatriate's international assignment

**Unaccompanied expatriate:** An expatriate who is not accompanied by his or her spouse during international assignments

**Un-accompanying spouse:** An expatriate spouse who does not accompany the expatriate on the international assignment

**Host country:** A country to which an expatriate is relocated for work purpose.

**Home country:** A country from which an expatriate originates; or the expatriate has permanent residency or citizenship in that country.

Home organization: An organization that assigns an expatriate to go to work abroad.

Host organization: An organization that is the employer of an expatriate in the foreign location.

## ABSTRACT

The significance of expatriates in managing the overseas operations and providing a boundary spanning role that helps integrate the operations of a subsidiary in the wider inter-organizational global network is widely accepted in international human resource management literature. Extant literature suggests that family plays a certain role in expatriation decisions, and success or failure of expatriates. The number of expatriates that are married/partnered make up the majority of the expatriate population, and most global assignees have family concerns and are influenced by their family in many aspects of their work life. While extant literature has paid attention to the experiences of the family and their influence on the expatriates' adjustment and performance in the host country, most of these studies have focused on expatriate families who accompany expatriates. The group of split families (where the family does not accompany the expatriates on the international assignment) has been neglected in the literature, thereby limiting our understanding of why in some instances families do not accompany expatriates, how expatriates adjust and perform their tasks in the host country without the physical presence of their families, and how split expatriate families experience international assignments.

Using family systems theory, the motivations to undertake international assignments of accompanied and unaccompanied expatriates were investigated, as were the reasons why split expatriate families participate in the split situation. In addition, how families of both situations influence expatriates' challenges and work outcomes in the host country and how these families experience international assignments were explored. Data for the study were collected using semi-structured interviews with expatriates, expatriate spouses and human resource managers or organizational representatives. The data collection was conducted in Vietnam, which hosts a large number of foreign expatriates, and is an emerging economy.

The findings of this current study show that families influence the motivations, considerations, challenges and work outcomes of expatriates in both accompanying and split situations. Furthermore, the experiences of expatriates and families in the split situation are vastly different from those in the accompanying situation although similarities also exist between the two situations. The key findings focus on six major areas: work-related vs. family-driven reasons, family-centered concerns and considerations, adjustable vs. enduring challenges, crossover and spillover effects on expatriates' work outcomes, tested emotional bonds and organizations' lack of care for the split situation.

By offering insights about split expatriate families in comparison with accompanying ones, this study contributes to the literature on expatriate recruitment, adjustment, work outcomes and family systems theory. In terms of practical contributions, the research outcomes will serve as lessons for multinational enterprises, organizations operating internationally and expatriates and their families to increase expatriation success without compromising family outcomes.

# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

A large proportion of the expatriate population who are married or partnered commit to a split expatriation where they are not accompanied by their partners during international assignments. According to recent statistics, this proportion is around 27% of married/partnered expatriates (Crown World Mobility 2015) while the majority of expatriates are married/partnered (70%) (Cartus 2014). With the expatriate population worldwide amounting to approximately 66 million in 2017, making up 0.9% of worldwide population, it could be assumed that more than 12 million expatriates are undertaking their international assignments without being accompanied by their partners. Given that families have long been confirmed as the top factor that influence the expatriation decisions, and success or failure of expatriates (Fischlmayr and Kollinger 2010, Shortland 2015), it is surprising to see the significantly limited amount of research on expatriates and their families living in the split situation. The current study is set to fill this major gap in the literature.

In the first chapter, an introduction of the study is presented in five sections. The first section outlines background information, research problems and research questions. The second section provides an overview of methodology. Next, contributions of the study are delineated while the outline of the thesis is presented in the fourth section. The chapter finishes with a summary.

## **1.1 Background information, research purpose and research questions**

The globalization of business activities is often credited with changing the nature of work around the world (Favell et al. 2007). Many companies have expanded into multinational arenas, leading to the emergence of a mobile global workforce that includes international assignees whose expertise is critical to the needs and ultimate success of the organizations. These international assignees fill different roles and duties depending upon the organization's requirements, which may include but are not limited to, transferring knowledge, coordinating global integration and controlling local subsidiaries (Bonache et al. 2001, Fee and Michailova 2019, Guo et al. 2018). International assignments, therefore, serve both individual functions (developing managerial and professional capabilities) and organizational functions that are deemed critical to successful corporate strategies (Lämsä et al. 2017).

Despite economic slowdowns and pressures to cut costs in organizations, the use of international assignees is on the rise in many economies (Malek et al. 2015). A survey conducted by Cartus (2004) of business organizations operating around the world in different industries such as oil and gas, manufacturing, consumer goods, finance, service and media, revealed that 50% of respondents anticipated that the number of expatriates would increase in the future due to the needs of international operations. This trend is not limited to the private sector, with demand for global employees in the public sector also growing rapidly (Kempen et al. 2015). This increasing need for international assignees has given rise to what has been termed a ‘global talent war’, where organizations compete with each other to secure the services of the best talented individuals in the marketplace (Beechler and Woodward 2009, Patel et al. 2019). Such is the strength of demand, that organizations have to strive harder to lure talented professionals to undertake global assignments, and providing better support to expatriate families is one possible way to attract global talent (Brookfield Global Relocation Services 2015).

According to the extant literature, family members play a marked role in the decision-making process that shapes the success or failure of a particular expatriate’s endeavors (Arthur and Bennett 1995, Brewster and Scullion 1997, Caligiuri and Cascio 1998, Hays 1971). Irrespective of whether they are accompanied by family or not when embarking on an international assignment, most expatriates have family concerns and many aspects of their work are influenced by their families (Shaffer et al. 2012). A recent survey conducted by Brookfield Global Relocation Services (2016) showed that while 68% of assignees were married/partnered, only 73% of this group were accompanied by their families on international assignments (meaning roughly 20% of the total sample were in the split family category). Similarly, the sample of Cartus’s (2014) survey consists of 70% married/partnered respondents and a third of them (a quarter of the total population) were unaccompanied by their dependent family. This survey also showed a trend towards increasing incidents of the split family situation during international assignments due to reasons such as unfavorable host locations and inadequate support from employers. While industry reports have indicated that there is a high proportion of split expatriate families, and the number of these families could increase in the future, the academic literature about expatriates and their families in split situations remains limited.

Previous studies may have paid some attention to expatriate families, but their main focus has been on families accompanying long-term international assignees or family issues pertaining

to unaccompanied short-term international assignees (Baker and Ciuk 2015, Fischlmayr and Puchmüller 2016, Lämsä et al. 2017, Mutter 2017, Mutter and Thorn 2019, Shaffer et al. 2016). There has been little exploration of the split expatriate families issues in traditional expatriate assignments (McNulty and Brewster 2017), and many key questions remain unanswered. For instance, what factors motivate unaccompanied expatriates to undertake international assignments and why do their families elect the split situation? How do split family members experience the international assignment time when they have to be geographically separate from the expatriates? Do these members influence the expatriates' adjustment and work performance even though they live apart? There is little or no information on the work and family outcomes of expatriates in the split situation. Meanwhile, an exploration into the grey literature including news, professional blogs, and personal blogs suggests that the consequences of the split situation could be as serious as failed assignments or divorce.

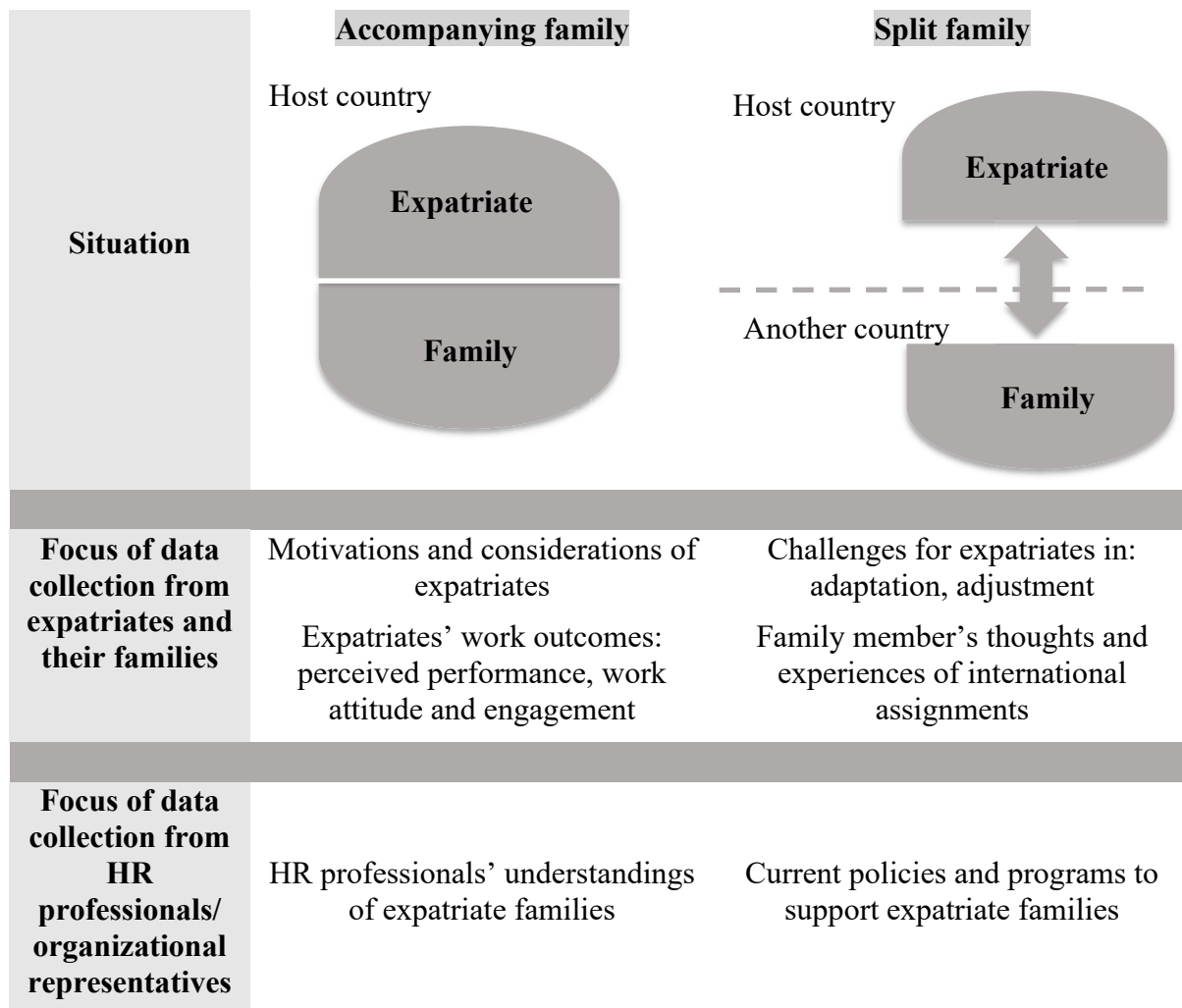
The reason why the literature on split expatriate families is scarce could be because expatriates and families in accompanying and split situations have been treated as a homogeneous group without any clear distinctions. Research has not investigated or proved the homogeneity or heterogeneity between the two groups. It could be informative to explore similarities and differences between accompanying expatriate families and split expatriate families. These unpacked issues leave major gaps in the literature that need to be filled.

To contribute to the international human resource management (IHRM) literature on expatriates and their families in expatriation, the purpose of this study is to understand how the family influences expatriates and how expatriates and their families experience international assignments in accompanying and split family situations. A comparative approach was undertaken to identify the similarities and differences (if any) between accompanying and split family situations. Such an approach helps to shed light on the comparison between two situations which add further insights into the literature and draw implications for practice. This required investigation and comparison of some aspects of expatriation from the perspectives of accompanied and unaccompanied expatriates and their spouses. These aspects of expatriation included motivations for expatriation; concerns and considerations about international assignments; and challenges related to adaptation, adjustment, perceived performance, work attitudes and engagement. It should be noted that only expatriates and their spouses were interviewed, but the experiences of other family members such as expatriate children were considered through the expatriates and their

spouses. Therefore, for data collection process, a family was referred to as an expatriate spouse. By adding insights about these aspects, the study was expected to provide a holistic picture of the expatriation process. Some of the issues pertinent to the expatriation process were also explored from the viewpoint of organizations.

Therefore, this study addresses the following gaps: (1) the lack of empirical evidence on the experiences relating to adjustment, work performance, work attitude and engagement of expatriates unaccompanied by their families (2) various ways by which families, either accompanying or un-accompanying, could influence expatriates in terms of their decisions to undertake a global assignment, their adjustment and work performance, 3) the lack of voices given to expatriate family members with regards to their own thoughts and experiences in the IHRM literature (4) the call for triangulating perspectives of expatriates, expatriate families and organizational representatives (Davies et al. 2015, Fischlmayr and Puchmüller 2016, Takeuchi et al. 2007).

This study is unique because of its investigation into a neglected group in the IHRM literature, that is, split expatriate families, through a comparative lens of expatriation process of accompanying and split expatriate families. Furthermore, the study includes the views of different groups who are considered to be the major stakeholders of international assignment processes namely expatriates, expatriate spouses (matched with expatriates) and human resource (HR) staff or organizational representatives. The difficulties of collecting data from matched expatriate couples, especially split couples, are well acknowledged in the literature (McNulty 2016). Including this sample is another strength of the current study. Figure 1.1 illustrates the study's foci.



**Figure 1. 1: Foci of the study**

The primary research question of this study is, *“How do expatriates and their families experience international assignments in accompanying and split situations?”*

The study also contributes to the literature of IHRM by answering the following six sub-questions: 1) What were the motivations to undertake international assignments and reasons to engage in the split situation from the perspectives of expatriates and their spouses in accompanying and split families?; 2) What were the considerations and concerns of expatriates and their spouses in accompanying and split families?; 3) What challenges (if any) do accompanied and unaccompanied expatriates encounter during international assignments?; 4) How do family and organizational support for expatriate families influence expatriates' work outcomes in accompanying and split situations?; 5) How do expatriate

families in accompanying and split situations experience international assignments?; 6) How do human resource professionals understand, and how do organizations support expatriate families in accompanying and split situations in international assignments? The study's methodology used to address these research questions is briefly described in the following section.

## **1.2 Overview of methodology**

This study employed a qualitative method to meet the study's purpose which was to understand how families influenced expatriates, and the experiences of expatriates and their families in accompanying and split family situations in international assignments. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with expatriates, expatriate spouses, and human resource managers/organizational representatives. In total, 43 interviews, including 10 accompanying and eight split expatriate couples and seven human resource professionals, were conducted. A hybrid approach of inductive and deductive analysis was followed to investigate the data collected (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane 2006). The interview data were analyzed thematically using a systematic procedure following Braun and Clarke (2006). This analysis process helped present the experiences of expatriates and their families when undertaking international assignments as well as organizational views of expatriate families. Furthermore, the systematic procedure was helpful in addressing the study's purpose of comparing the insights from accompanying and split expatriate situations. Chapter 3 details the research method employed for this study.

## **1.3 Contributions of the study**

This study contributes to the literature of IHRM and organizational practice, and has relevance for policy makers, expatriates and their families. First, a critical contribution to scholarship comes from the findings of split expatriate families pursuing and experiencing global assignments. The study provides in-depth knowledge of split families and expatriates living in split situations – although a growing population, the knowledge about such families remains scarce. Given that the difficulties of researching these families and collecting data have been well documented in the literature, the study's contribution is meaningful in developing and advancing the IHRM field.

Second, this study contributes to the literature on expatriate recruitment, experiences during international assignments (challenges and performance) by providing a holistic view of the influence of family on expatriates in both accompanied and split situations. Specifically, the study explored how family influenced expatriates during the decision-making process of an international assignment and found the family factor played a critical role in both situations. As a result, knowledge about potential antecedents of expatriation decision-making could be advanced, which contributes to the literature on expatriate recruitment.

Similarly, the insights about the concerns and considerations of expatriates and expatriate spouses, and the challenges during international assignments of accompanying and split situations expand upon the existing knowledge of these aspects. Moreover, the findings about how the expatriates performed at work, whether accompanied or unaccompanied by their families, provide a clearer picture of how expatriates' work performance was influenced by their families.

Meanwhile, while conceptual research has recommended organizations treat expatriate families as stakeholders of the firm (Lämsä et al. 2017), empirical findings undertaking this viewpoint are scarce. Furthermore, conflicting findings about antecedents of expatriates' work performance remain, which could be due to the lack of explanation of factors underlying expatriate performance. Therefore, the interplay between organizational support for expatriate families during international assignments and expatriates' work outcomes identified in this study fills another gap in the literature. It furthers the knowledge on the antecedents of expatriates' work outcomes as well as consequences of organizational practices in global assignments.

The use of multisource samples including expatriates, families (spouses) and organizational representatives is another contribution of this study as it overcomes the limitation of self-reporting data prevalent in most previous studies on this topic (Donaldson and Grant-Vallone 2002, Kuvaas 2008). By approaching multisource samples, the study sheds lights on different stakeholders' perspectives on the same issues (e.g. motivations, challenges, influence of family on expatriates, etc.) and identifies possible discrepancies among the understandings and experiences of these stakeholders. It would be impossible to do so without triangulating data sources.

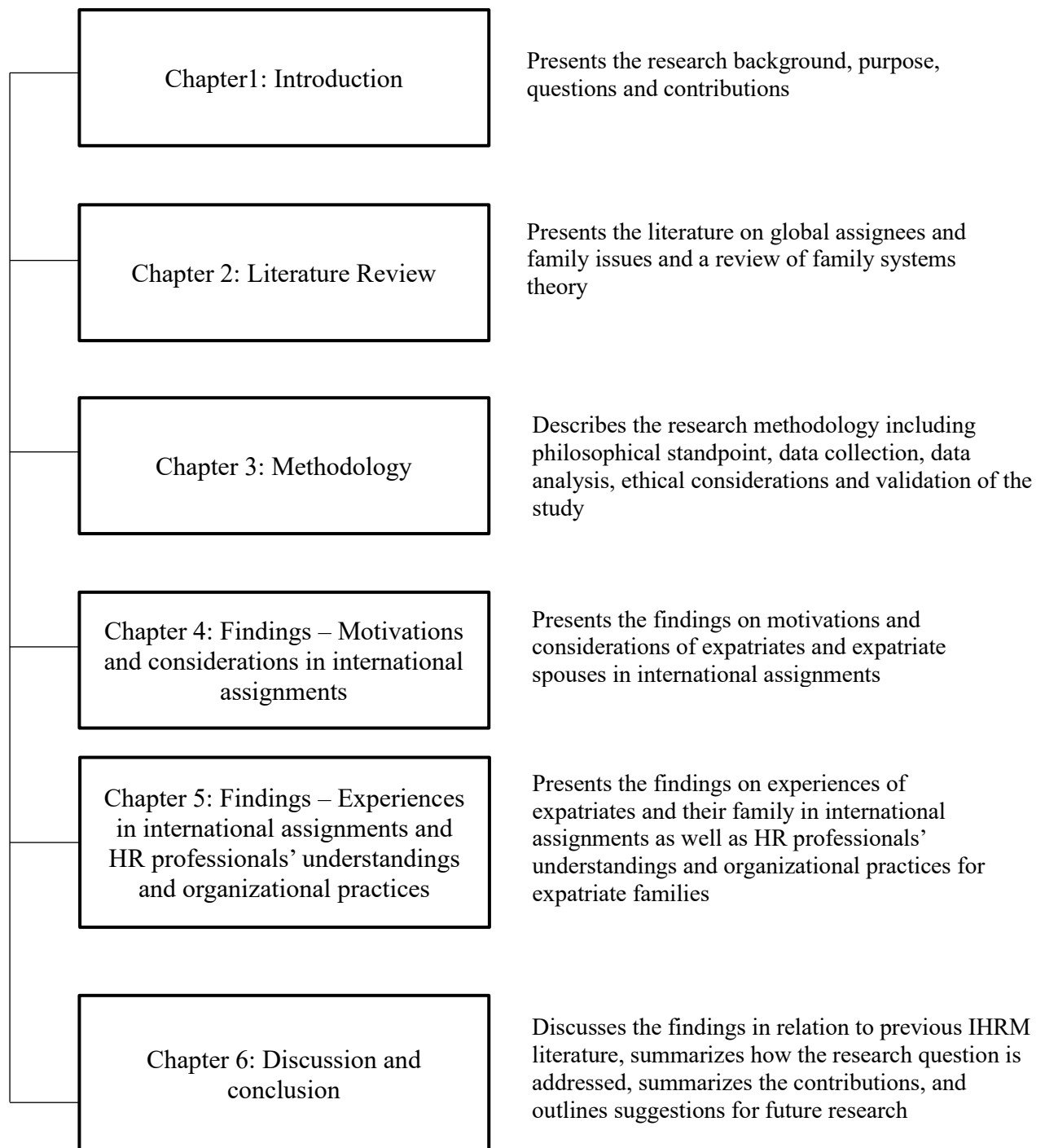
Furthermore, the study makes a theoretical contribution to the family systems theory literature with the application of this theory in the field of IHRM, particularly in the global

assignments of accompanying and un-accompanying expatriate families. The study not only provides evidence to support the theory in cases where family members live together, but also goes beyond to show how the theory functions even in split situations. The empirical evidence relevant to the family systems theory in this study strengthens its application in the IHRM field.

On the practical side, organizations can draw on the findings for their recruitment, selection, training and support mechanisms. By understanding the motivations behind the acceptance of international assignments in each situation, employers can tailor their recruitment tactics and assignment offers to attract the required talents. Furthermore, the findings about the concerns, considerations of expatriates and their families as well as the challenges they face in each family circumstance, will benefit organizations as they consider support packages for expatriate families in both split and accompanying situations. Once organizations adopt effective and suitable mechanisms, they can achieve both instrumental and ethical objectives thanks to increasing expatriates' contributions to the organization and minimizing potential negative effects on the family domain. By doing so, organizations increase the probability for success in international assignments and avoid failures. Additionally, knowledge on the specific challenges and experiences of global assignees and their families helps personnel policy makers, who wish to attract global talents to their country or territories, construct attractive policies for split and accompanied expatriates. Finally, potential global assignees and their families could benefit from the knowledge of what to expect during global assignments, thus better preparing them both mentally and physically.

#### **1.4 Outline of the thesis**

This thesis is divided into six chapters. The organization of the thesis is illustrated in Figure 1.2.



**Figure 1. 2: The thesis structure**

Following a discussion of background information, the research problem, purpose, questions, contributions and thesis structure in the current chapter, Chapter 2 continues the thesis by presenting an overview of family systems theory as well as the use of this theory in the literature of expatriate research and in the current study. The chapter also presents a detailed

review of the literature on global assignees and family issues. Chapter 3 delineates the methodology employed in this study to answer the research questions. The chapter describes the study's philosophical standpoint and the research method which is a qualitative approach. Concrete description of the data collection process then follows. Next, the data analysis process is outlined. Ethical considerations in the study and the approaches undertaken to increase the validity of the study are also outlined in this chapter. The findings of this dissertation are divided into two chapters. Chapter 4 presents the findings on the motivations and considerations of expatriates and their families before undertaking international assignments. Meanwhile, Chapter 5 reports on the experiences of expatriates and their families during international assignments. These experiences include: 1) challenges for expatriates and their family members during international assignments; 2) work outcomes of expatriates; 3) expatriations' influence on the family's emotional bonding; 4) influential factors on expatriate families' experiences of international assignments. Moreover, insights about organizational policies and practices for expatriate families are presented in this chapter. Chapter 6 discusses the study's findings in relation to previous literature while summarizing how the research question has been addressed. In addition, the chapter presents the contributions and practical implications of the study. The thesis concludes by acknowledging the limitations of the study and identifying suggestions for future research.

## **1.5 Chapter summary**

This chapter has introduced the study with background information and presented the problem and purpose of the study. The primary research question and sub-questions of the study were outlined, and the significance of this study was discussed from theoretical and practical perspectives. A roadmap of the study was also presented to guide the readers throughout the thesis. Chapter 2 reviews the family systems theory which is the theoretical lens used in this research and presents a literature review on global assignees and family issues to position the study within the broader literature.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents reviews of the family systems theory and the literature on global assignees and family issues. The chapter is organized into two major sections. The first section presents a review of the literature on family systems theory, the use of this theory in the literature of expatriate research, and how it has been applied in this study. The second section presents the literature on global assignees and family issues in the context of international assignments, and a broad definition of family applied in this review section is also provided. In reviewing previous studies, the literature on global assignees and family issues was analyzed thematically, and five major themes were identified, including *the influence of family on expatriates, influence of expatriation on families, adjustment in expatriation process, organizational practices in relation to family issues in expatriation, and social interactions of expatriate families*. The chapter concludes with a summary.

### 2.1 Family systems theory

The origin of the *family systems theory* can be traced back to the *general systems theory* which was introduced in the 1950s (Fingerman and Bermann 2000). Systems theory is a structural approach to study research problems not only in natural sciences, but also in social sciences (Fingerman and Bermann 2000). A system is made up of some components or elements. According to systems theory, a system is not the simple sum of its components as in an arithmetic addition, but it also consists of interactions between its components (Rosenbusch 2010). Due to the interactions between individual elements, these elements influence and shape each other, and create a whole, which is known as a system (Fingerman and Bermann 2000). Therefore, each element cannot be defined and studied independently, but the interactions with other elements in the system should be taken into account in order to understand it (Von Bertalanffy 1968). Systems theory also focuses on interactions between a system's elements and their environment (Fingerman and Bermann 2000). The analysis of a system from a systems theory perspective examines the process of how a system absorbs the effects of its environment and remains as an adaptive and definable entity (Rosenbusch 2010). In a system, members are bound together by a force which is referred to as a balance force (Broderick 1993). This balance force ensures all members of the system connect to each other and maintain the system's balance.

Although general systems theory is widely used in natural and social sciences, its application to the family did not originate or develop from the mainstream area of these sciences (Fingerman and Bermann 2000). In fact, the application of family systems theory came from applied clinical practice in psychiatry and psychotherapy (Bavelas and Segal 1982). When therapists worked with the treatment of individuals, they would consider each individual as existing in an ecological system named ‘family’ (Bavelas and Segal 1982). This allowed them to take into account the role of the family to better understand their patients as part of the diagnosis (Bavelas and Segal 1982). At that time, family therapists found the systems theory approach suitable and useful to understand and interpret the symptoms they were observing when switching the focus from an individual to the whole family (Bavelas and Segal 1982). Therefore, family systems theory came to the fore in the study of family therapy, and individuals as a component of the ecological system named family (Bavelas and Segal 1982).

### **2.1.1 Overview of family systems theory**

In line with broader systems theory, most authors covering family systems theory view a family as a whole or a set of people who are interdependent with reciprocal relationships between them (Fingerman and Bermann 2000). Members of the family establish and maintain their relationships by communicating with each other (Bavelas and Segal 1982, Caligiuri et al. 1998, Miller et al. 2000), and they exert influence on one another (Minuchin 1974). In other words, the actions of an individual are affected by those of other primary people in the family system (Caligiuri et al. 1998). Therefore, family systems theory does not merely examine individual members, but also focuses on the social dynamics occurring at the family level (Konopaske et al. 2009). To understand an individual in the family system, it is important to take into account other primary members of that system as well (Fingerman and Bermann 2000, Rosenbusch and Cseh 2012).

According to Fingerman and Bermann (2000), a family system consists of three components which are structure, development, and adaptation of the family. The family structure reflects an open sociocultural system which may undergo transformation (Minuchin 1974). The family experiences different stages, involving restructuring, which results in family development (Minuchin 1974). In circumstances where changes are occurring in the environment, the family may need to adapt to remain together and hence maintain the system (Minuchin 1974). Through this adaptation process, each individual’s psychosocial growth might be enhanced (Minuchin 1974). From this perspective, a family system is a system of

information processing, and is complex because constant changes may occur inside the system (Minuchin 1974). As aforementioned, according to Broderick (1993), there is a balance force in the family system. This balance force consists of family rules that require each member to remain as a member of that family and carry the family identity. However, individual members are also allowed to maintain their self-identity (Broderick 1993).

Two characteristics of a healthy family system are openness and adaptation/adaptability (Kantor and Lehr 1975). The openness of family systems means that the family as a whole and each member can be influenced by internal and external factors (Broderick 1993). Examples of internal factors that can affect family systems include but are not limited to internal family tensions, family rules, family members' attitudes and behaviors. External factors can be changes in living situations, changes in working environment of a family member and natural disasters, etc. It is suggested that there is an equilibrium existing in the family system (Broderick 1993, Minuchin 1974), and this equilibrium may be imbalanced by internal and external factors (Minuchin 1974). In the context of changes, the adaptation of a family system is important so that the family can maintain its equilibrium and continuity (Broderick 1993). Therefore, a healthy family system should be adaptive.

### **2.1.2 Family systems theory models**

There are several models developed to assess family systems, and among these models, the Circumplex Model that Olson and colleagues (Olson 2011, Olson 1986, 1993, Olson 2000, Olson et al. 1983, Olson et al. 1979) developed is perhaps the most well-known (Jaskiewicz et al. 2016). In the Circumplex Model, there are two core dimensions to assess each family system, namely cohesion and flexibility (adaptability) (Olson et al. 1979). Family cohesion can be defined as “the emotional bonding that family members have toward one another” (Olson 2000) while family flexibility can be defined as “the amount of change in its leadership, role, relationships and relationship rules” (Olson 2000).

Family systems models developed by other authors such as Parsons and Bales (1956), Kantor and Lehr (1975), Benjamin (1977), Reiss and Oliveri (1980), Beavers and Hampson (2000) also examine family systems along dimensions which are comparable or equivalent to the two dimensions of Olson and colleagues (Rosenbusch 2010). In the following sections, these models are reviewed in chronological order, and the Circumplex Model is reviewed at the end.

Parsons and Bales (1956), in their study of a nuclear family, identified two roles of the family system: expressive role and instrumental role (Parsons and Bales 1956). The expressive role involves protecting the well-being of the family as a group, which means that the actions and behaviors of the family and its members are towards common harmony (Parsons and Bales 1956). This dimension is comparable with the cohesion dimension suggested by Olson et al. (1979). The instrumental role focuses on the ability to adapt to the external environment of the family (Parsons and Bales 1956). This role is similar to the “flexibility” dimension in Olson’s model (Olson et al. (1979).

Kantor and Lehr (1975) conceptualized cohesion in terms of affect and flexibility with relation to power. Affect and power are two target dimensions of a family. In their description, affect is interpreted as the sense of loving and being loved, which means that family members’ love for each other is one of the target dimensions of a family (Kantor and Lehr 1975). The other dimension, power, is the freedom to make decisions and the ability to achieve those decisions as a whole family (Kantor and Lehr 1975). These target dimensions tie family members together in the family system and regulate interactional behaviors of family members (Kantor and Lehr 1975).

The Structural Analysis of Social Behavior (SASB) model developed by Benjamin (1977) looks more specifically at the details of each dimension to assess family systems. In this model, there are two dimensions examined which are affiliation and interdependence. Affiliation refers to behaviors that family members display to each other ranging from love and friendliness to anger and rejection. This dimension is related to personal interactions inside the family and can be linked to the family’s cohesion (Rosenbusch 2010). Interdependence refers to the extent to which each member tends to act independently and differently from the family group, and it ranges from interdependence to independence (Benjamin 1977). On the one hand, interdependence means personal boundaries among members of the family systems are diffused, and there is no differentiation among the decisions and actions of family members. On the other hand, independence means family members might be different in their decisions and actions, and each family member has their autonomy (Benjamin 1977).

Another comparable family systems model suggests families confront the external environment as a group, and believe that the external environment treat them as a united group (Reiss and Oliveri 1980). These authors focused on a family’s adaptability by examining two dimensions, namely coordination and closure. Coordination refers to the

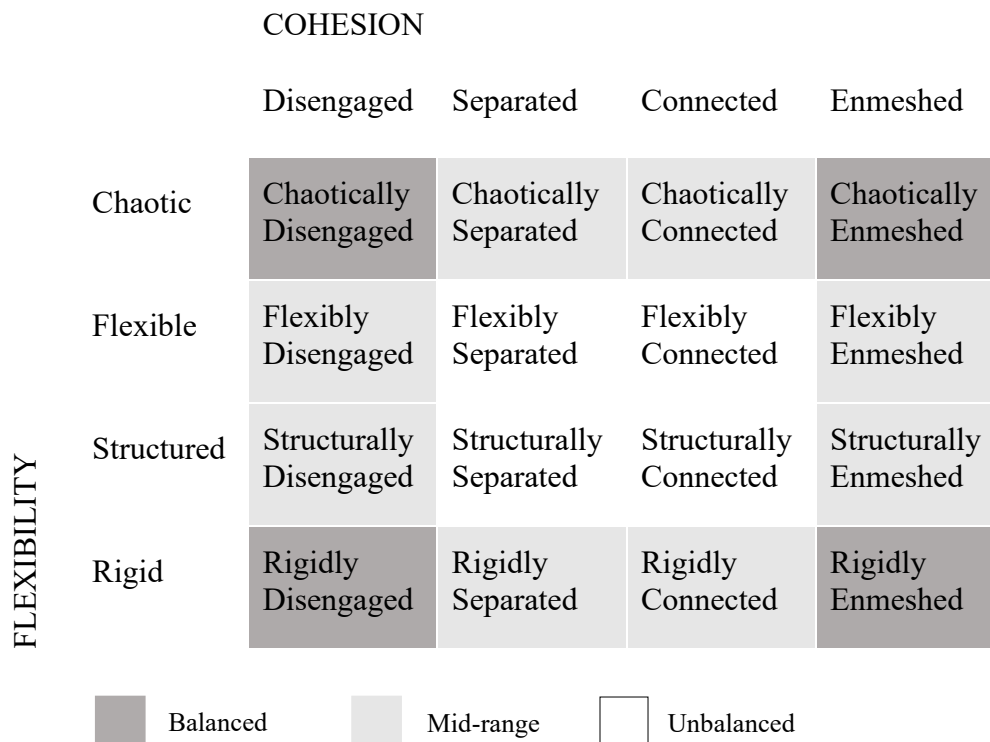
extent that family members pay attention to the effort to solve problems of each other, and can therefore be seen as having similar characteristics with the notion of cohesion (Reiss and Oliveri 1980). In other words, when a problem occurs, the measurement of coordination is not a simple agreement on a problem's solution, but the degree to which a member attends to the details of other members' problem-solving efforts and the degree to which family members believe they are a united group when experiencing the same social world (Reiss and Oliveri 1980). Closure is concerned with the decision-making process within the family (Reiss and Oliveri 1980). The family may delay making final decisions until they have sufficient evidence to make such decisions (Reiss and Oliveri 1980). Families who are high on closure usually approach a new environment with fresh minds and few preconceptions while families who are low on this dimension usually approach a new environment with experience and convictions from their own past. In some respects, this dimension is similar to Olson's dimension of flexibility (adaptability in original model) (Reiss and Oliveri 1980). Authors also believed that what happened to one member of the family system was also relevant to other members and the family as a whole. They also referred to the family as a system that is open to both inside and outside environments (Reiss and Oliveri 1980).

Beavers and Hampson (2000) constructed the Beavers System to examine family systems. The Beaver System Model looks at family style and adaptive flexibility of a family system. Family style is concerned with the way in which a family views the source of satisfaction with internal interactions inside the family, and it ranges from centripetal to centrifugal (Beavers and Hampson 2000). Some families perceive that family relationship satisfaction comes from inside the family, and Beavers and Hampson (2000) name this family style centripetal. Other families think that this satisfaction is influenced by the outside world, and this family style is called centrifugal (Beavers and Hampson 2000). Each family may fall at any point between the two extremes – centripetal and centrifugal. With regard to adaptive flexibility, the authors believed that families who were more flexible and had less rigid behaviors would be able to deal with stressful situations and evolve more easily (Beavers and Hampson 2000).

The last model that is reviewed in this part is Olson's Circumplex Model of marital and family systems (Olson and Gorall 2003). This model was first introduced in the 1970s (Olson et al. 1979), and it has since gone through several revisions. When the model was first introduced, the two dimensions to assess family systems were adaptability and cohesion (Olson et al. 1979), but later flexibility was used to replace adaptability, and communication

was added as a facilitating dimension for the other two dimensions. Therefore, this dimension is not illustrated in the main graphic model. In comparison with other models described above, Olson's model describes the components of each dimension in more detail. There are six components to examine flexibility, namely roles, discipline, rules, leadership, negotiation and assertiveness. Meanwhile, cohesion includes time, space, decision-making, emotional bonding, friends, interests, coalitions and boundaries (Olson 2000). Olson suggested that both change and stability are necessary in a family life, and the balance between these two is flexibility (Rosenbusch 2010). Cohesion symbolizes the balance between separateness and connectedness (Olson 2000). The communication dimension is critical to facilitate the movement on the two main dimensions which are flexibility and cohesion. The criteria to assess family's communication are family members' listening skills, speaking skills, clarity, respect and regard for each other, self-disclosure and continuity tracking.

In each main dimension, there are four levels to categorize family systems, and based on the four levels of each dimension, 16 family types are classified (Figure 2.1). For flexibility, these four levels range from chaotic, flexible, structured and rigid (Olson 2000). Structured and rigid are the two levels that are considered balanced in terms of flexibility. The four levels of cohesion within family systems are enmeshed (extreme high), connected, separated, and disengaged (extreme low). The balanced levels are marked as connected and separated (Olson 2000). When combining the two dimensions, four family types are considered as balanced, four family types are considered as unbalanced, and eight family types are considered as mid-range (Figure 2.1).



**Figure 2. 1: Circumplex Model: Couple and Family Map (Adapted from Olson (2000))**

Flexibility and cohesion can be considered as the foundational components of family systems theory although these concepts might be named differently by different authors in the literature of family systems theory.

Table 2.1 summarizes the dimensions used to examine family systems reviewed in this section.

**Table 2. 1: Summary of Family systems' dimensions**

Study	<i>Dimensions of family systems models</i>	
Parsons and Bales (1956)	Expressive role	Instrumental role
Kantor and Lehr (1975)	Affect	Power
Benjamin (1977)	Affiliation	Interdependence
Reiss and Oliveri (1980)	Coordination	Closure
Beavers and Hampson (2000)	Family style	Adaptive flexibility
Olson (2000)	Cohesion	Flexibility

### **2.1.3 The use of family systems theory in expatriation research**

In the literature of expatriate research, family systems theory has been adopted in several studies. The theory is popular among the study of international assignees' relocation willingness or adjustment in international assignments. Brett and Stroh (1995) applied the family systems theory in a study of international relocation willingness of expatriates and their spouses. By adopting the theoretical basis of family systems theory, the authors identified internal and external factors that could affect the family's equilibrium, and the willingness to relocate internationally as a result. A model from these factors was constructed and tested. The results from this study supported the arguments of family systems theory which contend that one member of a family system may affect the psychological state of other members, and the family system and its members are affected by various internal and external factors. Konopaske et al. (2009) used this theory to examine the willingness of managers and their partners to relocate for global assignments. However, while Konopaske et al. (2009) examined factors which were more personal such as age, sex, race, and career ambition, Brett and Stroh (1995) focused on factors related to significant others, especially elderly parents' needs. Therefore, it could be seen that family systems theory is relevant to the definition of family used in this study which includes any member who can exert familial influences on global assignees.

Caligiuri et al. (1998) in their study of the relationship between family adjustment and expatriate work adjustment, used the family systems theory lens to consider family as a unit and proposed a model in which family-system skills and characteristics were the antecedents for expatriates' adjustment at work. The study's findings that family characteristics and family perceptions of global assignments are related to family adjustment, and family adjustment mediates the relationship between family characteristics and expatriate work adjustment are consistent with family systems theory. This study brought family systems theory into the field of cross-cultural adjustment of expatriate families. Creed (2006) studied the adjustment of sojourner families by examining the dimensions to assess family systems. The author investigated family communication, family type, family satisfaction, and family flexibility and cohesion to predict adjusting experiences of expatriate families. The families that have a balanced level of flexibility and cohesion or a low level of these dimensions are the ones that are predicted to have the best sociocultural adaptation (Creed 2006). Later, Rosenbusch (2010) adopted family systems theory, in particular the Circumplex Model as the foundation to examine how the two dimensions of the model could predict cross-cultural

adjustment of expatriates and expatriate families as a whole. The results of this study confirmed the relationship between family flexibility and individual (expatriate) adjustment as well as family adjustment.

In a qualitative study of expatriate spouse adjustment, McNulty (2012) attempted to bridge the relationship between the resources and coping mechanisms of family systems and spouse adjustment. Organizational support, identity construction and reconstruction were examined as the components of family systems that could facilitate the spouse adjustment. The theory was also used to explain crossover effect within family systems. Similar to Rosenbusch (2010), McNulty (2012) used this theory to explain the dynamics of family systems. In both studies, family systems theory was used to explain the results.

Two recent examples of studies that adopt the theory are Alegre-Cruz (2018) and Hutchings and McNulty (2018). Alegre-Cruz (2018) examined military families' resilience and vulnerability during difficult events. Based on the theory, it was proposed, and the results confirmed that a positive relationship exists between perceived social support and coping of the families. Hutchings and McNulty (2018), meanwhile, employed family systems theory as a theoretical base to explain the functioning of expatriate families in the split situation.

#### **2.1.4 Family systems theory in the current study**

Family systems theory has been used in the literature on expatriates before. The theory serves as a theoretical base to investigate the processes within expatriate families which can affect important aspects of expatriation such as the willingness to undertake international assignments, adjustment, and the performance of expatriates and their families.

In this study, family systems theory was used as the theoretical lens for several reasons. First, the theory proposes that family members should be included in any study of expatriate relocation decision-making, adjustment and performance. According to this theory, since a family functions as a system, all family members are interrelated (Bader et al. 2015), and attempts to understand a family member as an independent individual without looking at other members and their interactions in the family system would only provide part of the explanation for the individual's behaviors. In international assignments, changes in outside environments and inside the family system may push the system to change, and may cause individual family members to modify their behaviors and attitudes or the family's cohesion and flexibility (Caligiuri et al. 1998). Since there are reciprocal relationships among family

members, behaviors, attitudes and actions of one member could influence and be influenced by any other member (Olson and Gorall 2003). As a result, expatriate adjustment and perceived performance at work could be affected by other members in the expatriate family. The influence can be seen as having a spillover effect from the non-work domain to the work domain (Brett and Stroh 1995, Caligiuri et al. 1998, Konopaske et al. 2009). In summary, including the insights from family members was necessary to identify and highlight issues in relation to expatriates' adjustment and performance.

Second, the theory was relevant in the context of this study on international assignments. Since the theory proposes that a family is an open system that can be influenced by external forces (Bader et al. 2015, McNulty 2012, Minuchin 1974), a foreign relocation is the disruption that the system may have to absorb and adapt to. Hence, the family may be in a constant state of transformation and adaptation to maintain its equilibrium. During the process of transforming and adapting, a family's cohesion and flexibility might be challenged by changes in the external environment. In addition, according to the theory and the literature on expatriation (Bader et al. 2015, McNulty 2012), organizational support is one of the external factors that can affect a family system and its balance status. Therefore, adding insights from organizations is meaningful to bridge the conceptual link between organizational support and perceived adjustment of expatriates and their families as well as perceived performance of expatriates. Some of the organizational policies and programs to support expatriate families were examined in this study, and therefore the theory's application was deemed to be appropriate.

Third, the theory provided the opportunity to study and compare expatriate families that accompanied the expatriates with split families, where the family did not accompany the expatriates on the international assignments. Within family systems, communication is essential and plays an integral part in systems' dynamics which may distinguish one system from another (Bader et al. 2015, Creed 2006). Expatriate families that go together on global assignments have the opportunity to have direct and instant communication with each other, and this may be useful for the balance and equilibrium of family systems. Separated expatriate families have to deal with long-distance relationships with many undeniable challenges. Although advancement in technology allows people to communicate more easily via emails, video calls, and electronic messaging, the physical separation can still be a challenge to smooth communication and instant support within split expatriate families. This might affect family cohesion and hence the family system's equilibrium. However, it is also

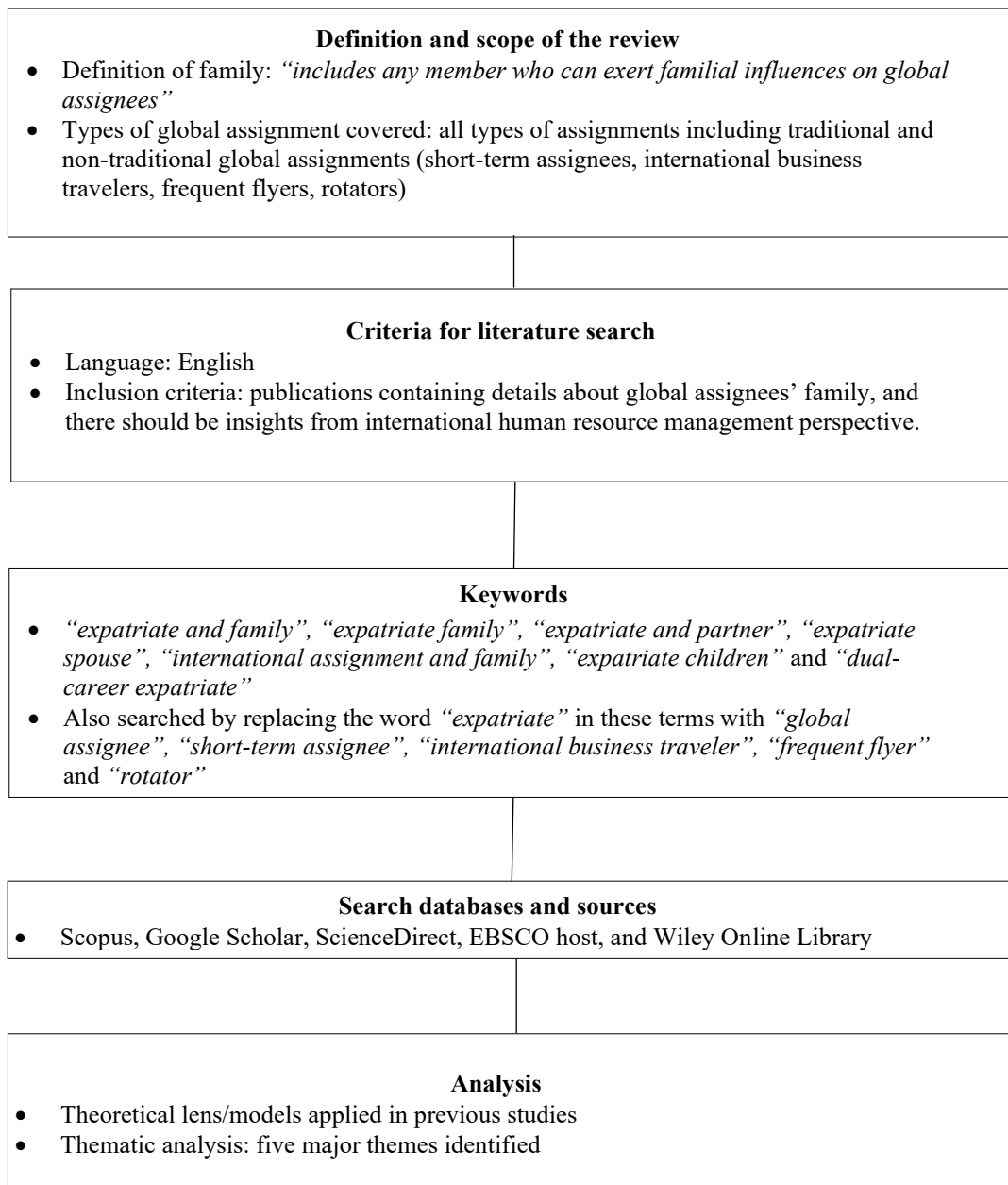
necessary to note that expatriates who bring their families to foreign relocations would expose the whole family to the same challenges of adjusting to a new environment as themselves (Bader et al. 2015), putting pressures on the whole family. In this case, the family system's flexibility may be affected. This was merely an assumption, and the similarities and differences between the two situations (accompanied or split) remain unclear. As such, family system theory provided a useful lens for this comparative study.

## **2.2 Literature review of global assignees and family issues in international assignments**

The role that family plays in global assignees' international assignments, and the expatriation experiences of these families have long been the topics of interest in the literature. These topics have not only attracted the attention of scholars from the IHRM field but also scholars from other disciplines such as business and management, psychology, medicine, and the decision-making sciences (Haslberger and Brewster 2008, Saint Arnault and Roles 2012, Van Erp et al. 2011a, Westman et al. 2009). The emphasis has been placed on the family's influence on expatriates' expatriation decisions, adjustment and performance as well as expatriate families' experiences of international assignments. To obtain an overview of literature on global assignees and their families, a detailed review process was undertaken which is illustrated in Figure 2.2. To present a rigorous and comprehensive review of the literature, a systematic review was conducted following the approach of López-Duarte et al. (2016), Meier (2011), and Tranfield et al. (2003).

First of all, to set the specific academic context, a consistent definition of family was proposed for this literature review. Furthermore, the scope of the review was defined. The literature search was limited only to publications in English, and they had to contain details about global assignees' families with implications for IHRM. For example, an article that includes expatriate children as the sample but focuses on children's health and draws implications for the health sector was not included (Sakai et al. 2009). This process excluded irrelevant publications following the process recommended by well-cited review articles (López-Duarte et al. 2016, Meier 2011, Tranfield et al. 2003). Publications were searched in various databases including Scopus, Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, EBSCOhost and Wiley Online Library using the keywords specified in Figure 2.2. In addition, to ensure all relevant works were included, the reference lists of included publications were checked. In the

following sections, more details about the scope of the review is provided together with the theoretical bases and thematic analysis of the field.



**Figure 2. 2: Literature review process**

The IHRM literature defines a typical family model as being made up of married or unmarried couples with or without children (Brown 2008, Käsälä et al. 2015, Luring and Selmer 2010, Van Erp et al. 2014). However, this view has been challenged to reflect the changing nature of the family structure in society, and to take into account cultural differences in the understanding of what constitutes a family (McNulty and Brewster 2017). For example, single or divorced people may also have family concerns related to their parents or their children (McNulty et al. 2015). In addition, it has been argued that the Western model of a nuclear family may not be applicable in Asian countries, where a family may include a cluster of close family members or relatives (McNulty and Brewster 2017). The latter definition is increasingly being adopted by many Western authors. Some of these authors include the multi-generational family, which includes parents and relatives such as grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins and others, who can exert familial influences (Clark and Altman 2016, Lê et al. 2010). Therefore, it was necessary to have a broader definition of expatriate family or family members of the expatriate.

Beside the various definitions of a family in the literature, another phenomenon is the inclusion of new family structures. McPhail et al. (2016) covered a new categorization of family, which consists of same sex couples. This type of partnership has gained increasing acceptance in society, and this family model may pose distinct opportunities and challenges in global assignments. Thus, it is likely necessary to include this new family type definition in global family literature in future research. This inclusion is evident in industry practice with 50% of KPMG global assignment policies and practices survey participants defining same sex unmarried couples as a family (KPMG 2015). Hence, in order to be inclusive, family is defined in this review section as including *any member who can exert familial influences on global assignees*.

In terms of global assignment, traditional expatriation seems to dominate research in relation to family issues. However, it has been argued that other types of global assignments (non-traditional) such as short-term assignment, frequent flyers, and international business travelers also present major family challenges because of the potential to disrupt the work-life balance (Baker and Ciuk 2015, Kang et al. 2017, McNulty 2016). Therefore, this review covers all types of assignments including traditional and non-traditional global assignments.

In reviewing the literature, it was uncovered that research on global assignees and their family has been underpinned by theories originating from different disciplines such as family

therapy, psychology, human capital and many others. Table 2.2 offers examples of theories and/or theoretical models that have been used in previous studies.

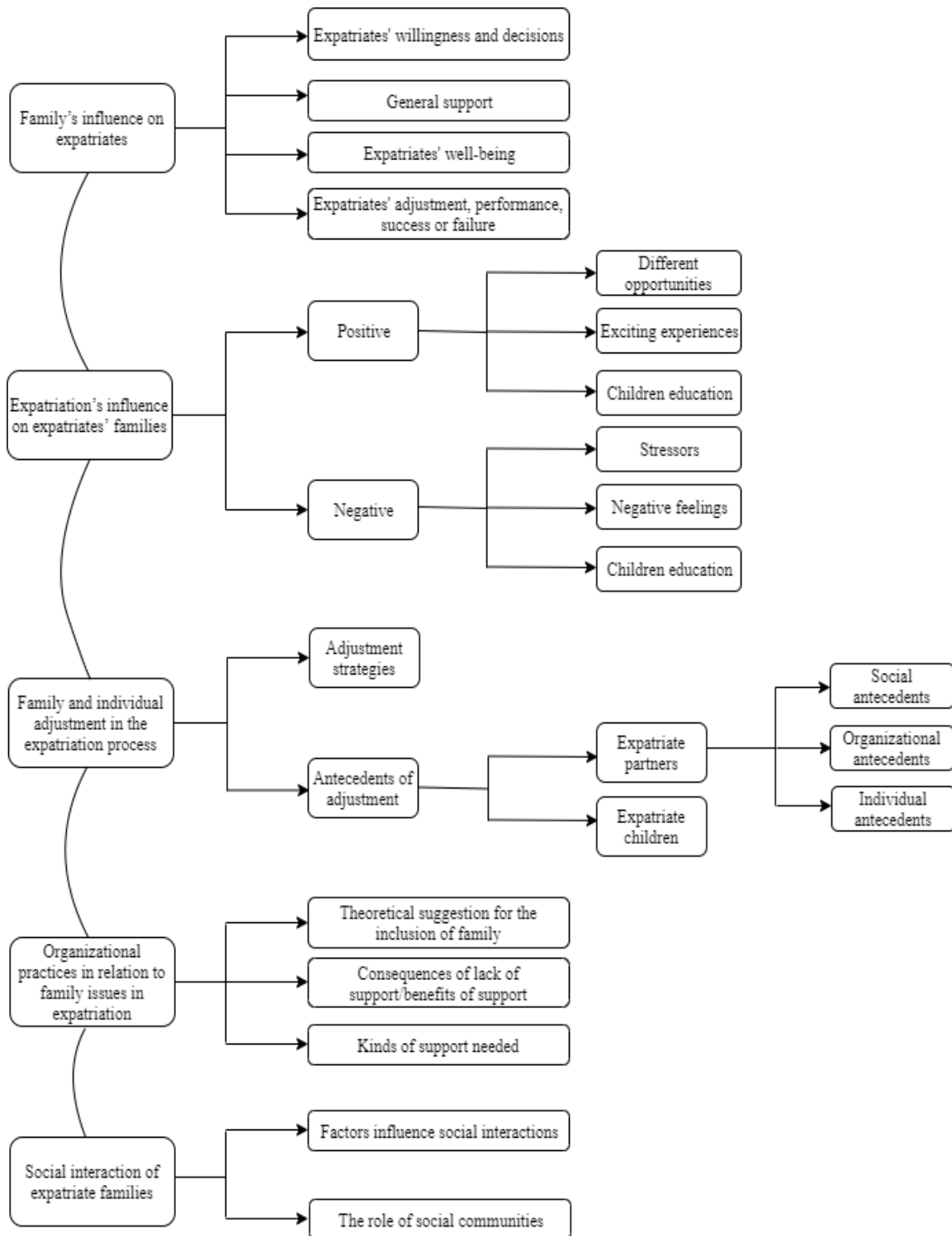
**Table 2. 2: Examples of theories / theoretical models / theoretical frameworks used in the literature on global assignees and their family**

<b>Theory/theoretical models or frameworks</b>
<p><b><u>Most commonly used:</u></b></p> <p><b><i>Conservation of resource theory</i></b> Westman et al. (2008), Van Erp et al. (2014), Westman et al. (2008), Mäkelä et al. (2017), Ballesteros Leiva et al. (2018)</p> <p><b><i>Family systems theory</i></b> Caligiuri et al. (1998); Konopaske et al. (2009); McNulty (2012); Bader et al. (2015)</p> <p><b><i>Job demands-resources theory</i></b> Westman et al. (2009); Lazarova et al. (2010); Cole and Nesbeth (2014); Mutter and Thorn (2019)</p> <p><b><i>Role theory</i></b> Tharenou (2008); Kempen et al. (2015); Shaffer et al. (2016);</p> <p><b><i>Social capital theory</i></b> Lauring and Selmer (2010); Fischlmayr and Puchmüller (2016); McPhail, et al. (2016)</p>
<p><b><u>Other theories/frameworks:</u></b></p> <p><b><i>Life role salience theory</i></b> Bikos et al. (2007b), Bikos and Kocheleva (2013)</p> <p><b><i>Social role theory</i></b> Dupuis et al. (2008); Cole (2012), Dupuis et al. (2008)</p> <p><b><i>Social learning theory</i></b> Harvey et al. (2010), Tarique and Weisbord (2013)</p> <p><b><i>Spillover and crossover theory</i></b> Cole and Nesbeth (2014); Trompetter et al. (2016)</p> <p><b><i>Anxiety/Uncertainty management theory</i></b> Malek et al. (2013); Malek et al. (2015),</p> <p><b><i>Reasoned action theory:</i></b> Konopaske et al. (2009); <b><i>Contagion theory:</i></b> Lazarova et al. (2010);</p> <p><b><i>Social cognitive career theory:</i></b> Tharenou (2008); <b><i>Theory of stakeholder salience:</i></b> Lämsä et al. (2017);</p> <p><b><i>Role identity salience theory:</i></b> Kim and Froese (2011); <b><i>Human capital theory:</i></b> Bahn (2015);</p> <p><b><i>Social penetration theory:</i></b> Van Bakel et al. (2015); <b><i>Theory of fit:</i></b> Cerdin and Pargneux (2010);</p> <p><b><i>Family stress theory:</i></b> Van Der Zee et al. (2007); <b><i>Relational Demography theory:</i></b> Davies et al. (2015);</p> <p><b><i>Theory of career hierarchies:</i></b> Käsälä et al. (2015); <b><i>Continuing bonds theory:</i></b> Henry et al. (2009);</p> <p><b><i>Equity theory:</i></b> Shortland and Perkins (2016); <b><i>Compensating differentials theory:</i></b> Shortland and Perkins (2016);</p> <p><b><i>Interdependence theory:</i></b> Chen and Shaffer (2018); <b><i>Contingency theory:</i></b> Kandogan (2018);</p> <p><b><i>Hope theory:</i></b> Kierner (2018); <b><i>Organizational legitimacy theory:</i></b> Moeller and Maley (2018);</p> <p><b><i>Self-determination theory:</i></b> Ramalu et al. (2017)</p>

In terms of theoretical background, there is a large variety in the literature on global assignees and their family issues. However, theoretically, it could be seen that this literature is still fragmented because a large number of theories were each only utilized by one study. The most commonly used theories are conservation of resource theory, family systems theory, job

demand-resource theory, role theory and social capital theory. It is noted that the origins of the theories are various, from individuals' roles (role theory, social role theory), work and careers (theory of career hierarchies), family relationships (family systems theory), social networks (social capital theory) and organizational legitimacy (organizational legitimacy theory). The variety of theoretical disciplines signifies the complexity of expatriate families' experiences of the expatriation process. In addition, it raises a need to develop theories that could underpin research on international assignments of global assignees' families.

The following section presents details of the themes identified after analyzing the literature regarding global assignees and family issues in international assignments. The issue of expatriates and the family was first discussed in a book by Cleveland et al. (1960), who looked at the issues of Americans living abroad. Since then, the academic conversation related to expatriates' families has been extended by many studies. The varieties and richness of previous literature on this topic enabled a thematic analysis to be undertaken in this study, thus providing a comprehensive overview of the field's scholarship. This approach was adopted because of the flexibility that it lent to different paradigms and its capability to deal with a large set of data (Braun and Clarke 2006). The approach also has the potential to provide richness yet complexity to an account of data, a review of the literature in this case (Braun and Clarke 2006). Furthermore, in light of family systems theory, the review directs attention to major stakeholders of internal family systems comprising expatriates and expatriate family members, and external stakeholders which are the employing organizations. It also focuses on the interrelationships among all stakeholders as suggested by the family systems theory (Minuchin 1974, Olson 2000). Accordingly, the five major themes identified are presented in Figure 2.3.



**Figure 2. 3: A summary of key themes in previous studies on global assignees and family issues in global assignments**

### 2.2.1 The influence of family on expatriates

Family can influence expatriates' opportunities, willingness and decisions to take global assignments. The influence of family on opportunities to take up expatriation has been

investigated in academic studies, but mainly with women expatriates (Hutchings et al. 2010, McPhail et al. 2016). Hutchings, Metcalfe and Cooper (2010) suggested that the expatriating opportunities for females depend on work-family conflict. Thus, a lack of family support might hinder women's global work opportunities (Hutchings et al. 2010) while opportunities may be facilitated with husband or family support. Work-family conflict could influence the promotion opportunities of female international managers during global assignments (Linehan and Walsh 2000).

- **Influence of family on expatriates' opportunity, willingness and decisions to undertake global assignments**

The research findings related to the influence of family on an individual's willingness and decision to accept an expatriate position have been mixed, and there is no consistent view in the literature. Family, including parents, spouses, and children, has been found to exert strong influence on expatriates' willingness or decision to go overseas (Bikos et al. 2007b, Brett and Stroh 1995, Dickmann et al. 2008, Doherty et al. 2011, Dupuis et al. 2008, Feitosa et al. 2014, Harvey and Wiese 1998, Harvey 1995, Ho et al. 2015, Kim and Froese 2011, Konopaske et al. 2009, Richardson 2006, Ridgway and Robson 2018, Schoepp et al. 2010, Shaffer et al. 2001, Shortland 2015, 2018a, b, Suutari et al. 2012, Tharenou 2008, Zhu et al. 2006), or to repatriate or withdraw from international assignments (Kierner 2018, Shaffer and Harrison 1998, Shaffer et al. 2001). While Gripenberg et al. (2013) argued that this influence seems to be increasing over time, others have suggested that this influence is evident, but not always strong, which means families either play no major role (Dickmann 2012, Khokher and Beauregard 2014), or have only a moderate influence on expatriates' decisions. Finally, Kim and Froese (2011) when studying Korean respondents found that marital role commitment had no effect on expatriates' decisions to go abroad. These variations in the influence of the family not only reflect the differences in culture, but also highlight the need for further studies regarding the influence of family on expatriation decisions. In-depth understanding of how expatriates consider their families in their decision-making process and what their drivers and concerns are when deciding to undertake international assignments with or without their families could help elucidate implicit information.

- **General support of family for expatriates**

In the context of international assignments, the significance of family support is found to be even more evident than in a domestic setting (Mäkelä et al. 2011). Previous literature

demonstrates that family support is important in all phases of the assignment (Mäkelä et al. 2011), and lack of support from family may result in psychological illness and distraction (McNulty 2014, Sarkiunaite and Rocke 2015). Family support is considered as a resource for global assignees to cope with challenges in expatriation (Ballesteros Leiva et al. 2018, Mäkelä and Suutari 2011). The common trend in this research area is to find out what kind of support the family can provide expatriates. Emotional support is the most common kind of support that the family can give (Mäkelä et al. 2011, Shaffer et al. 2016, Tzeng 2006). Psychological, practical, and professional support have also been identified (Davoine et al. 2013, Mäkelä et al. 2011). Noticeably, in the study of Luring and Selmer (2010), spouses actively assisted their partners' careers through their social and instrumental support. Previous studies have focused on the support of the accompanying expatriate family. However, families who do not accompany expatriates could also provide some sort of support. If and how un-accompanying expatriate families support expatriates remains unclear in the literature.

- **Influence of family on expatriates' well-being**

Family issues can be a key challenge for global assignees (Baker and Ciuk 2015). They could cause stress to expatriates due to conflicting roles between work and family domains in expatriation (Van Erp et al. 2011b), or due to pressure from family members, such as having difficulties adapting (Bahn 2015) or from safety-related problems in high-risk countries (Bader and Berg 2013). The rationale for this kind of challenge can partly be attributed to expatriates' ability to manage the work-life interface when they are accompanied by family (Kim and Tung 2013). The influence of each family member has also been examined separately in previous studies. Expatriates whose spouses experienced a high degree of stress suffered higher stress themselves (Forster 1997). While the impact of spouses on expatriates' work-life balance can be both positive (Mäkelä et al. 2011) and negative (Bader and Berg 2013, Bahn 2015, Van Erp et al. 2011b), the presence of children is found to have only a positive influence on expatriates (Brown (2008). However, undertaking an expatriate assignment without family may be stressful for international assignees because of feelings of loneliness, instability, and a loss of self-confidence (Furusawa and Brewster 2016). Empirical evidence of specific challenges in the case of expatriates going overseas by themselves is valuable to fill the gap in the literature.

- **Influence of family on expatriates' adjustment, performance, success or failure**

The influence of family on expatriates' adjustment has attracted much attention from researchers. Family can have an influence on the adjustment of expatriates in the host country because the more people involved in the expatriation process, the bigger the challenges of adjustment for the family as a whole, and for international assignees in particular (McPhail et al., 2014). In other words, it can also be said that the successful adjustment of family determines the pace at which the assignee adjusts (Froese, 2012; Bernd Kupka, Everett, and Cathro, 2008; Sarkiunaite and Rocke, 2015; Riki Takeuchi, Lepak, Marinova, and Yun, 2007). Specifically, expatriates' adjustment is influenced by family situation, family adaptability and family communication (Caligiuri et al. 1998, Sarkiunaite and Rocke 2015, Takeuchi et al. 2002), as well as internal family strength (McNulty 2016).

Davies et al. (2015) found that expatriates whose spouses were nationals of the host country had the highest level of increase in cross-cultural adjustment over time in comparison with expatriates who had spouses with third country nationality. However, expatriates whose spouse had the same home-country nationality as they did not adjust better over time (Davies et al. 2015). In contrast, Malek et al. (2015) found no significant relationship between spouse adjustment and expatriate adjustment. Furusawa and Brewster (2016) found no significant relationships between company's considerations for family situations and the adjustment of the expatriate, indicating a lack of spillover and/or crossover effect between the work and family domains of expatriates.

There is mixed evidence regarding family influence on expatriates' work performance. On one hand, similar to expatriates' adjustment, Furusawa and Brewster (2016) found that organizational considerations for family situations do not make a difference in job performance of a global employee. Similarly, Shen and Jiang (2015) and Bader, Berg, and Holtbrügge (2015) found that family does not significantly affect expatriate performance. On the other hand, some authors found a relationship between family issues and international assignees' performance (Abdul Malek, Jaguli, and Palil, 2013; Le et al., 2010). Safety-related family issues, and unhappy families can result in poor performance by expatriates (Bader et al., 2015; Shortland and Cummins, 2007). Meanwhile, being married seems to be positively associated with the work performance of global employees (Selmer and Luring, 2011). The differences among previous studies raise a need to investigate whether and how family influences expatriates' performance and the reasons behind it.

From a negative perspective, family issues such as spouse's career and their adjustment and children's education can be reasons for expatriates' failure (Avril and Magnini, 2007; Cole and Nesbeth, 2014; Ferguson, Nesta, and Storey, 2007; Gupta, Banerjee, and Gaur, 2012a, 2012b). Family issues were even identified as the most significant factor in the failure of Japanese expatriates by Fukuda and Chu (1994). Sarkiunaite and Rocke (2015) argued that family strongly affects expatriates' success. Similarly, Schütter and Boerner (2013) found enriching effects of family in their study.

### **2.2.2 Impact of expatriation on family**

In expatriate research, there seems to be an over-emphasis on the negative impacts of expatriation on families (Schütter and Boerner 2013). That was noticeable in this literature review as well. Attention has been mostly exclusively directed towards the accompanying family situation. Specifically, the major focus of previous studies on the impact of expatriation rests on the stressors confronting an expatriate family as a whole and each family member as an individual. As Fischlmayr and Kollinger (2010) concluded, the work domain intrudes on family life more than vice versa. Since international assignments usually ask assignees to expend time and effort at the expense of their family life (Kim and Tung 2013), stressors for expatriate families are usually time-based (Schütter and Boerner 2013), strain-based or even mobility-based (Mäkelä and Suutari 2011) due to the nature of global work. Furthermore, international assignments influence expatriates' family stability and family formation (Waibel et al. 2018). Negative feelings of separation from family and network, feelings of unsettlement, and loss of identity are experienced by expatriate families (Bikos et al. 2009, Haslberger 2011, Kupka and Cathro 2007, Lê et al. 2010). Specifically, homesickness, loneliness, isolation, anger, and fear are the feelings that are not exclusive to any family member or to any type of global assignment (Baker and Ciuk 2015, Cho et al. 2013, Haslberger 2011, Lê et al. 2010, Rosenbusch et al. 2015). In addition, cultural stress, learning a foreign language and difficulty in making new friends can make expatriate families more stressed (Cho et al. 2013, McNulty 2012, Rosenbusch et al. 2015). The problem of children's education is another concern of expatriate parents (Bahn 2015, Kim and Tung 2013, McNulty 2012, Sarkiunaite and Rocke 2015).

Among all the stressors of expatriation on the expatriate family, relationship tension seems to be the most common stressor as new pressures and responsibilities mean that the expatriates and their partners have less time for each other (Baker and Ciuk 2015, Lê et al. 2010,

Shortland 2015). In addition to expatriate spouses' lost career identity, marital stress and divorce are evident consequences of expatriation (McNulty 2012, McNulty et al. 2015).

The impact of expatriation on family is not always negative (Lê et al. 2010). Positive influences recorded include the opportunity for expatriate spouses to spend more time with the family because they no longer work as they did in their home country, exciting experiences linked to living in a different location, and opportunities to travel (Lê et al. 2010, Mäkelä and Suutari 2011). The effect of expatriation on children's education can be moderate (Fry 2009) or even highly positive (Lê et al. 2010). Sometimes, the challenge of expatriation can create a deeper bond between all members of a family (Lê et al. 2010). Therefore, international assignments are said to bring both conflicts and enrichment to expatriate family life (Mäkelä and Suutari 2011). However, the impact of expatriation on split expatriate families may be different from that experienced by families traveling/moving together, and this deserves more attention.

### **2.2.3 Adjustment in expatriation process**

Among the challenges that expatriates and expatriate families have to face, a prominent theme is adjustment. Both family and individual adjustment may impact work performance, engagement, and the success or failure of expatriation (Kupka et al. 2008, Lazarova et al. 2010, Mäkelä and Suutari 2011, Malek et al. 2015). Different antecedents of family and individual adjustment have been identified. Expatriates' adjustment is influenced by spouses' adjustment and acts as a mediator between spouses' coping strategies and spouses' adjustment (Chen and Shaffer 2018). Similarly, Caligiuri et al. (1998) and Takeuchi et al. (2002) found crossover and spillover effects between adjustment of expatriates and expatriate spouses. Self-initiated expatriates have so far been found to have higher levels of family-role adjustment than organization-assigned expatriates (Shaffer et al. 2016). With regards to spouse adjustment, many social, organizational and individual prerequisites were recognized. For example, Malek et al. (2015) found that support for the spouses in the host country influenced spouse adjustment, while Malek et al. (2013) found no direct effects between the two variables. From a country perspective, when investigating factors that help host governments to attract more investment through better facilitation for expatriates, Cherry (2010) concluded that Korea's image overseas, its nationals' attitude toward foreign people, national education, language and communication could potentially hinder expatriate spouse adjustment. The bigger the cultural distance between home and host country, the harder it is

for a spouse to adjust (Black and Stephens 1989, Kupka et al. 2008). Another factor found to be positively related to spouse adjustment is *Ibasho*, defined as “a sense of comfort and psychological security that a person feels in specific locations they regularly visit” (Herleman et al. 2008).

Organizational antecedents such as expatriates’ perceived organizational support, pre-departure training, and the appreciation of expatriate spouses of the international assignment were found to have positive impacts on spouse adjustment (Black and Gregersen 1991, Gupta et al. 2012b). However, no significant difference in adjustment was found between spouses who received organizational assistance and those who did not (Cole 2011), implying that organizational support did not have an effect on spouse adjustment.

In relation to individual factors, spouses’ existing skills and experience, personal strengths, positive attitude, self-esteem, hope and curiosity, cultural intelligence, and perceived gender role ideology were found to be positively related to their adjustment and their expatriate lives (Bikos et al. 2007a, Black and Gregersen 1991, De Cieri et al. 1991, Fukuda and Chu 1994, Harvey et al. 2009, Malek et al. 2013, Sarkiunaite and Rocke 2015, Simeon and Fujiu 2000). Moreover, educational level and language proficiency of spouses are also positive predictors of their general adjustment (Shaffer and Harrison 2001, Takeuchi et al. 2007). Similar to gender role ideology, parental demands have a relationship with spouse adjustment in the form of a nonlinear, U-shaped effect (Takeuchi et al. 2007). Another antecedent of spouse adjustment mentioned in many studies is spouse personality such as extroversion and openness to change or open-mindedness. These personalities are necessary for a spouse to adjust successfully to a new country (Gupta et al. 2012a, b, Van Erp et al. 2014, Weeks et al. 2009). Furthermore, the chance to work in a host country helps expatriate spouses to adapt quickly to a new environment (Cole 2011, McNulty 2014, Wilkinson and Singh 2010). Since the adjustment of expatriates and expatriate families is related to many issues which may differ depending on whether the expatriate family is in the home or in the host country, further insights into particular challenges of adjustment in each case will contribute to the literature of expatriate and expatriate family adjustment.

The adjustment of expatriate children was found to be affected by expatriates’ work satisfaction, family cohesion, family attachment, emotional stability and personality (Van Der Zee et al. 2007). Similarly, female expatriate spouses from more cohesive families were also found to have a higher level of adjustment (Copeland and Norell 2002).

To adjust in a family context, expatriate managers were seen to use family-level coping strategies, together with emotional coping, reappraisal and avoidance strategies to adjust (Mäkelä and Suutari 2011) because conflict avoidance was found to be beneficial for both parties (Van Erp et al. 2011a). Others tried to influence their relocation (Lê et al. 2010). Dual-career couples of a study conducted by Käsälä et al. (2015) used various coordination methods from hierarchical, egalitarian and loose strategies. Kierner and Suutari (2018) found evidence to support Kansala et al. (2015) in regard to adjustment strategies of dual-career couples. Another issue for the expatriate family is to find a suitable education for their children. In Japan, while Western expatriates adopted Japanese styles (Cook 2013), Japanese mothers combined both transnational and traditional home country strategies when living in host countries (Nukaga 2013).

#### **2.2.4 Organizational practices in relation to family issues in expatriation and social interaction of expatriate families**

Organizational practices are necessary to help expatriate families have a smoother expatriation process. As confirmed by Bahn (2015), of the workers relocating to Australia, those with families are people who need the most support. From a theoretical perspective, many studies have suggested frameworks to include the family as a stakeholder of the firm in the expatriation process (Kupka et al. 2011, Lämsä et al. 2017, Moeller and Maley 2018). The expatriate family and family situation should be taken into account in recruitment, selection and training processes (Avril and Magnini 2007, Harvey et al. 1999, Lund and Degen 2010). There is a strong call from academia for the need to consider expatriate families in these processes. However, what can commonly be seen from reality is that the family dimension is underestimated by organizations (Dickmann et al. 2008, Kupka and Cathro 2007, Kupka et al. 2008, McNulty 2012, Shen and Darby 2006, Zainol et al. 2013). Recently, Kandogan (2018) found the family situation was important when managers considered the suitability of candidates for international assignments.

There has often been a lack of support from organizations for expatriate families (Anderson 2001, Davidson and Kinzel 1996, Handler and Lane 1997, Harvey 1997, Riusala and Suutari 2000). Consequently, the lack of inclusion of family during pre-departure and on-site support may lead to violation of the psychological contract between expatriates and their organizations (Kupka et al. 2008). This proposition was empirically tested, and a lack of

organizational support for family was found to be the most common reason for expatriate failure (Cole and Nesbeth 2014). In contrast, organizations that pay adequate attention to the concerns of the expatriate families can experience increased efficiency and enhanced job-related outcomes from their international assignees (Lämsä et al. 2017).

The issue of support raises the point about what kinds are needed to assist expatriates and their families. Career, spiritual well-being, education, social networking, raising children, language and cultural support have been suggested by many authors (Bikos et al. 2007a, Haslberger 2011, Käsälä et al. 2015, Seak and Enderwick 2008, Wilkinson and Singh 2010). Wilkinson and Singh (2010) presented an example of these practices from the State Department of the United States of America and how these practices supported expatriate families in reducing stress to enhance the chance of successful expatriation for the whole family. The presence of an expatriate family in the home or host country may pose significantly different consequences for the expatriation process. Insights into current views and practices of organizations in the two groups of expatriate families (accompanying or split) may help advance knowledge in this area and help gain an understanding of what could be done to make expatriation more successful.

In addition to organizational support, social support is beneficial for expatriate families in host countries (McNulty 2012). Although spouses usually have low confidence in their interaction with the host country nationals (Kupka and Cathro 2007), they are usually perceived more positively by host country nationals in contrast to the expatriates (Malek et al. 2013). Expatriate partners even play a role in creating the relationships between expatriates and host country nationals (Malek et al. 2013). So, what are the factors influencing the interaction of expatriate spouses and host culture natives? Van Bakel et al. (2015) indicated nine factors which include three key factors of motivations, similarities and benefits.

Host country nationals were assumed to be the best community from whom to seek basic help by Malek et al. (2013), but from a study of expatriate partners in German multinational companies (MNCs), Kupka et al. (2008) found that expatriates' social community was the most common source of social support for expatriate spouses. Japanese women were also found to have close and complex relationships with other company wives (Arnault and Roles 2012).

## **2.2.5 Summary of the literature on global assignees and family issues in global assignments**

In summary, although previous literature has covered a wide range of issues related to expatriate families, there are still deficiencies that need to be addressed in future studies.

First, as mentioned earlier, despite a growing number of expatriates undertaking international assignments without their families, it is surprising that no study was found which specifically focused on split expatriate families. Perhaps there is an assumption that when the expatriate travels alone, they do not have familial concerns. However, this could be a myth since family separation may cause global assignees and their dependent families various stressors (Fischlmayr and Kollinger 2010, Fischlmayr and Puchmüller 2016, Kang et al. 2017, Shortland 2015). Therefore, family-related issues of unaccompanied expatriates need to be paid close attention. Specifically, questions remain as to how un-accompanying families influence expatriates' decisions to undertake international assignments, how these families influence expatriates' adjustment and performance, and how the thoughts and experiences of these families are different from or similar to those of accompanying families. This study has attempted to answer such questions.

Second, it is notable to observe the population sample in previous studies. Although the focal studies were about global assignees and family-related issues, only about one-third of them approached expatriates' significant others including partners, spouses or children. Relying on self-reporting data of expatriates while investigating expatriates' family issues is considered a weakness of the literature (Konopaske et al. 2009). Since the nature of global employees and family issues involves various stakeholders, the need to have studies of multisource samples is emphasized by many authors (Davies et al. 2015, Fischlmayr and Puchmüller 2016, Takeuchi et al. 2007). Although there are some exceptions, research in the literature is still being criticized for reflecting the perspectives of the expatriates themselves (McEvoy and Buller 2013). This is a significant methodological gap that has been addressed in the current study.

Third, although there have been a number of previous studies that focused on organizational practices in relation to expatriate families, little empirical evidence from various perspectives regarding these practices exists. Most research studies that attempted to investigate organizational practices in relation to the inclusion of families and support for expatriate families in expatriation are only limited to conceptual findings. There is little evidence of

companies making an effort to address these issues (Dickmann et al., 2008; McNulty, 2012; Shen and Darby, 2006). There are many questions that are yet to be explored, and empirical evidence for these questions would help advance the literature in the field and industry practice: (1) “How and to what extent should organizations include expatriate families in the expatriation process?”; (2) “What specific support should organizations provide expatriate families?”. The current study helps answer these questions from evidence collected from expatriates and their families, as well as from organizational representatives regarding current policies and practices.

### **2.3 Chapter summary**

Family systems theory was used as a theoretical lens to help answer the study’s research questions. Therefore, a detailed review of the theory and its use in the literature of expatriate research was provided in this chapter. The chapter also details the use of family systems theory in the study. Furthermore, this chapter has presented a review of the literature on global assignees and family issues. Five major themes emerged from the review of the literature. As an outcome of the review process, a summary of previous literature was provided, and the gaps that this study aims to address were identified. The next chapter presents the methodology employed in this study.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

This chapter presents the methodology that informed the study's data collection and analysis processes. The chapter first discusses the philosophical standpoint of the researcher. Next, details of the data collection process are outlined followed by an explanation of the data analysis. The fourth section delineates the study's ethical considerations and then outlines the validation of the study. A summary concludes this chapter.

### **3.1 Philosophical standpoint**

The philosophical standpoint of this study is social constructivism. The ontology of constructivism is relativism which means that reality is a multiple social construction of personally experienced reality (Denzin and Lincoln 2011). Considering the purpose of this study, to gain an understanding of the thoughts and experiences of expatriates and their family members, this view was suitable for several reasons. As mentioned in Schwandt (2014), thoughts and experiences are believed to be socially constructed. In this paradigm, the researcher either develops theory or generates theory instead of starting with a theory, as found in positivism (Creswell 2013a). The participants' views of the phenomenon being studied are also what the inquirer tries to rely on as much as they can (Creswell 2013a). These characteristics of constructivism fit well with the purpose of the current study. Furthermore, there is no better way to answer the research questions about inner thoughts, perceptions and meanings rather than indirectly accessing the phenomena through participants' views (Schwandt 2014), and therefore the constructivist approach was deemed appropriate.

The strategy of inquiry that was used in this study is phenomenology. The term "phenomena" is originally from a Greek verb meaning to appear or to show oneself (Sanders 1982). Phenomenology has slightly different definitions among different authors. However, most authors agree that phenomenology is an approach taken to study the lived experiences of some individuals and their perceptions of the world (Creswell 2013a, Kafle 2013, Sanders 1982). Phenomenological studies seek to describe the essence of lived experiences of different individuals, and then to uncover common insights among these individuals, focusing more on making the implicit meaning of human experience explicit (Sanders 1982, Van Manen 2016). Provided the aforementioned purpose of this study, a phenomenological approach was appropriate. In line with a social constructivist paradigm in which the

researcher mostly relies on the participants for their own points of view, phenomenology strengthened the possibility of answering the research questions by looking to participants to convey the essence of their lived experiences themselves.

Given the research purpose and the nature of inquiry being exploratory rather than confirmatory, applying a qualitative rather than quantitative research approach was more suitable for this study (Creswell 2013b, Symon and Cassell 2006). Utilizing a qualitative approach allowed for the possibility of elucidating in-depth insights into people's motivations, considerations, attitudes and behaviors (Birkinshaw et al. 2011, Creswell 2003). Furthermore, the general purpose of this study was to capture a holistic picture of people's real-life experiences, and how they perceived those experiences. A qualitative method was able to meet this objective because of its strength in providing panoramic views of studied phenomenon (Maxwell 2012, Miles and Huberman 1994). The fact that research on split expatriate families' thoughts and experiences of global assignments is nascent necessitated a qualitative exploratory approach that helped shed further light on comprehensive understandings of expatriates and their families before and during global assignments. It could be argued that similar situations could be found in domestic contexts such as the case of commuter relationships, and therefore a quantitative approach would also have been feasible. However, as established in the literature, there are a vast number of factors that make international and domestic human resource management areas different from each other (Dowling et al. 2008). Hence, the literature of domestic situations should not be taken for granted nor the knowledge applied to an international context. By pursuing a qualitative approach, the study may have developed opportunities to discover new insights into the work-family interface in the international arena. Finally, the selection of this approach also addressed the call for using qualitative methods to advance knowledge in international human resource management and work-family interface (Casper et al. 2007, Doz 2011, Gephart and Richardson 2008, Poelmans 2005).

The qualitative approach has also been chosen in recent studies in the literature of international work (Kang et al. 2017, McPhail et al. 2016), especially family issues of global assignees (Fischlmayr and Puchmüller 2016, Lirio 2014). The approach was used to study the family's influence on expatriates (Lê et al. 2010), motivations and perceptions of global assignments of expatriates and their family (Cho et al. 2013, Yao et al. 2016), and work-family attitudes and behaviors among expatriates (Khokher and Beauregard 2014). The

findings from these studies have contributed to the advancement of knowledge in work-family literature in global assignments.

The literature of international assignments and family is still emerging (Lirio 2014), and much remains unknown (Kang et al. 2017). A qualitative approach was appropriate for this study to be in line with the trend and call for rich description of the phenomena from the literature (Bader et al. 2015, Khokher and Beauregard 2014, McNulty 2016, Rosenbusch et al. 2015).

## **3.2 Data collection**

### **3.2.1 Researcher's role**

The researcher plays a critical role in qualitative research, especially in the processes of data collection and data analysis, because the quality of an inductive study depends on the interplay between the two sides of analysis which are creative and critical thinking, or the art and the science (Patton 1990). In a study that uses interviews as its research tool, the role of the researcher may be more critical because the researcher is also the main tool in the data collection process (Creswell 2013a). In this study, it was important to acknowledge that the researcher had similar first-hand experience with the phenomenon under research, which was one of the motivations for her to pursue the study. The researcher first moved to Australia as an accompanying spouse when her husband started his PhD study. For more than 4 years, she and her family lived together in Australia. Later, her husband finished his PhD study and relocated back to his home country. The researcher continued living in Australia to continue her PhD study and therefore experienced the situation of the split family. Having experienced both accompanied and unaccompanied situations, the researcher was interested in studying expatriate families who lived in these situations. Although the researcher's experience might not be identical to those of other expatriates, they were useful for her to embark on this research and pursue it during her PhD. However, the researcher was also aware of other advantages, as well as potential issues, arising from first-hand experience.

On the one hand, many authors agree that having personal experience as a starting point for a study could offer many advantages (Lofland et al. 2006, Strauss and Corbin 1998, Van Manen 2016). First, having lived and worked in different cultures in similar situations, the researcher was familiar with the lived experiences of the informants. Consequently, this could help her communicate with participants effectively, building rapport and promoting trust

while interacting with them (Locke et al. 2000, Mutter 2017). As suggested by Wax (1971), the relationship and trust between interviewers and interviewees are important to enable interviewees to share their honest thoughts and feelings, which are critical in a qualitative exploratory study. Second, it is believed that having first-hand experience facilitates the researcher's appreciation and understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Lofland et al. 2006). The researcher can stay focused on important information during interviews and grasp the insights as portrayed by informants. Last, the researcher's background is beneficial to evaluate the collected data in critical and in-depth ways (Strauss and Corbin 1998). Critical and original thinking promotes the ability to draw in-depth insights during the process of data analysis. Hence, the researcher remained aware of her background at all times so that she could both gain the benefits and make every effort to stay sensitive to the study.

On the other hand, there is a concern that the insider's experience might influence the objectivity of a study with the possibility of the researcher detracting from the role of a pure researcher (Kvale 2007, Smith and Berg 1988). Hence, in this situation, an interview guide was one of the tools used to ensure the researcher's neutrality (Charmaz 2005). Furthermore, a research journal which recorded the researcher's decision trail in relation to the study was kept to ensure the transparency of data collection and data analysis processes (Noble and Smith 2015). The inclusion of different perspectives from the expatriates, their spouses and the HR professionals also helped minimize potential effects of the researcher's bias (Noble and Smith 2015). Further information regarding the researcher's bias is presented in section 3.5 (Validation of the study) and section 6.4 (Limitations and directions for future research).

### **3.2.2 Semi-structured interviews**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the family's influence on expatriates and the experiences of expatriates and their families in international assignments, specifically the motivations, considerations and experiences of participants. Therefore, the study was required to gain in-depth insights from participants. As a result, conducting interviews was a recommended approach to uncover these insights (Bloomberg and Volpe 2012, Harris 2008). There are three main approaches to conducting qualitative interviews: structured interview, semi-structured interview and unstructured interview (Patton 2002). Structured interviews include a fixed set of questions that must be followed for all respondents and therefore limit the flexibility in probing (Patton 2002). Meanwhile, unstructured interviews completely rely on the natural flow of conversations between interviewers and interviewees to generate

questions, and no predetermined question set is used (Patton 2002). Semi-structured interviews follow a consistent approach across different interviews but permit flexibility to develop conversations based on respondents' answers (Kvale 2007, Patton 2002).

Semi-structured interviews were chosen for this study for several reasons. The study was looking at two groups of expatriate families (accompanied and unaccompanied), and there is some literature on one of them (accompanied). As a result, interviews with this group could be guided by some insights from previous literature. The approach of semi-structured interviews allows researchers to categorize findings into preliminary themes (Patton 2002). For instance, the themes "work-related motivations" and "country or culture-related motivations" of accompanied expatriates (See Section 4.1, page 77) were formed based on previous literature (Dickmann 2012, Froese 2012). During the interviews, participants were given the chance to tell their stories and expose their thoughts and experiences. Thus, semi-structured interviews proved to be appropriate for this study. Furthermore, the group of split expatriate families has rarely been researched. Therefore, although it could be argued that structured interviews could be used, the approach of structured interviews may not have been useful for revealing new knowledge about un-accompanying expatriate families. As suggested by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), semi-structured interviews offer researchers the opportunity to uncover new knowledge which might otherwise not be possible with a set of structured questions. This characteristic of semi-structured interviews was significant for an exploratory study like the current research.

Following the semi-structured interview approach, a set of open-ended questions was outlined for each group of participants (expatriates, expatriate spouses/partners and HR managers/organizational representatives). Probing questions were also included as appropriate, and the questions which could be asked were kept open depending on participants' answers.

### **3.2.3 Research sample**

- **Sample**

The target sample of this study included three groups. The first group comprised traditional organizational assigned expatriates who had relocated to work in the host country for long-term assignments of one year or longer. The second group included spouses/partners of the expatriates in the first group. The third sample group consisted of HR managers or

organizational representatives of the multinational enterprises (MNEs) that employed the expatriates. The inclusion of the three sample groups was to elucidate the match or mismatch between the perspectives of each side. Consequently, they could develop mutual understandings and sympathy, and therefore improve the international assignments' experiences and outcomes. Furthermore, the findings about the match or mismatch of different perspectives could contribute new insights to answer unaddressed questions in the literature. For example, the reasons why organizational practices do not yield positive experiences for expatriate families could be due to the lack of organizational understandings.

The study looked at these three groups located in Vietnam. Vietnam was chosen as the site of data collection for a number of reasons. First, Vietnam has been a recipient of a significant amount of inward foreign direct investment (FDI), and the flow of this form of investment in Vietnam remains on an upward trend (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development 2016). Second, according to a survey conducted by UNCTAD (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development) and published in the World Investment Report, Vietnam was named as one of top prospective host economies for multinational enterprises (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development 2016). As a result of an increasing number of companies establishing their operations in Vietnam, a growing number of expatriates are being employed to ensure successful business operations (Malek et al. 2015). Third, since Vietnam liberalized its economy in 1986 and joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2007, the country has made efforts to integrate with the global economy (Farley et al. 2008, Ohno 2009). The findings from this country would provide insights into the way expatriates may feel about other transitioning and newly opened economies. Therefore, Vietnam provides a useful context for a study of expatriates and was considered an appropriate site for this study.

- **Sample Recruitment**

***Sampling procedure and strategy***

A purposeful sampling process was employed to select the sample population for this study. Purposeful sampling yields rich information because samples are selected to yield the most insight for the study under investigation (Bloomberg and Volpe 2012, Patton 1990, Silverman 2013). The first step in a purposeful sampling process is to define the criteria for the selection of participants (Creswell 2013a). The criteria for choosing expatriates and their spouses/partners to participate in this study were as follows.

At the time of data collection, the potential expatriate and spouse participants had to meet all of the following conditions:

- were assigned by organizations to go on a long-term international assignment (of one year or more);
- were married or in a de-facto relationship;
- both they and their spouse could communicate in English or Vietnamese;
- neither they or their spouse had a Vietnamese culture background or origin.

The reason for the first criterion is because the focus of this study was on traditional long-term expatriates. In addition, organizational assigned expatriates and self-initiated expatriates show several differences with regards to motivations and experiences, which made it necessary to differentiate between them (Froese 2012). The second criterion was essential to investigate the interface between work and family, and how a nuclear family (direct family with spouse) mattered in global assignments of expatriates. The third criterion was to ensure practicality in conducting the study, as the researcher could only communicate in English and Vietnamese. Hence, to make sure she could directly interview participants, the participants needed to be fluent in either language. The last criterion was chosen to highlight the thoughts and experiences of participants when relocating to a country that was new to them. Although people may still have challenges to adjust when relocating back to their country of origin, their thoughts and experiences may be different from people who are new to a culture (Selmer 2002). Since this study aimed to illuminate key issues and gain in-depth understandings of foreign expatriates and their spouses/partners, the decision was made not to focus on individuals with a Vietnamese cultural background or origin.

The selection criteria for HR managers or organizational representatives working for organizations employing expatriates to take part in this study included:

- understanding about the expatriate management policies and practices of their firms/organizations,
- could communicate in English or Vietnamese.

The first criterion was necessary to gain insights for answering the research question under investigation. The second criterion was, as before, to ensure the researcher could directly interview participants.

### ***Sample recruitment process***

The recruitment of participants for this research was undertaken by widely circulating information about the study through three channels: 1) personal social networks of the researcher, 2) professional conferences and associations, and 3) referrals from respondents (termed - snowball sampling). Snowball sampling uses participant referrals to identify other potential participants suitable for the study (Cooper and Schindler 2003, Miles and Huberman 1994), and was employed in order to recruit an adequate number of qualified participants. Given that most potential interviewees were in leadership positions in firms, it was not easy to directly approach them. Networks played a vital role in gaining access to such people and the snowball sampling strategy was thus important in the study.

A brief summary of the study was presented to the participants, including the study's title, purpose and inclusion criteria for participants. It was highlighted in the summary that both accompanying and un-accompanying spouses were required. Also communicated in the summary, were the travel and time commitments required from participants, and the manner in which data would be collected. Furthermore, it was stated that their participation was voluntary and confidential. This summary was useful to communicate sufficient information to potential participants and proved to be effective in the recruitment process. In the interest of time and financial resources, for face-to-face interviews, potential participants were sought in major cities in Vietnam where many expatriates were located. For participants who were not in Vietnam at the time of data collection (e.g. split family members), the interviews were conducted virtually using telephone or video calls.

The first recruitment channel was personal networks. Information about the study was circulated through personal networks to reach potential participants. The study's summary was sent to known contacts to ask for their help in forwarding the information to those whom they felt might be suitable. Contact details were included in those emails so that interested and qualified people could express their interest in participating and seek further information if needed.

The second recruitment channel was professional conferences and associations. Professionals attending human resource management conferences in Vietnam and members of human resource management associations in Vietnam were approached. At the conferences, the study was explained to HR managers and company representatives and the inclusion criteria for study participants were specified. Contact details were given to these people and they were asked to make direct contact if they were willing to participate or could help by

forwarding the recruiting information to potential participants. They were also welcomed to ask if they had any further questions about the study. In addition, human resource management associations were approached and introduced to the study and were asked to help circulate the information within their networks. Similar to other channels, contact details and a summary of the study were included so that they could be provided to prospective participants.

The third recruitment channel was referrals from respondents. After each interview, as appropriate, the respondent was asked if they could suggest any potential participants and if they were willing to forward the information about the study. If they were willing to do so, a separate email similar to those used in the other channels would be sent to them so they could forward to prospective participants.

In the case of the expatriates and their spouses, since either could be the initial point of contact, they were asked to forward the research information to their spouses and seek their willingness to participate. They were informed that since each couple needed to be matched, the expatriate couples who met the defined criteria would be interviewed separately. An expatriate couple was included in the study only when both partners made direct contact to express their interest. This process was to ensure voluntary participation of all participants. The combination of three different recruitment channels was efficient and necessary for this study.

- **Sample Size and Sample Characteristics**

*Sample size*

In previous qualitative studies on expatriates, the number of interviews conducted by scholars has varied from 8 to 39 (Baker and Ciuk 2015, Cho et al. 2013, Käsälä et al. 2015, Lirio 2014, McPhail et al. 2016, Melby et al. 2008, Richardson 2006). According to Mason (2010), 31 is also the mean sample size in PhD studies using qualitative interviews, and there is a point at which data saturation usually occurs. In this study, three groups were interviewed; expatriates, their spouses/partners and HR managers/organizational representatives. Hence, with reference to the literature of expatriate research as well as qualitative studies, the researcher initially intended to recruit 10 matched couples of expatriates and their spouses in the accompanying situation and 10 matched couples in the un-accompanying situation. In total, the plan was to recruit 40 expatriates and spouses/partners. In addition, 10 HR managers/organizational representatives were to be recruited. In summary, 50 interviews was the proposed sample size of this study. Nonetheless, a decision to cease collection of further

data was made based on the saturation point at which no new themes were emerging (Shank 2006, Strauss 1987). Since the data collection and data analysis process were conducted simultaneously, the saturation point could be recognized. At the point where new themes ceased to emerge, a few more interviews were completed to further confirm data saturation. The final sample size at which data were saturated was 43. Details of the respondents are outlined below.

### ***Sample characteristics***

Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with three groups of interviewees. Detailed characteristics of participants are described in Table 3.1 (expatriates), Table 3.2 (expatriate spouses) and Table 3.3 (HR professionals/organizational representatives). In total, 43 interviews were undertaken comprising 18 expatriate couples (36 separate interviews) and 7 HR/organizational representatives. Interviews with the expatriates lasted from 45 to 120 minutes while those with the expatriate spouses lasted 47 to 111 minutes. The interviews with the HR professionals were shorter (33 to 63 minutes). In total, 49.8 hours (2990 minutes) of interviews were conducted including 22.4 hours (1347 minutes) with expatriates, 22 hours (1323 minutes) with their spouses/partners and 5.4 hours (320 minutes) with HR professionals.

Out of the 18 expatriate couples, 10 were accompanying couples, and eight were split. A total of 17 couples had children (including children from previous marriage(s)). The ages of the expatriate children ranged from one year old to 44 years old. All couples were married. In the group of expatriates, there were 17 male expatriates while there was only one female expatriate. The expatriates were in different age groups, ranging from 25 to over 70. In terms of job position, all expatriates were experts or middle level managers. They worked for different types of organizations including multinational companies and international organizations. There were six expatriates who had previously lived in Vietnam for work. The expatriates came from five different regions (Americas, Africa, Asia, Europe and Oceania).

Although gender was not within the scope of this study, the author tried to increase the variations of interviewees. It was quite difficult to recruit female expatriates, which is understandable because low representation of women is a common problem in both leadership positions and expatriation. For years, the problem has been highlighted in different reports (Brookfield Global Relocation Services 2015, Cartus 2014, 2016, Cartus and Primacy 2010, Grant Thornton 2019). Therefore, the modest number of female informants seen in this study is a norm rather than an exception. Furthermore, since the data collection and data

analysis processes happened simultaneously, the data collection process was only stopped once data were saturated, and no new themes emerged. Therefore, the low representation of female expatriates in the study was normal and did not affect the results of the study.

Since the couples were matched, in the group of expatriate spouses, there was only one male spouse and 17 female spouses. The ages of the spouses ranged from 20 to 60. The most common age group among spouses was 41-50. Similar to the expatriates, expatriate spouses came from five different continents (Americas, Africa, Asia, Europe and Oceania). Out of 18 expatriate spouses, five worked full-time, six worked part-time, and seven were unemployed at the interview time.

**Table 3. 1: Demographic Information of Expatriates**

Interviewee	Nationality	Gender Male (M)/ Female(F)	Age Group	No of Children and Age(s)	Accompany Status Accompany (A)/ Split(S)	Job Position Middle level manager (M)/ Expert (E)	Previously lived in Vietnam	Duration of interview (minutes)
1A	American	M	51-60	3 (19, 16, 12)	A	M*	No	55
2A	Mexican	M	41-50	2 (11, 9)	A	E**	No	120
3A	Ghanaian	M	51-60	4 (26, 18, 16, 16)	A	E	No	64
4As	Japanese	F	41-50	3 (8, 5, 2)	S	E	3 years for work	75
5A	South Korean	M	31-40	2 (10, 7)	A	M	No	74
6A	South Korean	M	31-40	1 (1)	A	E	No	65
7A	Australian	M	41-50	5 (14, 12, 11, 9, 9)	A	M	1 year for work	92
8A	Japanese	M	25-30	0	A	M	No	56
9A	Belgian	M	51-60	2 (33, 24)	A (spouse only)***	M	9 mths for work	105
10A	Japanese	M	31-40	3 (10, 8, 1)	A	M	6 years for work	77
11A	German	M	41-50	3 (15, 11, 8)	A	M	No	50
12As	Australian	M	41-50	4 (9, 6, 3, 1)	S	M	3 years for work	65
13As	South Korean	M	41-50	2 (18, 16)	S	M	No	45
14As	Mexican and American	M	61+	2 (44, 41)	S	E	No	73
15As	South Korean	M	41-50	3 (18, 16, 14)	S	M	No	91
16As	South African	M	41-50	1 (9)	S	M	3 years for work	113
17As	Sri Lankan	M	51-60	2 (13, 16)	S	E	No	57
18As	French	M	31-40	2 (5, 5)	S	M	No	66

**Note:** \*: Middle level manager; \*\*: Expert; \*\*\*: The children did not accompany the expatriate, only the spouse.

**Table 3.2: Demographic Information of Expatriate Spouses**

Interviewee	Nationality	Gender	Age Group	No of Children and Age(s)	Accompany Status Accompany (A)/ Split (S)	Current Working Status	Duration of interview (minutes)
1B	Mexican	F	41-50	3 (19, 16, 12)	A	Part-time	65
2B	Mexican	F	41-50	2 (11, 9)	A	Unemployed	75
3B	Ghanaian	F	41-50	3 (18, 16, 16)	A	Unemployed	95
4Bs	Australian	M	41-50	3 (8, 5, 2)	S	Full-time	64
5B	South Korean	F	41-50	2 (10, 7)	A	Unemployed	50
6B	South Korean	F	31-40	1 (1)	A	Unemployed	66
7B	Australian	F	41-50	5 (14, 12, 11, 9, 9)	A	Part-time	107
8B	Japanese	F	20-30	N/A	A	Full-time	83
9B	Taiwanese	F	41-50	1 (24)	A	Unemployed	47
10B	Japanese	F	31-40	3 (10, 8, 1)	A	Unemployed	67
11B	German	F	41-50	3 (15, 11, 8)	A	Part-time	111
12Bs	Japanese	F	41-50	4 (9, 6, 3, 1)	S	Full-time	73
13Bs	South Korean	F	41-50	2 (18, 16)	S	Part-time	64
14Bs	Argentina	F	51-60	N/A	S	Unemployed	82
15Bs	South Korean	F	41-50	3 (14, 16, 18)	S	Part-time	58
16Bs	Singaporean	F	41-50	1 (9)	S	Full-time	65
17Bs	Sri Lankan	F	51-60	2 (13, 16)	S	Full-time	70
18Bs	French	F	31-40	2 (5, 5)	S	Part-time	85

**Table 3. 3: Information of HR professionals or Organizational Representatives**

<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Industry</b>	<b>Home Country of organization</b>	<b>Interview Duration (minutes)</b>
HR1	HR Commercial Manager	Consumer goods and Retail	United States	55
HR2	HR Services Manager	Medicine	Germany	63
HR3	HR Executive	Consumer goods and Retail	Germany	40
HR4	HR Director	Consumer goods and Retail	Netherlands	35
HR5	Global Graduate in HR	Consumer goods and Retail	United Kingdom	33
HR6	HR Manager	Professional Services	United Kingdom	42
HR7	HR Manager	Automotive	Japan	52

For interviewees in the third group, five were HR managers/directors and two were HR executives at the time of interviews. They all had experience with managing expatriates in multinational companies or international organizations. They worked for different companies/organizations across four industries: consumer goods and retail, medicine, professional services, automotive and international organizations. The companies they were working for at the time of data collection headquartered in different countries across three continents including North America, Europe and Asia. The details of group three participants are presented in Table 3.3.

### **3.2.4 Pilot study**

Before finalizing the interview guide and interview procedure, a pilot study was conducted with three participants. Each participant belonged to one of the three sample groups; an expatriate, an expatriate spouse, and a HR manager. All three met the criteria detailed for participation in this study. Following the suggestion from Yin (2014), the pilot testing was carried out to ensure the quality of interview procedure prior to the official data collection process.

The purposes and benefits of a pilot study are well recognized in the literature as a means to test the validity of the research instrument and to assess the data collection procedure (Bryman and Bell 2015, Yin 2014). From the pilot study, the researcher has the opportunity to revise and adjust the data collection process of the main study (Kim 2011). Specifically,

this pilot study was undertaken to examine the suitability of the interview guide and interview procedure. Therefore, the intended questions were asked, and particular attention was paid to the clarity of the questions. The reactions of respondents such as their attitudes and behaviors when they listened to the questions and whether they asked for clarification were noted. Also noted was if the questions were understood in the way that was expected. The time taken for each interview, and the flow of the questions were noted. At the end of all pilot interviews, the respondents were also asked for feedback about the questions in the interview. After the pilot interviews were finished, all notes were summarized to help finalize the content and process of data collection.

Overall, a number of lessons were learned from the pilot study. First, the general logistics of the interview were proved to be suitable except for the expected duration of each interview and the time that participants took to answer the demographic questionnaire. The initial expected duration of each interview with expatriates or expatriate spouses/partners was 60 to 90 minutes, but it turned out that it could be longer. Therefore, the expected duration of interviews for these two groups was adjusted to between 60 and 120 minutes. Moreover, it was expected the demographic questionnaire would be completed via emails, but in two cases, participants preferred to finish it at the time of their interview. Hence, the time to fill out the demographic questionnaire was kept flexible. Second, some particular elements of the interview guide were revised. Specifically, the wording and/or order of some questions were adjusted to avoid potential ambiguities. Third, the importance of building rapport before each interview was emphasized when collecting data for the study. The objective of the process was for the interviewee to be open to sharing their thoughts and experiences (Locke et al. 2000). Finally, the importance of flexibility when doing semi-structured interviews, by allowing questions to be asked, was also highlighted (Kvale 2007). It became clear in the pilot interviews that the answer to a question might cover that of another question and the way interviewees answered the questions might be very different from each other. In summary, the pilot study met its goal and helped inform the main study.

### **3.2.5 Interview guide**

In a qualitative study using semi-structured interviews, an interview guide is used to ensure the main elements under investigation are followed for each respondent (Patton 2002). The interview guide is useful for increasing the reliability of the study by facilitating the consistency (Yin 2014). At the same time, it allows both the interviewer and the interviewee

to expand on the themes which are more significant to them (Richardson 2006). This is the advantage of an interview guide over a set of fixed questions. More personal stories will emerge, which help reveal deep insights of various stakeholders.

Three interview guides were developed for three groups of participants (expatriates, expatriate spouses/partners, HR managers) in this study. They were developed based on a combination of family systems theory and previous literature about expatriate families in global assignments. With family systems theory being the theoretical lens of the study, the dimensions of family systems were used to examine the internal dynamic of each expatriate family. In addition, the interview guides were also designed with reference to the themes that emerged from the literature of expatriate families and their influence on expatriates (See Figure 2.2) (Haslberger and Brewster 2008, Kupka and Cathro 2007, Lazarova et al. 2010, Mäkelä and Suutari 2011, Tharenou 2008). Furthermore, the interview guides were amended and developed based on outcomes from the pilot study.

The interview guides for expatriates and their spouses/partners both included demographic questions about them and their family. For expatriates, it was structured in three major parts: 1) questions about previous (if any) and the current assignment, 2) questions about motivations, considerations and the adjustment of expatriates and their families during the current expatriation, and 3) questions about work outcomes, organizational support, and work attitude and engagement. The interview guide for expatriate spouses/partners included two main parts: 1) general information about previous (if any) and current international assignment(s), and 2) thoughts and experiences of the current international assignment. The interview guide for HR managers/organizational representatives consisted of two sections, including pre-assignment practices and during-assignment practices of organizations for expatriate families. All interview guides concluded with reflective questions, allowing respondents to reflect on the interview questions and any other topics they wanted to expand on relating to their family and the current expatriation. The final versions of the interview guides are attached to this thesis (Appendix 2B, Appendix 3B, and Appendix 4).

### **3.2.6 Interview procedure**

Once potential participants agreed to take part in the study, they were emailed to determine possible available times for the interviews. If they resided in Vietnam, they were asked if they were available for interviews during the data collection period in Vietnam and whether

in-person interviews with them were preferred. If they agreed, a potential schedule was arranged. If potential participants were not in Vietnam during the data collection period, a schedule for a virtual interview with them was discussed. For both the expatriates and their spouses/partners, prior to each interview, a brief demographic questionnaire was sent to each for them to complete. Based on the experience from the pilot study, they were notified that they could complete and send through their answers either before the interview or on the day of the interview. The demographic questionnaire included questions about participants' nationality, gender, age-bracket, children, accompanying status (accompanying or split on the current assignment), and questions about the current position for expatriates. Appendices of the demographic questionnaire are attached to this thesis (Appendix 2A, Appendix 3A).

As noted previously, interviews were conducted both in person and virtually. With technological advancement, scholars have acknowledged that virtual interviews can adequately perform the functions of face-to-face interviews (Sullivan 2012). Both face-to-face and virtual interviews took place at a mutually convenient location to ensure that the interviewee was comfortable, and the interview could be recorded. With consent from the participants interviews were recorded for further analysis. Therefore, the chosen location needed to be free from outside interruptions and noise.

For face-to-face interviews with the expatriates, a meeting room at the workplace of the interviewee was used. The locations chosen were comfortable and convenient for the participants so that it took little of their time and money to travel to the locations (if they had to). For the spouses, a local place such as a public library was used. When necessary, interviews were conducted at their private house. The locations chosen also needed to be safe for the researcher. So, when interviews were undertaken at participants' houses, the interviewer carried a mobile phone with her at all times and informed her next of kin about the interview location, schedule and when she should be expected to return. For virtual interviews, telephone or video calls were made using applications such as Skype and Zoom, or whatever application was preferred by the respondents. In total, there were 35 face-to-face and eight virtual interviews conducted.

Each interview started by building rapport with the interviewee by having a quick informal chat, expressing appreciation of the interviewee's participation and introducing the study. The purpose was to create a positive climate for the interview so that the interviewee could express their insights in an honest and comprehensive way (Locke et al. 2000, Moustakas 1994). The Participant Information Sheet was then provided for the interviewee to read. In

the case that the interview was conducted virtually, the Participant Information Sheet (Appendix 5, Appendix 6) was sent through email prior to the interview. After the respondents finished reading the Participant Information Sheet, the purpose and focus of the interview were reviewed. The confidentiality of all participants' information and their right to withdraw from the study at any time were further elaborated before the Consent Form was given to the respondents. On the Consent Form, participants were asked to indicate their agreement to be audio recorded and to allow quotes from the interview to be used. Interviews were recorded using digital recorders, and notes were taken during interviews.

The questions in the interview guide were closely followed to ensure all key issues were discussed. Nonetheless, openness to question order and word choice to fit each particular interview as suggested by Charmaz (2005) were also kept in mind. This approach created a smooth flow for each interview. As a result, it helped establish a comfortable setting for respondents to answer the questions.

After each interview, the researcher listened to the audio and read the notes as well as making further notes of the interview in a research journal to conduct an information analysis of the collected data. The aim was to summarize the major points that emerged from the interview. The purpose of this process was to obtain an understanding of the data, thereby knowing when the saturation point happened, avoiding repetitive and overwhelming data. Conducting data analysis simultaneously with data collection was useful and is recommended in a qualitative study (Merriam 2002).

### **3.3 Data analysis**

Qualitative data analysis is defined as “the classification and interpretation of linguistic (or visual) material to make statements about implicit and explicit dimensions and structures of meaning-making in the material and what is represented in it” (Flick 2013, p.5). In this particular study, the interest was on participants' expressions of their thoughts and experiences. The final aim of the process was to arrive at meaningful themes that could address the research questions (Berg 2004). In order to meet this aim, the data analysis procedure involved organizing, managing, and analyzing the data (Bloomberg and Volpe 2012). The specific details of each step are described next.

### **3.3.1 Data organization and management**

Data were organized to provide systematic sources for the analysis process. In this study, the interview recordings, interview notes and participants' demographic information were the primary data sources. The first step of organizing these data was to store them. The following steps were taken in order to do so.

First, after each interview was completed, one code was assigned to the interview record, interview note and demographic information of that participant. Second, to avoid losing data, they were saved in two different secure locations. The original copies of all data were saved to a secure folder on the researcher's computer, which was password protected. Another copy of the data was used for analysis instead of the originals. Following the advice of Patton (2002), the original copies were kept untouched to protect the key source of raw materials. Furthermore, the data were saved to two secure folders on the researcher's CloudStor account: one folder for original data and another folder for analysis data. The account information was personal and only available to the researcher. The purpose of saving the data to a cloud-based storage was twofold: avoiding the risk of losing the data because of computer problems and allowing the researcher to access the data from different computers when necessary.

The second step taken to organize the data was to use Microsoft Excel (hereafter "Excel") and NVivo to manage the data gathered. Excel was used during the data collection process to record participants' demographic information in the form of matched samples (expatriate couples). This not only helped with organizing all participants' demographic information in a soft copy but also helped track the progress of sampling and interviewing. NVivo was utilized to store all forms of data collected (e.g. audio recordings, transcripts, notes and demographic information sheets). NVivo is useful for storing data in each particular case. Furthermore, the analysis process is also made more efficient with its powerful functions such as searching, query and visualization.

In order to render the data into a format that enabled later examination, the interview recordings were transcribed intelligent verbatim. The first several interviews were transcribed by the researcher. This was essential for the researcher to immerse in the data and generate insights (Patton 2002). For later interviews, three options were considered. The first option was to have the remaining interviews transcribed by the researcher. The advantage of this option was that the researcher would be immersed in the data and it would save money. However, it would be time-consuming. The second option was to use voice recognition

software or AI (artificial intelligence) transcription services. This option was efficient in terms of time and money since it was usually quick for these tools to produce transcriptions at a low cost. However, its disadvantage was possibly technical issues that could affect the quality of the transcriptions. As a result, a lot of extra time could be required to complete the transcriptions. The third option was to find a professional transcriptionist which would allow better quality transcriptions but would be more expensive compared to the previous two options. As initially planned and as took place in the pilot interviews, whether the interviews were transcribed by software, AI service or transcriptionists, each transcription would be checked by the researcher, listening to the whole recording and ensuring any mistakes were corrected. This would still allow the researcher to immerse in the data, thereby avoiding the issue of superficially working off transcriptions done by someone else (Patton 2002). Eventually, the researcher decided to transcribe all the interviews herself to be further immersed in the data. All interviews were conducted in English because all participants could communicate fluently in English. Therefore, all interviews were transcribed in English, and no translation was required.

### **3.3.2 Analysis process**

In this study, a hybrid approach of inductive and deductive analysis was followed (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane 2006). This approach is recommended by Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) as a combination of two approaches: one is the inductive data driven approach (Boyatzis 1998), and the other is the deductive approach which is started with some a priori codes based on research questions, a theoretical base, or preliminary scanning of data (Crabtree and Miller 1999). The hybrid approach was suitable for this study because, on the one hand, the study involved exploring the thoughts and experiences of participants in relation to international assignments, and on the other hand, the study adopted family systems theory as the theoretical lens and the interview questions were guided by the research questions and previous literature. Hence, the analysis process required the researcher to go back and forth between the raw data, the existing literature and family systems theory. The data collection and data analysis process were conducted simultaneously to revise the interview process as necessary and stay alert to any theoretical saturation, which meant no further data collection was needed (Corbin and Strauss 2008). The following section presents the tools used for data analysis and the analytic process.

- **Data analysis tools**

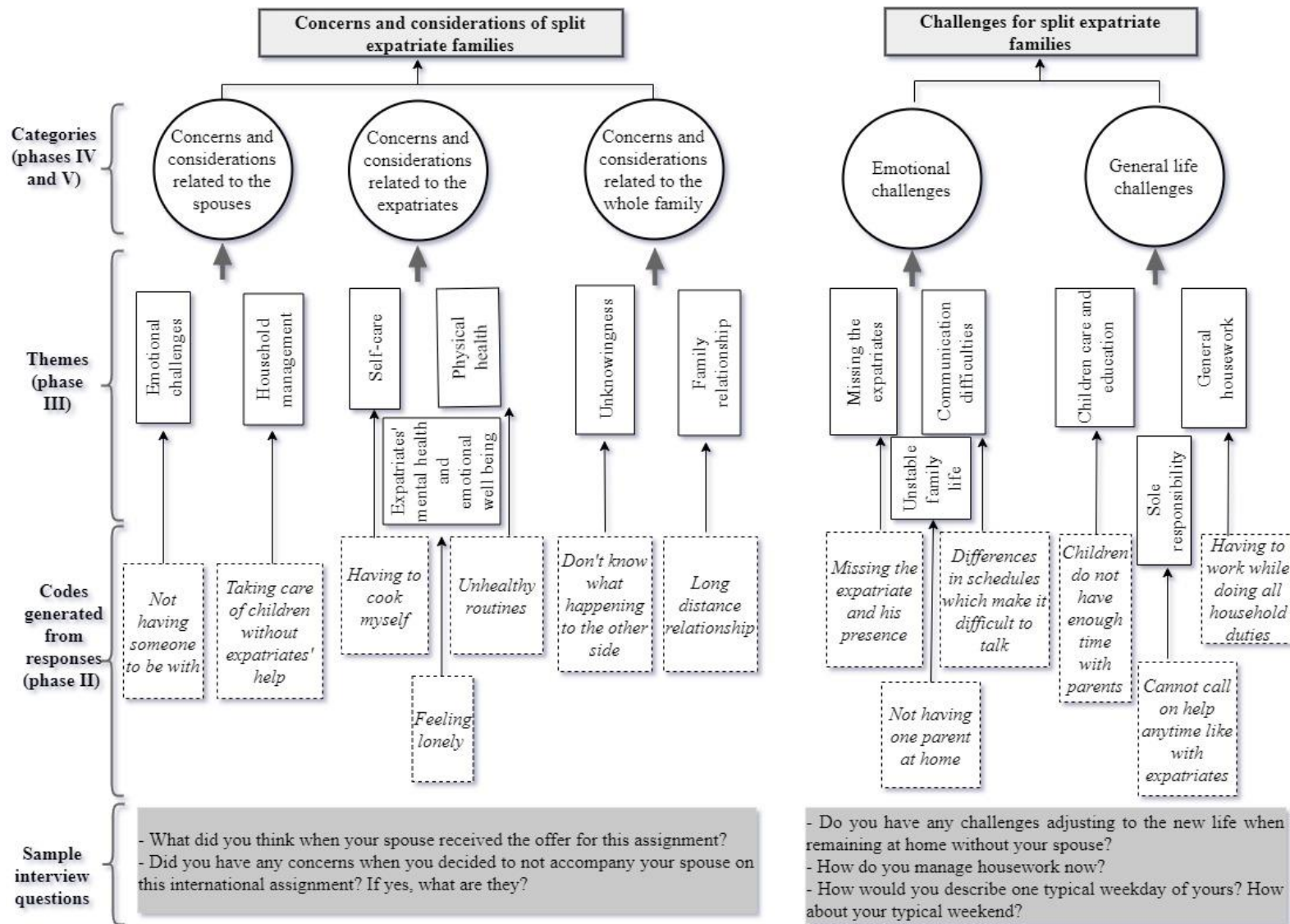
Once transcriptions of the interviews were generated, the data were examined both manually and by using computer software. It was important to perform a mixture of these two approaches. The manual analysis process involved reading through the hard copy of the transcripts, which helped with obtaining an overall understanding of all data and a sense of each particular case. This process served the purpose of reviewing and exploring the data before breaking into constituents of the data (Bloomberg and Volpe 2012). Furthermore, Leximancer software was utilized to perform exploration of the data. Leximancer can automatically analyze text documents and produce a concept map from those documents (Smith and Humphreys 2006). The transcriptions of all interviews were imported into Leximancer in order to produce concept maps which presented high level concepts through its analysis of all the input texts and the relationships between these concepts. By combining manual and Leximancer analyses, an initial exploration of data was conducted. The Leximancer conceptual maps produced from the data are included in Appendix 7.

Another software that was used for analyzing data was NVivo, which provides a set of tools for researchers to undertake an analysis of qualitative data. The capacity of the software to record, sort, match and link data can support qualitative researchers in various ways. For instance, researchers can manage data by storing and organizing various sources of material for their studies (e.g. transcripts, digital recordings, and memos), code data by creating nodes, and analyze data within and across cases (e.g. running queries, depicting links between nodes, extracting textual chunks). In this study, NVivo Version 11 was used to organize and analyze data. During the data collection period, all relevant data (e.g. demographic information, interview transcripts, and notes) were stored in separate cases in NVivo. During the data analysis process, coding in NVivo was undertaken after manual reading of hard copies of materials.

- **Analytic Process**

A thematic analysis process was carried out to analyze data. This process is defined by Braun and Clarke (2006) as “a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (p. 79). Thematic analysis was deemed appropriate for this study due to several advantages such as the possible provision of thick descriptions and highlighting of differences and similarities across the data (Braun and Clarke 2006). Furthermore, it was suitable for analyzing subjective insights from participants (Flick 2014).

Following Braun and Clarke (2006), the analysis process included six phases. The first phase (phase I) was familiarization with the data. To do so, the steps suggested by Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) which were review and explore data, and reread and examine data were followed. The interview records were listened to, and the interview transcripts were read several times. The transcribing process also enabled the researcher to immerse into the data. The second phase (phase II) involved generating initial codes. These codes were generated using three elemental methods namely Descriptive Coding, In Vivo Coding and Process Coding (Saldaña 2016). As defined by Saldaña (2016), Descriptive Coding “summarizes in a word or short phrase – most often a noun – the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data” (p. 102), while In Vivo Coding “refers to a word or short phrase found in the actual language in qualitative data records” (p. 105). Process coding “uses gerunds (-ing words) exclusively to connote actions in the data” (Saldaña (2016), p. 107). In the third phase (phase III) which was searching for themes, codes were collated into potential sub-themes and themes and all relevant data were gathered into each potential theme. The fourth phase (phase IV) involved refining the themes generated in the third phase by reviewing the coded references to see if they formed a further coherent theme (pattern) and considering if the themes could tell a story from the data set and could answer the research questions. The fifth phase (phase V) was similar to the fourth phase and served as the second round of the theme-refining process in order to arrive at names and definitions for final themes. The final phase (phase VI) was producing the report for the study. For illustration, Figure 3.1 presents the data analysis progression.



**Figure 3. 1: An illustration of the data analysis process**

The boxes at the bottom of Figure 3.1 display sample interview questions. To explore the concerns and considerations of split expatriate families, the responses to the questions ‘What did you think when your spouse received the offer for the assignment?’ and ‘Did you have any concerns when you decided not to accompany your spouse on this international assignment? If yes, what are they?’ were analyzed. The second row shows the codes generated from the responses. As mentioned, the approach to the data analysis process in this study was hybrid combining both inductive and deductive approaches. The majority of the codes were obtained by inductively analyzing the raw data. However, some were achieved by going back and forth between the informants’ responses such as ‘feeling lonely’, the previous literature and the research questions. Another source for data analysis was the concept maps obtained by Leximancer (Appendix 7). The researcher combined all aforementioned sources to come up with the codes and themes. The next level of Figure 3.1 delineates the themes consolidated from the codes. The themes were refined many times before being finalized. The top row displays the categories that the themes were gathered into. These categories emerged inductively from the themes without being based on any prior theories or literature. The next section presents ethical considerations of the current research.

### **3.4 Ethical considerations**

As this study involved humans, it was important to consider ethical issues and ensure that all potential risks were mitigated. Ethical issues can arise in different phases of the research process such as data collection, data analysis and findings dissemination (Bloomberg and Volpe 2012). Therefore, it was important to be aware of potential risks and pay attention to them throughout the study process. To meet the ethical requirements of conducting this study, an ethics application was prepared and submitted to the University of Technology Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). The Committee approved the ethics application for this study in February 2018.

Ethical standards that were conformed to in this study are explained next. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary. Potential participants were not contacted directly by the researcher but were forwarded an invitation to participate in the study. They needed to contact the researcher to express their interest. Furthermore, the confidentiality of participants was also stated clearly in the study summary used to recruit participants. Participants were not offered any compensation for participating in this study other than a summary report of the thesis if they were interested.

Before starting each interview, a Participant Information Sheet was provided containing information about the study and stating the participant's right to withdraw at any time. Participants' confidentiality was once again confirmed in this sheet. As with any study involving humans, consent was obtained before data collection commenced (Patton 2002). A formal Informed Consent Form was presented to participants to sign prior to each interview. The participants then indicated if they consented to be audio recorded, and if they allowed the researcher to use the data for future research. In addition, the participants were informed that excerpts from their interviews might be used in the thesis and other publications without their personal identity being revealed.

At the outset of the research, no clear and serious risks could affect participants apart from their time commitment for the interview. However, some minimal risks could be identified due to the nature of the interviews. These risks were made clear in the Participant Information Sheet. For example, those in the expatriate and spouse participant groups could feel vulnerable when being asked about aspects of their personal lives, their difficulties at work, or having to comment on policies and/or supporting programs of their organization. They might also feel emotional when discussing their family lives. The HR managers/organizational representatives participants might feel vulnerable when asked to comment on policies and/or supporting programs of their organization. Participants might have concerns about how information shared with the researcher would be analyzed or disseminated through publications or with other participants. To minimize these potential risks, three strategies were utilized including providing up-front information, opportunity for participants to withdraw at any time during the research, and assurance of confidentiality. During the interview process, any signs of discomfort from participants were carefully noted so as to stop or pause the interview as needed.

Protecting participants' privacy and the confidentiality of their information and insights was a critical responsibility of the researcher. Therefore, care was taken to ensure that requirements were met. After the data collection process, as mentioned above, all data were kept in secure places with passwords only known to the researcher. Based on the UTS Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) guidelines, the raw data will eventually be destroyed. Moreover, once the data were collected, each interview was coded using numbers and letters without any identifiable information. In all future publications, participants' information will also be de-identified. All details in each transcription were read through to ensure that personal identifiable information of participants (e.g. organization name) were removed and replaced

with alphabetic identifiers. With every effort taken to meet the highest ethical standards, it was expected that any possible harm throughout the study would be mitigated.

### **3.5 Validation of the study**

Although the approaches to validity of findings in quantitative and qualitative studies are different, one common element is that it is critical for researchers of all studies to establish validity in the results of their studies (Thomas and Magilvy 2011). In seeking to judge the trustworthiness of a qualitative study, different researchers have developed different terminology by borrowing from quantitative research or establishing alternative terms to reflect the nature of qualitative research (Bloomberg and Volpe 2012). Among these researchers, Guba and Lincoln (1998) stayed in the latter camp, and their criteria for judging the trustworthiness of the study were used in this study. These criteria include *credibility*, *dependability* and *transferability* (Guba and Lincoln 1998). Regardless of the terminology or criteria used, the core meaning of the validity process is to determine whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participants, and the readers (Creswell and Miller 2000).

*Credibility.* This criterion is concerned with the match between the participants' perceptions and the way they are portrayed by the researcher (Bloomberg and Volpe 2012, Guba and Lincoln 1998). Following the suggestions by Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) and Creswell (2013b), potential bias that could be brought to the study was clarified and a research journal was kept throughout the study. In this journal, different items were noted such as the researcher's reflections on issues she encountered during the research process, questions she had and lessons she learned from each interview. In doing so, subjectivity and potential biases of the researcher could be continuously monitored (Bloomberg and Volpe 2012). Although it is not possible to remain entirely objective in a qualitative study (Patton 2002), all effort was made to increase the credibility of the study as advised by Lincoln and Guba (1985). In addition to the research journal, and to further increase the study's credibility, the member-checking method was used (Creswell 2013b). This method entails the researcher sending transcribed interviews and the final report of the study to participants (Creswell 2013b). The transcriptions were sent to all informants to ask if they agreed with them or had suggestions for change. No changes to the transcripts were asked for by the interviewees. Furthermore, negative and/or discrepancies in understanding the phenomenon under investigation between the researcher and the participants were closely monitored. For

example, a certain situation was perceived as a challenge by the researcher, but the informant did not see it the same way. When the informant talked about how she got lost and then cheated on the street in the host country, the researcher thought that was a challenge. However, when probing further, it became apparent that the respondent thought it was normal and part of an interesting experience. Therefore, by being aware of these kinds of interpretations and discussing them with the participants, the study's credibility was increased (Creswell 2013b).

*Dependability.* This criterion refers to the possibility of tracking data collection and data analysis processes (Guba and Lincoln 1998). To meet this criterion, the processes were documented in detail and discussed in the dissertation. An "audit trail" of how the data were collected and the rationales for the choices of data collection were provided (Bloomberg and Volpe 2012). In addition, the way in which the data were analyzed and interpreted was also presented in the thesis. Hence, the dependability of the thesis was increased.

*Transferability.* The third criterion to evaluate the trustworthiness of this study was transferability which is the extent to which the readers could determine whether the processes by which the study phenomenon was investigated could be applied to another context (Guba and Lincoln 1998). Although generalizability is not the focus of a qualitative study, the possibility to apply the study's processes or findings to similar conditions is still important (Creswell 2013b, Patton 2002). Therefore, a qualitative researcher should be able to clarify in-depth how the study proceeded (Bloomberg and Volpe 2012). Therefore, in this study, rich and thick descriptions of the settings and the participants were communicated to the readers (Creswell 2013b, Denzin and Lincoln 2011). With this approach, the relevance of the study to other settings could be improved (Patton 2002).

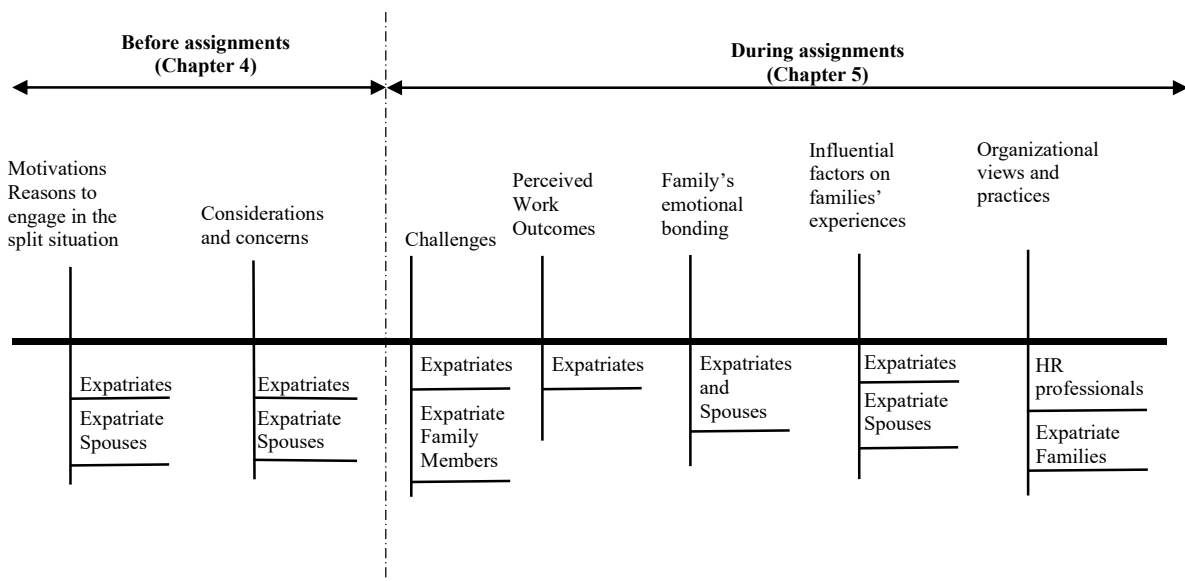
### **3.6 Chapter summary**

In summary, this chapter describes the study's research methodology. In-depth semi-structured interviews were employed to investigate the phenomenon of expatriates and their families undertaking expatriation in accompanying and split situations. A pilot was undertaken before official data collection commenced. Data collection happened simultaneously with data analysis. In analyzing the data, manual and computer-assisted software programs were employed to analyze insights of participants and compare and

contrast insights between participants. The next two chapters present the findings from this analysis process.

## INTRODUCTION TO FINDINGS CHAPTERS

The findings that emerged from the data analysis process are organized into two chapters to uncover the major aspects of the expatriation process before and during international assignments. Figure 4.1 illustrates the foci of the study and how these foci are divided in the two findings chapters.

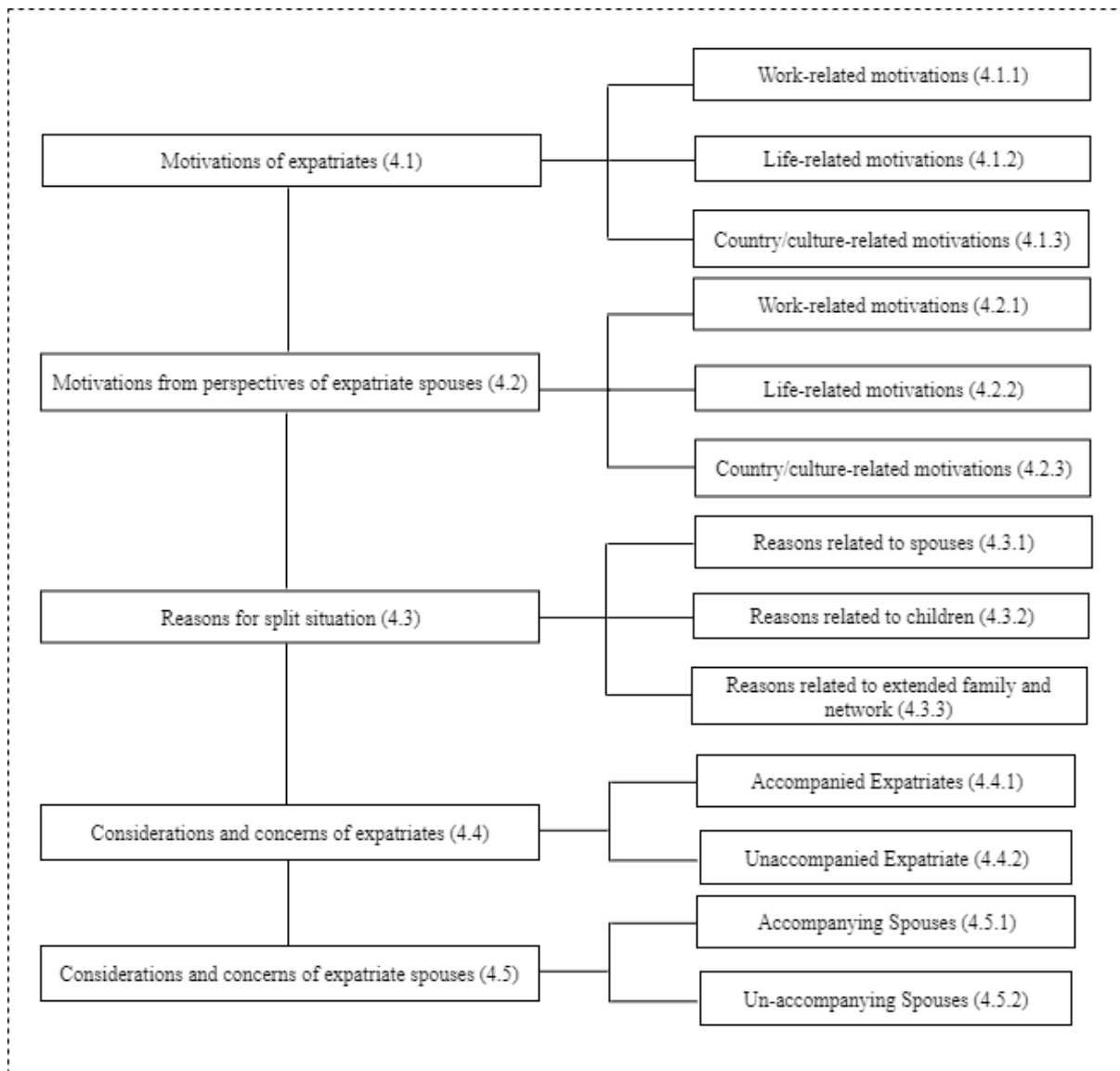


**Figure 4. 1: Presentation of Finding Chapters' Foci**

It should be noted that the insights in the finding chapters are as they were uncovered from the data. In the discussion chapter, the findings from different groups are brought together for comparison. The expatriates and their spouses were asked about what motivated them to undertake the international assignments when they received their offers and what they considered or were concerned about when thinking of taking up the assignments. Un-accompanying expatriate spouses were also asked about the reasons why their families had to choose the split situation during international assignments. The insights related to these motivations, reasons and considerations are presented in Chapter 4. Following, Chapter 5 targets how expatriates and their family experienced international assignments. In addition, the chapter delineates how HR professionals in charge of managing expatriates in organizations understood the experiences of the two different expatriate family situations and how organizations provided support for expatriate families in international assignments.

## **CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS – MOTIVATIONS FOR AND CONSIDERATIONS IN INTERNATIONAL ASSIGNMENTS**

The first section in this chapter describes the motivations of expatriate families to undertake international assignments. These motivations were investigated from the perspectives of both expatriates and expatriate spouses from two family situations (accompanying and split). In the cases of split families, the expatriate spouses were asked about the motivations which they thought drove the expatriates to take the international assignments, and about the reasons why their families had decided to engage in the split situation. The second section reports on the considerations and concerns expatriates and their spouses held about international assignments. These include what interviewees considered when thinking about their upcoming assignments and what they were concerned about before the assignments started. As outlined in Chapter 3, the data were analyzed thematically, and narratives from interviews are used to illustrate the key themes identified. This chapter concludes with a summary. An overview of Chapter 4 is presented in Figure 4.2.



**Figure 4. 2: Overview of Chapter 4**

## 4.1 Motivations of expatriates

The motivations to undertake international assignments of accompanied and unaccompanied expatriates show commonalities and differences, as depicted in Figure 4.3. On the one hand, they were both driven by work-related motivations. On the other hand, while accompanied expatriates also had life-related and country or culture-related motivations as the major ones that drove them to undertake their assignments, the latter were only supplementary to the work-related motivations of unaccompanied expatriates. In this section, the motivations of expatriates are presented according to category and theme with the common category of both expatriate groups being outlined first (work-related motivations – Section 4.1.1) followed by

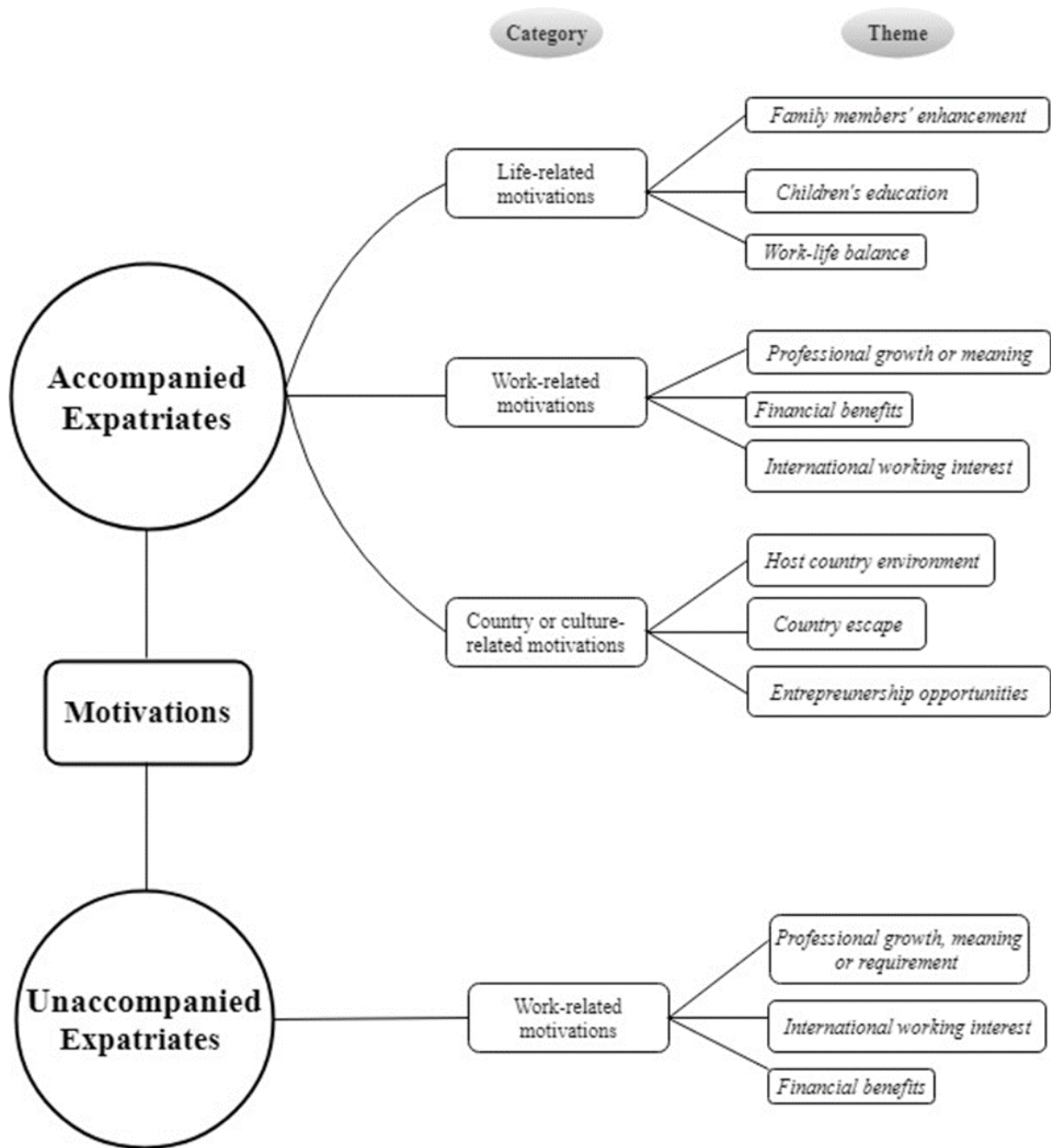
the other two categories where differences exist between the two groups (country or culture-related motivations – Section 4.1.2; life-related motivations – Section 4.1.3).

#### **4.1.1 Work-related motivations**

Work-related motivations were the most common for the acceptance of international assignments among unaccompanied expatriates. Based on the interviews, these motivations were very strong and decisive for this group since they had to leave their family behind, the “cost” of which was quite high. Meanwhile, work-related motivations were not the most frequently cited by accompanied expatriates.

Three major themes of work-related motivations emerged from the interviews with both accompanied and unaccompanied expatriates. They are *professional growth, meaning or requirement, financial benefits* and *international working interest*. The most critical motivation to both groups was *professional growth, meaning or requirement*. Many expatriates had been promoted or were given more responsibilities when commencing their current assignments. One unaccompanied expatriate mentioned that going on this assignment was perhaps the only way for him to advance his career. He was not likely to have been promoted to a higher position if he stayed in the same country. Some of them also had the chance to work in new areas. Therefore, by undertaking the assignments, their skills and knowledge were being developed:

It offered a chance for me to expand into an area I hadn't worked in. I was looking for professional growth. It wasn't something that I've done a lot of. I mean I think it was a feeling I liked it because it was bigger and different and give me a chance to expand the growth. So I felt very good about the assignment. [1A]



**Figure 4. 3: Expatriates' motivations for undertaking international assignments**

Moreover, expatriates thought that the assignments were important to their future career growth as highlighted by the following quote:

In my area, I think it is very important to have this kind of experience, international experience for further development. [8A]

Meanwhile, according to some expatriates, going to their current assignment was very meaningful because it allowed them to be closer to their clients and make more contributions to their work or their organizations. Therefore, among the many offers they received, the motivation to choose the current one was the meaning of their work or the impact they could make in the country. They simply loved the work and the nature of the work or the field in the country. This is clearly expressed by the following quotes:

But in the end, I decided to work where I can make the most impact. You know, anywhere I work, in the US, in Vietnam, what matters is ... I'm at a position in my career, and with my role, I can make an impact. I can help someone. Vietnam was such a choice because I knew I can make the most impact here. [14As]

I love the project, not only that the project, but it's kind of farming development projects. I feel it is very meaningful to work on those projects in this country at this time. [10A]

It should be noted that the element of work requirement in this theme was exclusive to unaccompanied expatriates. For some, going on the current assignment was a requirement of their work even though they were not going to be promoted. If they wanted to continue working for their organizations, they had no choice but to move on because the term of their previous assignment had finished.

I could not stay longer ... I had to move [from the previous country] because each [international] assignment should not be longer than a specific number of years. In my case, it was eight years on that assignment [in the previous country] already, which was too long and an exception itself. So, that's why I had to choose another country for this assignment. [17As]

Another motivation for accompanied and unaccompanied expatriates was the *financial benefits* that the assignments offered. Financial benefits are categorized as work-related motivations because they are the benefits that come from the work that drove the expatriates to accept their assignments. Financial benefits could come directly from increased salaries or indirectly from additional compensations that expatriates received such as paid housing, insurance, transportation, etc. Consequently, they could save a lot when going on international assignments in comparison with living in their home countries and paying everything themselves. A number of expatriates mentioned that they had more free capital and could invest in things such as real estate, stocks, etc. Given the financial benefits of the assignments, expatriates were motivated to accept them.

For expatriates who had not worked abroad before, they wanted to obtain international working experience which is thematized as *international working interest*. Therefore, when

the opportunities came, these expatriates were excited to take them. They also believed that by working abroad, they could develop themselves professionally because they had to work in a new country, with new people and new experiences.

When I was a student, I thought I would like to work abroad in the future. Luckily when I joined my company, the headquarters in Japan, I was asked if I was interested in working abroad. So, I still had that inspiration and motivation, and I said yes. [8A]

When this assignment was offered to me, I felt very excited because I would have a chance to work in another country, in another working environment. I was working in land management in [home country], and the project here is about e-systems for land management. So, the project itself was very interesting as well. That's why I decided to come to Vietnam. [13As]

It could be seen from the interviews that for unaccompanied expatriates, work-related motivations were critical in their decisions to undertake their assignments. If it were not for their careers and their work, they would not work abroad. Other country-related motivations were only supportive of or related to the work-related motivations.

#### **4.1.2 Country or culture-related motivations**

There was a distinction between accompanied and unaccompanied expatriates in relation to country or culture-related motivations. While this type of motivation was also one of the main ones for accompanied expatriates, it was only supplementary to work-related motivations of unaccompanied expatriates. Hence, it has not been summarized as a category for unaccompanied expatriates in Figure 4.3.

The majority of the expatriates had mobile careers which required moving between countries for international assignments. For accompanied expatriates, Vietnam was one of the options they had, and the motivation for them to go to Vietnam was that it had a good host country environment (*host country environment*). Some others had a particular interest to live and work in Vietnam.

One, this may sound a bit weird or strange, but one of the motivations is I would love to see how quickly this country - Vietnam is growing...

So, I thought that it would be very interesting to be involved in a very fast moving country. Because that was exactly what I experienced ... [5A]

For unaccompanied expatriates, some chose Vietnam as they were familiar with it as a host country and had experienced living there before.

And I moved to Vietnam because during my [previous country] time, I spent a lot of time in Vietnam. And, the reason for Vietnam is before, seven years ago, I lived in Vietnam for three years, but in [another city], and so I have a bit of a network. I understand the culture, the people a bit. [16As]

The familiarity with the culture, the people and having networks there made unaccompanied expatriates feel confident about the success of their assignments. They also assumed that it would be easier for them to adapt to life in a country they knew. Another reason to work in Vietnam was the distance to family. Since unaccompanied expatriates had decided not to bring their family with them, they wanted to choose a place which made it convenient for them to visit their family:

Vietnam is just another assignment in my job ... So, I could choose Vietnam, or I had to choose some other countries. The motivation for Vietnam itself ... it was close to [country where family was living]. That's the main reason. [17As]

This statement illustrates a situation that was very common among unaccompanied expatriates. They had to go on international assignments because of their career, and for various reasons, their families could not accompany them. Consequently, they would choose a host country that could minimize potential negative effects on their family. Therefore, although in split cases, motivation to undertake international assignments might not be related directly to their family, family considerations may still affect the choice of host country.

Some accompanied expatriates had previously spent time in Vietnam on personal holidays and had a good impression of the country. According to them, Vietnam was a great country to live in as a family. As mentioned above, many expatriates wanted their family members to explore and experience a new culture. Besides the attractiveness of the host country, a number of expatriates were driven by a desire to move out of their home country due to safety reasons or were seeking something different from their home country, thematized as *country escape*:

Well, I guess the first one, believe it or not, it was moving out of Mexico. We were a little bit tired of living in the country because it was getting very unsafe. Unfortunately, I need to say it. [2A]

We were thinking about moving out from Australia when we went on a plane back to [home country] from the Middle East. [7A]

The last motivation that was mentioned by accompanied expatriates was *entrepreneurship opportunities* in the host country. Some expatriates were employed by their organizations and were entrepreneurs at the same time. According to them, as a dynamic and developing country, Vietnam could provide many opportunities for entrepreneurs, and this was one of the motivations for them to participate in the assignments.

#### 4.1.3 Life-related motivations

The most frequently mentioned motivations to undertake expatriation for accompanied expatriates related to their life domain, and this type of motivation was exclusive to accompanied expatriates. Life-related motivations include *family enhancement, children's education, work-life balance*. Many expatriates expected that the assignments would be great opportunities for their family members to explore and live in a new culture. These chances would be meaningful for all family members, including the expatriates themselves, the spouses and children as encapsulated in the following quotes:

So we think we can open their eyes [children] through travel and open up to experience. They become adapted, become global citizens. Then hopefully we set them on the path to be able to be multilingual as well. [7A]

This is just a great opportunity for my whole family, me, my wife and my children to experience a new culture, and our perspectives will change positively I believe. That was one of the reasons motivating me to accept this assignment ... [2A]

Another important motivation for many accompanied expatriates to undertake their assignments was *children's education*. Although Vietnam is not a country with an advanced education system, increasing children's knowledge and skills was common among the motivations for accompanied expatriates to undertake international assignments. These benefits could be learning new languages, which were not limited to the local language, growing up in a multicultural environment, and improving their social skills and knowledge as future global citizens, as evidenced from the following quotes:

I thought that it is a good time, right time because we're going back to the education aspect. It would be late if my children were to move abroad some years later. And I think it is a perfect time, right time for them to learn English as they are young enough. [5A]

So when we have the opportunity to come to Vietnam, they go to a school where they are learning Chinese, learning Vietnamese, and they start to learn French ... but actually in our second year here, they're now going to a German school. So for the last 30 months, maybe

attending a German Catholic school, and intensively learning German. So now they are fluent in German.

So again it follows through the idea that if expatriates and their families can learn so many different languages then this can lead to some capabilities for them.

So we think we can open their eyes through travel and open up to experience. They become adapted, become global citizen. Then hopefully we set on path to be able to be multilingual as well. And then, I think if they can get these social skills and language skills, and another technical ability or intellect ... They have it. They will take care of themselves. [7A]

Meanwhile, it would not be easy to obtain these benefits if they stayed in their home countries or went on international assignments to countries with a less diverse language curriculum:

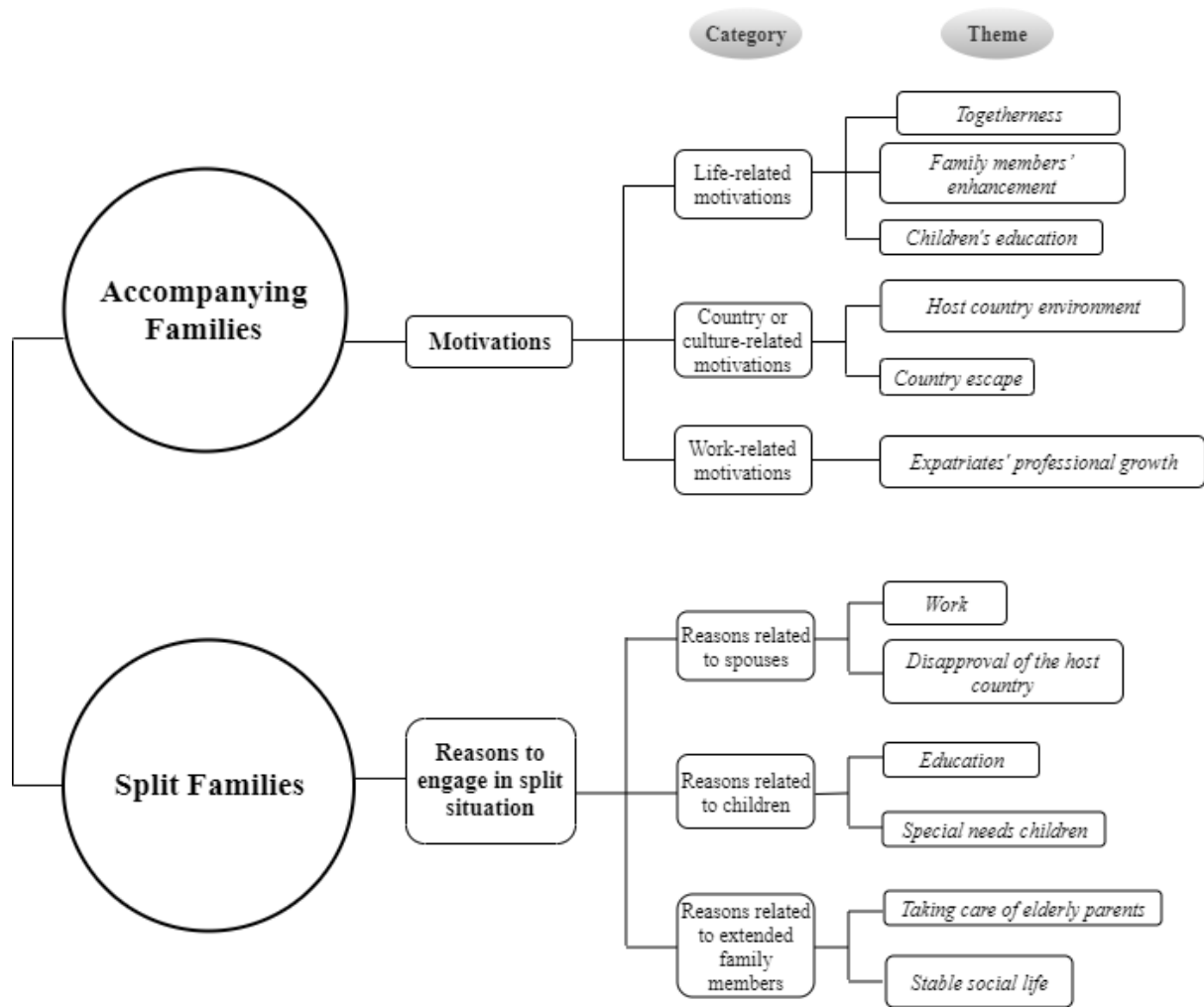
And in [home country], you don't even ... there're lots of different cultures, but because English is such a dominant player in [home country], it's not really forced to ... not like if you're in Asia or something, somehow you need, maybe at least two different languages. [7A]

A third life-related motive for accompanied expatriates was *work-life balance*. These expatriates said that when coming to Vietnam, although the work might not be less demanding, the working style and culture of work enabled them to balance their life and work commitments. In their countries, they had to work longer hours, and there was a common expectation that they devoted all their time to work. The common characteristic of these expatriates was that they came from countries that are highly work-intensive such as Japan and Korea:

I just wanted to go overseas because to work in [home country] is very difficult... Yes, because the work hours of the [home country] is the highest level in the world. Usually I go back home 11 or 12 PM .... At the time I cannot have the time to take care of my baby. This is why I wanted to go overseas to have my private life and take care of my family. [6A]

## **4.2 Motivations of expatriate spouses**

This section presents the motivations to undertake international assignments from perspectives of the expatriate spouses. Figure 4.4 summarizes the motivations (Section 4.2) and reasons to engage in the split situation (Section 4.3).



**Figure 4. 4: Motivations for international assignments and reasons to engage in the split situation from the perspective of expatriate spouses**

Similar to expatriates, the only common type of motivations between accompanying spouses and un-accompanying spouses was work-related motivations (Section 4.2.1). Therefore, this type is presented first. The other two types of motivations were life-related (Section 4.2.2) and country or culture-related (Section 4.2.3). These were only mentioned by accompanying spouses and are presented later.

#### 4.2.1 Work-related motivations

The uniqueness of the split situation was revealed when discussing the motivations to undertake the current assignments. As mentioned, the only agreed-upon type of motivations mentioned by all unaccompanied expatriate spouses was work-related motivations, and

specifically *professional growth or meaning or requirement*. The emphasis in the conversations was on long-term objectives of the expatriates' careers. For instance, the international assignments were necessary steps in the career ladders of expatriates if they wanted to progress in their organizations or their field.

I think he told me some of the reasons why he wanted to take up the offer. And also while he was based in [home country], he could see the projects were probably not as many because as a consultant they have to bring in the numbers financially. So ... and because he has also contacts in Vietnam as well. So going there to work on projects, helps him in his portfolio and also helps him to bring his numbers in. So, I guess supporting him in his decision, yeah, but also knowing not everything will be perfect. [16Bs]

The opportunities for promotion at work were limited if they just stayed in their home country or the host countries of their previous assignments. Some spouses also expressed that they understood the assignments were not only important to achieve career growth, but they were of great interest to expatriates. The expatriates were particularly interested in doing the jobs. Therefore, although the spouses were reluctant knowing that they would be split during the international assignments, they still agreed for the expatriates to go.

Accompanying spouses also spoke of motivations that were related to the work of the expatriates or of themselves. Expatriates' careers were primary. Therefore, spouses said that a major decisive driver was *expatriates' professional growth*.

... of course it has a big weight on the decision, the fact that it's a good job for my husband, not only because of financial matters, but also because of his professional growth. So, yes, I mean my husband has to get a job that develops himself and his career. [1B]

Spouses also said that although they did not really understand much about the expatriates' work, as long as the expatriates told them that the posts were good for their career, they supported expatriates' decisions. Besides, some spouses were interested in working abroad, and that encouraged them to accompany the expatriates.

#### **4.2.2 Life-related motivations**

The first and foremost motivation of accompanying spouses to go on the current assignments was *togetherness*. This driver was mentioned by all accompanying spouses in the sample. For these spouses, an unquestionable requirement was that their families had to live together.

My reasons? That's a good question. I mean at the end of the day, you know, I think I made a decision a long time ago to move around with my husband, right? And I don't question that

every time again. Because if I do it now, differently or not, you know, I don't think I questioned that because then I would right, so kind of I made that decision a long time ago that this is how we will do it... Anywhere we would go with him as long as we all agree that is a good option for us. [11B]

The above quote vividly portrays what all accompanying spouses thought; they would never compromise on family togetherness. Some expressed that they understood their spouses did everything for their family's sake, therefore, they would never question whether they would accompany them or not. Yet, they would always question if a particular assignment was considered suitable for the whole family.

We always think that as a family, we would live together, no matter what. We don't think about being separate for work or for any reason. So, it is a given that I go with him, no other reason. [6B]

The next given motivation was *family members' enhancement*. This enhancement could be achieved by exploring and experiencing a new culture. Many spouses showed their own interest to explore new cultures and the desire to do that for the children and for the whole family. They believed it would be exciting for them and good for their children.

I absolutely wanted to take it [the assignment] as an adventure for me and for the whole family. I felt like it [the assignment] was an opportunity to go to school with so many different Southeast Asian countries. I felt like there were opportunities to learn and be immersed in other cultures, immersed in the Vietnamese culture, and learn about other cultures. And certainly, the children, in the sense that they have got a keen desire to travel. [7B]

In the long term, they believed that the intangible benefits of immersing into a new culture and living in a diverse community was that their children would be more adaptable in an ever-multicultural world. Related to this motivation was *children's education*. The spouses were motivated to join the expatriates on the assignments because their children could go to good quality international schools. For the ones who were not from native English speaking countries, international assignments provided great opportunities for the children to study in an English speaking environment.

#### **4.2.3 Country or culture-related motivations**

When discussing what had motivated them to agree to go on the current assignments, expatriate spouses stated country-related factors such as *host country environment* and *country escape*. For many expatriate families, the current assignments were just the next one

that they had to go on. The question for them was not to say yes or no to an assignment, but to choose one location from the options. In some cases, they showed that they were really tired of moving, and therefore they just wanted to choose a place that sounded comfortable to them:

I'm tired of going [to international assignments]. Tired of moving. I mean I've done it [going on international assignment] before. I was confident I can do it [going on international assignment]. You know, always work well. You know, in the previous moves, maybe the excitement was, you know, the excitement of moving somewhere and going to a new place, and all this were maybe bigger. Whereas that time I felt a bit overwhelmed by having to move again. I have to say. But you know, taking into consideration, I think that, you know, we would move anyway, right, maybe if not now, a bit maybe in a year or two, and that Vietnam was a good position, an attractive location. [11B]

For expatriate families whose home countries had issues such as security or safety concerns, the motivation of a suitable host country environment was supplementary to the motivation of moving out of their home countries. They first wanted to go on international assignments before choosing a destination that they liked. They usually did some research and discussed with the expatriates before making the decisions on where to go.

We wanted to leave the country already because the conditions in the country right then were really bad ... mostly insecure, you know. There were a lot of kidnappings, bad government right then. So we were fed up with the politicians in our country. The job wasn't bad but we were hoping to have a better life. [2B]

### **4.3 Reasons for engaging in a split situation**

There were many reasons why expatriates and spouses had chosen the split situation. Un-accompanying spouses were asked about these reasons, which were organized into three major categories: reasons related to spouses; reasons related to children; reasons related to extended family and network. In many cases, it was the combination of more than one reason. Figure 4.4 illustrates these reasons.

The most commonly mentioned reasons by the expatriate spouses for choosing the split situation were related to spouses. These reasons could be because of *spouses' work* or *disapproval of the host country*. In many cases, the spouses were working when expatriates decided to accept the assignments. In these cases, the expatriate couples were dual-career couples, and the careers of both sides were equally important in terms of income and

profession. Indeed, there was a case in which the spouse had a position which was relatively more senior than the expatriate.

Now there were a few reasons why we were reluctant to do that. One, my career and position, I really enjoy the work that I do. I'm in a fairly senior position, actually more senior than she is in the organization. [4Bs]

Consequently, it was not easy for the spouses to give up their jobs. The duration of each assignment was about three years on average which was considered too long for a career break. Furthermore, ceasing work brought many other consequences for the spouses and the families. Specifically, for many families, there were financial constraints such as a mortgage and taking care of a big family that could not live on one single income. Therefore, spouses' careers were one of the most important reasons why expatriates and spouses had to be split during international assignments.

The other reasons related to the spouses were that they did not like living in the host country or did not enjoy the life there. In such cases, the spouse had gone to live in the host country for some time but had decided to go home due to feeling cut off from relationships and life in the home country.

I changed my mind after coming there. It was not really about anything in particular, but I felt it was not really my life there. I kinda couldn't do whatever I wanted and meet whoever I wanted like at home. Everyday, I mostly just stayed at home, sent the kids to schools and took them back home. I cooked. I did housework. I went out, quite often, but I still felt lonely, and it was not my life. So, that's why I wanted to come back. [18Bs]

Next, there were strong reasons related to children why expatriates and their spouses had chosen the split option. The most salient reason was *children's education*. In most cases, the respondents said that they wanted some stability in education for their children. For some, the quality of education in the home country was so good that they did not want to risk lower quality education for their children.

Also my daughter goes to school in [home country], and the public school in [home country] is very good and almost free. So if she came here, she would have to go to international schools. These schools are very expensive whereas we are unsure if they are as good as schools in [home country]. [16Bs]

In other cases, the children were at transitioning stages, such as high school, and any move would interrupt and affect their education.

Because our three children were studying in [home country], and they are not at the stage that we can easily move them because their studying is very important now. It would be difficult for them to adjust to a new education system. Not to mention that they would have difficulties to enter the schools when they come back home. [15Bs]

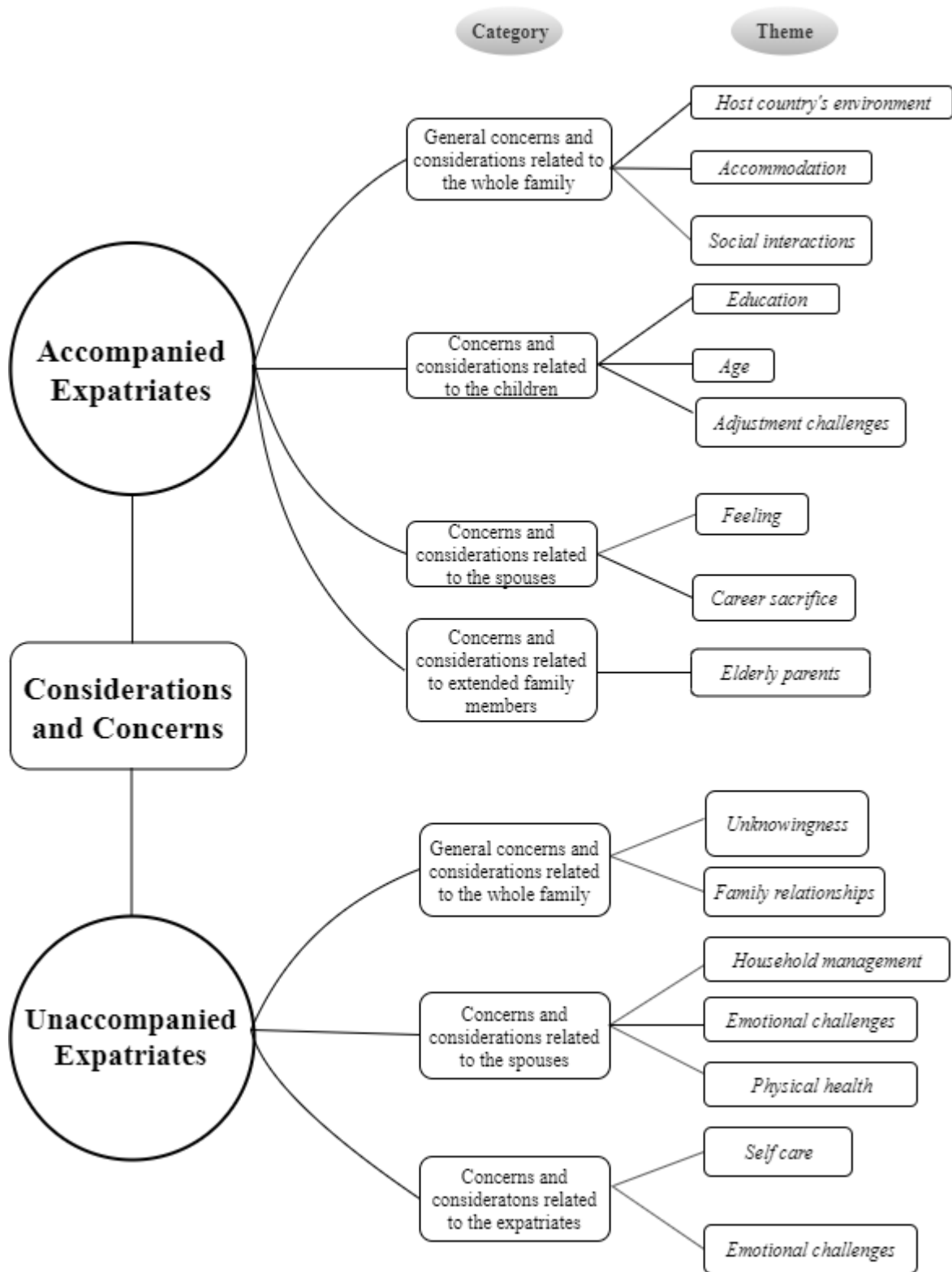
Another reason for expatriate couples to opt for the split situation was the children's age, where they were already grown up and did not need as much care and support from both parents. Therefore, the burden on the parent who stayed would not be too heavy. In addition, *special needs children* was another reason that one expatriate family had decided to be split. In this case, the child did not have normal development and the parents were worried that any change in their living environment could be detrimental to the child's growth.

Last, in listening to respondents, it was evident that in some cases, expatriates and their spouses had to be separate during international assignments due to reasons related to their extended family and networks. For example, the spouses had to stay at home *to take care of elderly parents (taking care of elderly parents)*. They stated that their parents had health issues or were at an age that required them to be present. In other cases, the expatriate spouses or children did not want to move because at home they had family and friends, which meant that they would have a more stable social life (*stable social life*).

And being in [home country] here, I have friends, my daughter has friends. It's a more stable kind of place, kind of life for her and for me. [16Bs]

#### **4.4 Concerns and considerations of expatriates**

This section communicates the concerns and considerations of the expatriates. They were asked if they had any considerations and concerns about having, or not having, their family accompany them (Section 4.4). Similarly, expatriate spouses were asked about their considerations when accompanying/un-accompanying the expatriates and if they were concerned about anything while accompanying the expatriates or remaining split during international assignments (Section 4.5). It became clear in the interviews that participants clearly differentiated between considerations and concerns. There were many factors that they considered, but they did not necessarily feel concerned or worried about all of those factors. Figure 4.5 depicts expatriates' considerations and concerns when going on expatriation. Since each group of expatriates had vastly different considerations and concerns, this section is structured according to accompanied expatriates and unaccompanied expatriates.



**Figure 4. 5: Expatriates' concerns and considerations when going on international assignments**

#### 4.4.1 Accompanied expatriates

Accompanied expatriates had many concerns and considerations when going on international assignments. These included general concerns and considerations related to the whole family, but also concerns and considerations related specifically to the children, the spouses, and extended family members.

- **The whole family**

When thinking about international assignments, the expatriates usually had some general concerns and considerations in relation to their whole family, including *host country environment*, *accommodation* and *social interactions*. In relation to the host country's environment, expatriates were concerned about safety, infrastructure, health services, shopping, etc. Specific to accommodation, expatriates wanted to have a comfortable and convenient place for their family to live. The possibility for social interactions of family members was also one of the accompanied expatriates' considerations.

... has to be a good environment with those others who[se] kids could have good relationships, good friendships, and my wife too ... [1A]

Most expatriates wanted their family members to have social interactions within expatriate communities, but some also expressed interest in integrating with the local community. The community they wanted to live in and interact with could influence their choice of a place to live. For example, if they wanted to live within expatriate communities, they would choose the specific areas hosting those communities. Regardless of which community they related to and communicated with most, social interactions were one of the important considerations of accompanied expatriates:

... maybe friends close because if I take them to live in small towns outside Hanoi, of course it is not going to be very nice. It is important that my family have friends around. [2A]

In addition to general considerations and concerns that related to all family members, expatriates also expressed concerns and considerations specific to each family member as follows.

- **The children**

Among the main concerns of the expatriates, those related to children were the most common. These concerns included *education*, *age* and *adjustment*. First, since many accompanied expatriates had children of school age, they highlighted the children's education

or schooling as the first and foremost consideration when thinking about international assignments:

I mean consideration is always schooling for my kids, which is wonderful here. [11A]

So, the quality of the schooling was the number one priority. [7A]

Many expatriates echoed these statements which emphasized the importance of a good quality education. This is understandable since no expatriate wanted to sacrifice their children's learning opportunities for the sake of their career. Furthermore, they also expected that their children would be exposed to a learning environment that would help them develop their skills and knowledge, especially language skills. While expatriates who came from English speaking countries appreciated that their children could go to schools that taught other foreign languages, expatriates who came from non-English speaking countries highlighted English speaking environments and the English exposure that their children could get in such environments.

The first thing was that we looked at the benefits that my children could have. Because they would go to international schools, and they would learn English. Yes, and they will be exposed to an English speaking environment. [5A]

Nevertheless, they did not forget about their mother tongue. They mentioned that it was also important to have extra classes or curriculum in their mother tongue available so that their children did not forget the language and could keep up with the program in their home country. This concern was relevant to those expatriates who came from a non-English speaking country.

In addition to children's education, the expatriates considered their children's age when deciding to take an assignment offer. In most cases, expatriates were concerned because their children were too young. They considered whether it was the right time to go living abroad. Some mentioned that they actually had to postpone the assignment or had previously refused offers when their children were too young. Others chose to come to the host country first and brought their family members later when they thought it was a more suitable time.

Adjustment challenges for children was also a concern of expatriates. They were worried that it could be difficult for their children to adjust to the environment, education system, and finding new friends.

I was afraid that my children would have some challenges, as I said, in adjusting to new school system and getting close to new friends ... [5A]

However, this concern was not common among all expatriates. Some others even mentioned that they were not really concerned about adjustment challenges for their children because they believed children could adapt very quickly.

- **The spouses**

Besides children, expatriates were concerned about their spouses' feelings, or expressed that their spouses needed to be happy living in the host country (*feeling*). Most of the expatriates, especially the ones with their spouses staying at home in the host country, understood that it would not be easy for their spouses to live in a new place without having things to do because the spouses did not work and did not know many people.

My wife should be, I was afraid that my wife should feel more lonely, yeah. Because she also will stay far away from her friends and her own family. And, so, I am the only one who could take care of her, and I am outside during the day. She would be left alone at home. [5A]

In the interviews, some expatriates also acknowledged the sacrifice that their spouses had made for them and for their children. Especially, some expatriate spouses worked before the assignments, and they had to quit their jobs when deciding to accompany the expatriates.

I had the kind of concern that my wife would have to sacrifice as well. But I try to convince her that it would be a good chance for our children and for our family as well....So my wife had to sacrifice by, you know, resigning from her job to come with me. [3A]

*Career sacrifice* of spouses was a major consideration of the expatriates. Expatriate spouses would not only have to adapt to a new living environment, they also had to get used to being unoccupied due to having left everything behind in the home country. In such cases, the expatriates were highly appreciative of their spouses.

- **Extended family members**

Although this study relied on interviews with expatriate spouses/partners who are considered nuclear family, some expatriates explicitly mentioned their concerns in relation to extended family members. They were concerned about their ageing parents' physical and mental well-being, and were worried that living away would make it harder to take care of them (*elderly parents*). There was also a concern that they would not be able to promptly deal with any arising issues related to their parents.

Although our concern is that our parents are getting older. They need someone to take care of them. They also want to see us, see their grandchildren more often now ... A relative of mine

passed away several months ago. I could not attend the funeral. That reinforced my concern about my parents while we live so far like this. [1A]

#### **4.4.2 Unaccompanied expatriates**

Since unaccompanied expatriates and their family members lived distantly during their assignments, they had a lot of concerns and considerations about their life domain. From the interviews with these expatriates, there were more concerns than general considerations, and in most cases, the concerns remained and intensified throughout the assignment time. The concerns and considerations of unaccompanied expatriates could be categorized into three types: concerns and considerations related to the whole family, the spouses, and the expatriates themselves.

- **The whole family**

While undertaking international assignments, unaccompanied expatriates had some concerns that were not related to any particular family member but rather to the whole family. As their family was out of sight, they were worried that they would not know what was going on on the other side (*unknowningness*). This created insecure feelings in the unaccompanied expatriates. They were worried that if there was anything happening, their spouses would not be able to deal with it or would suffer from it. Some of them acknowledged that there might be nothing worth worrying about, but they were still concerned. This type of concern was quite ambiguous, but was not rare among unaccompanied expatriates.

Another type of concern that was mentioned by unaccompanied expatriates was spousal or family relationships (*family relationships*). As they could not spend frequent time with their spouse, some of them were afraid it would create a distance between them. Others were concerned that they would miss important stages in their children's lives, and consequently a disconnection could be developed.

The main consideration was not being with them like daily, especially with the children. I have teenage daughters. So, you know, children grow up very quickly, and there's a certain period of the child's life you develop a bond. So, I was very concerned about not being there for the most important years. So, that was the biggest consideration. [17As]

From the interviews, it was observed that the expatriates' concerns about relationships with their spouse or their children depended on the time and opportunities for connecting and communicating with them. For example, while some expatriates had concerns about their spousal relationship, there were others who said that they talked to their spouse frequently.

Similarly, expatriates who did not have time to share with their children over the phone did not feel good about the bond with the children while they were away.

- **The spouses**

While the expatriates were away on international assignments, in all cases except for one in which the female expatriate brought her children to the host country, their spouse was the one who mainly took care of the family. Therefore, it was not surprising to see that the most common concern of unaccompanied expatriates was related to their spouses. Before deciding to accept the offer for their international assignment, they considered if their spouse would be able to handle their family life while they were absent (*household management*). Once they were away, they were still concerned if their spouse would be able to deal with all the responsibilities at home:

I was worried that my wife had to take care of our two sons without my help. It would be hard for her. [18As]

Although in most cases, they believed that they could rely on their spouses' ability to deal with domestic life, they were aware that in reality, it would be difficult for them. As a result, there could be potential effects on their spouse. Other concerns existed when the spouses did not have children to take care of:

I mean, being my wife and me, we of course not being together, and the loneliness, and not having someone to be with physically is also difficult. So, that was also a concern. [17As]

This statement illustrates another type of concern related to spouses that unaccompanied expatriates emphasized – the loneliness and emotional challenges for spouses (*emotional challenges*). This type of concern was common among all expatriates. Although in most cases, expatriate spouses lived with children, expatriates worried that they would suffer emotionally. In the case of the female expatriate, the spouse lived by himself, and therefore this concern was even more pronounced for her than in other cases. She raised this on several occasions during the interview:

... because he's alone, and he's very lonely. I thought that he even suffered much more than us because I and the kids had each other here. [4As]

Furthermore, expatriates were also worried about the physical health of their unaccompanying spouse (*physical health*). In most cases where the spouses were left with the children, expatriates were concerned that the spouses had too many things to take care of, which could become exhausting for them and not allow them time for themselves. In cases

where the spouses were alone, the expatriates were worried that they could develop unhealthy routines which could be harmful to them:

My wife has to take care of everything by herself. She could feel tired. I know that there is a lot of stuff that she has to do. Her health is not really good, especially when she feels unwell mentally. [18As]

I think he's not healthy to be by himself, you know. He worked day and night so that he did not feel lonely. He didn't even want to go to the gym. [4As]

- **The expatriates themselves**

Besides the concerns and considerations related to their family members, unaccompanied expatriates were also concerned about themselves. Some, who had not previously gone abroad alone to work for a long-term contract, were concerned about taking care of themselves while living a life without the care and support of their spouse (*self care*). When living with their spouse, they did not have to be worried about cooking, washing, etc. because all housework was done by their spouse. Therefore, they were not familiar with doing housework, and they felt reluctant to do so.

The first thing is that when I lived in [home country], all my daily things like my clothes, my meals and many other things were taken care of by my wife. So, when I came here, I had to live by myself, and was worried about taking care of my own life. [15As]

The other concern was their loneliness and other emotional challenges (*emotional challenges*). The challenge of living with the absence of the spouse was not always easy to cope with. Unlike the above mentioned concern (self care), most expatriates with this concern had previous experience of being split from family for some time, such as being on short-term international assignments. In addition, the expatriates said that they were concerned because living alone after getting married and having kids would be totally different from before. The following statement perfectly captures this concern:

This is not the first time that I have lived by myself ... I mean after getting married. I had some short-term assignments before. I didn't bring my family with me, and it was really hard, you know, the loneliness. I missed my family a lot. So this time, I felt quite concerned and hesitant. [18As]

## **4.5 Concerns and considerations of expatriate spouses**

Expatriate spouses shared their considerations and concerns which are summarized in Figure 4.6. The two groups of spouses (accompanying and un-accompanying) had completely

different concerns and considerations. Therefore, the insights in this section are presented according to each group.

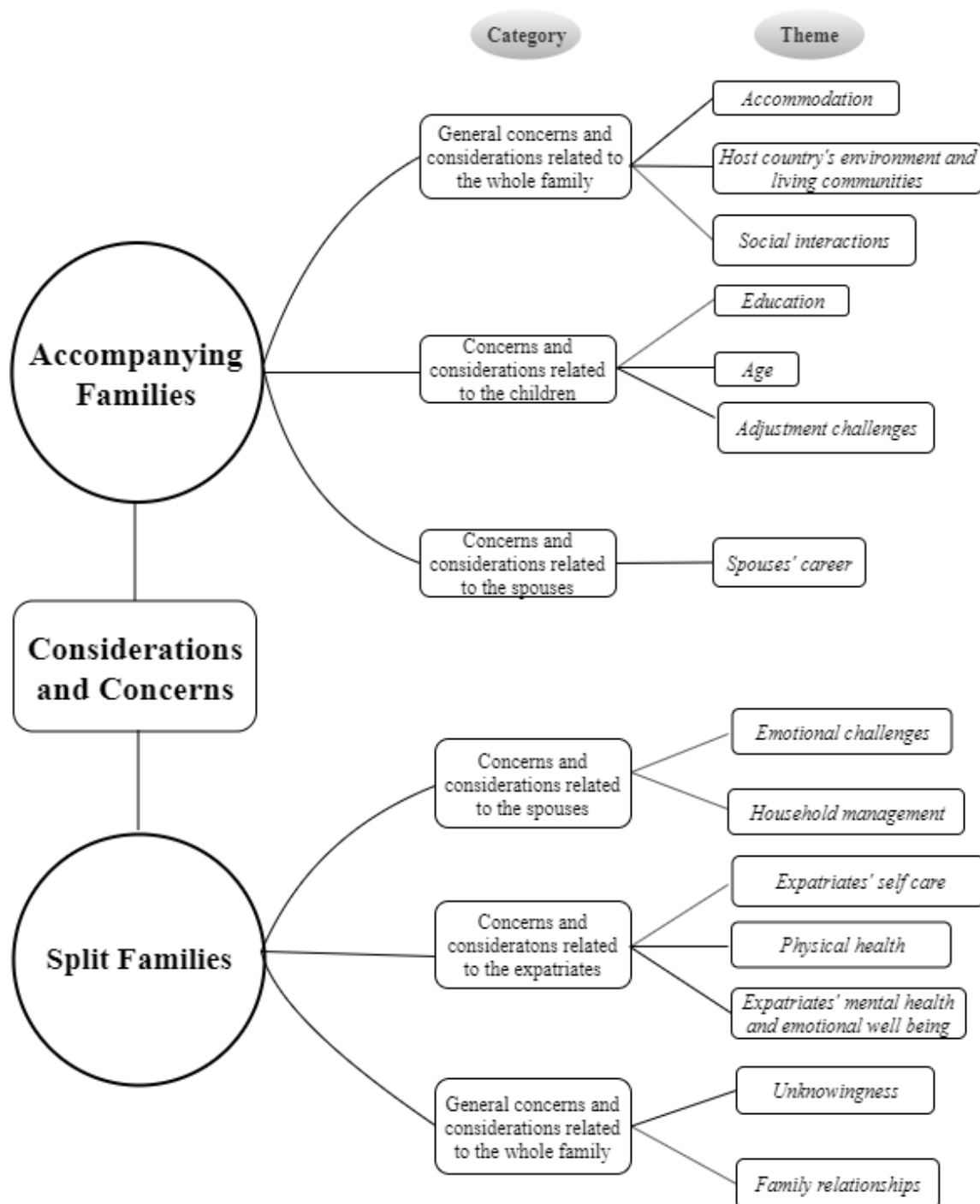


Figure 4. 6: Expatriate families' concerns and considerations in international assignments

### 4.5.1 Accompanying spouses

The concerns and considerations mentioned by the spouses were both different and similar to those mentioned by the expatriates. Overall, expatriate spouses had three major types of concerns which related to the whole family, to the children, and related to themselves. Specific details of each type are outlined below.

- **The whole family**

Accompanying expatriate spouses expressed specifically that they were concerned about the *host country's environment and living communities*. Security and safety was their number one consideration. All the spouses interviewed said that they would not go to a war zone where their lives could be constrained or threatened. Some families who were religious also considered whether there could be any potential religious conflicts when living in the host country. Similarly, some wondered if the host country would be friendly to them or accept them because of their origins.

Major concern was that ...the other thing was that ... I wasn't sure ... the uncertainty on the other side. *"Is this country going to be okay? Was it going to be accepting? Was it going to be okay to live here"* [3B]

Meanwhile, some others had health concerns. They explained that they had heard the environment was not really clean. So, they were worried and tried to safeguard themselves. Also, some mentioned that since they could not speak the local language and English was not that common in the host country, so they were concerned about facing difficulties when living there. Another concern that was very common among expatriate spouses was the neighborhood or social communities, especially expatriate communities. To them, these communities were very important because they played a valuable role in their smooth integration into the host country.

You know, what is the expat community like? You know, is it like easy to meet people? Are they concentrating in some areas? You know. Are there any active networks? So that's something I try to find out. Believe me. I've been to many assignments before, and these communities helped heaps. They could help with practical things, and they were the ones we could relate to when we felt we were suddenly thrown into a new place. [11B]

Similar to the expatriates, the spouses cared about accommodation or the conditions of the place they were to live. In general, their concerns and considerations related to the whole family were quite similar to those of the expatriates. The spouses were just more detailed when talking about these concerns.

- **The children**

Accompanying spouses seemed to have the same concerns and considerations related to the children as the expatriates. The first consideration was children's education (*children's education*). They consistently talked about the availability of international schools. Most of them said that was the most important thing.

The school is always the biggest factor. So how is the school? Is there a good school for the children? [11B]

Another spouse mentioned that she thought about schools immediately when her husband received the job offer. Expatriate spouses also believed that the first thing the expatriates considered before accepting job offers was the children's schools. Although the spouses did not describe the school concern as specifically as the expatriates did, they were on the same page with expatriates in emphasizing this factor. For instance, the expatriates delineated clearly the criteria they looked at when choosing schools for their children and what options they thought about. The spouses did not discuss it in great detail but they did confirm how significant schools were in their considerations.

The next concern that was discussed more consistently by the spouses than the expatriates was the adjustment challenges for children. Despite the expatriate children being at different ages, the spouses were commonly concerned about them adjusting to their new lives in the host country. The spouses with small children were worried about their children's health such as whether they could adjust to the food there or if they would get sick.

I was only worried about my baby ... whether the food here was fine for her, what we needed to do if she got sick ... [6B]

Whereas the concerns related to older age children was about them adjusting to the schools' environment and curriculum. Since at their ages they had developed quite strong friendships, the spouses were not sure if these school-aged children would be welcomed and would adjust to school life in the host country. They may also have academic challenges with the change in curriculum.

And also he was older so we were worried about him adapting too, especially when he had friends there, we said it's going to be hard for him to adapt and start school again. [1B]

Similar to the expatriates, the spouses considered children's ages when making decisions regarding international assignments. Some spouses who had young children were hesitant and concerned about their age. Meanwhile, others said that more consideration had to be

given when the children were teenagers as they had already created their own lives and any move could become complicated for them.

- **The spouses themselves**

When talking about themselves, the spouses just mentioned one concern which was their *careers*. Some spouses worked before accompanying their husbands on international assignments. Therefore, they wondered whether they would have a chance to continue working in the host country. For some of them, they had to consider and be prepared to sacrifice their careers. They claimed that this was not easy for them since they not only relied on the work financially, but it was also important to their sense of self and independence.

My only concern was losing my job. Basically losing my job and losing my funds. It meant my independence. I have always been busy with my work, and that made me feel fulfilled.

You know, in that not being able to work, it's always, you know, I find it a big concern. [3B]

This concern of the spouses was also recognized by the expatriates. It signifies that the expatriates profoundly understood their spouses' concerns and considerations. The next section presents the concerns and considerations raised by un-accompanying spouses.

#### **4.5.2 Un-accompanying spouses**

Although un-accompanying spouses did not accompany the expatriates, they had a lot of concerns and considerations when the expatriates went on international assignments. In general, they had more concerns than the expatriates themselves. A feeling of insecurity could be sensed through the accounts of these spouses. They had concerns related to themselves, to the expatriates and to the whole family.

- **The spouses themselves**

In the discussion about the concerns and considerations that expatriate spouses had related to themselves, it turned out that they did not worry about themselves too much. Their two major concerns were *loneliness and emotional challenges* and *taking care of household by themselves*. The spouses were worried that they would feel lonely and miss the expatriates:

Not so much of concerns ... but when thinking about us living here and he's living somewhere else ... I told my husband that I would miss him a lot ... What would I do if I miss him ... [13Bs]

Other spouses shared the same feeling. However, they did not talk a lot about themselves, but rather said the expatriates were worried and concerned about them. In addition to this

emotional concern, some spouses were concerned about taking care of the household by themselves without the expatriates' help. Most of these cases had the expatriates going on international assignments and leaving families behind for the first time.

I felt scared, nervous at the same time. I was like “What happened if the kids got sick?”, “What happened if I got sick?”, “What would I have to do if anything urgent happened?”. You know, some daily things, may not be too many, but if you are left by yourself all the time to handle everything, you would feel exhausted and stressful. [18Bs]

As mentioned before, spouses were not too concerned about themselves. However, they showed concerns about the expatriates. The following section outlines these concerns.

- **The expatriates**

The un-accompanying spouses consistently expressed concerns in relation to the expatriates. First, the spouses were worried about expatriates taking care of themselves (*expatriates' daily self-care*). In most cases, the expatriates were used to being taken care of by their spouses before going on the current assignments, and now they had to take care of themselves. Meanwhile, they had busy schedules and tended to work more when they were by themselves. Consequently, spouses were worried about what they ate, how they dealt with laundry, who took care of them when sick, etc.:

One, I think he doesn't get proper meals. Because sometimes he works late he just eats whatever is available. And then, I also realized, I think, since the past one or two years when he has been away, he has put on a lot of weight, probably from a very unhealthy lifestyle of working, sitting at the desk and not eating well. [16Bs]

The spouses had common concerns about the expatriates' physical health (*physical health*). They were also concerned about expatriates' mental health and emotional wellbeing (*mental health*) in general. Since the expatriates had left for work without their families, they did not have many people there that they could talk to, therefore, the spouses were worried that it would be hard for them. Especially when they had difficulties or challenges at work, the expatriates did not have anyone to share these with. Therefore, expatriates' emotional and mental health during international assignments were of serious concern for un-accompanying spouses.

He doesn't know many people there except working colleagues ... there're a lot of things he can't share with them, especially related to work. After a long working day, he needs someone to talk to and to come back to ... I know... [17Bs]

- **The whole family**

The un-accompanying expatriate spouses were aware of the emotional challenges and loneliness that the unaccompanied expatriates had to confront. As a result, these spouses expressed their concerns about spousal and family relationships. The spouses were hesitant when talking about this topic. They admitted that they knew they had to trust their spouses, but the feeling of not knowing what was going on in the other country caused them to be concerned.

I had a lot of questions and concerns that kept going on my mind. We [she and her husband] agreed that we both needed to try and trust each other ... but ... you know ... although we talked everyday, I can't know what is really going on ... [18Bs]

The conversations then naturally led to the concern of the expatriates not being able to stay away from temptation. If the expatriates were not able to remain attached to their families, the families could break up. The spouses had witnessed similar cases before and were concerned about their own families. It was not that they did not trust their spouses, but they understood the issue existed and kept reminding the expatriates and themselves directly and indirectly about being faithful to each other.

So, yeah, I ... So I think in terms of his social life, the relationships, it's also ... I also think that who knows if he also meets someone there, right? So, that is a concern as well, having the spouse working away. I saw some cases in which the families broke up because one partner worked abroad. [16Bs]

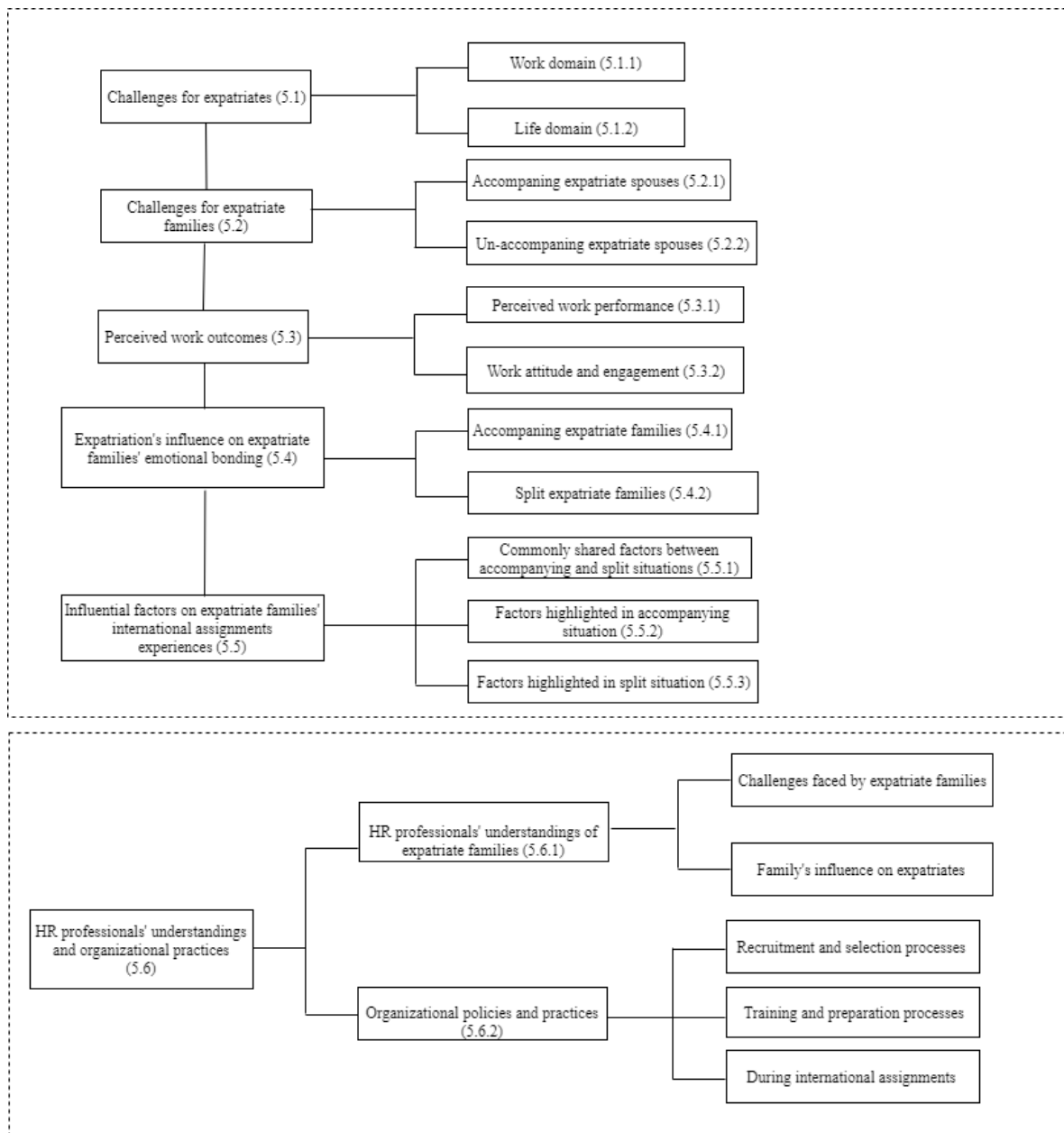
## **4.6 Chapter summary**

In this chapter, the first parts of the findings have been delineated. This chapter describes the participants' thoughts before the commencement of international assignments. The motivations for undertaking international assignments and the reasons to engage in a split situation from the perspectives of expatriates and their spouses initiated the chapter. Specifically, the motivations to undertake international assignments of both accompanied and unaccompanied expatriates were outlined. Next, the motivations to undertake international assignments from the perspectives of accompanying spouses and insights from un-accompanying spouses about reasons to engage in the split situation followed. The chapter then turned to the considerations and concerns of expatriates (accompanied and unaccompanied) and their spouses (accompanying and un-accompanying). In the following chapter, the actual experiences of expatriates and their families and HR professionals'

understandings of expatriate families and organizational practices continue the findings of the thesis.

## **CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS – EXPERIENCES IN INTERNATIONAL ASSIGNMENTS, HR UNDERSTANDINGS AND ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICES**

Chapter 5 delineates how expatriates and their family members experienced expatriation. In addition, the chapter presents organizational views and practices for these families. In this chapter, four major aspects of expatriate families' experiences during international assignments are presented. The insights from accompanying and split family situations are presented in parallel. The first and second sections focus on the challenges that expatriates and their family members encountered respectively. The third section presents the perceived work outcomes of expatriates, including how the family influenced expatriates' work performance and how organizational support for expatriates' families influenced their work attitudes and engagement. How the expatriation process influenced expatriate families' emotional bonding is described in the fourth section. Meanwhile, the fifth section outlines factors that could influence expatriates and their families' experiences of international assignments. The fourth and fifth sections combine the insights shared by expatriates and their spouses. HR professionals' understandings of each family situation (accompanying and split) and organizational practices in relation to expatriate families are detailed next. The chapter ends with a summary. Figure 5.1 captures the overview of this chapter.



**Figure 5. 1: Overview of Chapter 5**

## **5.1 Challenges in international assignments for expatriates**

The expatriates were asked about the challenges in international assignments in general and the challenges specifically related to their life domain. Answers to direct and indirect interview questions were fleshed out to reveal the underlying themes. In analyzing the challenges that accompanied and unaccompanied expatriates confronted, both groups had similar challenges in the work domain, but life domain challenges were completely different.

The insights are presented here according to the work domain and the life domain. Figure 5.2 depicts the challenges for expatriates.

### **5.1.1 Work domain challenges**

In examining accompanied interviewees' accounts of what challenged them in the work domain during international assignments, three salient themes emerged: challenges in dealing with host nationals (*host nationals*), challenges related to head office's communication and understandings (*head office*), and challenges related to work requirements (*work requirements*). Unaccompanied expatriates shared the first two types of challenges in the work domain (*host nationals* and *head office*).

- **Challenges in dealing with host nationals**

The expatriates faced several challenges in dealing with host nationals. Some of them were caused by the host country's characteristics such as language and cultural barriers, and others were because of host nationals' attitudes and prejudices.

***Language and cultural barriers.*** Since Vietnam is not an English speaking country, many locals are not able to communicate in English fluently. Even though the expatriates spoke English, they encountered difficulties in communication with their colleagues. Some expatriates whose native languages were not English often had more issues.

Also, when I was there [home country], I only worked with [home country] people. So, I did not have to speak English, which was easier for me. Here I managed Vietnamese people. So, it is more difficult for me. [8A]

First, in terms of language, in [home country], I don't need a translator. So, whatever I want to say or I want to do, I can do much more quickly. Sometimes I feel my work would be much more efficient if we could communicate smoothly, but unfortunately not yet. [13As]

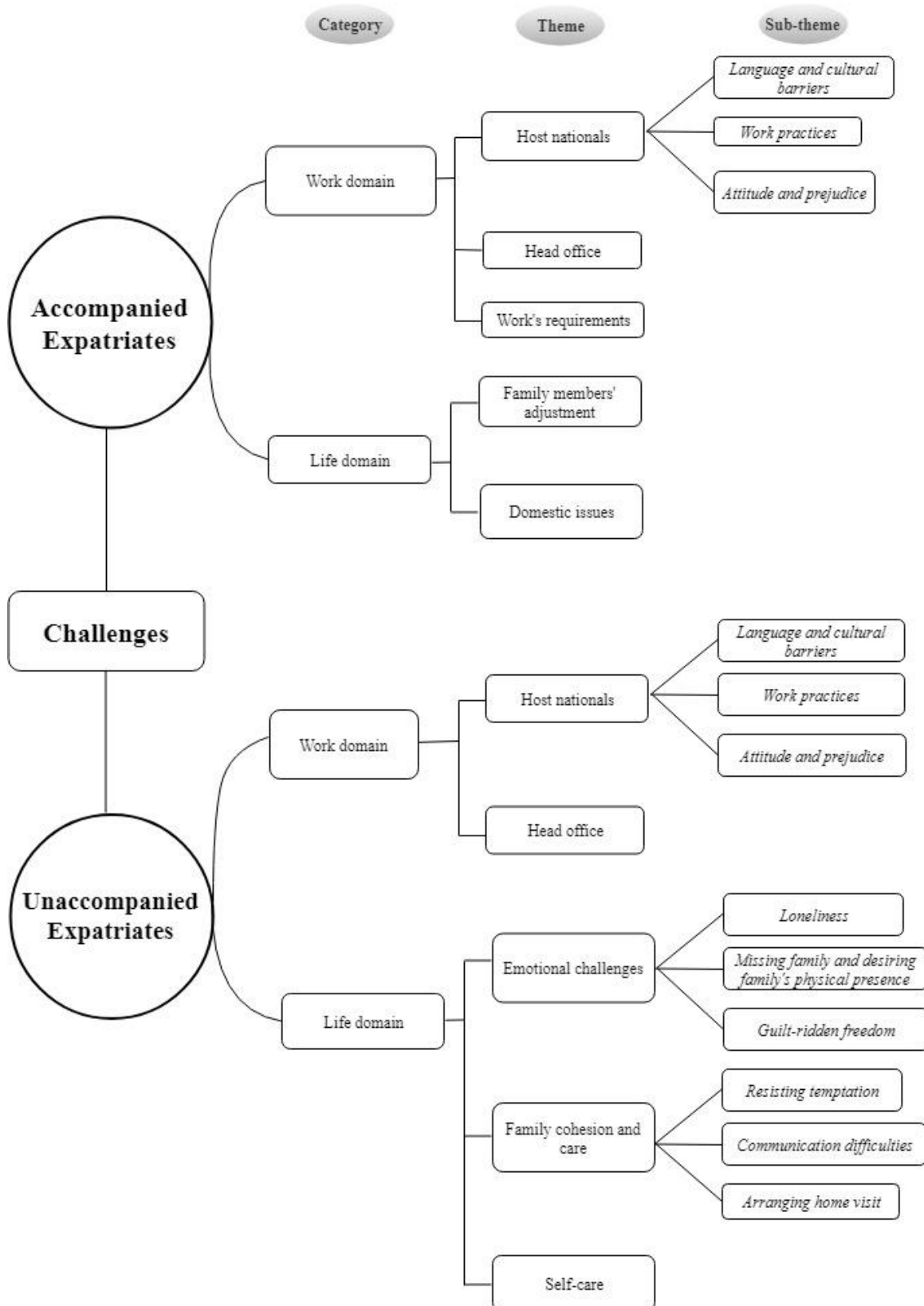


Figure 5. 2: Challenges in international assignments for expatriates

In addition to language barriers, there were also cultural differences that affected the adjustment of the expatriates. The ways of thinking and the values appreciated by expatriates might be different from those of the locals. As a result, the expatriates had daily challenges such as being misinterpreted when working with colleagues and business partners.

And the work thing is, I think it's just, sometimes the language and culture barriers, that's too much. I'm never going to be able to breach some gaps. It makes me a little bit sad sometimes. So I think in that sense, it feels a more intense work effort compared to where your culture or language and everything is, in a sense, like your home country and home language where it's more normal. [7A]

In some instances, even though the expatriates had previous experience in living and working in the host country, they claimed that differences existed between the cultures of different regions and different cities and consequently they still experienced difficulties. They had to stay more cautious.

What was difficult in [the current city] to adapt to was [people in the current city] have a different culture than [the city that the expatriate previously lived]. Here people are more complicated to understand and to communicate with ... I'm also very careful, very cautious what I say, how I say, to whom I say it. [16As]

**Work practices.** Although language and cultural barriers were common for expatriates in international assignments, these challenges were not mentioned as consistently as the challenges related to work practices in the host country, especially in the first year of the assignments. The expatriates had to work with different stakeholders, and they complained that the ways things were done by the stakeholders caused them frustration. The way the expatriates expected the work to be done was different from what people around them usually did. For example, some expatriates had to deal with partners from the local government, and they had to accept that things could be done very slowly.

... the government has a different timeline process. So it's been delays ... like some small technical system project delays for two years and expired ... And then in the same situation now, we are preparing two projects but government process is so slow or, well, they have their own, you know, program ... meaning agenda [3A]

However, these challenges were not usually persistent and would improve after some time. The expatriates adapted to the issues or they found ways to change the dynamics around them. In most cases, the expatriates were aware of these challenges despite their previous experiences with international assignments. As one expatriate shared:

... somehow part of the attraction of trying to get a different culture or work experience is to be exposed to different ways of thinking, and so different work methods and different markets and different dynamics. So I always think going on this assignment, you do have to make adjustments, particularly in the first year. [7A]

***Host nationals' attitude and prejudice.*** Coming into an international assignment, most expatriates accepted that they could have challenges in dealing with host nationals in many contexts. It was not just because of the manner of work in the host country, but also because of the host nationals' attitudes and prejudices which created invisible barriers for the expatriates at work, influencing their confidence. Not all expatriates had this problem, but it did exist, as one expatriate said that he faced strange attitudes from host nationals because of his ethnicity:

So the first year was a bit challenging because people did not even know you and you came as a black person there. I remember the first conference I organized with inspectors all over the country in one big room. And when I entered, everybody was like ... oh all their eyes were glaring at me ...yeah and they were surprised "Is this the guy going to make a presentation?". [3A]

However, ethnicity or age of expatriates were not the only issues that caused challenges for expatriates when dealing with host nationals. In some cases, it was believed that the expatriates had come to change things in the organizations. As a result, they faced reactions such as disagreement from host nationals. Local employees thought that the expatriates did not know much about local operations, and they had been working well without the changes that expatriates wanted to apply. They did not want to listen to the expatriates or follow what the expatriates expected them to do. This kind of prejudice created hurdles that were not easy to overcome and could affect the success of the assignments:

... they [host nationals] started telling you ... "you're going to be the change agent. You going to bring the Western culture to this country. That would be a big failure". I survived but I was not able to be the change agent... [9A]

However, the expatriates also noted that this kind of challenge was not particular to this host country, but could arise in any country. Even though the expatriates had previous experiences with international assignments, they could still face this issue as expressed by one expatriate - "in any assignment, that actually hurts" [3A]

- **Challenges related to head office’s communication and understandings**

Another challenge in the work domain of both accompanied and unaccompanied expatriates came from the head offices’ communication and understandings, especially expectations from their organizations’ head offices. Although this challenge was not as difficult as the above mentioned ones, some expatriates found it to be the root cause of their work pressure. In the first several months on assignment, many challenges came from people and conditions of the host country that required the expatriates’ attention, therefore a certain degree of inertia could be expected in terms of meeting the assignments’ objectives. The fact that head offices’ expectations were too high compounded these other challenges.

[the assignment in] Vietnam could fail because the expectations of the person who put me were too high ... although I had to say “listen, it's not going to be up to me only”. [9A]

First, when I am here, in order to make the project progress, I still need the cooperation of people in [home country]. However, because I am here, sometimes they don’t respond to my request in a timely fashion. That creates some problems. [17As]

Therefore, the expatriates believed that if head offices understood the difficulties in the host country, especially in the first period of their assignments, and lowered their expectations or allowed some time for them to adjust, the assignment would be less stressful. The expatriates also explained that it was not due to a lot of effort, but the actual situations were harder than what head offices perceived. One expatriate spoke of this challenge:

So the first year it takes time for you to get connected to people. So she [the expatriate’s manager in the head office] is somewhere in [the headquarters]. So she did not see the effort I was making... [3A]

In many instances, the expatriates overcame this challenge after some time as they became familiar with the environment and people around them. This was similar to the two types of challenges above. However, there was another type of challenge that could persist throughout the assignments – *challenges related to work requirements*.

- **Challenges related to work requirements**

Among all work domain challenges, the challenges related to work requirements are the only type that was not shared between accompanied and unaccompanied expatriates. Unaccompanied expatriates did not encounter this type of challenge, possibly because they had more time for work. Only accompanied expatriates spoke of challenges that came from work requirements. These requirements included long working hours and heavy workload as well as frequency of travelling. Although many expatriates were familiar with high work

requirements and international assignments, they said that each assignment could be different or these requirements never got easier. They just had to accept them.

Well, I always work a lot. My projects in [another country] required a lot of time ... all projects were controlled, much work control. This is the hardest project ever. This project requires a lot of time and effort. [1A]

Some expatriates had to travel regularly to accomplish their duties. In some instances, this was not expected. When relocating long-term to a host country, they thought that the frequency of travelling would be reduced. In fact, travelling intensity remained in many cases. Sometimes this kind of challenge had a spillover effect on their life domain since it affected their family life.

Although these requirements were quite typical in international assignments, not all expatriates had these challenges. As mentioned above, some expatriates who came from or had been working in work intensive countries such as Japan and Korea did not have any issues with these requirements. They even found that the workload for them was much lighter when working in Vietnam.

### **5.1.2 Life domain challenges**

While accompanied and unaccompanied expatriates shared most of the work domain challenges, life domain challenges for each group were entirely different. Therefore, in this section, challenges are presented according to each group.

- **Accompanied expatriates**

*Challenges related to family members' adjustment.* There was a clear influence of family members on accompanied expatriates. The expatriates who spoke of challenges because of family members' adjustment said that these challenges at some point made them reconsider their assignments. Some family members had problems adjusting to the new environment. They did not feel happy living in the country, especially in the first stage of the assignments. In the words of the expatriates, sometimes the problems were nothing serious. They simply did not like the place where they were living because they did not have anyone to talk to or there was no playground where children could play freely. However, those issues made them feel isolated and as a result, the family members were unhappy.

... firstly, the place for children. For example, the place for babies, for kids to play together, big issue. And public transportation. They can't take a bus or something. There are many

issues, of course ... Though they were not serious ...but they were not really happy. If my family stays happily and there are less issues, and there are places for kids to play together. Then the stress will be reduced. [10A]

Similarly, expatriate children could have difficulties integrating into the new school with new friends while missing their friends at home. If the children were not able to adjust, expatriates would feel concerned, and the challenge for them was to find the solutions for the situations. One of the solutions was to return home:

I asked him [the son] and said “Do you want me to take the decision to go back to [the home country]? Of course, I can do that. As a family, I can do that because we always take into account everybody”. [2A]

Most expatriates said that the assignments were not only for them and because of them but for the whole family. Therefore, if there was any member suffering, they would have to find a way to enable the family to overcome the challenge together. However, that responsibility could also be the reason why they absorbed the challenges from their family.

I mean initially, as I said, they were struggling within the environment and all that. Initially my wife had a lot of challenges staying home without working and having too much time on her hands. She easily got bored and was complaining all the time ... I was always thinking about “are they coping?” and all that, you know. So initially, when I had to travel outside, I was always concerned, you know... [3A]

In these cases, the expatriates admitted that they were not functioning at their best. Their work performance was affected because they could not focus on work 100%. The challenge for family members to adjust became a challenge for the expatriates to take care of family and balance work at the same time.

***Challenges in dealing with domestic issues.*** In addition to indirect challenges because of family members’ adjustment, some expatriates discussed the challenges in dealing with domestic issues. When settling down in the host country, there were many requirements to establish a home. For example, electricity and water needed to be connected or there may be problems with the landlord if their spouses could not communicate with local people. Hence, they needed to spend time sorting these issues.

Challenges... sometimes, especially in the beginning days because everything should be settled down, and there were some problems in my house, water supply and some other things as well. My wife could not communicate with local people. So, I had to deal with it all by myself, and I understand that my wife was quite upset about living here. She confronts many

challenges that were not imaginable in [the home country]. So from time to time she called me to complain or blame things like that, and I had to deal with that as well. [5A]

During the settling time, the expatriates also had to familiarize themselves with the new job and new working environment. Meanwhile, expatriates family members had not adjusted yet and frequently complained to the expatriates. Therefore, they felt pressured and even regretted their decision to accept the assignment.

And I was also busy because I had to deal with my new job, new assignment. So, I was busy as well. So I was under very, simultaneous pressure. I thought, sometimes I thought that I shouldn't have come here. But, I also, I thought that things would get better as we gradually adapted and sorted out some problems [5A]

Besides the initial domestic issues, others persisted throughout the assignment. These could be daily things such as going shopping, traffic or the conditions of the host country that the expatriate family did not feel comfortable with. However, since they wanted to hold on to the assignment, they had to accept or adapt to the situation. The expatriates cited these issues as causing distraction and affecting their work as depicted below:

Well, there are small challenges every day you know... First, the most acute one is medical. One of the kids has some problems, and we just can't find the solution that we can be comfortable with. Not to say that the support is not good, but sort of distracts from time we have to travel to get medical attention for our kids. So it's been the biggest distraction or interruption to focusing on work. That's particular about being in this place. [7A]

- **Unaccompanied expatriates**

Generally speaking, unaccompanied expatriates experienced more stress from challenges in the life domain than those in the work domain. Many also believed that although they had more time for work, they were not sure if they were really working efficiently, and the well-being of themselves and their families was definitely affected. Furthermore, unlike the saying 'Out of sight, out of mind', expatriates were actually confronted with many challenges in their life domain. These included *emotional challenges*, maintaining family cohesion and taking care of family (*family cohesion and care*), and taking care of themselves (*self care*). The temporary nature of the living situations and the desire of many expatriates to finish the assignments as soon as possible proved that the challenges for unaccompanied expatriates might be more serious than organizations may have assumed.

**Emotional challenges.** The emotional challenges while going on international assignments were quite salient for the unaccompanied expatriates. These challenges could be loneliness, missing families, feeling insecure, constrained and worried about families, or desiring the physical presence of their families. Although interviewed informants were not similar in terms of personalities, family situations, and their distance to families, they all experienced loneliness. This challenge was mentioned by all expatriates:

I'm by myself. I feel very lonely. You know... It is not easy. [13As]

... it's kind of strange ... you're sitting in a restaurant on your own. It's not the same as being out at a restaurant with your partner or with the family. It's very different. It's been more isolated. [19As]

The loneliness of unaccompanied expatriates was also noted by their colleagues. Their colleagues completely shared with them that feeling and tried to help them feel better. For example, one expatriate mentioned:

We see a colleague that was here alone. His family is not with him. We always try to get that expatriate close to us and say, "We are going to have dinner, you want to share with us?" or "we are going to have a party" ... you know ... "we want to have this, you want to come and share with us"? To try to keep him away from loneliness. [2A]

Even though many expatriates had experiences of international business trips or being away for work for some time, that did not mean they were accustomed to being alone on long-term international assignments. In these cases, the expatriates said that their families may be familiar with living with their absence, but the fact that they themselves were alone for a long time was never easy. Therefore, some expatriates said that the hardship for them was greater than for their families.

I found it was more difficult for me. Even when I was living with them in [another country], I still traveled a lot. I would go away for missions, like work in other countries. So, they were used to me being away, sometimes a week. And anyway, they are well settled. They have each other, and they're busy, and we talk. So, it's okay. For me, it's much harder, especially in the evening, and the fact of not having somebody physically. [17As]

The loneliness that unaccompanied expatriates had to suffer could lead to some consequences such as mental or physical distress (loneliness). For example, one expatriate admitted that he consumed more alcohol than normal. Although he did not want to drink, he felt lonely and bored when coming home with nothing to do or nobody to talk to. Therefore, he just drank alcohol to kill his free time and his loneliness. Expatriates could also become accustomed to a

life by themselves, and their communication with people around them significantly reduced. That unconscious intention could manifest as the time passed by, making them become less social:

The con is you start developing a lonely life from that perspective, and you start to develop, to become less social. You don't know how to communicate with the people anymore because you don't really communicate much. [16As]

Meanwhile, some others tended to work all the time to keep themselves occupied. Although that meant they could devote more time to work, they were also aware that the habit was not good for their health. They said that the situation was unhealthy for them, and they did not think they should continue it for long. In other words, many expatriates mentioned that they would like to end the assignments as early as they could.

Together with loneliness was the challenge of missing their families (*missing family*). These two emotional challenges are interrelated. As all expatriates in this study were married, if they went on international assignments by themselves, they could not really feel as free as single people. In the words of one expatriate, "you are suddenly single, but you are not really single". All the expatriates expressed that they missed their families a lot. Even if the expatriates were adaptable, they could not avoid that feeling:

Believe me, I'm really adaptable to anything, but the first month in here was really complicated and maybe also, it was ... because for us December is really an important month to gather. So, I missed my family so badly. [2A]

As seen from the interviews, the feelings of expatriates could be triggered on some occasions. For example, on special occasions when families usually get together, such as Christmas, if the expatriates could not get home, they missed their families immensely. Nevertheless, their feelings could also be triggered when they had free time such as coming home after work or during weekends. They shared that they had the feeling of needing somebody to come back to after a tiring working day. They also missed the daily trivial things usually shared with their families such as dinner time, get-away weekends etc:

Yes, when I'm back to [home country], it's the nicest to have the dinner, especially with my daughter. Just she always drives me very crazy because she takes a long time to eat her food, but I think she just does it on purpose... So, then she wants to show me something or show her mother something. So, yeah, I enjoy that company... So, if I don't work late at night, and I come back home early, yeah, I would like to have somebody home just to talk to. Not even

talk to, but just feeling the presence of somebody at home is a good feeling, and that's something I miss dearly at times. [16As]

Expatriates also admitted that they thought they would miss their families less as time passed by or at least they would feel better, but in reality, that was not the case. They just had to “live together with that feeling”, and finding the solutions to overcome that challenge was challenging in itself. Some expatriates said that they no longer enjoyed hanging out with people after work. Meanwhile, some others said that they avoided gathering with other families because they would miss their families even more. The following quote from an expatriate who was in his 70s and did not have children of whom he had to take care, highlights the feelings of many other unaccompanied expatriates. It also proved that regardless of age or situation, as long as expatriates had an emotional attachment to their families, they encountered the challenge of missing families.

I missed my wife terribly, especially during the first three months. I thought that the feeling would go away after some time but no. I just became familiar with that feeling. I have to admit that that feeling never goes away during this assignment. [19As]

As expatriates felt lonely and missed their families, many of them expressed that they had strong desire for their families' physical presence. Although there was a general assumption among unaccompanied expatriates that with the convenience of technology and instant communication their families would feel much closer, expatriates said that it was not actually the same. Therefore, at times, they felt like they dearly needed their families besides them:

... So, during that time I feel like I need to speak with them, I need to feel that vicinity of them, to hug them and I really love to hug my children and kiss them... And that makes me really feel sad to begin to... I don't have that. But I can see them through the screen, through the Ipad and using the Skype and all other things, all the Whatsapp but it's not the same; I can see them but I cannot feel them ... touch is a completely different thing. [18As]

A challenge that clearly revealed the differences between single expatriates and expatriates who were married or partnered was the feeling that the latter had when going on international assignments by themselves. Many unaccompanied expatriates felt constrained and worried about family (*guilt-ridden freedom*). On one hand, expatriates were by themselves, and they thought that they could have a lot of freedom. On the other hand, they were not free from concerns related to their families. As a result, they could not enjoy the single life or felt guilty doing so while their families, especially their spouses, had to manage things at home on their behalf. The following example from an expatriate perfectly illustrates the situation:

... let's say if you're really single, and some of your friends who are single wanted to go out, and you went out dancing and drinking all night. It sort of feels a bit strange to when you, you know, you're separated from your family. And then, the next day, you talk to your wife and kids, it's like "what did you do last night?". "Oh, I went out all night drinking and dancing" which sort of doesn't feel like quite normal to do that, so it's sort of more of a challenge. [19As]

Similarly, sometimes they fell into a vicious circle whereby they wanted to relax after working hard, but were not comfortable doing so when thinking about their families. Consequently, they stayed at home and continued working, leading to their burnout.

You still have all that family, so, yeah in a way you're sort of thinking about them, and sometimes I would think it would be really nice to go away for the weekend, you know. You might feel like you really need some time off. I'm going to go to the beach, but then I would think, well but then if I'm going to go to the beach, I really should go and see the family this weekend, fly over to [city where the family was]. But then for some reason, I might not be able to do that. So, then I just stay at home, at work. [19As]

Furthermore, some of them constantly felt insecure because they were worried about the families they had left behind. They did not know what was going on with them, and therefore could not feel free from worries although they understood that they could be worrying for no good reason.

***Maintaining family cohesion and taking care of family.*** Another type of challenge that was unique to unaccompanied expatriates was maintaining family cohesion and taking care of family while away. These challenges included resisting temptation while living alone (*resisting temptation*), difficulties in communication with families (*communication difficulties*), and arranging to come home (*arranging home visits*). To overcome these challenges, unaccompanied expatriates had to constantly monitor themselves and always try to maintain their family cohesion.

Related to other emotional challenges, unaccompanied expatriates admitted that they had to resist temptation when living by themselves. Although not all of them mentioned this challenge, the topic was raised in the interviews by some informants themselves. It seemed to be a sensitive topic, but was not rare among expatriates who lived alone.

Like I said, it's easy to get distracted, at least for me. For a man, there's more temptations, let's say. You can easily go astray especially in a country where there are beautiful women. So, it's something to really be cautious about. [17As]

This challenge could be sensitive to gender. Male expatriates mentioned that they tended to be more prone to temptation than women. This could also be seen through the fact that the only female unaccompanied expatriate in this study did not mention this type of challenge for herself even when the issue was probed. Importantly, according to a number of interviewees, whether or not expatriates could stay away from temptation depended on the strength of the relationships between the expatriates and their spouses:

And, the challenge is to keep the family together. When we are here by ourselves, sometimes we could get distracted because of other people, other relationships. I think if the relationship between two partners is not strong enough, and both sides do not try hard, it could break anytime. I mean it is just mental, just feeling. [18As]

Another expatriate also agreed with this statement. He further added that this issue could be particularly more sensitive in Asian host countries. In other words, there could be some influence of host country characteristics on the life domain challenges that expatriates encounter:

Unfortunately, there's something about Asia in general that if a man's living by himself in a different country, and his family is off in another, it's so easy to have a so-called second house. That ends up splitting, but that happens if there's already problems in the family. I know of three cases of people who have left their wife and family and married somebody from the country they're in. Those are, they already had a problem. [14As]

Another challenge in maintaining family cohesion for unaccompanied expatriates was difficulties in communication with families. While communication over long distances has become very easy, for some reasons, many expatriates still found this a challenge. The first reason was differences in time zones. Some expatriates had families who lived on the other side of the world. While they were free at night, their families had to rush to schools and work. Therefore, keeping in touch as often as possible was quite complicated for some expatriates. Even when the time difference was not that much, different schedules meant that expatriates still had difficulties communicating with their spouses and/or their children:

... sometimes I think it's easy to have a quick phone call every day, but because of the time differences and different schedules, that's not always possible, you know. Sometimes I might call, and it just would be difficult or an inconvenient time because she'd be trying to get one of the kids to bed. Or they'll be having dinner, and it's disruptive. Or she might call me, and I'd be in the middle of work or doing something else. [19As]

Furthermore, it was not only about just communicating with families, but communicating when the expatriates had the need to do so. For example, when they felt stressed because of

issues at work they wanted to talk to their spouses but they could not reach them. Consequently they had to internalize the stress until they had a chance to talk or even forgot about it. Those kinds of issue accumulate and could be harmful to their mental health and their family relationships.

To maintain family cohesion and try to take care of their families, the expatriates would like to go home and visit them. Unfortunately, some expatriates reported that they had challenges arranging this. Not all expatriates had home-visit leave and even when they had that benefit, usually it was not long enough for them. Moreover, most expatriates had busy schedules which meant that it was not simple for them to take days off to go home. Sometimes, they were also dependent on flight schedules, and the fact that they were constrained in terms of time meant that the trip had to be rushed which made them feel exhausted afterwards.

Yes, because I have to take leave to go and see them. That is sometimes difficult because I have to manage, find time to take it. So, I cannot just go for a weekend. I have to take a Friday and Monday, for 3 days. So, that's a challenge because I try to juggle, try to keep up my schedule. [17As]

In addition to time, going home costs money, and the expatriates were not always sponsored by organizations. Therefore, although they wanted to physically get together with their families as often as possible, they had to weigh everything carefully. In some cases, they also mentioned that the challenge was not only being home frequently but being home when needed such as for important family events.

***Expatriates take care of themselves.*** Most unaccompanied expatriates in this sample had gone to Vietnam by themselves except for one female expatriate who had brought her children. Therefore, the fact that most of them had the challenge to take care of themselves was understandable. Some expatriates said that since they had been accustomed to having their spouses take care of them, they did not do a really good job of caring for themselves. They expressed tiredness when discussing the housework they had to do although it was just for themselves. They ended up eating out most of the time.

Meanwhile, some others said that although they were actually good at cooking, they did not want to cook because it was just too boring and a waste of time to cook for themselves.

I enjoy cooking if I cook for somebody, not for myself. It's boring, right? You just do the basic thing, you can sometimes ... I will just eat cereal for dinner or yogurt or peanut butter and jam sandwiches and a glass of milk. I don't even bother. [16As]

Many expatriates did not explicitly mention taking care of themselves as a challenge but revealed opinions and routines that were very similar to the above statement. The common admission for them was that they spent “most of their days at the office, eating something quick and late, sleeping late, and doing the same things everyday”. They hardly enjoyed their lives during their international assignments. The resonance between the tiredness from a lack of self care and other emotional challenges could worsen their situations. Therefore, taking care of themselves was a challenge and something that they did not enjoy doing while they were on international assignments without their spouses or families.

## **5.2 Challenges for expatriate families**

To draw a clear picture of expatriate family members’ experiences of their current international assignments, first an overview of their lives and experiences in general is provided. Next, the challenges for them during the current international assignments are presented. Since the challenges for accompanying and un-accompanying families show no commonalities, the insights from each group are presented separately in this section (Section 5.2.1 and Section 5.2.2). Figure 5.3 summarizes the challenges for both groups in international assignments.

With regards to accompanying expatriate families, both the expatriates and accompanying spouses were asked about their overall experiences of living in the host country. Generally speaking, most of them conveyed that their expatriate lives had been quite positive. Although some did not have any idea about the country before they came and some others reflected that the environment was not really clean, they spoke of many positive things about living there.

Well, I think the things that we're hoping to experience ... energy, the energy and dynamics, when you can witness this, and just sort of feel part of it, it gives you big energy and big inspiration about the potential of what can happen. And Vietnam is at a particular point in its history, and it has so much excitement. I think you're fortunate participating or contributing.

[7A]

The majority of expatriates and spouses had the same thoughts as described by this statement about the general environment of the host country. Most of them enjoyed their lives there. Another factor which contributed to the positive experiences of these expatriate families could be that this country was family friendly, as mentioned by some informants.

Furthermore, the living conditions were good with the availability of many expatriate communities and friendly locals.

The answers to the typical weekdays of spouses revealed that most spouses had quite similar daily activities except for one case in which the spouse worked full-time and she had no children. However, the common thing was that in all cases, spouses filled their days either with work or with a lot of other activities. In the cases that expatriate spouses did not work full-time, the centre of their lives was around taking care of their children and the expatriates. They started their days by preparing their children for school and their husbands for work, and their days finished with making dinners for the whole family. In between, depending on each case, most spouses did their housework. Some of them also had part-time or casual work, but they emphasized that whatever they did, they needed to make sure they were available at home before their children and husbands returned. In most cases, when necessary, they could easily hire someone to help with the housework or get help from the expatriates. Therefore, in no case did any of the spouses show issues in dealing with housework. The activities where they could enjoy themselves or which gave them a chance for socialising were quite various such as reading books, reading clubs, volunteering or religious groups etc. During weekends, typically expatriate families spent time together either with activities around home or having get-away trips. In some cases, it was specifically highlighted that besides activities for the whole families, they usually created private time just for them and their spouses to nurture their relationships and make sure everything was going well with each other. In general, depending on each case and each individual, the experiences that expatriate family members encountered were quite various.

In exploring the lives of unaccompanied expatriates and families, it is hard to say that either had joyful and happy lives. Instead, most stories expressed the feeling of something missing. Both expatriates and expatriate spouses were asked about their typical weekdays and weekends. Their days varied depending on the situation. For example, during weekdays, the expatriate spouses who had children were always occupied with their care, doing housework and working. In this sample, all of them said that they had external support to deal with housework when necessary. In some cases, they needed to have support from parents or helpers everyday. Some others only sought support when they had difficulties such as health problems, urgent issues etc. Meanwhile, the spouses who did not have children tried to fulfill their “boring days” either with work or studying. In the host country, expatriates usually

committed themselves to working long days. During weekdays, homes were more of a hotel room to them,

When I thought about this single life, I thought that I would go to the gym more. That I would maybe study Japanese, you know, do extra things, but actually in reality, what I ended up doing most days was staying at the office until 9:00 PM, having dinner outside late, going home late, sleeping late, and then doing the same thing every day. [19As]

During weekends, un-accompanying expatriate spouses seemed to be even busier with taking care of the kids, arranging housework, visiting families etc. whereas the expatriates had to find lots of things to keep them occupied. Most of them continued working during the weekends. In addition to work, some hung out with friends and colleagues, went out to explore the cities, learnt the local language and did housework. It did not matter what they did however, they said they felt guilty due to not being able to spend time with their families. The best things they could do for their families while being away was keeping in touch frequently and being encouraging, especially to their spouses. They also tried to visit their families as often as possible.

I have to say not much because I am here. If there is anything I can arrange from here, I try to help my wife out, but a lot of daily things, I can't help her. And, it is not because of my work demands, but because of distance. We are not living together, but worlds apart. So, you know, there is not much you can do. [18Bs]

Even when their families did not stay with them, there was a unique type of support that expatriate families could give which was the feeling of security. Specifically, both the expatriates and the spouses mentioned that when the families were well, the expatriates had peace of mind and could concentrate on work. Therefore, what the spouses tried to do was to make sure everything was good with the families, to make the expatriates feel worry-free and give them confidence in what they are doing. Talking with the expatriates and giving them updates frequently were also meaningful. In the words of the unaccompanied expatriates, that gave them the power to pursue what they had chosen to do. Without such support from their families, many of them admitted that they might have given up at times because of the various challenges. The variety of challenges expatriate family members experienced during international assignments are illustrated in a later section (Section 5.5).

### 5.2.1 Challenges for accompanying expatriate families

When accompanying expatriates on international assignments, expatriate family members could encounter a number of challenges. These challenges could be common for all family members (challenges from the host country or living area) or specific to each member (expatriate children and expatriate spouses). Expatriate children were not interviewed directly, but what they encountered was conveyed through the expatriates and expatriate spouses' accounts.

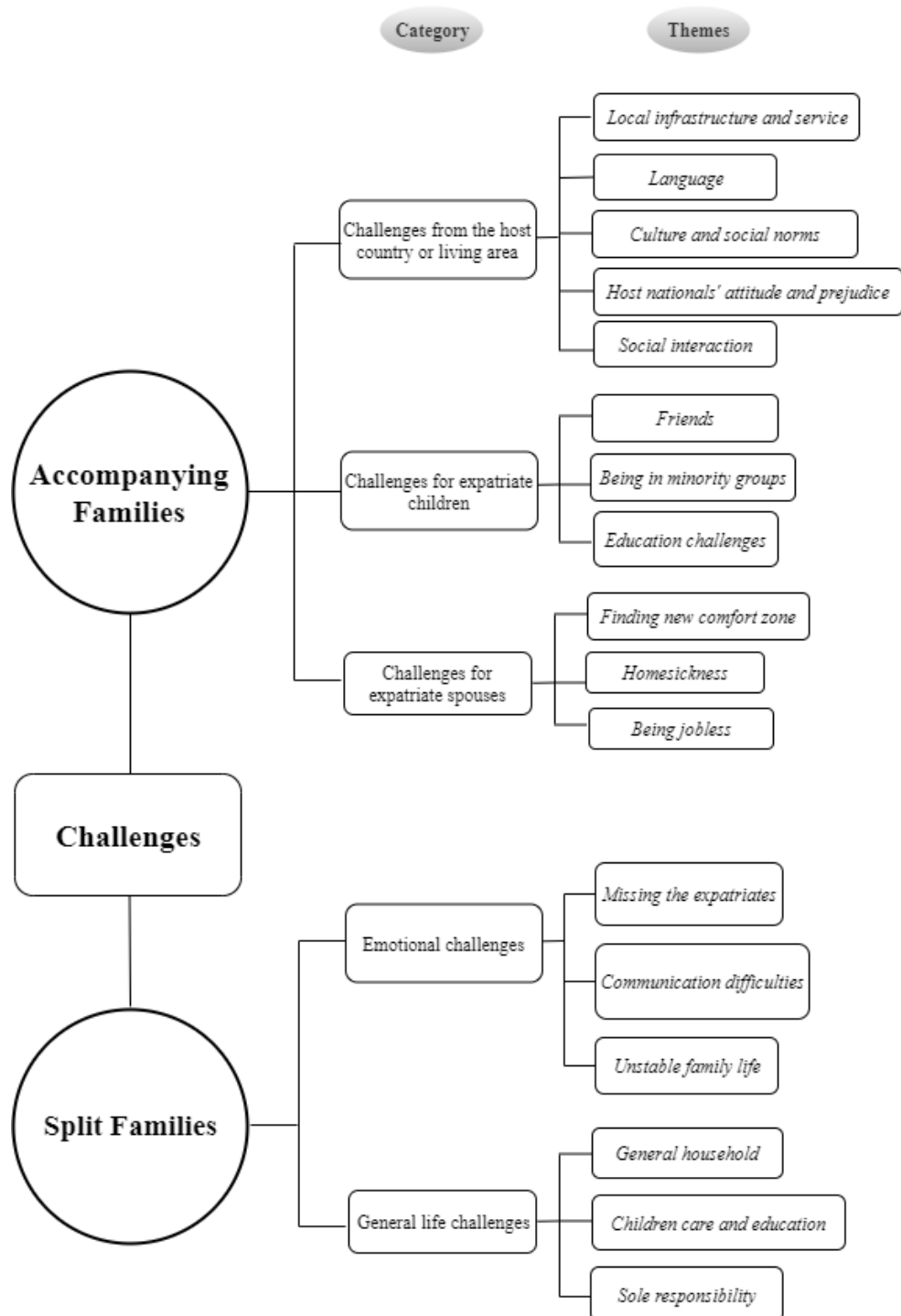


Figure 5. 3: Challenges for expatriate families in international assignments

- **Challenges from the host country or living area**

With regards to the host country or living area, there were five major types of challenges that expatriate family members had to face which were *local infrastructure and service, language, culture and social norms, host nationals' attitude* and *social interaction*. First of all, although the living conditions in the host country were commented as good in general, some issues still existed. For example, traffic and transportation issues were consistently mentioned by the informants.

However, I think people need to ... have some more high ... higher standards of public society. What I fear most devastating or frustrating was traffic jams. They don't follow any, especially motorbikes, motorbike drivers do not keep the traffic rules and traffic lights. It's disappointing and unsafe. [5B]

Most informants felt scared the first time living in the host country because of the traffic. Public transportation was convenient but it was very dangerous because of the traffic. Although the more they lived there, and the more familiar they were to the conditions, traffic was still an issue for them. The availability of space for recreational activities was also an issue, especially for the expatriate family members coming from more developed countries. Similarly, some complained about health and medical services. They said that health and medical services were overpriced and of poor quality. Consequently, they sometimes had to go home for treatment. Some spouses expressed a common challenge related to shopping. They found the choice of goods was limited and over-priced.

Second, language was another challenge mentioned by both the expatriates and their spouses. Although all informants could speak English quite fluently, the fact that the average person in the host country could not speak English made daily communication challenging. In some cases, it was beyond what they expected.

There was some disappointment when I realized that the language is beyond what I can do. I just don't have time to learn the language. So, there's a barrier there, right, which I think I had some expectations that I could learn the language and get even closer to normal Vietnamese right. But that hasn't happened. [11A]

Culture and social norms caused some challenges for this group. Coming from another culture, things that they usually took for granted might not be the same in the host country. For instance, the informants found that some ways of thinking, attitudes towards work, and respect for other people's privacy were different there. Sometimes, these characteristics made

informants feel frustrated. Another challenge was facing host nationals' negative attitudes towards their ethnicity or origins.

People are not used to us. So, we go out, people are staring and looking at us as if we just dropped from the jungle. And it was tough. Sometimes my kids, they didn't find it easy going out, you know, like you go to the malls, and people are looking at you and they make you know that they're looking at you. You know that kind of thing, it was tough, it was really tough. [3B]

The last challenge for expatriate family members was the neighborhood's conditions which constrained their social interactions. When coming to a new country to live, it is always possible that expatriate family members could feel isolated. If they did not choose the right place to live, the situation might worsen, like in some cases in this study. One expatriate spouse who had experienced this before said that choosing a place to live which allowed her to relate to suitable people could be more important than usually thought of. Meanwhile, another spouse who was still suffering expressed:

And, because we are living in a villa now, we are quite isolated. We don't have many neighbors, and they can't speak [their language]. That's particularly difficult for our kids. They don't feel good. [10B]

- **Challenges for expatriate children**

Expatriates and expatriate spouses who had children were asked about the challenges that their children encountered. The general impression was that although the parents were most concerned about the children, the children did not really have as many difficulties as their parents thought. The expatriates and their spouses mentioned three major challenges such as making new friends and leaving behind old friends (*friends*), *being in minority groups*, and *education challenges*.

Although the specific challenge for each expatriate child might be different depending on their age, the challenge of making new friends and leaving behind old friends was consistently mentioned by many of the expatriates and their spouses, especially those with school-aged children. The following quote typically describes the feelings of many expatriate children:

Our second daughter, she was very unhappy to move. She was very unhappy to move because she really felt at ease with her friends. And everything she said, she didn't want to move. She wanted to stay in one place forever, you know. I mean it's just a lot of emotions, raw emotions. [11B]

In most cases, the children who suffered this challenge suffered for some time, but as they integrated with the new environment, the challenge faded away. Some of them got depressed and wanted to go home in the first couple of months. Some even cried every single day. This challenge was also related to that of being in minority groups. In some cases, the children studied at schools where there were not many expatriate children. As a result, they could not avoid being treated differently by the teachers and/or their classmates. They could be treated better or worse, but they did not feel comfortable with being treated differently regardless. However, after they made new friends and got along with them, they and their parents would eventually feel comfortable.

Another challenge for expatriate children was related to education. It was normal for expatriate children to start a brand new curriculum. For some of them, it was not easy at first. It made them feel stressed and even lose their confidence and identity. Not knowing the teachers and the classmates very well, if they had education difficulties they did not know where to look for help or were hesitant to ask for help. Consequently, they could confront a dip in their learning, as illustrated in the following quote:

... the costs of adjustment for kids into the new schools. Right, there's always sort of a dip in getting adjusted. Maybe a dip in academic learning, finding new friends, getting familiar with teachers and schools ... [11A]

Although not all expatriate children had this challenge, for some of them, it was quite intense. They cried and did not even want to go to school. At those times, they needed a lot of support from their parents. Meanwhile, expatriate spouses had their own challenges during the assignments which are described in the following paragraphs.

- **Challenges for expatriate spouses**

When going on international assignments, there were some challenges that were typical for the expatriate spouses. These challenges included *finding a new comfort zone*, *homesickness* and *being jobless*. In most cases, when first coming to the host country, expatriate spouses fell into a situation that was not very pleasant for them as one expatriate said: “I had my own work. The kids go to schools. My wife was left alone at home” [3A].

The first challenge *finding a new comfort zone* describes the circumstance in which the spouses had a lot of things to do after arriving in the host country to settle down and set up a new life which they felt comfortable with. For example, the daily things such as where to shop for the food they needed and where to find good doctors, sounds simple but could make

them feel frustrated. In order to create their new comfort zones, it was really important that they could build up new social networks including new friends, neighbors, other expatriate spouses etc. The following excerpt vividly describes the common feelings of the spouses:

Keeping moving, and just starting from scratch every time again. It's tiring, you know. You don't have friends. You got to meet new people, and you know, again I mean. [11B]

In addition, as many spouses felt lonely, especially during the early period of the assignments, they had the challenge of *homesickness*. They kept communicating with their families and friends back home, but it was not always easy since everyone had their own lives. In many cases, the spouses had a lot of free time, and they felt so empty that they really wanted to go home.

Yeah it was. We came in October. June, summertime, I wanted to go back home. Desperately wanted to go home. So I was desperately itching to go home, but then we didn't have the funds to support that travel. So we just couldn't go. It was tough. I mean it was very difficult that time. But there was nothing much we could do, we just had to stay through. [3B]

The last challenge *being jobless* was not common for all spouses but just for those who had worked before they came to the assignments. To these spouses, this challenge was quite difficult to overcome. Expatriate spouses did not have work permits in the host country and job opportunities for them were quite rare. Being jobless was linked to a number of negative feelings.

Initially it was tough, because for me as well it [going on the assignment] meant that I was going to leave my job. And for me earning salary for myself is very important for me, you know. I had developed my own career, and working is always an important part of my life. So, being jobless somehow makes me feel meaningless. I am also unoccupied, and tend to overthink the simple things. I tend to complain more. I know that. [3B]

All the challenges usually lightened as time went by and the spouses resolved the challenges and fit in with their situation. Most of them acknowledged that after some time, as they made friends and became familiar with the ways of the host country, they felt quite comfortable living there. The expatriates and spouses also mentioned a number of factors that influenced their experiences during international assignments as presented later in Section 5.5.

## 5.2.2 Challenges for un-accompanying expatriate families

Unlike accompanying expatriate families, split expatriate families did not have multi forms of challenges. Contrastingly, they consistently talked about similar challenges, but these remained during the assignments. In addition, although both the expatriates and the un-accompanying spouses were asked about the challenges that their children had, they said that the children did not have many challenges except for the emotional ones which were similar to the spouses. Therefore, the two main categories of challenges for split expatriate family members were emotional challenges and general life challenges. They were portrayed vividly through the conversations with the informants.

- **Emotional challenges**

When being asked about the challenges during the assignments, all un-accompanying expatriate spouses said that they missed the expatriates (*missing the expatriates*) or everyone in their families missed each other dearly. It might not be a coincidence that many of them sighed before responding to the questions. Each differed in the time they had spent apart from the expatriates because of the current international assignments, but they all had the same feelings.

What challenges ... well only the one ... the human one, the regularly ... like missing him. His presence at home, the gathering together around the family and going to the movies and having breakfast together and that ... [15Bs]

It could be interpreted that this emotional challenge did not lighten as the time passed by but continued throughout the assignments. The expatriate spouses were then asked if they adapted to the situation and felt better. Their responses were again forthright and consistently similar, as illustrated in the following statement:

It [emotional challenge] never fades away, I'm telling you. It [emotional challenge] is like a chronic pain in your body that you can't cure. I am just familiar with it [emotional challenge]. I live with the pain. I live everyday knowing that I miss him a lot. [13Bs]

The expatriate spouses said that they had to brace themselves because they had to take care of their families, and the expatriates relied on them to take care of everything. Nevertheless, sometimes they felt stressed, and they thought their mental health was affected. The spouses were aware that this kind of emotional challenge could be harmful to their health:

Before, when we have concerns, we could physically meet and talk about some concerns, about our children. We don't have to wait. Just every day we can talk ... but now because we are separated, so sometimes you feel like concerned, but it also feels like ... you don't

necessarily talk every day. So I think it's ... in terms of mental health, it's not good. You cannot consult. It's not healthy. So sometimes you think too much without talking. It's not healthy. [19Bs]

There were reasons why the spouses did not want to talk over the issues in their lives with the expatriates. First, they did not want the expatriates to be worried about things at home, so that they could focus on work. They thought it would be disturbing to the expatriates if they had to worry about spouses and children. Second, when the spouses really wanted to talk, the expatriates might not be available (*communication difficulties*). When the expatriates had time, the issues might be over already. Consequently, the issues could be passed over without being addressed, and problems could accumulate:

I feel, yeah stressed. I cannot reach him and then I have to wait for a couple days to talk. Not so good or healthy. Not so comfortable as well, yeah. And then as the time passes by, that forms kind of like routines, sometimes make a distance [between the expatriate and the spouse]. [18Bs]

Similarly, some expatriate children missed the expatriates and had the challenge of having an unstable family life (*unstable family life*) because the expatriates were away most of the time and just came home occasionally. However, this challenge seemed to be related to the children's ages. The expatriate children who were teenagers or adolescents were quite independent. Unlike them, the younger children, especially the ones who were under teenage, suffered. Even when the expatriate came back every one or two weekends as in one case, the child still suffered that void.

... because he spends time away, he tries to come back either every week or every two weeks to visit the family. So there's also disruptions in the family life, right? Like you know, my husband and I and my daughter, we all miss each other throughout the week, and also my daughter is not having a stable family, the father, you know, being stable and being around all the time. Yeah. So she has even told her teacher at school that she misses her dad. [16Bs]

Due to the emotional challenges that the spouses and children had to face when living away from the expatriates, they expressed a strong desire to reunite soon. They wanted the assignments to be finished soon and did not want to be apart anymore. None of the informants thought that they would ever choose to be split with their spouses again.

- **General life challenges**

In addition to emotional challenges, the un-accompanying spouses spoke of specific, general challenges in their life without the expatriates at home. Most of the un-accompanying spouses

in the sample were working either part-time or full-time during the expatriation. Therefore, except for the two cases without children, the informants (both expatriates and spouses) mentioned the challenge of juggling work with taking care of children (*general household*). The spouses had to carefully arrange their schedules or timetables to accommodate both work and family domains at the same time.

Yeah, so that's the dilemma. I always feel like around 6:30, I have to go, but I have a lot of work. In the weekend, I know I cannot work. So during the week, some days, I stay late. I come back when my younger ones are already sleeping, and I just have to read to my son, yeah. So that's the, I think, working more. And sometimes I have to work after they sleep, yeah, at home. [19Bs]

There were two issues in these cases. First, they had too many things to take care of both at work and at home. Second, when they felt pressured either at work or at home, they did not have their spouses to share it with straight away. Therefore, somehow the challenges multiplied for them. In addition, the spouses, and mostly female spouses who made up the majority of this study's sample, experienced daily, trivial, but annoying challenges. Previously, certain tasks or chores had been divided, and now all tasks had to be undertaken by the un-accompanying spouses. For example, one spouse said that she hated driving. When her husband was at home, she did not have to drive. However, when her husband was not at home, she had to do that herself. Another expatriate wife described:

I think the other thing is also certain things at the house, you know, I need. I can't do it on my own, like maybe the light bulb needs to be fixed or something dropped and we need him to fix it. So those things we need his help. I could ask for someone to help, but it takes time. We have to wait. So, I really feel annoyed. [16Bs]

Although some spouses had external help from extended family or helpers, there were a lot of things that no one could do on their behalf. For instance, no one could actually help them with disciplining their children or teaching their children to study. Furthermore, no one else could organize their family's household and they had to be the decision maker all the time. If the expatriates were at home, they did not necessarily have to be solely in charge of everything.

Adjustment challenges? I think that's maybe more work, in terms of not just actual work, but housework, that's the bigger things. It's on the weekend evening I have a lot of homework to do... yeah manage the home. It's like I have to be the decision maker for everything. Basically in the past, that was like more shared with my husband. But because he cannot see, he is not around, so I have to adjust to do everything by myself. That's the bigger burden. [15Bs]

Even though the spouses could seek assistance if they needed to, they said it would not be the same as having the expatriates share the workload at home with them. There was not the convenience of someone at home to ask whenever they needed. The following statement clearly portrays the spouses' insights.

We are a family, and when one family member is not there, especially my husband, it is not easy. It is not always easy. I mean most of the time I have to handle things by myself. I mean not so much about stuff that I have to do because if I need, I could have family help, like from parents, brothers and sisters. However, it's not the same, you know, you can't ask for help all the time, but if that's your husband, you can ask him anytime. [17Bs]

The feeling of having no one to share the responsibilities with or to rely on, and having to figure out everything by themselves created an extra burden for the spouses. However, these were just daily challenges, so when irregular situations arose, for example, when the spouses were required to be absent from home, the challenges were really heightened:

Challenging is when I have to go out of the country sometimes for a mission, no one will watch the children. No one can. So on that week, I have to call and then look at, you know, his homework on the phone, and workout with him. So it's work-life balance, it's challenging too. When I have to, even within the country, sometimes, I have to travel to another city, yeah, that's a challenge for me. [17Bs]

Further to the difficulties of dealing with too many things, the spouses also reported that educating their children without the expatriates at home was challenging (*children's care and education*). Sometimes the children did not listen or obey the spouses and many interviewees said that the children tended to be more obedient to the expatriates. Many of the expatriates were also aware of this issue. This kind of challenge happened mostly to families with school-aged children, especially the teenagers. The spouses with these children expressed that they felt stressed. Consequently, they were challenged by having to handle too many things and feeling unable to control things. In their words, they had both mental and practical challenges:

Sometimes I just feel stressful and I wish my husband is here with me, especially teaching and raising the girls. They are not easy to manage now, you know. They talk back and things like that. My husband is better than me at managing the girls. That's why I have challenges, both practically and mentally, but more mentally. [17Bs]

Many spouses shared similar feelings. In summary, the split expatriate family members did not have as wide a range of challenges as the accompanying expatriate families. However, the challenges for them were highly intense and detailed clearly in the interviews.

## **5.3 Perceived work outcomes of expatriates**

In order to draw a comprehensive picture of the expatriates' experiences of international assignments, it was necessary to investigate their work outcomes. Therefore, this section encompasses the perceived work outcomes of the expatriates which include the family's influence on perceived work performance (perceived work performance - Section 5.3.1) and the influence of organizational support for families on expatriates' work attitude and engagement (work attitude and engagement - Section 5.3.2). The insights from accompanied and unaccompanied expatriates are consolidated.

### **5.3.1 Perceived work performance**

The expatriates were asked about their work performance in general and how their families influenced their work performance. In general, for both accompanied and unaccompanied expatriates, the family could affect how they performed at work, but the specific mechanism of influence might be different for each particular case. The following sections present the insights from accompanied and unaccompanied expatriates.

- **Accompanied expatriates**

Accompanied expatriates perceived their performance in three ways: positive, negative and neutral. They were asked to compare their current work performance with that of their previous jobs. They were also asked if they met all the objectives of their organizations and whether they had any difficulties meeting those objectives. The majority of them said that their work performance was good, and they did not really have any challenges meeting their organizations' expectations. Some expatriates said that they even thought their performance was better in some ways because working in Vietnam was more difficult, but they were still able to perform well. Some others said that they performed similarly to how they did before. The nature of their work had not changed much or they always did their best and met all expectations. Meanwhile, some expatriates said that their performance was not as good as they expected. The reasons given to explain unsatisfactory performance were mostly related to their adjustment to the assignment. During the first stage of their assignment, for example the first year, many expatriates had to take time to adjust to the new working and living environment. So did their families. It took time for them to understand how things worked. Therefore, if the expatriates were interviewed while they were still trying to adjust, their perceived work performance could be negative. Furthermore, the influence of the family on perceived work performance of expatriates was an emerging theme as presented below.

*Family's influence on perceived work performance.* The expatriates had different views in relation to how their families influenced their work performance. All expatriates thought that their families exerted certain influence on their work performance. Many expatriates perceived this influence as positive. Some admitted that their family's influence on their work performance was negative. Meanwhile, others said that their families had both positive and negative influences on their work performance. In order to answer the primary research question as to how families matter in international assignments, the insights of each group were analyzed carefully.

All expatriates attributed a positive effect on their work performance to the presence of their families. Families were an essential resource for them while being on international assignments. It might be claimed that families could be important in all situations. However, while being on international assignments, the accompanied expatriates were by themselves with their families. Therefore, the role of families as a resource was usually multiplied. First and foremost, expatriates said that families were important to them:

On the long run, because whatever I do, I do it for the family, yeah. That's the most important.

[9A]

Families were not only important because they could act as a resource for the expatriates, but also expatriates acted as a resource for their family members. This was evident in the accounts of many expatriates of how their significance to their family members gave them the motivation and encouragement to strive to do better at work. The presence of their families was a constant reminder of why they were working on their assignments because "I matter to their lives". Furthermore, having their families with them gave this group of expatriates peace of mind. They expressed that they felt comfortable and secure when their families were around them. If their families were elsewhere, they would worry about them, and it would be really hard to focus fully on work.

From an emotional perspective I think I can be more stable. I can focus on my work even though I have to take care of my family here, take more care of my family here. I'm not sure if there are some kinds of question like this one, but if I were here alone, then I could not be as stable as I am now because the presence of family when overseas is quite influential I think.

[5A]

In some cases, the expatriates mentioned that having families at home provided them a kind of escape from work and helped them have a balanced and healthier life. In the long-term,

that was better for both their personal and also their work lives. In some ways, since expatriates had to spend time with their families, they were more efficient at work.

So I think having your family here forces you to be more conscious, balancing your life and your work. So I think it's almost a daily physical reminder that there's more to life than your work, which I think is healthy. It is also maybe the flipside. It drives you to be more efficient because you go to work, do your work, so you can come home and put distance from work and enjoy your family life. So I think having your family with you is a positive reminder of balance and gives you an outlet for your pressure. [7A]

Another expatriate further added that the time with family was restorative. After work, she had to switch her mind to focus on her children, and that gave her a break from work. Then, the next day she could continue working again.

Although a positive influence from families on work was undeniable for the expatriates, some negative influence also existed. In explaining this negative influence, the expatriates said that when their families had issues in their lives, because they could only rely on the expatriates, that put more pressure on them. This was heightened during the time that expatriate families members were adjusting to life in the host country; the expatriates were always concerned. Even for those who claimed that they tried to separate work life and family life so that one did not affect the other, they admitted that when their families were not well, it had a negative influence on their work. Conversely, if they had any issues at work, it was hard not to bring their worries home.

I always try to be a professional. So, I really try to divide the work and my personal life, so that one thing could not affect the other life, but yes, at times, it was hard to avoid crossover between the two. [6A]

- **Unaccompanied expatriates**

Similar to accompanied expatriates, unaccompanied expatriates were asked to rate their own performance during their current assignments. Unaccompanied expatriates were also divided into three groups according to their perceptions of their work performance: positive, negative and neutral. In the positive group, expatriates said that their performance was going “quite well” or “better” than previous assignments or jobs. They attributed their good work performance to two reasons. The first reason was because they had more autonomy over their work. As a result, they could decide overall strategies and methodologies for execution, which was then translated into better work outcomes. The other reason was that they had

more time for work since they did not have to take care of family, and therefore had more time to devote to work. Meanwhile, the expatriates who said their work performance had not changed (neutral) said that they could deliver what their organizations expected, but they faced many challenges along the way. The challenges could be because of being away from family or difficulties when working with host nationals. The expatriates who were pessimistic about their work performance claimed the hurdles arose from the nature and time of the projects they were working on. The projects were in the beginning phases, and they required some time to come into fruition. Although the topic of family influence on work outcomes was not initiated by the interviewer, the interviewees introduced the topic to the discussions. Therefore, to explore in more depth how family matters in unaccompanied expatriates' international assignments, the unaccompanied expatriates were asked about their thoughts in relation to the topic.

***Family's influence on perceived work performance.*** Unlike the accompanied expatriates, not all unaccompanied expatriates thought that family influenced their work performance although the majority of them thought so. These expatriates were asked if they believed the absence of their families had any influence on their work performance. The expatriates who said no gave two reasons for their answers. First of all, one explained:

She's [his wife] not absent. We're so close together through media. I don't see where she's absent. So, her absence does not influence my work performance. [14As]

This expatriate emphasized the communication between him and his wife was so frequent that he did not feel her absence. They were always available for each other anytime. He also mentioned that he was kind of a workaholic who was very passionate about his job. His wife understood that and even supported him in his work. Therefore, although he "dearly missed" his wife, his work was not influenced by her absence. Meanwhile, another expatriate said:

I have been working for 18 years, and I have never had any problems in differentiating between work and family. Work is work, and family is family. I don't let work influence my family and vice versa. So, there is no influence. [13As]

The answer from this expatriate represented what many others thought. They tried to differentiate between the work and family domains. However, what was interesting was their responses to the question whether they thought they would work better when having their families with them:

I think if my family is here, I can work more effectively, and I have more motivation to work better. [13As]

This kind of response was interpreted that unaccompanied expatriates wanted to deny negative influence from family on their work performance, but not the positive influence if their families were with them. They also did not want their organizations to think that they were not professional by letting the family domain influence the work domain in a bad way. Therefore, family influence on work performance seemed to be unavoidable to some extent although some expatriates did not acknowledge it.

Meanwhile, other expatriates explicitly admitted that their work was influenced by not having their families with them. They explained that although they tried to minimize the effect, they missed and worried about their families, which made them unhappy and less focused at work, as perfectly described by the following answer:

When I was in [home country], I could work better partly because I feel more secure about my family. When I am here, I somehow can't focus all the time because I sometimes feel worried about my family. [15As]

Many expatriates' responses echoed this answer. Due to mental challenges when living away from families as mentioned in the previous section, the expatriates did not function as well as they could. Nevertheless, the families' absence could also positively influence expatriates' work performance. The most visible effect was expatriates had more time for work since they did not have to make time for their families:

Since they are not here, I spend more time working because I don't have much else to do and partly I enjoy it because I feel less stress. Because I like to work a lot. So it means there's less stress from that perspective because I can come, I can focus on ... like last night, I left the office at 9:00 ... Where if they were here or at the time I had to go home, it's more stressful from that perspective. So, I think there's a pro and a con. The pro is I can focus more on work, get more done. [16As]

Other expatriates confirmed that they could work at night or overtime without being questioned why they came home late or disturbing other family members' lives. However, they were similar in saying that they could work more effectively if their families were with them:

If they were here, maybe I would work more efficiently. I'd manage my time better. Now, I probably don't manage my time as well. [17As]

In summary, expatriates affirmed that without their families, they spent more time on work and avoided the stress of having their families live with them in the host country. Nevertheless, mental challenges for them when living away from their families were undeniable. In addition, despite having less time for work when accompanied by their families, the expatriates' work performance could be as good as when unaccompanied, since they learn to work more efficiently.

### **5.3.2 Work attitude and engagement**

In addition to work performance, long-term and intangible aspects of work outcomes including work attitude and engagement of accompanied and unaccompanied expatriates were investigated. Specifically, the analysis of how organizational support for the family influenced expatriates' work attitude and engagement was conducted through the accounts of the expatriates. The analysis shows that the two groups of expatriates shared many insights. Therefore, the findings from the two groups are consolidated below.

When asked if organizational support for family influenced their work attitude and engagement during international assignments, all accompanied expatriates said yes except for one. When asked to elaborate, all informants highlighted that organizational support for families would lessen their worries about their families. Therefore, that minimized any negative influence from the family domain of the work domain, resulting in them being happier. They could concentrate more on contributing their energy to work. One expatriate exemplified the effect very clearly in his answer:

I think so because especially the initial period if you are left to look for your own accommodation, I think that you would spend much more time thinking about those things. Thinking about your kids' education, thinking about a lot more than your work, because you want your family to feel okay. So you spend a lot of time. But once they take care of all those things, it's easier, you know, it helps you fit into your job so quickly. [3A]

In the long term, the expatriates agreed that organizational support for families would influence their work engagement. If the organizations cared about their families, they would feel "much more motivated and committed" to contribute to work. Unaccompanied expatriates also shared this thought. All the unaccompanied expatriates in the sample agreed that organizational support for families could influence their work attitude and engagement. Some expatriates were hesitant to mention explicitly that the organizational support

influenced their work attitude and engagement, but they confirmed that better support would improve their engagement:

I actually did not expect much. So, I think that does not influence. However, I think if the company cares more about us, we could feel more motivated to contribute to the company.

[15As]

In explaining their answers, the expatriates conveyed that they did not mean to reduce their work effort, but families were the most important thing to them. Once their families were taken care of, they would, on the one hand, be less worried about them, and therefore could concentrate more on work. On the other hand, they felt thankful for what organizations did for them:

I mean we are professional. So, we still can work if the company's support for our family is not that good. However, if the company cares more about us and our family, our engagement of course would be improved. We feel more like we are part of this company, and since the company sincerely cares about us, we should work hard, work better to pay back. [18As]

Organizational support for family resulted in the expatriates' increased responsibility and commitment. They emphasized that in domestic work settings where the expatriates and their families had many external resources and could take care of themselves, organizational support for the family might not be necessary. Whereas, in international assignments, organizational support could be very significant to smooth expatriation.

So maybe the employer can just choose not to help with, say, figure out, you should be able to look after yourself. But I think having it, in that probably makes you feel that you've got an extra support, and you got some extra reasons to consider this is a good option compared to others. [7A]

Meanwhile, there was one expatriate who said that he did not think a company's support for his family could influence his work performance. The reason given by him was because he had a strong commitment to work and always devoted 100% or more:

If you have the will to commit and to work hard and to achieve or over achieve, then that's what you stand for. And then if you are given benefits to support your family, you take them as a benefit and not as a precondition to perform better or the other way around. [9A]

Nevertheless, in fact this expatriate did not have dependent children, and he also said that his company's benefits for his family had been quite good. The compensation for him was also higher than average. Therefore, apart from his own work ethics, another reason for his thought could be that he did not really have to worry much about his family, and therefore did

not see any influence from organizational support for family on his work attitude and engagement.

Some unaccompanied expatriates even openly criticized their employers. They complained that if their employers really cared about them, they would care more about their families. However, according to them, the employers did not really care about long-term issues such as keeping the expatriates or the employees longer. As one expatriate sadly expressed - “they probably don’t care”. Consequently, the attitude and care of a firm for expatriates’ families in split situations affected not only the attitude and engagement of current employees, but also the attraction of potential candidates for future international assignments, especially the ones who had previous experience with a split situation:

You know of course yeah, you know, the more flexible the organization is to accommodate those sorts of things [time to visit family], the more easily you would be to consider whether these options are good for the family or not. You know ... I think as a family we wouldn't like to do this indefinitely or too often, you know, not under the same types of arrangements ... because I think in the long term, it would have detrimental effects on a family. [19As]

It is possible that organizations might think that since the expatriate families had not accompanied the expatriates, they did not have the responsibility to care about the families or any related issues. However, unaccompanied expatriates affirmed that they spent more time and effort on work and they would not be able to do that without the support and the effort of their family members, especially their spouses. Therefore, from this perspective, organizations should pay more attention to split expatriate families.

#### **5.4 Emotional bonding**

It became apparent through many interviews that there were both negative and positive influences of expatriation on expatriate families. The most noticeable influence of expatriation on the whole family was on the family’s emotional bonding. The directions of influence varied depending on each family. Furthermore, the ways in which the families in each situation (accompanying or split) were influenced by international assignments were different. Therefore, in this section, findings about accompanying and split expatriate families are presented respectively.

### 5.4.1 Accompanying expatriate families

Most of the expatriates and spouses cited some kinds of positive influences. In many cases, informants explained the fact that all family members had the same experiences and faced the same challenges and this brought them closer to each other, as the following quote illustrates:

We have chances to see things together. She comes from Mexico, and I am from America. So we see things differently anyway. The kids tend to see things with both Mexican eyes and American eyes. But, being here, we all sort of see new things at the same time, and face the same things that together we have to overcome, that kind of experience. [1A]

Furthermore, when moving to a new country, expatriate family members were also cut off from their own networks. Consequently, they only had each other to rely on and relate to. Many mentioned that also meant the expatriates had more time with their own families while they would have to spend time with extended families and friends etc while living in the home country.

For us, we experienced becoming closer and having to be more cooperative, more together because in our home country you've got a bigger network, maybe more freedom, maybe to go and do your own thing and the kids going off with different friends. When you're in this environment, you tend to spend more time together and doing more things together. You have to be more supportive. [7A]

However, expatriation also tested the bonding inside each expatriate family. For families that had strong emotional bonding, they could overcome challenges and thrive, but for families whose emotional bonding was not really strong, their bond could be tested. Therefore, if the bond was not strong enough before the assignments, expatriate families' emotional bonding could be negatively affected.

You just see people getting posted, different relationships and different things. So it's [an international assignment] certainly going to test whatever the bonding is. [7A]

It is worth mentioning that in several cases, informants said the expatriation had not influenced their families' emotional bonding at all. The reason given was that the bonding among family members inside the family had been so strong that external factors such as international assignments could not affect it. Nevertheless, not many families had that utmost bonding.

### 5.4.2 Split expatriate families

Similar to accompanying expatriate families, the influence of expatriation on split expatriate families during international assignments that was mostly emphasized was the family's emotional bonding. International assignments first tested the emotional bonding and the effort to keep the bonding. In split situations, there were a lot of challenges and distractions to test family bonding. Therefore, the expatriates and their spouses had to work hard to keep the family together. In addition, split expatriation could increase expatriate family members' understandings of the importance of being together, as one expatriate shared:

You miss them, and you know, recognize the value of having them there. So, when you are together you really appreciate it and so that's a good thing, you know, they say absence makes the heart grow fonder. So you know, you really enjoy that time that you do have together you know. [19As]

This was a common feeling of many of the expatriates and spouses. Emotional bonding of split expatriate families could also be influenced negatively and/or positively by international assignments. However, a negative influence was more emphasized by informants.

So emotional bonding ... , I would say, will be, yeah, I won't say negative or positive. I think it will be both, and the negative side is you start to become distant from each other. I mean everybody [expatriate family members] becomes distant from each other because it's not enough face time, which is important. [16As]

Informants consistently said that the geographical distance would gradually grow the psychological distance among family members. Depending on each family and the effort of all family members, the psychological distance could be small or large, but the informants admitted that it existed. Nevertheless, there was also a positive effect of split assignments on expatriate families that should be noted. For example, one respondent mentioned that since they knew it was challenging to stay bonded and such an assignment was not easy for both sides, they appreciated each other – “when you're going through a difficult time, and when you rely on someone else to make it through that time, it might be a bond which grows stronger” [14As].

In summary, even in one family, there could be both negative and positive influences of international assignments on emotional bonding. This sounds like a paradox. However, in analyzing carefully and deeply what the respondents said and their expressions during the interviews, it could be explained that the negative influence existed, but it was temporary. If the bonding was strong enough and each side tried hard to hold onto each other, the bonding

could grow stronger in the long term. Conversely, if the bonding was not strong enough, and there was not enough effort from each side to keep together, there could be long term negative effects on the family, such as family breakup. As a split assignment usually increased the resilience of both the expatriates and their spouses, and children to some extent, the independence of each member could be increased. However, if they did not look to each other and understand that they needed to put more effort into maintaining family bonding, the family could fall apart.

## **5.5 Influential factors**

An important recurrent topic in all interviews was related to the many factors that influenced the experiences of the expatriates and their families during international assignments. The informants brought extensive insights into these factors. The goal of this section was to dig deeper into the underlying factors that could impact on the expatriation process of the expatriates and their families. It should be noted that the majority of the findings in this section was obtained by inductively analyzing the data. In other words, the insights herein emerged from the data with little prior expectations from the researcher. Through the accounts of both accompanying and split expatriate families, the richness of the data offered critical findings. There were some common factors that affected families in both situations, including expatriate family members' *adaptability and characteristics, work and occupied status, previous experiences, spousal or family relationships and extended support and network*. These common factors are presented first. Whereas, there were also influential factors exclusive to a particular family situation. In cases of the accompanying situation, expatriates and their families could be influenced by *social interactions and community, characteristics of host country and living environment, and prior expectations*. Meanwhile, the way expatriate families in the split situations experienced expatriation could be affected by *communication within family, religion and beliefs, and distance between home and host countries*.

### **5.5.1 Commonly shared factors between accompanying and split situations**

- **Adaptability and characteristics**

The examination of interviews from accompanied expatriates and their spouses revealed that the most commonly mentioned factor that could influence their experiences in international assignments was expatriate family members' adaptability and characteristics (*adaptability*

*and characteristics*). They included the adaptability and personality of the spouses, the expatriates and the expatriate children, as well as the children's age. These also applied in the cases of split expatriate families. Among all these, spouses' adaptability and personality were most commonly talked about by both the expatriates and their spouses. Most expatriates appreciated their spouses and attributed the smooth expatriating processes of their families mostly to their spouses.

Because she [his wife] is very resourceful, very adaptable, probably more resourceful, more adaptable than I, and far more soulful. So she will find a way to connect to people and to make good, no matter what the situation. [7A]

When speaking of themselves, the accompanying spouses who did not have many challenges adjusting usually described themselves as "trying to see things in a positive way", "flexible", "adventurous", "open-minded". Some of them also had the same idea that "all can be taken care of" or "things will work out eventually". Similarly, if the spouse was adaptable and resilient, they could overcome the challenges of being split from their expatriate which was not actually easy. Conversely, the ones who suffered some challenges said they thought that was mainly because of them, their personality.

Similarly, the expatriates' adaptability and personality were believed to be decisive to the experiences of expatriate families in international assignments. In general, the expatriates did not explicitly describe themselves but tended to give examples that illustrated their characteristics. One expatriate who was very outgoing spoke of his situation which then could be translated into his open-mindedness and adaptability.

We might lose, like myself, a necklace being robbed on the street. It [issue] happens. You take it [the issue], and you say "okay, I have to be more careful. It wasn't my own mistake, but I should not wear an expensive watch". You adapt to it. Because you still learn, you know. That's ok. [9A]

The expatriate spouses also commented that thanks to their expatriates' resilience and personality, their family lives and experiences in the host country had been more smooth. Although in many cases, the expatriates were very busy and their work was highly demanding, they tried not to bring their stress from work to home, and they made the family time valuable. The following quote is a typical example:

He's not a person that brings his stress home, which is really helpful. So, in that way, he's really different from me. And, he, kind of the moment he comes in the door, he's present, and that's something I like about him, too. So yes, he's not easily stressed. I mean, I know that

there were some situations that stressed him. But you cannot sense, you know, he doesn't withdraw himself, or he's in a bad mood, or he's not like that, he's very stress resistant. It's very good for the family. [11B]

For unaccompanied expatriates, their adaptability decided their capability of adjusting to life without their family and adapting to the new environment. If they were not adaptable, they would find their assignments difficult, especially without their family, and they “could have stopped the assignments already”.

Furthermore, the expatriates and spouses added that if their children were adaptable, their lives were more easy. They could not have peace of mind and focus on their work if their children were not happy. In contrast, they would feel “very comfortable” if their children could adapt and enjoy their lives there. The adaptability of the children also depended on their ages: “they were at different ages, and therefore their experiences could be different, which influenced us differently”. [6B]

In the split situation, children's age was a critical factor that dictated the kind of challenges the spouse was likely to face. In many cases, the expatriate children were of an age where they were quite independent and did not require constant parental care. Therefore, the burden on the un-accompanying spouses was reduced. Next, the adaptability of the expatriates and their spouses obviously influenced how the expatriate families experienced split international assignments.

- **Work and occupation status**

The second factor that could influence expatriate family members' international assignments' experiences was *work and occupation status*. In accompanying cases, this factor translated more appropriately to *working opportunities and other activities for spouses in the host country*. Accompanied expatriates and spouses had mixed opinions about how working opportunities and other activities for spouses in the host country could influence not only the spouses but the experiences of the whole expatriate family. Some said that these opportunities positively influenced the experiences of expatriate families during international assignments. According to this group, the fact that the expatriate spouses had some kind of job to do in the host country helped the spouses feel much better, and that in turn influenced their whole family positively. However, not all expatriates and spouses had the same idea. The second group believed that working could negatively influence the spouses and other family members. They explained that working took a lot of their time, and could make them feel stressed, especially if they had too much work. As a result, they could bring their stress home,

which could make other family members unhappy. In some cases, since the children needed so much attention and care from the spouses, they could suffer if the spouses were not able to devote their time to the children. In summary, the influence of working opportunities and other activities for the spouses in the host country on expatriate family members' international assignments' experiences could vary.

For split expatriate families, the majority of informants mentioned *work status and work demands of each family member* as an important factor that affected their experiences during international assignments. Although informants cited some negative effects of work demands on their experiences, most of them still confirmed that having a job helped the spouses and their families have positive experiences. On one hand, while the expatriates were away, the fact that the spouses had a job and consequently had to meet both work and family responsibilities could make them feel overloaded. On the other hand, if the expatriate spouses had a job, in most cases, the experience of a split international assignment would be better. When the left-behind spouses were occupied with work, they had less empty time, and therefore had fewer emotional challenges because of missing their expatriates. Furthermore, the expatriates said that they could focus more on their own work instead of being disturbed by calls and texts and complaints if their spouses had no work.

- **Previous experiences**

For accompanying expatriate families, *previous experiences with expatriates' international assignments or work* undeniably influenced their experiences of the current assignments, but the degree of influence depended on each particular case. In all cases, they acknowledged that previous familiarity could help them undertake the assignments more easily. The kinds of experiences were also various. It could be family members' familiarity with busy schedules or the absence of the expatriates in the house. As a result, family members could actively organize things without much help from the expatriates, who could in turn focus on their work, which made a smooth expatriation process. This fact was also true in the cases of split expatriate families. A lot of the expatriates had traveled for international business trips frequently before, which helped their family members get used to their absence.

To accompanying expatriate families, previous experiences with moving and living abroad was influential in their expatriation. With these experiences, some spouses said that they felt confident that they could handle things in the assignments. Even if they had some initial challenges, they knew it just took time for them to be over. These attitudes and beliefs helped

the expatriate family members take what they encountered during international assignments more easily.

Similarly, *previous experience with the living situation or international work* was an important influential factor to split expatriate families. In addition, they got familiar and accept the emotional challenge of missing the expatriates. Although they admitted that a short business trip of several weeks was vastly different from a long assignment of more than a year, the fact that they had experienced the absence of the expatriates before definitely made them adapt to the situation more quickly.

I think it's not the first time that he's been away. So, I'm quite used to that. He had to travel a lot for business trips before. We had time being split because of international assignments as well. Of course it is different when he is away for a couple of weeks and comes back for a long time and when he is mostly away, but I've learnt how to arrange things at home without him. [16Bs]

Some informants said that they were familiar with the split situation to some extent. For example, before getting married, they had conducted a long distance relationship. Therefore, they were not new to the idea of being apart. They knew how to maintain a family while being split because of international assignments.

- **Spousal or family relationships**

A factor that emerged from the data as an important one which could affect how expatriate family members went through international assignments was *family cohesion*. Family cohesion refers to the cohesion between the expatriates and their spouses and also expatriate couples with their children. It also reflected the suitability of the personalities of expatriates and expatriate spouses, the sympathy and support for each other in the couples. In many cases, the informants said although the circumstances were difficult, thanks to their family cohesion, they could overcome the challenges. The bond inside the family gave them the strength to get through hardship during international assignments. Conversely, if family cohesion was not strong enough, drifting part could be exaggerated in international assignments.

The strength of spousal or family relationships was very important to how each member and the whole family experienced split international assignments. However, in the split situation, *nature of spousal relationship* emerged as a salient theme rather than family relationships in general. When discussing this theme the expatriates acknowledged that the nature of the

relationship with their spouses was a major factor that influenced the way they and their spouses experienced the assignments. If the spousal relationship was strong, they would trust each other and have fewer concerns regarding each other's faithfulness and therefore they could focus on their work and life while being away from each other. Furthermore, they had strong motivation and encouragement to achieve their and their family's objectives of undertaking the international assignment:

And also I think it's important when you're away like this. You have to trust each other. So, if you start worrying whether that wife is, let's say, cheating on you or something, then it can create more negativity. But if you have a strong understanding, then it shouldn't create such problems. As our relationship is strong, we are aware that we even have to try harder during the assignment. So, she feels the emotional support I still give. There's not ... emotionally she's very supportive, and I feel the same. So, I don't feel like I'm lonely. I know that I have a family, and I have to try hard because of this family. [17As]

Conversely, if the relationship is not strong enough, there could be drift in that relationship, and each side could feel tired and stressed because of unavoidable challenges during international assignments. The challenges could escalate because of tensions in the relationship. That then could result in bad consequences for both the work and family domain of the expatriate.

- **Extended support and network**

The next factor that could affect the experiences of both accompanying and split expatriate families is *extended support and network*. In the accompanying situation, this factor is more exactly *external support*. External support for accompanying expatriate families could come from various sources such as organizational support, social communities and paid services. Initially the expatriate families usually needed support with setting things up such as accommodation, schooling, dealing with the landlord etc. Therefore, if organizations provided this practical support, they would have fewer challenges. Meanwhile, social communities and relationships were useful in helping families integrate into the host country. An advantage of this particular host country was that housekeeping and other services were abundant and cheap. The expatriate family could easily afford to hire these services. Consequently, the expatriate spouses did not usually have to deal with all the housework by themselves, which made their lives easier and their experiences with the assignments were more positive.

For split expatriate families, the factor could be interpreted as *extended network*. In split family instances, the extended network's support was quite critical, both mentally and practically. Extended network of expatriate families including extended family members (parents of expatriates and spouses, relatives) and their friends. Many informants advised that they either had regular practical help or sought support on an as-needed basis:

It is hard for my wife to handle all things at home, but she could. But, sometimes, if there is any problem like my wife or my sons getting sick or something, it could be a disaster. That's when I feel bad, insecure. Then, we usually seek help from my mother or her mother in those cases. The availability of such help is very meaningful. [18As]

Additionally, the extended network of the individuals provided some emotional support to expatriate family members. The spouses said that with this kind of support, they got used to the absence of the expatriates more quickly. As they still had connections to their familiar networks, their life was less chaotic, which was good for themselves and their children.

I meet my friend and my relatives like once or twice a month. I also meet them to get used to the absence of my husband. So, I think meeting them helps me feel better, like I don't feel so lonely when my husband is not here. [13Bs]

Similarly, the fact that the expatriates had support from people around them in the host country reduced the challenges for them during international assignments and enabled them to adapt more smoothly. These people included the expatriates' friends, locals and colleagues etc. The role of the extended network in affecting how expatriate families experienced international assignments seemed to be more emphasized in split cases than in accompanying cases.

### **5.5.2 Influential factors highlighted in the accompanying situation**

In addition to factors that were commonly shared between the two family situations, there were some that emerged only in the accompanying situation. These factors were *social interactions and community, characteristics of host country and living environment* and *prior expectations*. Details about these factors are presented below.

- **Social interactions and community**

Another factor discussed by informants in the accompanying situation as having significantly influenced their experiences during international assignments was *social interactions and*

*community*. Most respondents directly or indirectly mentioned how people in their community helped them familiarize with their new life in the host country. These communities could include neighbors, religious groups, expatriate groups, school groups, volunteer clubs etc. They helped newcomers both emotionally and practically.

So, I could meet with them ... have someone to meet and talk and also ask all my questions that I have ... how things work, where to get something, how to get around? Where to find things, what to do, what the kids can do, all these things. So, I had someone to ask, that was also very helpful here in this post. [11B]

In the words of some respondents, this kind of help and relationships were tremendously meaningful to their smooth expatriation process. Contrastingly, others expressed how the lack of social interactions negatively influenced their integration process. Therefore, this factor should not be underestimated during international assignments.

- **Characteristics of host country and living environment**

The next factor that could affect accompanying expatriate family members' international assignments' experiences is *characteristics of host country and living environment*. Expatriate families had different experiences with different host countries and living environments, and some assignments could be easier than others. In this particular assignment, most expatriate families had positive experiences in general. They attributed their positive experiences to good living conditions, the family-oriented culture of the host country, friendly locals etc. However, it did not necessarily mean going on international assignments in more developed countries would be more easy than less developed ones. Specific experiences also depended on each person and each family.

- **Prior expectations**

In addition to previous experiences, both the accompanied expatriates and their spouses spoke of *prior expectations* as being able to significantly influence how an expatriate family experienced an international assignment, as one expatriate said:

Then we come with this idea that it will be very important for families to know what to expect here. [2A]

If expatriate family members had set reasonable expectations which were close to reality for themselves, they said that they had fewer issues. These reasonable expectations could come from doing their own research about life in the host country before arriving or having proper pre-departure training and information from organizations. Many informants said that they

even did the research before deciding to accept the offer of the assignments.. It could not be said that having reasonable expectations equalled successful assignments, but it had saved expatriate family members from a lot of disappointment.

The experiences of expatriate families with international assignments could be vastly different due to many underlying factors influencing their experiences. Some of the above mentioned factors could influence the lives of any families, whether undertaking international assignments or not. However, the circumstance of international assignments intensified these factors and highlighted the internal and external dynamics of the expatriate families.

### **5.5.3 Influential factors highlighted in split situation**

Similar to the accompanying situation, there were some factors that were specific to the split situation which affected expatriate families' experiences. These factors included *communication within family, religion and belief* and *distance between home and host countries*.

- **Communication within family**

*Communication within family* was a factor that had some impact on the experiences of the split expatriate families during international assignments. In split situations, informants confirmed that the frequency and quality of communication within the family was important in reducing their difficulties and challenges and maintaining their family cohesion. Many informants reported that by maintaining daily talks, each knew what was going on with the other and both felt more secure. They had the peace of mind and encouragement to keep up with their responsibilities. The benefits of instant communication including phone applications such as WhatsApp, Facetime, Messenger etc. should also be noted. In addition, in times of hardship, timely communication with the partner helped them feel much better. Differences were also observed between the couples who had frequent and quality communication with each other and the ones who did not. Specifically, the latter usually complained more about their issues, possibly because they could not share with the other.

- **Religion and beliefs and distance between home and host countries**

The last two factors that were identified as influencing expatriate family members' international assignments' experiences were *religion and beliefs* and *distance between home and host countries*. In some cases, the respondents mentioned that they were religious or they subscribed to beliefs that significantly informed their behaviors. These beliefs held the

couples together and they strived for the whole family's happiness and prevented them from going astray:

...through absences and not suffered at all. Neither one of us are worried. It's not easy. It's not easy, but we're not worried. I have to tell you that we're both really strong. We are both Catholics, and that belief system, having shared beliefs, and knowing that our relationship is spiritual as well as physical and intellectual is what makes it work. [14As]

Meanwhile, the geographic/physical distance between home and host country could also influence the emotional or general life's challenges for expatriate family members. If the distance was not far and the expatriate could come back home frequently, the challenges were fewer than in situations where the home country was far and it was not convenient to visit regularly. Therefore, distance was noted as a factor although not a major one because there were many challenges that all expatriate families shared no matter how far apart their home and host countries were.

## **5.6 HR professionals' understandings and organizational practices**

There were two major goals in examining organizations' policies and practices, and HR professionals' understandings of expatriate families on international assignments. The first was to provide in-depth qualitative insights of these aspects which was limited in the literature. The second goal was to compare HR professionals' understandings with expatriate families' views or experiences of the influence of families on expatriates in international assignments, and the challenges of international assignments for these families. HR managers or officers of organizations (herein addressed as human resource or HR professionals) which employed the expatriates were interviewed. Since the study focused on accompanying expatriate families and split expatriate families, they were explicitly asked about both groups. The following findings were mostly extracted from these interviews in combination with the insights from the interviews with the expatriates and their families. The findings are structured into two sections: HR professionals' understandings of expatriate families, and organizational policies and practices related to expatriate families.

### **5.6.1 HR professionals' understandings of expatriate families**

One of the objectives of this study was to uncover HR professionals' understandings of expatriate families, particularly in two situations, namely accompanying and split expatriate families. In this part of the chapter, firstly general views about expatriate families are

presented. Secondly, the kinds of challenges that the HR professionals thought expatriate families could encounter in international assignments are described. The last section summarizes what the HR professionals thought about the influence of families on expatriates in international assignments. The HR professionals were asked distinct questions regarding accompanying expatriate families and split expatriate families.

There have been on-going debates about the role of expatriate families as stakeholders of organizations during the expatriation process. However, how HR professionals actually understand expatriate families and the responsibilities to take care of them remains unclear. Therefore, the first question that was asked was to what extent the HR professionals thought organizations should be responsible for expatriate families during the expatriation process. The responses to this question were extracted directly and indirectly from the different answers from the HR professionals. There was a split in the views exhibited.

The majority of the HR professionals expressed the view that families were the expatriates' responsibility, and the expatriates had to take care of their families. They commonly shared that organizations' obligations were to provide a salary or a family package for expatriates, and then the rest was the employees' responsibility. This view is portrayed vividly through the following excerpt:

[Company's name] is a global company, and the fact that this year you are working in Hong Kong, next year in Thailand, and later in Vietnam is a normal thing. And, usually the salary for one person is more than enough to take care of the whole family. You can imagine one woman goes to work, and her husband stays at home to take care of three kids. So, what [the company] does is to offer a very generous salary to support our employees. So, the rest is the employees' responsibility. [HR1]

Since all the organizations were international and sent expatriates globally, expatriation was perceived as the norm rather than the exception. Furthermore, expatriates usually received a high salary which was said to be more than enough to take care of their family. Therefore, many HR people thought that international assignments for expatriates with families should be simple. They also explained that the expatriates were not forced to undertake the international assignments and could refuse, in most cases anyway. They thought that once employees took the decision to embark on international assignments, they should be responsible for their decisions, including the decisions in relation to their family. One informant even shared:

... because sometimes when you are in senior positions, you need to sacrifice. So, they know that the movement is better for them, necessary for their development plan, they have to sacrifice or they need to balance or find the way to balance their needs. [HR5]

It could be seen that the HR professionals thought expatriates should arrange their family matters as mature professionals. They did not see a distinct difference between domestic work and international work. In other words, the underlying view that was dominant among many HR professionals was “their [expatriates’] family is their [expatriates’] family, their [expatriates’] business”.

Nevertheless, this view was not exclusive. Some HR professionals had another point of view concerning the responsibility to take care of expatriate families during international assignments. Accordingly, they thought that expatriate families were important to organizations because they could influence the expatriates’ work performance. Therefore, organizations should be responsible for them. These professionals emphasized:

I think giving money is not enough. The company should show their care and their support for expatriate families so that they can contribute more to the company. [HR2]

While the majority of the HR professionals thought organizations only had to give financial means to expatriates and their families, some objected to that idea. They argued the evidence was that in many cases, organizations had to accept failure in expatriation although they had invested a lot of money to pay expatriates and their families. Therefore, if organizations just gave away money and left everything to expatriates and their families, it would be a weakness to ensure smooth expatriation of expatriates and their family. Following this latter view, some HR professionals saw expatriate families as resources rather than burdens for their organizations. They also added that in addition to financial benefits, organizations should show their sincere care and willingness to support expatriates and their families as needed.

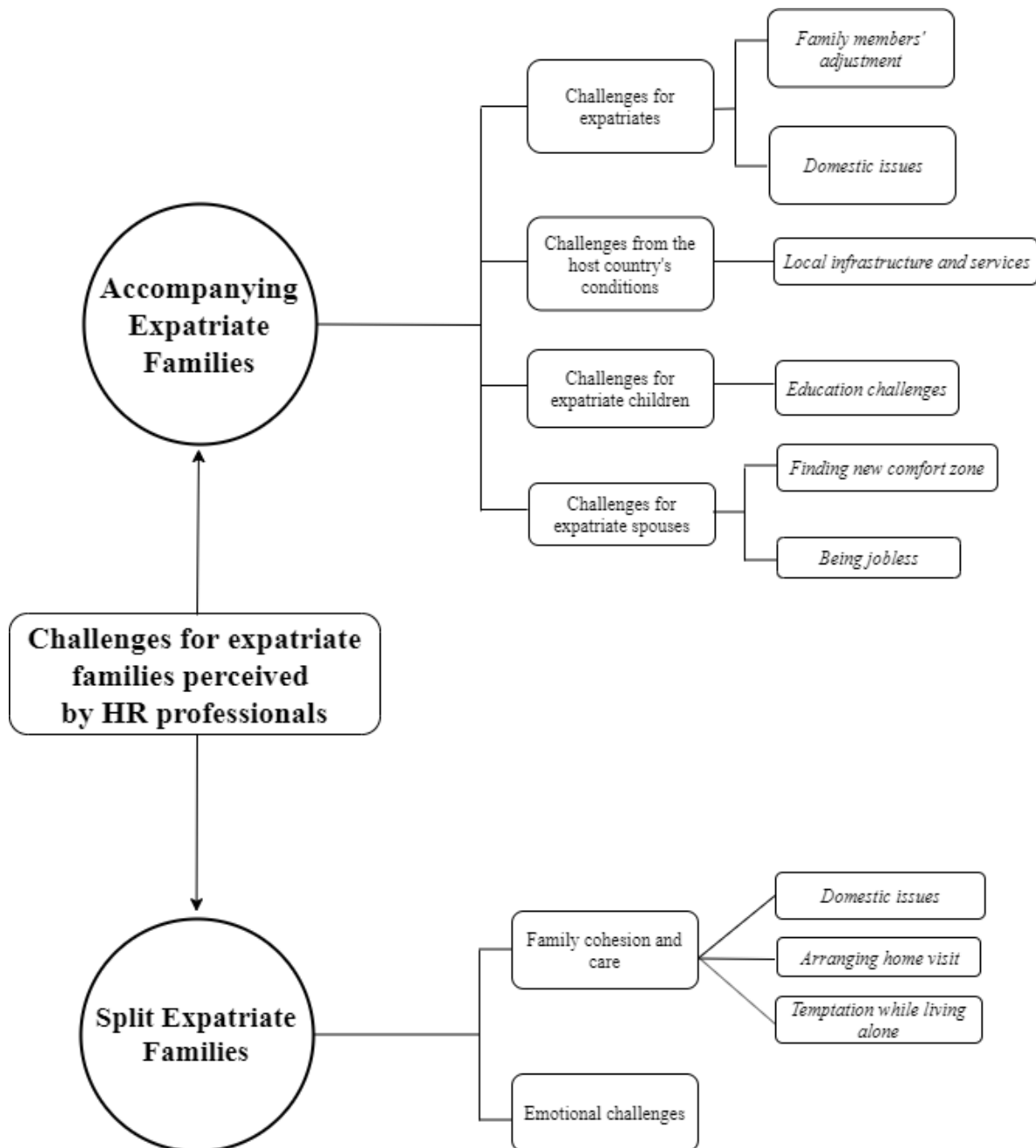
In my past experience, I’ve seen candidates refuse our offer because of their family. I’ve also seen candidates that stopped the expatriation early because of their family. And, that costs a lot, not only in terms of money, but also time and effort and everything that we have to rearrange. So, we try to make sure it is alright from the family side. In many cases, we are willing to go the extra mile more than what is stated in the expatriation contract to support expatriates and their family to ensure things are alright. [HR6]

Conflicting views among the HR professionals regarding their responsibilities towards expatriate families during international assignments could be related to some underlying

organizational characteristics. These differences could possibly lie in the origins of the organizations (home country), organizational culture and home country's culture, types of organization (corporate versus government versus international aid or non-profit etc). It would be worthwhile investigating how these factors influence or form HR professionals' views related to expatriate families in a future study.

- **HR professionals' understandings of challenges faced by expatriate families**

To compare and contrast the HR professionals' understandings and expatriate families' experiences of the same aspects, the HR professionals were asked about the challenges they thought expatriate families encountered in international assignments (Figure 5.4). They were asked about accompanying expatriate families and split expatriate families respectively. Generally speaking, the HR professionals understood the challenges for expatriate families in each situation.



**Figure 5. 4: Challenges faced by expatriate families on international assignments as perceived by HR professionals**

***Challenges faced by expatriates and families in accompanying situation***

The HR professionals openly discussed the challenges experienced by the expatriates and their accompanying families during international assignments. Similar to those mentioned by the expatriates, the HR professionals spoke about two major challenges in the life domain

that accompanying expatriates could face, challenges because of family members' adjustment and challenges in dealing with domestic issues. The HR professionals also mentioned that all expatriates did not have all the same challenges, but there could be a combination of different challenges depending on each situation.

In our company, we had some cases like after one or three months, the family could not adapt, or a member of the family had health issues, and they had to move back to their home country. When it comes to children, it would be the same. If the children can adapt well, are familiar with moving and studying at international schools, have good health, then things would be fine. Otherwise, there could be issues for the expatriate. So those issues are case by case and could pose significant challenges for expatriates. [HR7]

Similarly, the HR professionals witnessed many cases where expatriates had experienced challenges due to domestic issues which took a lot of expatriates' time and effort. For example, the expatriates could have challenges in setting up things at home such as electricity, negotiating with landlords etc. The HR professionals assessed that challenges in dealing with domestic issues affected expatriates' absenteeism and their concentration at work.

Further to challenges for the expatriates, the HR professionals discussed the challenges for accompanying family members. In listening to the HR professionals, it could be deduced that they had general understandings about the challenges faced by accompanying expatriate family members. For example, the most commonly mentioned challenge was related to the host country's conditions – *local infrastructure and services*. The respondents acknowledged that there could be many challenges because of the conditions of the host country such as the quality of health services, schools, transportation etc. They explained that since most expatriate families came from more developed countries, there were many fundamental services and infrastructure they took for granted or expected to be standardized in their home countries that were very different in the host country. Therefore, challenges and disappointment were unavoidable. Other challenges for family members that were well recorded by HR professionals related to *finding new comfort zone*, especially *adjustment challenges*.

For accompanying families, the challenges are related to their adjustment to the new environment, you know, new schools, new living style, traffic, weather and everything, and language as well. [HR6]

The HR professionals also added that because of the challenge to adjust and find a new comfort zone, especially during the first several months, conflicts could happen in expatriate families. In addition to challenges that were common for all expatriate family members, the informants talked about challenges for each particular member. Specifically, they said that expatriate children could have *education challenges* while expatriate spouses might encounter the *challenge of being jobless or unoccupied*. Nonetheless, there were still some challenges that were emphasized by expatriate families but went unrecognized by the HR professionals. These included the challenges of making new friends and leaving old friends (*friends*) for both expatriate spouses and children, *being in minority groups* for expatriate children and feeling homesick (*homesickness*) for expatriate spouses. Therefore, although the HR professionals were aware of most challenges faced by accompanying expatriate family members, it was hard for them to be sensitive to all the challenges that the expatriate family members encountered during international assignments.

### ***Challenges for expatriates and families in split situation***

All the HR professionals interviewed identified that the challenges for expatriates and families in a split situation were different from those for accompanying expatriate families. However, unlike accompanying expatriate families, not all the challenges faced by split expatriate families were fully recognized by the HR professionals. What they perceived to be challenges for split expatriate families were generally quite shallow.

There were two major types of challenge that were common for both expatriates and their split family members mentioned by the HR professionals. The first type of challenge reported was maintaining family cohesion and taking care of the family (*family cohesion and care*). There were many specific challenges for expatriates related to this theme such as arranging domestic issues from a distance (*domestic issues*), arranging the time and budget to visit home (*arranging home visit*), as an example given by one respondent:

In another case, as I mentioned, the guy from [a country], he had challenges supporting his family, and that affected his work performance. His wife was staying at home without his support. So, he had to spend many hours calling back to arrange things for his family. At that time, she suffered, and he also suffered. There are some others who do not have their wives here, and they are very unhappy. So, they have to visit home frequently, costing more money because the budget from the company is not enough. Some people they fly home every month. Some people have elderly parents, and they have to fly home more often. [HR2]

The HR professionals explained that although unaccompanied expatriates received a payment for visiting home, it was usually not enough for them. Therefore, in order to maintain family cohesion and take care of the family to some extent, expatriates had to take money out of their own pocket. The HR professionals further emphasized that not all the expatriates could afford to visit home as frequently as they wished and wanted. Some expatriates went on international assignments without their family partly because of financial reasons.. Therefore, for them, they had to save as much as they could, and the challenge of maintaining family cohesion while being away was even more stressful. Moreover, the HR professionals said that many expatriates went on international assignments at the cost of missing their families' important events and stages such as seeing their children growing up. Another challenge of this type that the HR professionals noted was temptation while living alone (*temptation*). This challenge, according to one HR professional was also relevant to expatriate spouses:

The third challenge is how to maintain the bond within the family. Since the husband comes here by himself, and he could have a lot of free time without anybody. So, if he goes out, there could be potential problems that could affect their family. So, it is a challenge for the husband to resist temptation, and also a challenge for the wife to keep the husband aside.

[HR3]

The next type of challenge that the HR professionals identified and had witnessed that split expatriate families encountered was *emotional challenges*. Both sides suffered these challenges. Expatriates and their spouses and/or children might be missing each other. Since expatriates usually went alone, the feeling of loneliness was unavoidable according to the HR professionals. The expatriates did not know what to do in their free time, which increased their loneliness. Meanwhile, on the side of the expatriate spouses, HR professionals noted that they had the challenge of dealing with the entire household without the expatriates.

In short, although the HR professionals understood the challenges faced by unaccompanied expatriates and their family members during international assignments to some extent, their understandings were limited both in terms of size and type of challenges. They were not aware of all the challenges mentioned by the split expatriate families. For example, the challenge for the expatriates to take care of themselves while living alone and the challenges for the expatriate spouses to teach and educate children, which were strongly highlighted by the families, were not mentioned by HR respondents. Furthermore, they were not able to tell detailed and in-depth stories about these families. This was partly due to the fact that the

majority of expatriates coming to the host country were accompanied by their families. Another important reason was that split families had been neglected by the organizations.

- **HR professionals' views on the family's influence on expatriates**

The next question that the study sought to answer was what the HR professionals thought about the influence of families on expatriates in international assignments. The insights related to this issue were extracted from various answers of the HR professionals. Although the interviewees were only directly asked about the influence of expatriate families on expatriates' work performance during international assignments, they mentioned other aspects, especially with regards to accompanying expatriate families. In both situations, all HR professionals consistently affirmed that expatriate families affected expatriates' work performance. They commonly shared the importance of the family's role during international assignments:

Usually, the expatriates think that their family is sacrificing for them, for their career either in accompanying or split cases. So, from my observation, the expatriates who have their family really appreciate their family, and they really care if their family is happy or not. In general, according to my experience and my observation, the expatriates who come working here, some of them are easy, some of them are difficult, but they all appreciate their partners, their spouses. They are highly concerned about their spouses, their family. [HR1]

The HR professionals were clearly aware of the family's influence on the expatriates. According to them, as ordinary human beings, the family's influence applied to almost all employees. Expatriates were also ordinary human beings. As such, the family's influence on their work domain was understandable. Nevertheless, in the context of international assignments, the HR professionals explained that the work domain might be more intrusive on the family and life domain, and as such the family's influence on the expatriate's work domain was even higher than in the domestic context.

I think a family always has some impact on its members, whether you like it or not. It is a big part in each person, especially for expatriates who move all the way from their home to a strange country. So, to make sure the family is happy is one of the top priorities for the expatriate. If the family is happy, the expatriate will feel more confident, more comfortable and more dedicated to work. [HR4]

The HR professionals mentioned that the influence was present in different phases and aspects of expatriation including deciding to expatriate, adjustment, work performance, success and/or failure of both accompanied expatriates and split expatriates. To investigate further the phase during assignments, the HR professionals were asked about work

performance. As mentioned before, all informants thought the expatriates' families influenced their work performance, and many of them had observed examples of this:

I've seen many examples. If their family is happy at home, then they come to work happy. That's obvious. If the family is not happy ... they can't find the food they want ... the transportation is too bad ... the kids are not comfortable at school ... or the wife couldn't find any job to do during her spare time, that would influence the expatriate. And, the expatriate could not concentrate 100% on work. So, there's definitely an impact of family on expatriates' work performance. [HR2]

According to the HR professionals, if the family did not adjust, the family's influence on the expatriate's work performance would be negative and vice versa. When the family enjoyed their lives in the host country, the expatriate felt good accordingly and could concentrate on work. Although the HR professionals said that there were both negative and positive influence of the family on expatriates' work outcomes, they admitted that the negative influence could be observed more easily as they normally investigated reasons for poor performance rather than those for good performance. In other words, they only investigated reasons when problems occurred. The above examples are about accompanying expatriate families. The HR professionals were also asked about the split situation, and they were not hesitant to say that families could influence expatriates' work performance even when they were not together.

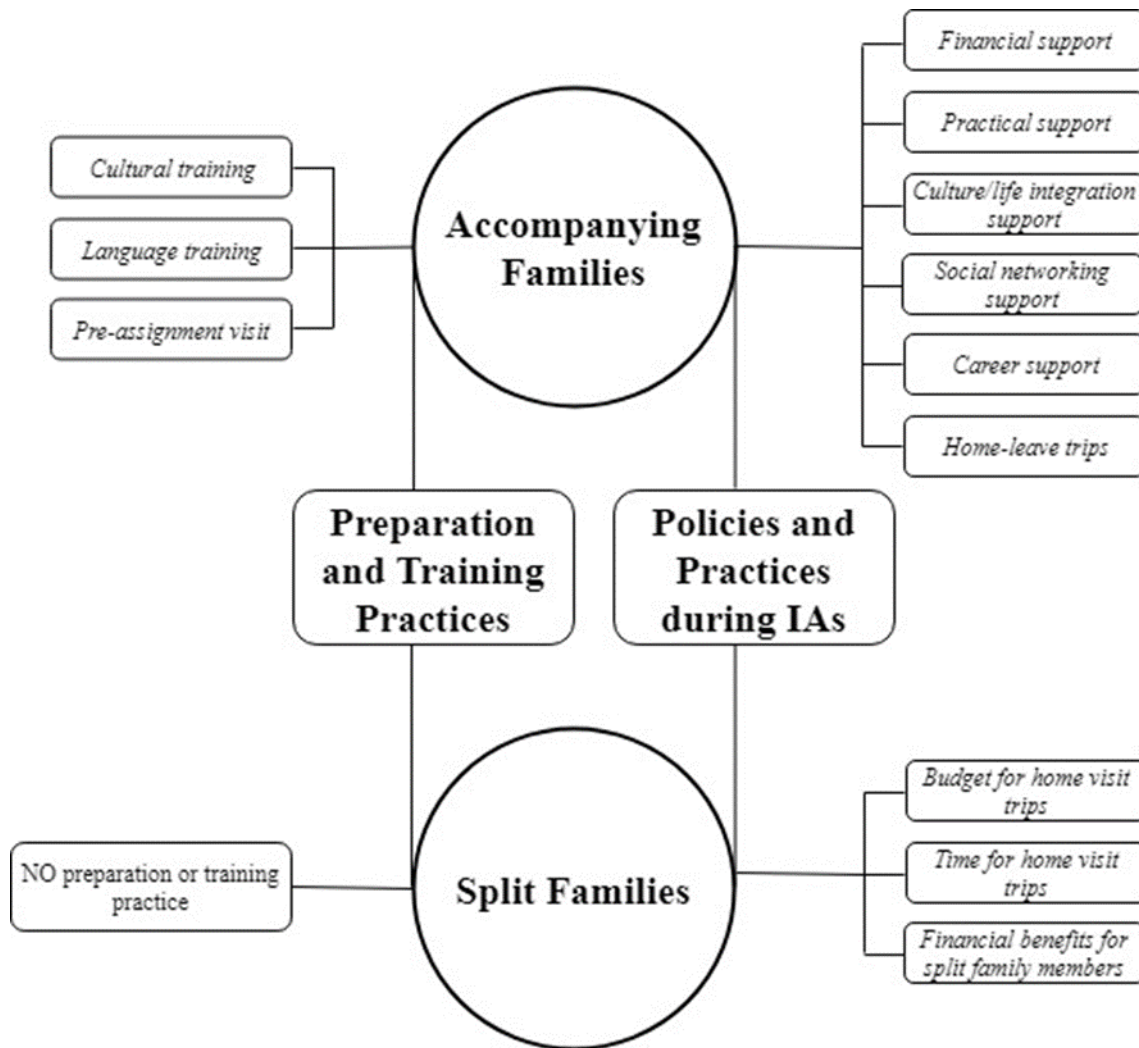
I remember one [nationality] expatriate came to VN, left his wife and his son in [home country] for several months only. So, for several months, his performance at work was not really good because he was just thinking and missing his wife and his son. And then, when the family came, his performance we could see that increased, and reached the highest point. So, it would be difficult to separate them and their family, and that could have an impact on their work. I talked to him sometimes. When his family was not with him, he had a lot of concerns, thinking about [home country] and Vietnam. So, when it came to work, he couldn't concentrate his best on work. [HR2]

The interviewees from the HR department admitted that in terms of concentration, they could only see the negative influence of family, or to be more exact, the absence of family, on expatriates' work performance. However, in terms of time, the absence of family could give expatriates extra time to contribute to work. Therefore, it could be concluded that the HR professionals were aware of the family's influence on expatriates' work domain, especially work performance either in an accompanying or a split situation. Many of them also shared that they tried to make the family's influence as positive as possible. According to the HR

professionals in this sample, the degree of influence differed depending on several factors. They explicitly mentioned some factors such as the expatriates' nationalities or cultural origins, their personalities or characteristics (maturity, professionalism), and the expatriates' attachment to their families.

### **5.6.2 Organizational policies and practices related to expatriate families**

The insights in this section have been divided into pre-assignment and during assignment policies and practices for expatriate families. Specifically, this section focuses on three aspects: 1) practices in relation to expatriate families in recruitment and selection processes, 2) preparation and training practices for expatriate families in international assignments, 3) policies and practices for expatriate families during international assignments. The findings in this section were mainly taken from the responses of the HR professionals and partly from those of the expatriates and their families.



**Figure 5. 5: Organizations’ preparation, training policies and practices for expatriate families before and during international assignments**

- **Recruitment and selection processes**

The HR professionals were first asked generally about their considerations of expatriate families in the recruitment and selection processes. There was no consensus in their answers. On the one hand, some said that their organizations did not take expatriate family members into account during these processes. Specifically, these people did not ask about the family of potential candidates for international assignment as to whether the family agreed to go, nor did they check if the family was suitable for international assignments in terms of their willingness and adaptability. The arguments put for not considering expatriate family members were twofold. First, the family would not affect their decision to select a candidate. Second, it was at the expatriate’s own discretion to consider whether their family was suitable

or could adapt to international assignments or not. The following response portrayed vividly their practice.

First of all, [the company] does not do that. Families do not really affect our [recruitment and selection] decisions. Secondly, we have an assessment process that we call a talent review process. In that process, we ask the employee every year or every quarter if they are available for mobility. So, the employee has to arrange their family commitments so that they can answer yes or no. And, they have the right to say no if they do not want to go. [HR1]

On the other hand, some HR professionals reported that they did consider the family situation of the candidates when recruiting and selecting personnel for international assignments. For instance, they asked about the family status of candidates, if unknown, and the willingness of the family to relocate or to support the candidates to go working abroad. One respondent highlighted some of the questions asked during interviews in relation to a candidate's family:

We ask "Are you married or do you have a family?", "Are you available for mobility?", "Is your family willing to relocate?", "What do you think if your family is not going with you?" etc. [HR6]

The respondents said that there were two reasons why they asked about a candidate's family. They like to understand the motivations of candidates to undertake the international assignments and the impact of the family on their motivations. Furthermore, the answers to these questions impacted the benefits that the companies needed to offer the employee.

The HR professionals were then asked about their preference of particular family status of potential candidates (single or married). In general, all interviewees said that they did not specify or prefer a family status of candidates in the recruitment process. However, when being asked further, while some still affirmed that family status did not influence their selection decision at all, some others showed some signs of preference over a particular family status. For example, one gave an example if they had two candidates who were both qualified for a position but one was single while the other was married, she would choose the single candidate. She explained her choice was because of the financial cost to the company. However, she also added that in case the company just wanted to offer a single package for an expatriate, they would usually ask the married candidate if the person could consider taking the offer. Another reason for marital status preference during selection process was the length of the assignment:

For example, if the assignment is really long, like more than three years, we may prefer the single candidate. Because for married expatriates, they usually just want to go for

international assignments within three years, and they want to come back to their home country. So, if the assignment is less than three years, we may choose the married candidates, but more than that, we may prefer the single candidate. [HR5]

Nevertheless, respondents noted that they felt married candidates were more stable and had greater commitment than single ones, although not all cases were the same. When it came to married candidates, all respondents said that they asked the candidates about their intention to bring the family. The purpose of asking was to prepare offers for the candidates. Whether an expatriate brought their family or not influenced the details of the package for that expatriate:

As I said, we asked to arrange the package, the offer for them. We need to prepare in terms of logistics issues and assign people to take care of things for the candidate. [HR7]

None of the respondents directly involved expatriate family members in the recruitment and selection process although some did care and ask about them through the expatriates. As they commonly shared, they understood that family could influence expatriates' motivation, success or failure, but it took too much time and effort if they interviewed or investigated expatriate families in terms of their adaptability or suitability for an international assignment. Therefore, they usually relied very much on the candidates for confirmation about whether their families felt comfortable and willing to move or if the families supported the candidates' decisions to move etc. These insights about organizational practices during recruitment and selection processes in relation to expatriate families were also confirmed through the interviews with expatriates and their spouses. Most of them confirmed that organizations had not asked about the family during the recruitment process. The organizations only asked about the family when they were about to offer an assignment to a candidate or when the expatriation decision was confirmed.

- **Preparation and training processes**

After an expatriate was chosen for an international assignment, the next step was to get the expatriate and their family prepared for the assignment. The HR professionals were asked about their preparation and training practices for expatriate families in two circumstances: accompanying families and split families. The expatriate families (expatriates and expatriate spouses) were also asked about these aspects. The following findings are a combination of the insights of both HR professionals and expatriate families.

Not all organizations provided preparation and training activities to the expatriates and their accompanying families. Among those which were provided, the preparation and training practices for expatriates and accompanying families in international assignments included

*cultural training, language training and pre-assignment visit.* Cultural training seemed to be the most common type of training that organizations offered to expatriates and their families. Organizations understood that cultural training was important for the adjustment and adaptation of expatriates and their families.

At [name of the company], we give them cultural training so that they can easily adapt to the country. These trainings are very important. We don't think, we don't feel worried whether they can adapt or not because we prepare for them carefully in that sense. [HR2]

However, the way each organization did this kind of training differed. Cultural training sessions could be provided either in the home countries or in the host country. Similarly, people who delivered training were not the same in these organizations. Some invited cultural experts to run the session while some others just asked employees who previously went to the same host country to share their experiences. Depending on each organization and the size of the expatriate population, the sessions could be structured or very unstructured. The length of these training sessions varied from one day to a week. It is important to note that in most cases, officially the cultural training sessions were only provided to expatriates instead of specifically targetting the expatriate families.

In addition to cultural training, some organizations offered language training. However, similar to cultural training, in theory, language training was only given to expatriates. The HR professionals explained that because of tax implications, in contracts, only expatriates had language training:

After they arrive in [the host country], we have 100 hours of language training for them. The company pays for them. Actually in theory and contracts, we give the training to the expatriates only because of tax implications. However, in fact, we usually invite a tutor in to teach, and the tutor can teach both the expatriates and their family. [HR1]

The last preparation activity for expatriate families provided by organizations was a pre-assignment visit. However, not all organizations paid for a pre-assignment visit of the whole expatriate family. Some organizations only sponsored the expatriates to undertake those trips while others paid for the whole families. According to the latter, since the whole family would move, it was important for the whole family to forsee the living environment of the host country and gain some experience of it:

Before coming to [the host country], the expatriates will have a paid trip for the whole family to come and visit the country and to have some general ideas about the country. So, that's how we prepare them mentally several months before the assignment starts. [HR6]

During this trip, the HR professionals reported that the families would have a chance to take a city tour, visit different schools, visit the various housing/ accommodation options etc. While at some organizations this kind of trip only happened after the expatriation contract was signed, other organizations gave the expatriates and their families the opportunity to undertake this trip before they decided to take the assignment offer. Although the second approach could cost the organizations more, they believed it was helpful to do so to avoid expatriation failures later.

Not surprisingly, all the HR professionals confirmed that their organizations did not provide any kind of training or preparation for split expatriate families. This finding was also embedded in the interviews with the expatriates and their un-accompanying spouses. According to the HR professionals in this sample, since the split families did not relocate, they did not need any training and preparation:

In my opinion, there is no need to provide training for those families because only the expatriates will come. Then only expatriates need the kind of cultural or similar training. Only expatriates live and work with employees there. If the family wants to know, the expatriate can give them some information. [HR2]

The HR professionals were in agreement on this. It confirmed the ‘out of sight, out of mind’ reality that the split expatriate families had experienced from organizations. No matter what issues the split families may have, since the organizations did not have contact with them, it was not the responsibility of the organizations to take care of them. Meanwhile, the split expatriates and their spouses said that the organizations should have prepared them better, at least psychologically. There could be various psychological issues that the split expatriate families had to confront, and it would not be too costly or complicated to prepare them for these. These respondents even mentioned that sometimes they just needed the organizations to show that they cared which would encourage them to overcome the challenges. Unfortunately, the organizations showed little interest in families in split situations.

- **Policies and practices during international assignments**

The organizational policies and practices for expatriate families during international assignments were talked about most extensively by both the HR professionals and the expatriate families. To meet the purpose of comparing accompanying expatriate families and split ones, the HR professionals were interviewed about their practices for each group. Furthermore, in contrast with the insights from organizations, the accompanying expatriate families and split expatriate families were also asked about what kind of support they

received during international assignments. The following two sections present the findings for each group.

### ***Organizations' policies and practices for accompanying expatriate families***

Organizations' policies and practices for accompanying expatriate families were clustered into several types. These included *financial support*, *practical support*, *culture/life integration support*, *social networking support*, *career support* and *home-leave trips*. Each organization had different kinds of support for expatriate families. Some offered all types of support while some others only offered one or two forms of support. The specific support was also subject to the level or position of the expatriates.

*Financial support* was the most common form of support that organizations offered to accompanying expatriate families. Financial support included several types such as accommodation, education fees for expatriate children, insurance for the whole family, transportation, stipends for the spouse, budget for short courses such as cooking or drawing and so on. With regards to accommodation and education for expatriate children, although most organizations provided this, the amount each organization paid was different. Some organizations just paid partial costs while others paid the total. However, a point in common was that all organizations set a ceiling level for the housing allowance depending on the position of the expatriate, and the schools for expatriate children met basic standards for international schools. In addition, insurance packages for expatriate families often covered their access to international health service providers. Meanwhile, transportation might mean anything from a budget for public commuting to private cars and drivers for the whole family. Notably, in a couple of cases, expatriate spouses were paid stipends that were exclusive to them. These cases were linked to Japanese companies, which were unique in their policies for expatriate families. The human resource manager said that the company wanted to show its appreciation of the spouse's sacrifice for the expatriate when accompanying them. Furthermore, some organizations offered an extra budget for expatriate families to do language learning or for minor items such as expatriate community membership fees, art classes, cooking classes etc. This budget was not common, and was often offered by those organizations which provided all other financial means mentioned above.

In addition to financial support, the organizations provided *practical support* to accompanying expatriate families. Practical support meant dealing with practical things such as arranging accommodation, organizing schools for expatriate children, tenancy and

household arrangement etc. This kind of support was similar to on-site support where organizations either hire agencies to help expatriate families or had someone in-house to do so. The HR professionals shared that a lot of this type of support was not officially stated in the contract with the expatriates or needed by expatriate families continuously. However, in most cases, they were still willing to help the families:

In theory, it is actually not our responsibility. However, we are willing to give them that support when they need. So, when the family asks us, we give them some hints to deal with those things or we can give them the contacts of some agencies. [HR5]

The next type of support accompanying expatriate families received was *culture/life integration support*. This type of support consisted of activities such as a cultural or life integration coaching program, language training in the host country and a check-in program. A culture coaching program was one in which a personal culture/life coach paid by the company would run some sessions so that each expatriate family could share with the coach issues about their life in the host country, the challenges they had, and the coach would help them figure out how to solve their problems. The coach also spent time separately with each family member so that they could talk freely and openly about anything. Such a program was confirmed to be really helpful by both the expatriate families and the HR professionals. However, this program was quite limited to some positions at some companies. Meanwhile, language training courses for expatriate family members were more common. Organizations would invite tutors in to teach expatriate family members, especially expatriate spouses, or paid for external courses so the spouses could participate. Another activity was a check-in program. In this program, organizations paid a consultant to talk with expatriates over the phone every month to check if everything was going well with them. Although the consultant only talked to the expatriates, the program targeted issues in the family domain in addition to the work domain. Therefore, this was considered as a program for expatriate families.

Another type of support which was considered highly relevant and necessary by the expatriate families was *social networking support*. There were also some good examples of this kind of support that organizations provided to expatriate families. For example, some organizations formed social networking groups for families or spouses or spouse groups for expatriate families to connect and get together. They also held regular events. Although these events might not be frequent, they created opportunities for expatriate families to socialize with each other. At some other smaller organizations in which the expatriate groups were not big, the HR professionals could give information about social groups depending on each

family's needs, nationalities, religions etc. In addition to face-to-face networks, one company invested in an online platform for its expatriate families all over the world to communicate with each other.. However, some organizations left the work of finding a community or group that expatriate families could socialize with to the families themselves. According to the expatriate families, this kind of support would not take too much time and effort to organize while it could be very meaningful to the expatriate families. Therefore, the expatriate families recommended the organizations should pay more attention to offering this kind of support.

Besides social networking support, *career support* was offered to accompanying expatriate families at some organizations. This support came in different forms including providing information about job opportunities, providing connections to potential employers and giving brief coaching on how to find jobs in the host country. However, except for the coaching sessions, most organizations provided this kind of support unofficially, which meant that it was not listed on their contracts with expatriates to provide career support to expatriate spouses.

Actually, if they come to us and ask for help, we can help them. For example, especially the HR department, we may look around to see if there is any opportunity, any job that suits them. But that is not a formal support. We are just willing to help if they need. [HR4]

One spouse spoke of a great example of a career coaching workshop that was officially offered to expatriate spouses. She participated in the workshops for several full days with a group of people and learned a lot; like how to reinvent herself, and how to keep her career going. The workshops provided her with useful tools and processes such as help with drafting a CV, making job interview calls and presenting herself. This support seemed to show sincere care from the organization and was highly appreciated.

The last type of benefit that was mentioned by the HR professionals and accompanying expatriate families during international assignments was *home-leave trips*. Not many organizations offered this benefit. They stated that they just offered a family package for expatriates with accompanying families, and it was the families' responsibility to pay for their home-visit trips. They explained that these trips were quite costly, and each family had their own needs. The expatriate families did not complain about not being given this benefit.

### ***Organizational policies and practices for split expatriate families***

In analyzing organizational policies and practices for split expatriate families, it was shown that split expatriate families received little attention and support from organizations. Some

organizations did not give any support or benefit to these families. Moreover, the support for split families was mainly given to the expatriates rather than their whole families. The limited support for split families included *budget for home visit trips*, *time for home visit trips* and *financial benefits for split family members*.

*Budget for home visit trips* was the most common support that organizations offered to expatriates with split families. This support was mentioned by all HR professionals and unaccompanied expatriates. The HR professionals explained that since the expatriates moved by themselves, the organizations did not have to pay family packages for them. Instead, they gave the unaccompanied expatriates more money to visit their families. The following statement illustrated the typical response of HR professionals when being asked about the support and benefits for split expatriate families:

How can we support the family, right? If the family accompanies the expatriate, we pay for the family one home-leave trip a year. However, if the family does not accompany the expatriate, we divide that amount into several trips for the expatriate to go home and visit the family. [HR1]

Usually this kind of budget would only be enough to cover return flight tickets for expatriates. The frequency of this trip depended on each organization, ranging from one to several times a year. Within an organization, expatriates of different levels and positions also received different amounts. The higher positions and levels they were at, the more money they received to visit home. Noticeably, one expatriate who was not so positive about the organizational support for his circumstance explained that on the contract, the organization paid for his home visit trips. However, in fact, they just did so to reduce the income tax that they had to pay for the expatriate.

In addition to a budget to visit home, many expatriates were granted days off or *time for home visit trips*. The HR professionals said that depending on the distance between the home and host countries and their positions in the organizations, the expatriates would have different amounts of home leave to visit their families. This kind of information was usually clearly outlined in the organizations' policies. Nevertheless, this benefit was not provided by many organizations. Some organizations just gave annual leave to expatriates and it was the expatriates' responsibility to arrange trips home. Some organizations considered flexible work arrangement for expatriates. For example, expatriates could work from home while on leave without taking days off. Unaccompanied expatriates expressed that in many cases, they could work from home without it affecting their work performance. Therefore, such a flexible

working policy could be helpful for expatriates in the split situation when they needed to go home, although they expected much more support from the organizations.

The last benefit that split expatriate families could receive from organizations was *financial benefits for split expatriate family members*. Specifically, when sending an expatriate on international assignment, regardless of whether the family accompanied the expatriate or not, some organizations still sponsored international schools' tuition fees for expatriate children. If the expatriate spouses and children did not live in their home countries, these organizations also paid for their accommodation. These benefits were commonly offered to all expatriates working for these organizations regardless of their accompanying or unaccompanying status. In comparison with other organizations which were mostly corporates, these organizations offered much better benefits for split expatriate families.

In summary, the policies and practices organizations offered to expatriate families in accompanying and split situations were vastly different. The overall impression confirmed that split expatriate families were largely ignored by organizations. This reality is underlined by a deeper analysis of the organizations' views towards expatriate families which is discussed further in the next chapter (discussion).

## **5.7 Chapter summary**

This chapter presents the second set of findings which are structured into five sections: challenges, expatriates' work outcomes, expatriation's influence on expatriate families' emotional bonding, influential factors on families' experiences, and organizational views and practices, as also shown in Figure 5.1. The findings reveal that there were similarities and differences between the challenges that accompanied and unaccompanied expatriates faced during international assignments. Meanwhile, as expected, the challenges for accompanying families and un-accompanying families were completely different. In terms of expatriates' work outcomes, the family exerted influence on both types of expatriates' work performance, and organizational support for expatriate families influenced expatriates' work attitude and engagement. Expatriation also affected expatriate families' emotional bonding in various ways. Lastly, findings about HR professionals' understanding and organizational practices for expatriate families clearly showed a lack of consideration and support especially for split expatriate families. In the final chapter of the thesis, the study's findings are discussed in

relation to previous literature. Theoretical contributions, practical implications as well as limitations and future research are also delineated in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

The overarching purpose of this study was to investigate the family's influence on expatriates and the experiences of expatriates and their families in both accompanying and split family situations in international assignments. Specifically, the objectives of the study were to: (a) investigate the motivations, considerations, and experiences of accompanied and unaccompanied expatriates; (b) explore the motivations, considerations, and experiences of expatriates' family members ; (c) explore how HR professionals and organizations understand and support expatriate families, and (d) compare the insights related to the two expatriate family situations. The study aimed to shed light on these issues from the perspectives of individuals (expatriate couples) and organizations (HR professionals). Specifically, expatriates, expatriate spouses, and HR professionals were contacted for participation in the study. A qualitative research approach with in-depth semi-structured interviews was employed in this study. Using this approach, the study was able to reveal findings that specifically uncovered the experiences of expatriates and their family members during international assignments in two situations – accompanying and split.

In this final chapter, a summary of how the study's findings meet the overall study purpose by addressing the primary research question is presented first. The study's findings are then discussed in relation to the extant literature on expatriate families on international assignments and family systems theory (Section 6.1). Based on this discussion section, Section 6.2 presents theoretical and methodological contributions. Next, the chapter proceeds with the practical implications of the study (Section 6.3). Section 6.4 lays out the study's limitations and suggestions for future research. The thesis finishes with a conclusion in Section 6.5.

In order to meet the study's purpose, six sub-research questions were addressed. These investigated the major aspects of international assignments including motivations, considerations, challenges, and work and family outcomes. First, the findings revealed that family members played a critical role in the decision-making process concerning the undertaking of international assignments of both accompanied and unaccompanied expatriates. Specifically, family members exert a strong influence on the motivations to undertake international assignments of accompanied expatriates and on the reasons to engage in a split situation of unaccompanied expatriates. In the case of the accompanied expatriates, while they were driven to embark on international assignments by work-related and country-related motivations, life-related motivations were also salient to them. These life-related

motivations were all connected to their family members such as their spouses and children and their family life (work-life balance). Lazarova et al. (2010) explain that international assignments were often perceived as disruptive to expatriate families. The findings of this study challenge such a perception and subscribe to the result of Richardson (2006) by showing that accompanied expatriates perceive international assignments as beneficial to the family in terms of family members' enhancement and children's education (see for examples Sections 4.1.3, 4.2.2 and 4.2.3). While family issues have been identified as one of the reasons why expatriates undertake international assignments in a few studies, most of these studies looked at self-initiated expatriates or those coming from less developed home locations to more developed host locations (Dickmann 2012, Froese 2012, Selmer and Luring 2011a). The findings here, which were drawn from organizational assigned expatriates, mostly coming from more developed countries to a developing country suggest that motivations to expatriate should be perceived from broader contexts. In other words, the focus should be broadened to explain why expatriates from developed countries are not forced but motivated to accept assignments in less developed host countries. Traditionally, more emphasis has been placed on the motivations of expatriates from less developed economies to work in developed ones (Dickmann 2012, Froese 2012, Selmer and Luring 2011a). The attractiveness of developing host locations to expatriates coming from developed countries should be acknowledged.

Meanwhile, for unaccompanied expatriates sent on international assignments by their organization, work-related reasons were identified as the main driver. However, due to family-related reasons such as the spouse's work, children's education and the responsibility of caring for elderly parents at home, they had to leave their families behind. Believing that a split situation would be disruptive, the expatriates in this study often expressed a sense of guilt for leaving the family behind which then translated into family concerns during the expatriation assignment. The strong influence of family members on expatriates' motivations and decisions to undertake international assignments also gives evidence to family systems theory, according to which, members of a family system are interrelated (Fingerman and Bermann 2000, Minuchin 1974). Specifically, the expatriate's decision to undertake international assignments was made in consultation with and considerations of their family, showing a construct of family systems' cohesion (Olson 2000) – decision making. According to Olson (2000), balanced family systems are characterized by a democratic decision-making process in which each family member can participate and negotiate. It could be seen that the

expatriation decisions are jointly made and agreed upon by members of each family in the current study.

There were a number of family-related considerations and concerns for both accompanied and unaccompanied expatriates. On the one hand, when bringing their family with them, accompanied expatriates wanted to ensure that their family members had a happy life. They considered various factors related to the whole family (living environment, housing, social networking) or to their children (age, education, adjustment) and spouse (feeling, career sacrifice). Many were willing to cease their assignments or to repatriate if their family did not want to remain in the host country, despite the consequences such as financial costs to the organization and the possibility of them losing their position and reputation. On the other hand, it has been commonly thought that as unaccompanied expatriates do not bring their families with them, they are free from all family-related issues (Shaffer et al. 2012). The current study proves the opposite. It was uncovered that although the unaccompanied expatriates were generally asked about their considerations when going on international assignments by themselves without their spouse, they voiced many points of concern. For example, they were concerned about their family relationships, their spouse having to take care of household emotional challenges and even themselves when living without their spouse. Therefore, it is clearly affirmed through this study that although expatriates may not be accompanied by their family, it does not mean that their concerns and worries are less. In summary, family matters were dominant in all expatriates' concerns and considerations during international assignments, regardless of being in an accompanying or split situation. Similar to motivations, this proves the interconnectedness between members of a family system and that a member's thoughts and behaviors cannot be fully understood without other members (Bader et al. 2015).

The next aspect investigated was challenges for expatriates during international assignments. It is clearly seen that many challenges the expatriates encountered were related to their families. An interesting observation from this study is that accompanied expatriates faced more work domain challenges than unaccompanied expatriates. Specifically, unaccompanied expatriates did not have the same challenges from work requirements which the accompanied expatriates had. This could be explained by the time and effort they could devote to work afforded by their single status. Accompanied expatriates had to divide their time and effort between the work and life domains. Meanwhile, most unaccompanied expatriates confirmed that since they did not have their families on board, they could work as late as they wished.

This finding is similar to what has been found with regards to short-term expatriates that unaccompanied employees benefit from having fewer daily household responsibilities and therefore less work-family conflict (Westman and Etzion 2002, Westman et al. 2008). However, this benefit is temporary and there could be potential long-term consequences for expatriate families and expatriates' performance (Mayerhofer et al. 2004, Shaffer et al. 2012). Therefore, it could be affirmed that as long as expatriates had family responsibilities, family matters would be part of the challenges they encounter in the work domain, showing a spillover effect between life and work. Furthermore, unlike the common assumption that unaccompanied expatriates are not involved in family-related issues (Kang et al. 2017, Mayerhofer et al. 2004, Welch and Worm 2006), this study shows that these expatriates had more life domain challenges compared to their accompanied counterparts. Such challenges were linked to family separation such as loneliness, missing and feeling worried about family, temptation, self-care and well-being (Section 5.1.2). Hence, it could be concluded that the family matters in the challenges for expatriates of both situations.

Lastly, the influence of family on expatriates' work outcomes was undeniable. Primarily, the family influenced the perceived work performance of both accompanied and unaccompanied expatriates. Previous studies have confirmed such an influence on accompanied expatriates (Bader et al. 2015, Lê et al. 2010, Malek et al. 2015, Selmer and Luring 2011b, Trompetter et al. 2016). The current study detailed that influences on accompanied expatriates could be positive and/or negative. For unaccompanied expatriates, while previous research has only provided assumptions about family influence on their work performance (Mayerhofer et al. 2004), the current study offered empirical evidence. Most of the unaccompanied expatriates said that their family influenced their work performance. Some expatriates stated that their family did not influence their work performance. Nevertheless, they said if their family lived with them in the host country, their work performance would be better. It should be noted that the majority of the unaccompanied expatriates had been on international assignments with their family before embarking on the current split one, which meant they fully understood how their family could influence their work performance in both situations. Moreover, the majority of all the interviewed expatriates mentioned that organizational support for their families during expatriation affected their work attitude and engagement. Therefore, it could be concluded that the family influenced perceived work outcomes, including work performance, work attitude and engagement of expatriates.

To conclude, families have an important role in various aspects of expatriates' international assignments, both in accompanied or unaccompanied situations. These aspects could be related to both work and life domains. Therefore, adequate attention should be paid to expatriate families, especially un-accompanying families who have long been ignored in academia and practice. The following section highlights and discusses the study's findings in further detail.

## **6.1 Discussion of findings**

### **6.1.1 Work-related vs. family-driven reasons**

The findings of this study highlight similarities and differences in the motivations to undertake international assignments of accompanied expatriates and unaccompanied expatriates. The salient finding is that unaccompanied expatriates were only motivated by work-related factors while family-related reasons drove them to choose the split situation. It should be noted that the motivations in this case could be the motivations to undertake international assignments and/or to choose the particular host country or the particular assignment. First, both groups of expatriates had similar work-related motivations, including professional growth/meaning of work, financial benefits and interest in working internationally. It has been a criticism of recent research that little has been known about the individual's motivations for undertaking international assignments (Collings et al. 2009, Shortland 2016). The motivation related to professional growth or the meaning of work in the host country is consistent with the results of previous studies such as Adler and Bartholomew (1992), Richardson and McKenna (2002) and Selmer and Luring (2012) which suggested that career benefits motivated global assignees to undertake international assignments. Similarly, financial benefits were among the perks that attracted global assignees to international postings (Konopaske and Werner 2005, Tung 1998). The interest to work abroad is somewhat akin to the desire for adventure or to experience work and life in other countries that has been found previously by many authors (Doherty et al. 2011, Inkson et al. 1997, Tung 1998). Nevertheless, analyzing the interview data from the two groups, it was observed that unaccompanied expatriates had stronger work-related motivations than those of accompanied expatriates. Furthermore, in this study's sample, the accompanied expatriates were not driven by either work or professional requirements to undertake their assignments, but unaccompanied expatriates were strongly motivated by this factor.

Previous studies have found country or culture-related factors to be drivers for expatriates, such as escape from the home country or attraction of the host country (Richardson and McKenna 2002, Stahl et al. 2002). This study's findings echo the literature with regards to these factors. In addition, the findings expand on our existing knowledge about the influence of country or cultural factors on the individual's desire to undertake expatriate assignments (Richardson and McKenna 2002, Stahl et al. 2002). First, for the accompanying expatriates, *the interest to discover entrepreneurial opportunities* is new to the literature of individual expatriation motivations. Some expatriates coming from developed economies perceived Vietnam as a dynamic developing country with a lot of excitement and room for development, offering them abundant opportunities to do business. Those expatriates with an entrepreneurial mindset would welcome the opportunity to do business in such a promising host country. Previous studies have not identified expatriates' interest to discover entrepreneurial opportunities as an individual motivation for international assignments. This finding adds new knowledge to extant literature. It is novel and could be relevant to other countries with similar characteristics. As Froese (2012) identified, motivations can affect the adjustment of expatriates in host countries, so this newly found knowledge not only extends current literature on expatriation motivations but also potentially adds a new variable to the antecedents of expatriates' adjustment. For the unaccompanied expatriates, the motivations were more about choosing this host country over others. The advantages of close *distance to home* or *familiarity with the host country* motivated them to undertake their current assignments. This finding supplements the study of Dickmann (2012) which proved locations were incentives for expatriates to choose a particular destination for their assignments.

The most striking difference between the motivations of expatriates in the two situations is life-related motivations. While accompanied expatriates had three major types of motivations namely life-related, work-related, and country- or culture-related motivations, unaccompanied expatriates were mainly motivated by the two latter types, with country-related motives being secondary to work-related motives. In most cases, unaccompanied expatriates perceived the international assignments as detrimental to their lives, particularly their family life. The international assignments, instead of being seen as enriching, were rather seen as a sacrifice of their family's personal life for the expatriate's career. Meanwhile, the accompanied expatriates mentioned that positive by-products of their assignments were partly the reasons that motivated them to expatriate. Specifically, *family members' enhancement*, *children's education* and *work-life balance* were among the important

motivators to go abroad. This finding supports the studies of previous authors (Dickmann et al. 2008, Harvey 1985, 1995). Consistent with Inkson et al. (1997), this study further contributes to the idea that the desire for adventure and enhancement not only for themselves but also for family members is a key motivator for accompanied expatriates to embark on global assignments. The finding here also challenges the idea that family plays no major role in expatriates' international assignment decisions (Khokher and Beauregard 2014). The difference of this study's findings to previous literature could be underpinned by expatriates' personalities and spousal and/or family relationships of expatriates as previously identified.

Furthermore, the findings here about accompanying expatriate families contribute empirical evidence to family systems theory. Specifically, family members exert influence on expatriates' motivations for undertaking international assignments, and most families were at balanced levels (separated and connected) in terms of their cohesion (detailed in Figure 2.1 – Chapter 2). These families could adjust and generally enjoy the assignments. This fact supports family systems theory's argument which suggests families with balanced levels of cohesion could achieve optimal functioning (Olson 2000).

With regards to expatriate spouses, the insights from accompanying and split expatriate families show few commonalities and vast differences. While the motives to undertake international assignments from individual perspectives have been identified as limited (Shortland 2016), those particularly from expatriate families' perspectives were even more scant and somewhat fragmented. Accompanying spouses were driven to go on international assignments with expatriates because of life-related, country- or culture-related and work-related motivations. In addition to the most emphasized motive, which was for their family to be together, the accompanying spouses wanted to go on international assignments because they saw many benefits such as family members' enhancement, children's education or expatriates' professional growth. Therefore, the findings show that accompanying spouses do not always passively follow the expatriates on international assignments, referred to as trailing spouses (Harvey and Wiese 1998, McNulty 2012), but they are also self-motivated. The fact that they are self-motivated may in turn affect their support for the expatriation decision because previous studies have shown that expatriate spouses who do not want to go on international assignments may hinder expatriation decisions (Hutchings et al. 2010).

Indeed, to the best of the author's knowledge, no academic research has been done in relation to the reasons for engaging in split situations of long-term expatriate families. This study's findings show that expatriate families engage in the split situation due to the spouses' work or

disapproval of the host country, children's education, special needs children, elderly parents or the spouses' desire for a stable social life. Although these reasons show the independence between expatriates and spouses according to family systems theory (Olson 2000), the fact that the international assignments decisions were jointly made by the unaccompanied expatriates and their spouses indicates the dependence between them. Both independence and dependence are needed for the maintenance of family systems (Olson 2000). In summary, significant contributions of the current study lie in the detailed findings of what drives expatriate families to accompany expatriates on international assignments and why split expatriate families choose to live apart during international assignments.

### **6.1.2 Family-centered concerns and considerations**

With the purpose of understanding expatriates and their spouses' thoughts about international assignments, particularly what they worried about before embarking on international assignments, the study explored expatriates and their spouses' considerations and concerns before going on global assignments. The findings show that there are numerous considerations and concerns surrounding expatriate families in both accompanied and unaccompanied expatriate family situations.

Much literature has focused more on the concerns upon repatriation (Lazarova and Cerdin 2007, Riusala and Suutari 2000). This study focuses on concerns before going on expatriation. The study's findings show that family and spouse issues are at the center of expatriates' concerns (Fischlmayr and Kollinger 2010). Specifically, the study delves deeper into revealing specific concerns when expatriates consider international assignments. The findings show that expatriates' considerations and concerns were strongly linked to the challenges they encountered during assignments.

In general, all the expatriates had similar areas of concerns related to the whole family and their spouses. However, the particular concerns for accompanied or unaccompanied expatriates were different. For instance, in relation to the whole family, accompanied expatriates were concerned about living-related conditions. By identifying the social life concerns of accompanied expatriates, the findings here extend previous literature which has only discussed concerns relating to practical issues (Ashamalla and Crocitto 1997). This study found that social life was important for the adjustment of expatriate families during expatriation and therefore social life concerns should be recognized. Meanwhile,

unaccompanied expatriates' concerns were more about psychological aspects such as not knowing what was going on at home (*unknowingness*) and *family relationships* (See Section 4.4.2 for details). These concerns have not been explored before although mental stress has been recorded as an issue for unaccompanied expatriates (Furusawa and Brewster 2016). Investigation into these expatriates' concerns has been scarce. Therefore, these findings add new and specific insights about unaccompanied expatriates' concerns, setting the background for future research into the insights of unaccompanied expatriates.

With regards to the spouses, the common point between the two groups of expatriates was that they both worried about the *feelings* or *emotions* of their spouses. This could be because the emotional challenge for all expatriate spouses might be unavoidable. In addition to this concern, accompanied expatriates considered their spouses' *career sacrifice* when following them on international assignments. This consideration has been found to be common, especially in the context that there are more and more dual-career couples (Lirio 2011, Punnett et al. 1992, Riusala and Suutari 2000). Whereas, unaccompanied expatriates' concerns were that their spouses had to take care of and/or manage children or household (*household management*), which were strongly relevant to the concern about their spouses' *physical health*. These insights add to the limited knowledge about the split expatriation situation, especially in relation to unaccompanied spouses.

The two areas of concern that were exclusive to accompanied expatriates are those related to children and to extended family members, particularly elderly parents. In accompanying cases, children are usually the top priority of expatriates (Brown 2008). Hence, the expatriates had to consider factors such as *children's age* and be concerned about *children's adjustment* in general as well as in education. What was found here corroborates previous studies' results (Cook 2013, Kim and Froese 2011, Kupka and Cathro 2007, Wilkins 2013). The concerns about *elderly parents* mentioned by the accompanied expatriates in this study support and extend the argument put forward by Haslberger (2011) and Clark and Altman (2016) that extended family members could influence expatriates during international assignments.

While the accompanied expatriates were concerned about their children and elderly parents, unaccompanied expatriates did not have similar concerns. The reasons could be because unaccompanied expatriates moved by themselves, and their children and/or their elderly parents were taken care of by their spouses. Furthermore, unaccompanied expatriates' children did not have to adjust to a new living environment. Accompanying children,

however, had to adapt to living and studying in a new environment, which created concerns for the accompanied expatriates. Next, un-accompanying spouses reported concerns and considerations pertaining to themselves, to the expatriates and to the whole family. Since so far, no published research has focused on concerns and considerations in international assignments of long-term expatriates' un-accompanying spouses, the findings here bring new knowledge to the field. First of all, un-accompanying spouses expressed concerns about *emotional challenges* for them as well as having to take care of the household by themselves (*household management*). These are strongly linked to what expatriates worried about in relation to non-accompanying spouses, which suggests that expatriates usually understand their spouses quite well. Furthermore, un-accompanying spouses were concerned about the expatriates, specifically *expatriates' self-care*, *expatriates' physical health* and *expatriates' mental health and emotions*. Once again, these concerns also matched with expatriates' concerns about themselves. Finally, with regard to the whole family, the un-accompanying spouses' concerns related to not knowing what was going on with the expatriates in the host country (*unknowingness*) and *family relationship*. Similarly, these were the concerns of the expatriates which related to the whole family.

As discussed, there was a strong alignment between concerns and considerations of the un-accompanying spouses and the unaccompanied expatriates. The only point that was not similar lay in the spouses' concerns related to the expatriates and the expatriates' concerns related to their spouses. Specifically, both the spouses and the expatriates were worried about each other's physical health but not themselves. This point also shows great sympathy between the two sides. Therefore, in summary, it could be interpreted that in general, these split families' cohesion was quite strong, which is needed to maintain the family during split international assignments. It is not limited to long-term assignments, short-term assignments also require such a cohesion within families (Taylor and Simmonds 2009). Furthermore, the fact that most of the considerations and concerns of expatriates were centered on their family and vice versa proves that families cannot be disregarded when studying expatriation. Hence, this study supports the arguments of family systems theory which suggests that members of a family system are interrelated and cannot be studied independently (Fingerman and Bermann 2000, Rosenbusch and Cseh 2012). Specifically, the current study shows that expatriates and their spouses have mutual understandings and are connected in different aspects (concerns and considerations), indicating their family bonding. Connectedness and family bonding are dimensions used to diagnose the cohesion of family systems (Olson 2000). It is also seen

through the concerns and considerations that expatriates and spouses who are more connected in these aspects have a higher level of cohesion and connection than the couples whose do not match.

### **6.1.3 Adjustable vs. enduring challenges**

While the answers to the previous research questions shed light on expatriates and their spouses' thoughts (motivations to undertake international assignments and concerns and considerations before going on expatriation), the next section uncovers actual experiences of expatriates and their families in relation to the challenges of adaptation and adjustment. The major finding is that expatriates and families in an accompanying situation could adjust and overcome challenges over time, but challenges for expatriates and families in the split situation usually remained.

In the expatriate management literature, there has been abundant interest in examining challenges faced by expatriates on international assignments. However, most previous studies focused on accompanied expatriates and short-term global assignees such as frequent flyers, and international business travelers (Fischlmayr and Kollinger 2010, Mayerhofer et al. 2004, Tung 1998, Welch et al. 2007). This study adds evidence to the literature and supplements it by exploring the challenges for traditional expatriates both in accompanying and split situations. The knowledge about the latter situation is scarce in previous literature. As found in previous research, the accompanied expatriates had challenges in both the work domain and the life domain. In the work domain, the accompanied expatriates' challenges were almost identical to those of the unaccompanied expatriates in relation to host nationals except for challenges from *work requirements* which only applied to the accompanied expatriates but not to those who were unaccompanied. These challenges are similar to work role stressors recorded in previous literature (Fischlmayr and Kollinger 2010, Kraimer 2004). However, the unaccompanied expatriates did not report that they encountered these challenges. The difference between the two groups of expatriates could be explained by spillover effects between the work and life domains (Byron 2005). Expatriates have to divide their time and effort between the two domains. According to Greenhaus and Beutell (1985), there are three types of work-family conflict, namely time-based conflict (conflict due to time constraints limiting role involvement), strain-based conflict (strains because of different roles) and behavior-based conflict (conflict due to incompatible behavior brought from one domain to another). Since unaccompanied expatriates could devote most of their time to work, they

were not faced with time-based conflict. They did not live with the family, and therefore did not have to take care of it daily. Therefore, the unaccompanied expatriates encountered little strain-based or behavior-based conflict. As a result, the unaccompanied expatriates were not confronted with challenges because of work requirements.

During international assignments, all the expatriates faced challenges in the personal or private life domain, but these differed between accompanied expatriates and unaccompanied expatriates. The accompanied expatriates had two major challenges in the life domain related to *family members' adjustment* and challenges in dealing with *domestic issues*. The relationship between family members' adjustment and expatriate adjustment has been found to be positive in previous studies (Froese 2012, Sarkiunaite and Rocke 2015, Takeuchi et al. 2007). This study's findings explain at a deeper level the mechanism by which family members' adjustment influences expatriate adjustment by showing that the expatriates encountered challenges when their family members struggled to adjust with international assignments, hence they struggled to adjust as well. Family systems theory can be employed here to explain the findings because the theory argues that there are interactions and influence among a family system's members (Konopaske et al. 2009, Rosenbusch and Cseh 2012, Von Bertalanffy 1968). Furthermore, managing problems arising in the family is also a well-documented challenge for expatriates (Shaffer et al. 2012). Therefore, the study's findings in relation to challenges for accompanied expatriates are in line with the studies of Froese (2012), Sarkiunaite and Rocke (2015) and Takeuchi et al. (2007), but contrast to Malek et al. (2015) and Furusawa and Brewster (2016) who suggested no significant relationship between adjustment of spouses and expatriates.

The unaccompanied expatriates were confronted with a lot of challenges during their international assignments. Challenges identified previously for expatriates who do not bring their family with them have largely been based on short-term global assignee samples (Espino et al. 2002, Mayerhofer et al. 2004, Starr and Currie 2009). First, and consistent with findings related to short-term global assignees, unaccompanied expatriates could have *emotional challenges* (Mayerhofer et al. 2004). However, in the current study, due to longer durations, emotional challenges for unaccompanied expatriates are assumed to be more enduring. Although Mayerhofer et al. (2004) probed into difficulties that assignees without families faced, they did not specifically outline what exactly these assignees encountered. Therefore, this study's findings address a significant gap in the literature by delving deeper into describing specific emotional challenges for unaccompanied expatriates including a)

*loneliness*, b) *missing family and desiring family's physical presence*, and c) feeling constrained and worried about family (*guilt-ridden freedom*). These specific challenges for unaccompanied expatriates have not been explored thoroughly in the IHRM literature and merit further attention.

The next life domain challenge for unaccompanied expatriates was maintaining family cohesion and taking care of family (*family cohesion and care*). This was a critical challenge for the unaccompanied expatriates. The findings here lend support to the notion that avoiding a broken family is a major issue for international assignees, but also extend extant literature that only has empirical evidence on short-term assignees (Mayerhofer et al. 2004). Particularly, to maintain family cohesion, the expatriates had to bear in mind that they had to resist temptation while living by themselves. This was difficult not only because of the loneliness but also the feeling of not having someone to share their feelings and problems with due to the difficulties in communicating with their families. Even though the expatriates were aware of the responsibilities of taking care of their families and keeping the connection with them, arranging work, time and the budget to visit home (*arranging home visits*) was another challenge. The findings here clarify the specific challenges for unaccompanied expatriates in avoiding a fractured family while working away from home. Furthermore, the challenges manifest how external factors such as changes in working environment (moving to work in another country) and living situation (living apart from families) could influence the functioning of a family system's members. Therefore, the empirical evidence here illustrates the family systems theory's argument that family systems can be confronted with external factors and have to adapt to them (Minuchin 1974). The way and the extent to which these family systems adapt to the external environment also shows the systems' flexibility (Olson 2000). For instance, the un-accompanying expatriate spouses had to manage all household responsibilities which had previously been shared with the expatriates. In the context of being split, most of the expatriates and spouses tried to communicate as often as possible to prevent any potential negative consequences of split assignments. These changes illustrate the adjustment of family systems.

The last challenge for the unaccompanied expatriates in the life domain category was taking care of themselves (*self-care*). This insight is new because long-term unaccompanied expatriates have been almost neglected in the literature and that existing on unaccompanied, short-term expatriates has mainly discussed the challenges for them in relation to their family (Espino et al. 2002, Mayerhofer et al. 2004, Starr and Currie 2009). It could be argued that

single expatriates might also have self-care challenges. However, as explained in the findings, the unaccompanied expatriates were usually taken care of by their spouses when together, which formed a routine. Therefore, once separated from their spouses, they faced the challenge of self-care. Meanwhile, it should be noted that the challenge to take care of themselves might make unaccompanied expatriates more prone to emotional challenges and the possibility of going astray, resulting in a possibly marriage breakup. Alternatively, the expatriates may prematurely end their assignments, leading to organizational costs. Therefore, this finding is a significant addition to the field.

In this section, the challenges that expatriate families encountered have been compared with their concerns and considerations before actually experiencing the international assignments. By doing so, the study has been able to identify any potential gaps between thoughts and experiences of expatriate families regarding the expatriation process.

Similar to other aspects, the findings show that the challenges for accompanying families are totally different from those for split families. This again reinforces the rationale for this study to have explored split expatriate families. Moreover, there have been complaints that the knowledge about the experiences of spouses from their own perspectives is minimal (Andreason 2008). The study's literature review echoes this comment and reveals that most previous studies on expatriate families' experiences, especially adjustment during international assignments, have focused on antecedents of and strategies for adjustment. Meanwhile, in listening to the participants' stories, the study suggests that it is important to understand the challenges faced by expatriate families to address the root causes and enable smooth adjustment. The discussion of these challenges is presented as following.

Challenges for the accompanying expatriate families consolidated into three areas: challenges related to the host country or neighborhood, expatriate children, and expatriate spouses. Challenges related to the host country or living area included those related to *local infrastructure and services, language, cultural and social norms, host nationals' attitudes and prejudice and social interaction*. These findings relate mostly to the research of DeLongis et al. (1988) who identified these as the daily hassles that expatriate families have to face when embarking on international assignments. According to many authors, the daily hassles are even more relevant to the stress of expatriate families than major events (DeLongis et al. 1988, Haslberger and Brewster 2008, Patterson 2002). This study identified that these challenges were common for almost all family members. The study revealed that particular challenges for expatriate children were making new friends and leaving old friends

behind (*friends*), *being in minority groups* and *education challenges*. Education is of such importance that many studies looking at expatriate children have focused on this topic (Cook 2013, Fry 2009, Wilkins 2013). In support of these studies, the findings from this work confirm that education is salient among challenges for children, as Haslberger and Brewster (2008) suspected. In addition, the findings about the other two challenges for children identified in this study (*friends* and *being in minority groups*) shed further light onto the literature concerning the difficulties expatriate children encounter when following their parents on international assignments.

The challenges for accompanying expatriate spouses were *finding a new comfort zone*, *homesickness* and *being jobless*. The first challenge – finding a new comfort zone is similar to the concept of personal interaction and cultural adjustment and adaptation that has been studied extensively (Black 1990, Black and Gregersen 1991, Chen and Shaffer 2018). This finding therefore aligns with previous studies by identifying that adjusting to and feeling comfortable about life in the host country is a challenge for expatriate spouses (Black 1990, Cole 2011, Chen and Shaffer 2018). In support of previous studies which have suggested that for expatriate spouses the biggest challenge during international assignments is being cut off from their friends and family (Adler 1986, Andreason 2008), the current study revealed that homesickness was a challenge for the spouses. Lastly, being jobless was also a major challenge for the expatriate spouses who had changed their employment status. This challenge is well recorded in the literature (Handler and Lane 1997, Riusala and Suutari 2000, Shaffer and Harrison 2001).

Unlike accompanying families, the challenges for split families were not thematized according to the stakeholders involved but were organized into emotional challenges and general life challenges. The emotional challenges reported included *missing the expatriates*, *difficulties in communication with expatriates* and *unstable family life*. Since limited studies have focused on global assignees that leave their family behind, and they mainly look at short-term assignees, the emotional challenges, particularly missing the expatriates, have not been portrayed clearly in previous studies. Therefore, the findings here relate mostly with the literature on split families in the domestic context, such as military soldiers (Andres and Moelker 2011, Barker and Berry 2009) and the studies of Mutter (2017) which explored a specialized population (sailors' spouses). The finding confirms that missing the expatriates is unavoidable for the un-accompanying spouses and children of long-term expatriates. In addition to the challenge of missing each other, the current study details the two other

emotional challenges (communication difficulties and unstable family life). The three emotional challenges here might sound similar, but in fact they are distinct. They might be interrelated to the extent that one challenge could be escalated because of the other challenge, but they could also appear independently as reported by this study's informants. Therefore, by identifying two emotional challenges specifically for split expatriate families, namely difficulties in communication with expatriates and unstable family life because of the expatriates' regular absence, this study adds new insights to the conversation about split expatriate families' experiences during international assignments.

In addition to emotional challenges, split families were confronted with general life challenges composed of dealing with *general household, taking care and educating children and taking sole responsibility*. It is no surprise that un-accompanying spouses have the challenge of dealing with the general household because they have to undertake the responsibilities that are usually taken by the expatriates when they are at home (Espino et al. 2002, MacBeth et al. 2012, Mutter 2017, Mutter and Thorn 2019). While previous studies have mainly focused on military soldiers or short-term assignees, the findings herein also inform that the household challenge is applicable to long-term unaccompanied assignees and suggest that because expatriates are usually absent from home for longer periods, this challenge for spouses could be more stressful than for short-term assignees' spouses. Moreover, this challenge may be exacerbated by the challenge of sole responsibility with nobody to share the workload when necessary. It may leave the un-accompanying spouses with a feeling of helplessness.

While one partner is away, it is understandable that the un-accompanying spouse has to seek support from their extended network such as parents and friends (Mutter 2017, Mutter and Thorn 2019). Therefore, the challenge of having nobody to share the household duties with or having no practical support is consistent with previous research on global assignees and the split situation (Mayerhofer et al. 2004, Mutter 2017, Mutter and Thorn 2019). Where this study provides an additional insight to supplement the literature is by identifying the challenge of taking care of the children and being responsible for their education for the un-accompanying spouses. This challenge was strongly emphasized by both the un-accompanying spouses and expatriates. In many cases, the children tended to listen and obey the expatriates more than the spouses. As such, while the expatriates were away, the spouses had a difficult time disciplining and managing the children. Expatriates and spouses who plan to engage in split international assignments should be aware of this challenge.

In comparing the challenges that the expatriate families experienced with their concerns and considerations before going on the assignments, it could be seen that both accompanying and un-accompanying families had similar assumptions about their expatriate lives. However, as expected, while the concerns and considerations of expatriate families did in fact convert into their actual challenges, the challenges experienced were more extensive than the expressed concerns and considerations. For instance, with the accompanying expatriate families, while the spouses were worried about being jobless, they had not considered there would be challenges of homesickness or finding a new comfort zone for themselves. Similarly, the un-accompanying spouses were not able to predict that they would be confronted with challenges in taking care and educating their children or with communication difficulties with the expatriates. This is understandable because there are always potential gaps between expectations and reality (Stroh et al. 1998). The gaps between the expatriate families' concerns and the actual challenges signify a need for both organizations and expatriate families to be fully aware of all potential challenges to ensure a smooth expatriation process.

#### **6.1.4 Crossover and spillover effects**

The next major findings outline the expatriates' perspectives on how family influences their work performance and how organizational support for expatriates' families influences their work attitude and engagement. The ways in which the accompanied and unaccompanied expatriates perceived these relationships also showed both similarities and differences. However, in general, there were crossover effects between the expatriates and their families and spillover effects between the work and life domains. Firstly, while the accompanied expatriates confirmed the influence of family on their work performance, the views of the unaccompanied expatriates were varied. There has been mixed evidence in the literature with regards to the family's influence on expatriates' work performance, but this mainly refers to accompanied expatriates. The fact that the accompanied sample of this study found both positive and negative influences of their family on their work performance during international assignments aligns with the studies of Bader et al. (2015), Lê et al. (2010), Malek et al. (2015), Selmer et al. (2011) and Trompeter et al. (2016) but contrasts with Furusawa and Brewster (2016) and Shen and Jiang (2015) both of which suggested no relationship between the family and work performance. These findings therefore add to the debate within the work-family interface in the literature on international assignments.

Second, while there has been growing interest in the literature in non-traditional and unaccompanied expatriates, to the best of the author's knowledge, there have been scarce findings in relation to the influence of family on these expatriates' work performance. An exception is the study of Mayerhofer and colleagues (2004) which only assumed an adverse effect of family on short-term assignees' work performance. Indeed, the current study provides evidence for the influence of family on unaccompanied expatriates' work performance. The findings are mixed. Some respondents believed their families, or the absence of their families did not influence their work performance. The explanations for this are two-fold. First, the cohesion between expatriates and their spouse could be so strong that even when they do not live together, they still feel connected. According to family systems theory and the Circumplex Model (Olson 2000), these families' cohesion could be at the *enmeshed* level. Meanwhile, their families could be quite flexible and adaptable. Therefore, each member is still quite independent. Second, some expatriates attributed this fact to their tactics of applying a boundary to differentiate between work and family. This boundary management style is called *separator* which describes the technique a person uses to clearly segment work and family roles (Kossek and Lautsch 2012). Nevertheless, these expatriates also mentioned that if their family were with them, their work performance would improve. Hence, it could be interpreted that they did not want organizations to think that they were not professional, or that their family had a negative effect on their work.

Many other unaccompanied expatriates thought their families, or their families' absence, had both negative and positive influences on their work performance. The most visible positive effect was that expatriates had more time for work. However, some suffered mental issues while living away from their families. These findings strongly support and extend previous literature on short-term assignees (Mayerhofer et al. 2004, Westman and Etzion 2002, Westman et al. 2008). The evidence of the family's influence on expatriates' work performance also supports the argument of family systems theory that family members influence each other through direct or indirect interactions (Minuchin 1974). Moreover, due to distance and a lack of communication, the facilitating dimension in family systems, the unaccompanied expatriates encountered various challenges (Olson 2000). It could be considered that with a high level of separateness among family members during split assignments, expatriates fall into an unbalanced status (Olson 2000). In order to recover a balanced status, family members should remain connected through frequent communication

and mutual encouragement. By doing so, family members could retain attachment and commitment to each other, thereby improving the family balance (Olson 2000).

In answering the question whether organizational support for family during international assignments influenced expatriates' work attitude and engagement, accompanied and unaccompanied expatriates' responses were not completely similar. Some accompanied expatriates said organizational support might influence their work attitude and engagement and others said it might not. Whereas, unaccompanied expatriates consistently affirmed that organizational support influenced these factors. All expatriates who said organizational support for their families influenced their work attitude and engagement agreed that their families were very important to them and no matter where they were, they had to take care of their families. Therefore, if organizations cared about their families, the expatriates would be less worried and feel that they should show their gratitude to their organizations. These findings echo previous studies (Aladwan et al. 2015, Cole and Nesbeth 2014, Kupka et al. 2008) which suggested that organizational support for expatriates' families could be related to expatriates' psychological contracts. Moreover, most expatriates acknowledged that organizational support for their families during international assignments could influence their work attitude and engagement. Aligned with McNulty's study (2012), this finding confirms organizational support as one of the external factors that influences the functioning of family systems (both accompanying and split families) during international assignments. Contrastingly, one accompanied expatriate said his work attitude and engagement was not influenced by organizational support for his family during the assignments. This could be explained by his situation (not having accompanied children) or his separator boundary management style of his work and family domains (Kossek and Lautsch 2012). Further investigation, especially with quantitative studies into the relationship between situation or boundary management style with work attitude and engagement would help clarify these conflicting findings.

### **6.1.5 Tested emotional bonds**

Although expatriates and spouses were asked about the general influence of expatriation on their families, they all discussed its particular influence on their families' emotional bonding. Therefore, instead of presenting expatriation's influence in general, this section discusses that specific influence on expatriate families' emotional bonding. Overall, expatriation tests the emotional bonding of all expatriate families. The types of influence that expatriation exerts

on both accompanying and split families are similar: positive, neutral and negative. However, as the findings outlined in Chapter 5 reveal (Section 5.4), the specific mechanisms and circumstances of each influence is not the same in the two family situations. On the one hand with regards to the accompanying expatriate families, the study identified negative influences that are in line with the previous literature. Previous literature has largely inclined to negative effects of international assignments on the family's bonding (Fischlmayr and Kollinger 2010, Mäkelä and Suutari 2011, Schütter and Boerner 2013). However, this study's participants predominantly reported positive influences. Therefore, echoing Lê et al.'s (2010) findings, this study adds evidence of expatriation's positive influences on accompanying expatriate families' emotional bonding to the debate on work-family interface in international assignments.

On the other hand, the study's findings acknowledge that negative influences and testing effects of international assignments were more dominant than positive or neutral effects in the cases of split families. While studies on families of long-term expatriates in split situations are scarce, studies on the influences of expatriation on these families are even scarcer. The only exception is Mutter's study (2017) which only discussed the impact of expatriation on expatriate children's education. Hence, the current study could only relate to the work of Mayerhofer et al. (2004) which suggested that fractured family bonds could be the long-term cost for short-term global assignees. Nevertheless, the findings here suggest that because traditional expatriates are usually away for extended periods, the negative impact could be more serious than in the case of short-term assignees who go home more regularly. Meanwhile, the positive effect of expatriation on split families' bonding should not be denied, although it is less common. Additionally, it is noteworthy that expatriation may not influence some families at all, while it may test the bonding of others. These findings again support family systems theory. The theory argues that each family system could react to changes in its external environment differently (Olson 2000). Furthermore, as the emotional bonding of some families is tested, the family cohesion could change from balanced (separated and connected) to unbalanced (disengaged and enmeshed) levels (Olson 2000). For example, expatriates could feel disconnected to and independent of their spouses and children when living alone in the host country due to lack of interaction. At this time, their family's emotional bonding could fall into a disengaged status. However, once they visit their family, they realize the significance of their spouse and their children. The expatriates and their spouse could discuss ways to reconnect again by keeping daily communication and

showing care for each other. As they change, their family's emotional bonding could be improved. The finding that international assignments could test the emotional bonding of expatriate families proves that expatriation's influence on expatriate families' emotional bonding is not static as either positive or negative during international assignments, as has been indicated in previous literature (Mayerhofer et al. 2004). This influence could change during the expatriation process. Therefore, the finding here adds a new insight to the literature.

As indicated in the findings, the mechanisms in which expatriation influences expatriate families depend on various factors, including the internal dynamic of each family. In other words, families' cohesion and flexibility dimensions in family systems theory could be employed to explain these findings. Another point suggested by family systems theory is that a family system absorbs the environment's effects and in order to remain its equilibrium, the system has to adapt to its environment (Broderick 1993, Fingerman and Bermann 2000, Rosenbusch 2010). In the context of international assignments, there could be a lot of changes in external factors that require internal factors to adapt. In the cases of accompanying expatriate families, there are changes in the living environment when they move from one country to another, and in the working environment of the expatriates. These are among the major changes in one's life (Wilkinson and Singh 2010). The findings suggest that to remain adaptive, internal factors of family systems' do not necessarily have to change. Specifically, almost all accompanying families confirmed that family rules, distribution of roles and leadership remained similar. Although they acknowledged that there could be an increase in communication among family members, family flexibility as well as family cohesion. In other words, members of the family systems had to communicate more with each other and enhance family cohesion and flexibility in order to overcome the challenges of changing working and living environments together. As a result of this process of adapting, participants appreciated that their psychosocial growth could be enhanced, as proposed by Minuchin (1974). Such psychosocial growth will be discussed in the next paragraphs.

The findings also suggest that split expatriate families might go through a different adaptive process. There were changes in the living and working environment of one side (expatriates) while the living and working environment of the other side (expatriate spouses) usually stayed the same. As a result, there were changes in the distribution of roles, family members' attitudes and behaviors (Broderick 1993). For example, the spouses with children had to take on more responsibilities to take care of the household. Additionally, the communication

among family members was limited despite the availability of virtual media, which put additional burdens on the family relationships. Both sides also had to be stronger to overcome general life and mental challenges. Consequently, they reported that they became relatively more resilient, which could be recorded as psychosocial growth (Minuchin 1974). Furthermore, it was seen in these families that family cohesion and family relationships could be threatened. In order to adapt and remain connected, their family rules, especially the relationship rules between the two partners, had to be reinforced. In addition, they had to remind themselves of keeping in touch with each other. Where the families were not able to communicate frequently, there were drift effects that could be seen. Members of split families also had to be more flexible. For example, the spouses who had to stay behind to take care of the children needed to be willing to do things that they would not usually do when the expatriates were at home, such as driving, fixing facilities, etc. As a result of the adapting process, changes could be observed in the dimensions of these family systems (family cohesion and family flexibility), reflecting what is called transformation of the family systems (Minuchin 1974, Olson 2000).

When investigating each couple in particular, it was seen that those whose family dimensions were at balanced levels (flexibly separated, flexibly connected, structurally separated, structurally connected) saw fewer challenges and went through international assignments more smoothly in comparison with the ones having unbalanced or mid-range levels (See Figure 2.2). In summary, family systems theory is a useful theoretical lens in explaining the functioning of family systems in both the accompanying and split situations in this study. The study also clarified that the dynamics and adaptive process of families in two situations could be different, and split families in general have to go through more changes in their systems to be sustained through international assignments.

#### **6.1.6 Lack of care for the split situation**

The issues discussed previously include the HR professionals' understandings and perceptions of expatriate families during international assignments, the challenges for expatriate families and the family's influence on expatriates during international assignments. The way organizations treat expatriate families could be explained by their views and understandings, and changes in these understandings could lead to changes in organizational policies and practices (Ajzen 1985, Greenwald and Banaji 1995). The salient finding is that

there is a significant lack of care from HR professionals and organizations for expatriate families in the split situation.

The study first revealed how HR professionals generally thought about the responsibility to take care of expatriate families during international assignments. As seen in the findings from Chapter 5, the majority of HR professionals in this study thought that families were the expatriates' responsibility. This is in contrast with previous studies which suggested they treat expatriate families as a stakeholder of organizations (Kupka et al. 2011, Lämsä et al. 2017). Nevertheless, a number of HR professionals considered expatriate families to be important, and that organizations should be responsible for them. This view is in line with recommendations made in previous studies (Kupka et al. 2011, Lämsä et al. 2017). The findings here, while aligning with previous literature, go beyond to delve deeper into the perceptions of HR professionals, and could set the background for future studies to further investigate the root factors that influence organizational policies and practices for expatriate families during international assignments.

As uncovered in Chapter 5, generally speaking, HR professionals in the current study had a good overview of the challenges that expatriate families faced in both accompanying and split situations. Furthermore, while they acknowledged that there existed differences in the challenges confronted by each family, their degrees of understanding about each situation were not equal. Specifically, with regards to accompanying expatriate families, the details and examples given by the HR professionals were quite close to those by the families, and only a couple of challenges mentioned by the families were not discussed by the HR professionals. However, their understandings about split expatriate families were quite superficial both in terms of types of challenges faced and the specifics of each challenge.

There could be several explanations for the unequal understanding of organizations. First, there were not as many cases of split expatriate families as accompanying families in the host country, which reflects the reality of the expatriate population (Brookfield Global Relocation Services 2015, Cartus 2014). Therefore, the HR professionals did not have as much experience with split families as with accompanying ones. Second, the lack of understandings about split expatriate families who did not relocate could be a reflection of the 'out of sight, out of mind' viewpoint (Mayerhofer et al. 2004). Organizations may not pay attention to these families as they do not relocate to the host country. This view is alarming since unaccompanied expatriates still have huge challenges related to the family, and family

concerns could adversely influence their performance and success (Mayerhofer et al. 2004, Shaffer et al. 2012, Starr and Currie 2009). The question as to whether organizations understand families' influence on expatriates in international assignments or not is discussed next.

The HR professionals shared their understandings of family influence on expatriates in international assignments. Regardless of accompanying or split situations, they indicated that families could influence the expatriates' decisions to undertake global assignments, their adjustment, success and/or failure. This is completely in line with previous literature (Avril and Magnini 2007, Froese 2012, Takeuchi et al. 2007). Furthermore, specific to expatriates' perceived work performance, the HR professionals understood that families could exert both positive and negative influences. This is again consistent with the perceptions of the expatriate sample in this study.

The organizational policies and practices relating to expatriate families include recruitment and selection, training and preparation, as well as those related to the period of expatriation. The findings herein show some differences among organizations, which was expected. Despite calls to consider expatriate families during the recruitment and selection processes (Lämsä et al. 2017, Mendenhall et al. 1987), empirical findings show that the family dimension has mostly been given little weight (Franke and Nicholson 2002, Goby et al. 2002, Lämsä et al. 2017, Shen and Edwards 2004, Stone 1991). One exception is Tung's study (1981) which showed that the majority of HR professionals interviewed both the expatriates and spouses for management positions. Adding to the debate on family inclusion in expatriates' recruitment and selection, this study provided examples of differences among organizations' practices, particularly in relation to the following aspects: considerations of expatriate families in the recruitment and selection processes in general, preference of particular family status of potential candidates in the selection process, and questions about the families of potential candidates during the selection process. Organizations' answers to these questions were inconsistent. The reasons given for their answers related to expatriate selection criteria (which could exclusively consider expatriates or their family), and the financial availability or the budget of the organizations for the positions. It is also noteworthy that all interviewed HR professionals reported that their organizations did not directly involve expatriates' families during these processes but just asked the expatriates anything they wanted to know about the family. This is again consistent with the criticism of the lack of family considerations in expatriation (Kupka and Cathro 2007, Shen and Darby 2006, Zainol

et al. 2013) and reinforces the recommendation by Kupka et al. (2011) for organizations to pay attention to employees' families in expatriation.

All HR participants consistently reported that they did not specify family status of potential applicants in their recruitment notices. This was expected and understandable, as explained by one participant that firms neither wanted to discriminate or miss any suitable candidates. Nevertheless, in some cases where organizations were restricted in terms of their budget, they might prefer single candidates to married ones or only offer a single's package. On another note, all the HR professionals confirmed that they asked candidates about their intentions to bring their families with them. Most of them reported that they asked with the purpose of arranging logistics for the assignments. From the findings, it can be seen that organizations do not really consider expatriates' families as their stakeholders during expatriation as suggested by Lämsä and colleagues (2017), but rather try to minimize any negative impact from the families on the expatriates.

Once expatriates are chosen for international assignments, they need to have training and preparation before embarking on their journeys. Therefore, the HR professionals were asked if these activities were provided for accompanying expatriate families and split expatriate families. It should be noted that all participants had previous experience in managing expatriates in both situations, illustrated in Figure 5.5.

The training and preparation activities for accompanying expatriate families included *cultural training*, *language training* and *pre-assignment visits*. These forms of training are quite common and consistent with what have been found in other studies (Kupka et al. 2008, Tung 1982, Zainol et al. 2013). Nevertheless, it should be noted that none of this training was officially provided to expatriate family members. Organizations provided such training to expatriates and their families attended unofficially, which means this training was not specified as policies for the families. The ways in which training was executed was also different among the organizations. Specifically, training could be structured or unstructured, delivered by experts or former expatriates in home or host locations. Furthermore, only a small number of organizations paid for expatriate spouses to go on pre-assignment visits. Such visits could be beneficial to the preparation and adjustment of expatriate families as indicated by this study's participants. By experiencing the host environment, they would know what to expect, what to prepare and feel less concerned about the assignment. These findings strongly align with previous literature in terms of how these activities were unorganized and lacked consideration of expatriate families (Kupka et al. 2008, Mendenhall

et al. 1987, Shen and Darby 2006, Zainol et al. 2013). Therefore, despite academic emphasis on including expatriate families in pre-departure training and preparation (Avril and Magnini 2007, Black and Gregersen 1991, Malek et al. 2015, Mutter and Thorn 2019), this study has demonstrated that organizations have yet to employ such initiatives, confirming the doubt of Dowling et al. (2008). The reason for such a gap between academic recommendations and industry practices could be the pressure to cut expatriation costs for organizations in recent years (Cartus 2018). It could also be underpinned by the HR professionals' perception that it is not the organization's responsibility to take care of expatriate families.

Regarding split families, it is a concern that split family members did *not receive any preparation or training activities from organizations*. This finding, however, is not so surprising because similar findings have been found in previous research on short-term assignees (Mayerhofer et al. 2004). The organizations' viewpoint was that since these families did not relocate, things remained mostly similar, and there was no need to provide training or preparation to them. Even when they wanted to do so, they were unclear about what types of activity they should give split expatriate family members. This suggests a gap between the issues faced by expatriate families and functions of international human resource management as previously identified in the literature (Mayerhofer et al. 2004, Schuler et al. 2002).

The following section addresses policies and practices for expatriate families during international assignments. In general, the findings are quite consistent with previous literature, and almost no new practices were identified. Specifically, six major types of support could be provided to accompanying expatriate families. First, it was identified that *financial support* and *practical support* were the most common types of support they received. This is not surprising and consistent with academic literature as well as industry reports (Cartus and Primacy 2010, McNulty 2012, ORC Worldwide 2008, Wilkinson and Singh 2010). However, the literature has widely acknowledged the role of cultural integration to the adjustment of expatriate families in the host country (Black and Gregersen 1991, De Cieri et al. 1991, Mendenhall et al. 1987). Therefore, cultural/life integration support is useful and has been found being provided by organizations in previous studies. The finding about *cultural/life integration support* for expatriate families in this study is in line with the literature (McNulty 2012, Wilkinson and Singh 2010). Each specific activity found in this type of support such as language training, cultural coach, etc. (Section 5.5.2.3) was also similar to those mentioned in other studies.

*Social networking support* is also considered to be helpful for expatriate families. There are different social groups that expatriate families could relate to either in the form of practical or psychological support (Black and Gregersen 1991, De Cieri et al. 1991, Harvey 1995, Kupka and Cathro 2007). Examples of these groups are expatriate family groups internal to the organization, external expatriate communities, groups of similar nationalities, religious groups, etc. A number of organizations in this study recognized such groups and helped the expatriate families connect with them. This finding therefore confirms and strengthens previous studies (Black and Gregersen 1991, De Cieri et al. 1991, Kupka and Cathro 2007, Wilkinson and Singh 2010). Furthermore, a new practice that was found in the current study is the utilization of online platforms in addition to traditional social networking channels. In the age of the virtual social network, this was expected and shows that organizations are quite active in engaging different tools to manage and support their international personnel.

Another type of support is *career support*. In the IHRM literature, organizational career support for expatriate spouses has been of interest to many scholars (Kupka and Cathro 2007, McNulty 2012, Punnett 1997, Wilkinson and Singh 2010). It is undeniable that career support is meaningful to expatriate spouses accompanying their husband/wife on international assignments, especially in the case of dual-career couples (Harvey 1997, Harvey et al. 1999, Ravasi et al. 2013). Meanwhile, it was shown in the current study that being jobless was a salient challenge for the expatriate spouses who had a career before going on international assignments. However, despite recommendations from academic literature, empirical evidence shows a lack of this type of support for expatriate spouses (Kupka and Cathro 2007, McNulty 2012, Riusala and Suutari 2000), which is consistent with the findings in this study. Although career support existed in a few cases, it was not widely practiced by all organizations. Deeper investigation into the reasons why organizational career support for spouses is limited from the perspective of HR professionals revealed new findings. There were two reasons given. First, the HR professionals thought that it was not the organizations' responsibility. Second, they expected that expatriate couples should be mature enough to take care of their own business. Furthermore, the salary packages for expatriates were usually quite generous, which meant expatriate spouses might not need a job in the host country. Besides, providing career support to expatriate spouses would require financial and personnel resources which were limited due to resource constraint and the pressure to cut costs. Although the HR professionals acknowledged the challenge of being jobless for spouses, the aforementioned reasons could underpin why many organizations did not provide career

support to them. While previous research has consistently identified a lack of career support for expatriate spouses, limited attempts have been made to explain why it is the case. Therefore, once again, this study not only adds evidence to support previous studies but also extends the IHRM literature by suggesting the reasons why there is a lack of organizational support for expatriate spouses.

The last type of support for accompanying expatriate families found in the current study is *home-leave trips*. This support is quite a traditional one offered by organizations (Wilkinson and Singh 2010). Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that only a few organizations provided this to accompanying expatriate families. Some organizations offered a benefit package to expatriates which they assumed would cover such trips. They were not interested in the details of how expatriate families used their money because it would create extra work for them.

While accompanying expatriate families could receive various types of support, support for split expatriate families was quite limited. In addition, except for *financial benefits for split expatriate family members* which was directed specifically towards the family members, *budget for home visit trips* and *time for home visit trips* were actually given to the expatriates. However, since these types of support were related to the family life of the expatriates, they were considered policies for split expatriate families. Although previous literature has argued that organizational support for families is needed even in the cases of unaccompanied expatriates and there are interrelations between organizational support for families, expatriates' work-family conflicts and expatriates' work outcomes, the evidence has mainly been in relation to short-term international assignees (Grant-Vallone and Ensher 2001, Mayerhofer et al. 2004, Starr and Currie 2009). Furthermore, details about the actual support given by organizations remain vague. The lack of support for expatriate families who are left behind has been highlighted strongly by Mayerhofer et al. (2004). Therefore, while this study's findings are mainly consistent with the lack of organizational support for expatriate families in split situations (Mayerhofer et al. 2004, Mutter and Thorn 2019), they offer deeper insights to the literature by identifying some examples of such support. It is suspected that organizations have the 'out of sight, out of mind' viewpoint. This view means that as they think they do not disrupt the life of split expatriate families, they do not have to be responsible for them.

There could be several explanations for the uneven understanding of organizations. First, there were not as many cases of split expatriate families as accompanying families in the host

country, which reflects the reality in the expatriate population (Brookfield Global Relocation Services 2015, Cartus 2014). Therefore, the HR professionals did not have as many experiences with split families as with accompanying ones. Second, the lack of understanding of split expatriate families could be a reflection of the ‘out of sight, out of mind’ viewpoint as suggested in the literature (Mayerhofer et al. 2004). Organizations may not pay attention to these families, as they believe they do not remove these families from their living environment. This view is alarming since unaccompanied expatriates still have huge challenges related to their families, which could then adversely influence their performance and success (Mayerhofer et al. 2004, Shaffer et al. 2012, Starr and Currie 2009).

Most of the families in both situations also emphasized that they expected better and more sincere care from the organizations. In this study, the mismatch between the actual support provided to the expatriate families by organizations and the needs of these families indicate the organizations’ lack of consideration for families in the expatriation process. According to Dickmann and colleagues (2008), organizations tend to overestimate the impact of prior experience, financial and family considerations to the success of expatriates’ assignments. Contrastingly, there was not such an overestimation of family considerations seen in this study. In reality, the organizations seemed to understand the challenges faced by the expatriates and their families as well as the influence of the families on the expatriates. Such understanding and the responsibility they felt towards expatriate families influenced their support policies towards families in international assignments. If the lack of organizational support is the result of inadequate organizational understanding of challenges faced by expatriate families, organizations should study more and pay more attention to these families. Nevertheless, in most cases where there was a lack of support for expatriates and their families, there was a commonly shared view by the HR professionals that expatriate families’ issues are not the organizations’ responsibility or that the organizations already give money/financial support to expatriate families. Therefore it is important to identify the root causes underpinning the lack of organizational support to address that issue.

## **6.2 Theoretical and methodological contributions**

The present study investigated a neglected but common group of expatriate families, which is split families. It also compared and contrasted the insights from expatriates and their families

living in both the accompanying and split situations. Therefore, the study findings make a number of significant theoretical and methodological contributions to the literature.

First, the study offers important contributions to family systems theory. The study not only uses theory to explain the findings but also contributes to the body of the theory literature. While previous studies on expatriate management have adopted the theory (Brett and Stroh 1995, Caligiuri et al. 1998, Konopaske et al. 2009, McNulty 2012), it has not been used in studies on split expatriate families. The findings of this study about both accompanying and split situations support the major argument of family systems theory (Olson 2000), that balanced family systems function more effectively in the context of international assignments. Specifically, balanced family systems which have middle range levels of family cohesion and family flexibility tend to have joint decision-making processes in relation to expatriation, and overcome challenges more smoothly. The emotional bonding of these family systems is less likely to be influenced negatively by international assignments. Meanwhile, the families which suffer more in expatriation show unbalanced levels of family cohesion and family flexibility. These dimensions are either too low or too high. Furthermore, the investigation into the communication of expatriate family systems reflects communication as a facilitating dimension of these systems.

The findings also demonstrate that the communication dimension is significant to the functioning of expatriate families. International assignments highlight the significance of this dimension because international assignments entail many changes in the life and work domains as well as the external environment of expatriates and their families. In the context of these changes, positive communication skills are required from each member of the family system. Furthermore, the study elucidated that the adaptive process of family systems in two situations (accompanying and split) could differ from each other, detailing the application of family systems theory in IHRM literature.

The theory and all subsequent models have not been explicit about the functioning of family systems where systems' members live geographically distant. The current study has manifested how these family systems operate in international assignments. Specifically, although the split family systems' members were distant, the main dimensions, including cohesion and flexibility, could be diagnosed. Balanced levels of these dimensions are important to the sustainability of these family systems, while unbalanced levels could signal possibilities of breakdown in the family system or the cessation of the international

assignment. In addition, the communication dimension plays a major role in facilitating these families' cohesion and flexibility. When a family system's members live apart during international assignments, frequent and positive communication is critical to maintain such a system. This is a critical contribution to the theory, highlighting the appropriateness of family systems theory being applied to study expatriate families living in the split situation. Furthermore, the study has implications for family systems theory literature by highlighting the influence of geographical co-presence or separation of members in a family system on the system's dynamics. Specifically, as discussed in section 6.1.5, the study finds that in order to adapt to the changes in external factors in the environment, expatriates and families in the accompanying situation may not need to change their internal factors such as rules and role distribution. However, there is a high requirement for expatriates and families in the split situation to change in order to remain as an adaptive system. The study also suggests that the changes in family systems' dimensions including family cohesion, flexibility and communication are greater in the split situation than in the accompanying one. Therefore, the implication for family systems theory literature is that geographical co-presence or separation of a family system's members could affect the degree of the requirement to adapt the system's dimensions. However, this implication should be tested or verified in future research. Subsequent studies to apply this theory should consider this factor in investigating the functioning of family systems.

Second, the findings on the expatriates' motivations to undertake international assignments contribute to the literature on individual motivations to expatriate. Collings et al. (2009) and Shortland (2016) claimed that this literature is limited. Especially, insights into the unaccompanied expatriates' motives, which is a novice finding in IHRM literature, set a foundation for future investigation of this group. Moreover, for the accompanied expatriates in this study, what was unique was the interesting discovery that pursuing entrepreneurial opportunities was a motivation shared by several expatriates. These expatriates might be inherently entrepreneurial, however, the characteristics of the host country could also contribute to the formation of such a motive. This finding might also be applied to other host countries with emerging economies where there are numerous opportunities for development.

In addition, the qualitative capture of both groups' motivations in the same study is a key feature, which could facilitate and promote quantitative examination and comparison of their motivations in future research. The comparative finding that while accompanied expatriates were motivated by work, life and country factors, unaccompanied expatriates were only

motivated by work-related factors, is also a unique feature of this study. Additionally, while the unaccompanied expatriates were pushed to undertake international assignments because of requirements of their work, accompanied expatriates were not. This is a difference between two groups of expatriates that had not been discovered before. Since there are relationships between the motivations to undertake international assignments, adjustment and work performance of expatriates (Andreason 2003, Froese 2012), the adjustment and performance of expatriates in accompanying and split situation could differ. Hence, the finding here draws an implication for any theory that models predicting the adjustment and performance of expatriates should differentiate between accompanied and unaccompanied expatriates.

Furthermore, this study also takes a step further to supplement nascent work by its exploration of the motives to undertake global assignments from the perspective of expatriate spouses (Mutter and Thorn 2019). On the one hand, for accompanying families, while the majority of motivations from the spouses' perspective were matched with those of the expatriates, the most important and common motive for expatriate spouses to go on international assignments, togetherness (family being together), was not well recognized in the literature. On the other hand, for split expatriate families, reasons why they engaged in the split situations remain virtually unknown, especially for long-term traditional assignments. While industry reports have cited some reasons for engaging in the split situation (Brookfield Global Relocation Services 2014, 2016), the IHRM literature has remained blind to this topic. Henceforth, the findings regarding the reasons for the split situation which consolidated into three categories namely reasons related to spouse, children and extended family members may fill a major gap in the literature of IHRM. The findings also set a fundamental background for future studies.

Third, another area of new knowledge this study adds to the literature is the findings about the considerations and concerns of expatriates and their spouses before entering international assignments. They had numerous considerations and concerns that related to their experiences of international assignments. This topic has not been explored in the literature to date. Furthermore, the study revealed that although unaccompanied expatriates did not relocate with their family, they had intense concerns about their family, countering the common perception that unaccompanied expatriates are free from family issues (Shaffer et al. 2012). They were also concerned about themselves, which had not been assumed or found in previous studies. The new findings of this study can help explain previous studies' results

such as the challenges that each expatriate family member encounters or why they encounter such challenges. In addition, the findings herein could also add new variables or constructs to future research that investigates challenges and experiences of expatriates and their families.

Next, the findings on the challenges for expatriates during international assignments, especially with regard to unaccompanied expatriates, shed light on unexplored issues and specify the particular challenges expatriates could encounter. Therefore, the study significantly contributes to the literature on challenges for expatriates in global assignments. To be more specific, the challenges in the life domain of unaccompanied expatriates are new to the current knowledge of the field of expatriate management. Resisting the temptation of having affairs, arranging home visits, and self-care are enduring challenges for unaccompanied expatriates which have not been found before. The comparison between the two groups of expatriates also suggests that although accompanied expatriates might have more challenges in the work domain with the presence of their family in the host country, they encounter fewer challenges in the life domain. Meanwhile, although unaccompanied expatriates have fewer challenges in the work domain, they are confronted with many issues in their life domain which could ultimately exert an adverse effect on their work performance (Mayerhofer et al. 2004).

Indeed, another contribution of the present study is going beyond assumptions about the family's influence on unaccompanied expatriates' work performance to provide empirical evidence for such an influence. Unlike common assumptions that un-accompanying families might not affect expatriates' work performance (Kang et al. 2017, Shaffer et al. 2012), this study has shown the opposite. The unaccompanied expatriates shared that their work performance was influenced by their family although their family lived geographically distant. This finding is new and raises a need for future studies to add more dimensions related to the un-accompanying families if they are to investigate unaccompanied expatriates' work performance.

The next contribution of the study lies in the findings about the influence of organizational support for expatriate families on expatriates' work attitude and engagement. While previous studies have attempted to investigate the relationships between organizational support with expatriates' work outcomes or family members' adjustment (Bader et al. 2015, McNulty 2012), to the best of the author's knowledge, no effort has been made to explore the relationship between organizational support for family and expatriates' work outcomes,

particularly work attitude and engagement. Thus, what was found in this study, that organizational support for family influenced expatriates' work attitude and engagement, is unique in the IHRM literature. Further, the confirmation of such a relationship adds support to the argument that the family should be included in the expatriation process (Lämsä et al. 2017, Mutter and Thorn 2019), not only from a responsibility standpoint, but also from an instrumental viewpoint. The study has also provided a new theoretical variable to models that study expatriates' work attitude and engagement, namely organizational support for the expatriate family in the expatriation process.

Previous literature seems to be biased to some extent in that it over-emphasizes the negative influence of expatriation on expatriate families, especially accompanying families (Lazarova et al. 2010). The findings from this study about the positive influence of expatriation on expatriate families challenge previous literature and suggest future research to take a more objective view to investigate this topic. In addition, the findings also indicate that expatriation affects expatriate families' emotional bonding in different ways. It not only affects expatriate families' emotional bonding, positively or negatively, but also tests the bonding. Furthermore, the study has cast some light upon the expatriation's impact on the emotional bonding of split expatriate families, which has not been explored before.

The findings about specific support that split families receive during international assignments are significant additions to the literature. The study adds to the dearth of insights about this topic. Furthermore, it initiates the conversation about organizational support for split expatriate families and encourages future studies to explore the support for these families in different contexts, such as different types of organizations, for example corporations, non-government and government organizations, or different host countries. Also in extremely tough countries as described in Bader and Berg (2013), Bader et al. (2015) where many expatriates have to leave their families behind, there could be heightened tensions, and expatriates and their families could expect to receive more support. While there could be more situations where expatriate families have to commit to the split situation, the state of knowledge remains nascent (Hutchings and McNulty 2018), and future studies could shed further light on this topic.

Incorporating the voices of matched expatriate couples, especially split couples, is another important contribution of the current study. The difficulties of recruiting split couples for expatriate research have been well documented in the literature (Hutchings and McNulty

2018). That could be one of the reasons why research on expatriate families who are split during long-term international assignments has been scarce. By having both sides of expatriate families speak, this study has been able to identify the similarities and differences of the perspectives on the same aspects of international assignments, such as motivations, considerations, and challenges. Moreover, the study went a step further to include the perspective of HR professionals to see whether they understood the challenges faced by expatriate families, how these families influenced expatriates' work outcomes and how organizations treated these families. The triangulation of data collection from various sample sources is recommended and expected but not easy to achieve in the IHRM field (Gupta et al. 2012b, Shaffer et al. 2016). Therefore, including the voices of expatriates, their spouses and the organizations that have experience with employing expatriates all in the same study both increases the validity of the findings and contributes to the literature.

### **6.3 Implications for practice**

Further to theoretical contributions, this study offers multiple practical contributions for organizations and individuals. First, the insights about motivations to undertake international assignments of accompanied and unaccompanied expatriates could help employers understand how to attract potential candidates. Knowing that accompanied expatriates are driven to accept international assignments not only because of work-related factors but also life-related and country-related factors, employers could expand their understandings of each candidate's needs and expectations to better draw their interest to international assignments. For instance, during the recruitment and selection processes, organizations should highlight the conditions of the host country, and the benefits that the international assignment could bring to expatriate children's education and the development of family members. Organizational perspectives tend to over focus on work-related motivations and underestimate other dimensions (Shortland 2018b). Since unaccompanied expatriates are only driven by work-related factors and expect enhancement to their careers after finishing expatriation, organizations should ensure that these expatriates achieve the expected financial benefits and professional growth or promotion upon repatriation. Furthermore, since the family plays an important role in the expatriate's decision to undertake an international assignment (Fischlmayr and Kollinger 2010, Shortland 2016), the knowledge about motivations for expatriation from the perspectives of expatriate families could be helpful to

employers. They could encourage family members to enhance the expatriate's acceptance of international assignments.

Second, although there have been calls to pay attention to expatriate families' concerns (Cheng and Lin 2009, McDonald 1993, Punnett 1997, Punnett et al. 1992), organizations seem not to have responded thoroughly yet. Part of the reasons could be unclear insights about the specific concerns that expatriate families have. Therefore, by outlining the particular concerns during international assignments of expatriate families in both accompanying and split situations, the study can assist practitioners better understand and support expatriate families in each situation, both psychologically and practically. Furthermore, the differences found in the concerns and considerations between accompanying expatriate families and those of split families reinforce the suggestion to have different approaches to support each case. Likewise, having clearer knowledge about the challenges each family situation faces would enable organizations to provide more relevant support.

As previously indicated, the success of expatriation could depend on the expectations that expatriates and their families have towards the expatriation process. If their visions are close to reality, they are better prepared psychologically and could avoid potential shocks upon arrival. Therefore, organizations could take advantage of what expatriates and their spouses consider and what they are concerned about, to consult with and support them. For example, given that the host country environment creates concerns for expatriate families, organizations could provide detailed and clear information about the host country so that they are less worried. This was also recommended by many expatriate families. According to them, many organizations tended to underestimate this kind of information and leave the research up to the expatriate families. Additionally, the identification that expatriate families' concerns and considerations are close to the challenges they could encounter during international assignments highlights the need for organizations to pay attention to such concerns and considerations in order to avoid relevant challenges during expatriation.

Third, the study identified that the challenges that all expatriates encountered during international assignments fall into two types, namely work domain and life domain challenges. The work domain challenges for both accompanied and unaccompanied expatriates were quite similar except for the fact that accompanied expatriates faced more challenges from work requirements, possibly due to the time they needed to allocate to the

accompanying family's needs and requirements. This suggests that organizations could consider on-site support for accompanying expatriate families such as dealing with household issues. Practical issues like dealing with landlords, electricity suppliers and service providers once the families arrive in a foreign country could take a lot of time and cause trouble, as indicated by the expatriates in this study. However, these issues could easily be dealt with by local staff.

Furthermore, first, the family exerts influence on expatriates' work performance. Second, organizational support for the family could influence expatriates' work attitude and engagement. For unaccompanied expatriates, the study has highlighted the need for the critical attention of organizations to their life domain challenges. These expatriates have numerous and enduring difficulties in their life domain which could result in negative consequences for their health, work and family life such as burn-out, expatriation failure or divorce. Nevertheless, it was clear that the organizations in the study ignored unaccompanied expatriates' life domain issues, which is alarming. Hence, this study strongly urges organizations to pay attention to potential difficulties that unaccompanied expatriates could encounter. Specifically, organizations should offer regular home-visits for these expatriates including both budget and time for them to visit their families, or organize trips for their families to visit them in the host country. Flexible work arrangements such as working from home on occasions so that expatriates may return to attend to family issues is recommended. Furthermore, organizations could reduce the challenge of self-care for unaccompanied expatriates by arranging meals and ordering housekeeping services for them. In many host countries, such service is available and does not induce a high cost and by doing so, organizations show their care and help expatriates avoid tiredness as well as other aforementioned consequences for their family such as divorce. Un-accompanying families might need external support from their families, friends, helpers and professionals such as electricians and plumbers. Therefore, offering financial support to split families at home in case they need to seek support services could be considered. These findings substantiate a strong argument that organizations should care about expatriates' families and their life domain.

From the positions of expatriates and expatriate family members, knowing what challenges each other faces would be useful for them to understand and sympathize with each other. Therefore, future potential expatriate families could refer to the knowledge about challenges and experiences of the expatriate families in this study. Thanks to mutual understanding,

family cohesion and resilience towards challenges during international assignments could be boosted. For example, in accompanying cases, the expatriate spouses communicated that as long as the expatriates understood the challenges they experienced and appreciated their effort, they would feel much better. Similarly, if the expatriate spouses knew that the expatriates had difficulties at work, they would try to encourage the expatriates and relieve them of any unnecessary burdens from family life. Such expectations were also shared by un-accompanying spouses. While it is expected that the cultural and occupational stressors experienced by the expatriates may be difficult for their spouse and family left at home to understand, it is likely that the expatriates may also have difficulties in fully appreciating the stressors, strains and daily hassles of the spouses left at home. Meanwhile, it is understood that the challenges for each side are numerous and intense. One of the challenges is that the unaccompanied expatriates and their spouses missed each other, and communication could be difficult. As the study identified, communication within split families was critically significant for family cohesion as well as the strength and resilience of each side. Therefore, families are strongly recommended to keep in touch on a daily basis. They should also encourage each other to do a good job with the assignments and the goals they set for their family out of the assignments.

The findings related to HR professionals' views and organizational practices reveal that the lack of organizational care and support for expatriate families might be mainly attributed to their attitudes about the responsibilities of organizations towards families during expatriation. Although organizations have sound understanding about the experiences of expatriate families and the family's influence on expatriates' work outcomes, many organizations did not see it as their responsibility to take care of expatriate families. Whereas the expatriates and expatriate spouses expressed that if the organizations showed that they sincerely cared about them, they would feel motivated and encouraged. Therefore, to improve expatriates' work engagement and contribution, organizations should treat expatriate families as important stakeholders in the expatriation process. Specifically, they should show the expatriates that they care about the expatriate families and show willingness to support them. In many cases, organizations could improve expatriates' engagement without having to pay more financially. The expatriates and spouses shared that they would feel better if organizations show their genuine care and encouragement for them and their family.

The mismatch between the understandings of three groups on the same aspects also draws implications for practice, especially for split expatriate families. For instance, while the

challenge of self-care was intense for expatriates, the majority of HR professionals were not aware of or did not acknowledge it. There could be consequences for organizations and expatriate families because of this challenge such as premature repatriation or breakdown of the expatriate's relationship with their spouse. To minimize the chances of these consequences, it is recommended that organizations arrange support for expatriates' household and care for expatriates' families. HR professionals also remained blind to general life challenges of split expatriate families. Organizational acknowledgement of such challenges and appreciation of split expatriate families' efforts during international assignments are meaningful in this situation.

To summarize, the findings of in this study is particularly meaningful for HR professionals, organizations and future expatriates alike. Future practices based on the findings advanced here will uncover specific contingencies for the better management and support of expatriate assignments that involve families. By identifying similarities and differences between the two groups and the specific difficulties for each, practitioners could tailor their preparation and support programs for each group to reduce hardships for expatriates and families and increase the possibilities of expatriation success. Similarly, expatriates and their families could understand what they might be confronted with and have realistic expectations of and thorough preparation for international assignments.

#### **6.4 Limitations and directions for future research**

Regardless of how well a study is planned, there are usually inherent limitations, and it is necessary that they are acknowledged in the study (Bloomberg and Volpe 2012). As such, this study has four specific limitations. Efforts were made to control these limitations by acknowledging them and mitigating their impact. Furthermore, future research directions are outlined to continue advancing the literature beyond the current study.

The first limitation is the possibility of researcher's bias as generally found in a qualitative study (Creswell 2013b). The fact that the researcher of this study had similar personal experience to the targeted participants could bring both pros and cons to the study. To minimize the negative impact of the researcher's bias, the following strategies were applied: 1) An interview guide was used to ensure the main elements were focused on in all interviews; 2) The researcher adhered to her role as a mere interviewer whose focus was on uncovering and recording the participants' stories; 3) a research journal was kept to ensure

the study process and all decisions related to the study were transparent; 4) the collection of data from the perspectives of expatriates, their spouses and HR professionals increased the objectivity of the study.

The second limitation relates to the design of this study. Since the study is cross-sectional in nature, it can only provide a snapshot of the participants' stories (Shortland 2018b). It must be acknowledged that expatriation perceptions and experiences may change over time. Therefore, longitudinal studies that capture these insights at different points in time are recommended for future research. Time and multi-wave data in quantitative studies following initial outcomes of the current study could obtain more nuanced and generalizable findings. Such studies could cast further light upon detailed thoughts, feelings and experiences of expatriate family members, and a model of their thoughts and experiences in international assignments could be built.

A further limitation that lies in this study is related to its sample. First, the nature of participation in this study was voluntary, which meant that the study only covered the insights from the people who were comfortable with sharing their experiences. However, people who were not willing to take part in the study might have had difficult experiences or challenging times during their expatriation that were uncomfortable to share. Therefore, the study may not necessarily cover all representative participants. Furthermore, the recruitment of participants through the researcher's personal network could have limited the objectivity and the possibility of more nuanced findings. To minimize this limitation, all effort was made through the snowball sampling strategy to recruit all possible and more diversified participants as needed.

This study focused only on expatriates in Vietnam, which might negatively influence the study's generalizability. However as noted previously, generalizability was not the intended goal of this research so much as transferability (Lincoln and Guba 1985). A thick and rich description was aimed for so that the study's applicability in other contexts could be increased (Creswell 2013b). This limitation opens areas for future research. It is suggested that scholars conduct research on expatriate families living in different host countries with different levels of development and circumstances. Indeed, comparative studies between expatriate families coming from and living in various countries could immensely enrich our state of knowledge and respond to outstanding gaps in the literature (Khokher and Beauregard 2014). Third, due to data collection limitations, only expatriates and their spouses were approached and not expatriate children, although the study sought to reveal the

experiences of the whole family. Consequently, expatriate children's experiences were obtained through the expatriates and their spouses. Future studies should aim to gain insights from expatriate children directly to possibly reveal new knowledge (Mutter and Thorn 2019). Furthermore, although the initial ambition was to match the sample of expatriates with their organization, due to the unwillingness of some organizations to participate in the study, this ambition was not achieved. Future research could benefit from matching individual (expatriates and spouses) and organizational samples to identify any potential gaps between different perspectives.

Another limitation that should be acknowledged is memory bias, which occurs when participants do not remember past events or details to share with interviewers during interviews. To minimize the effect of this issue, informants were given extra time to think about their experiences and feelings as necessary. By doing so, informants could recall more information.

The last limitation of this study is the languages used to communicate with participants. The study only sought to recruit participants who could communicate in English and/or Vietnamese because these were the two languages in which the researcher could communicate fluently. The reason was to gain direct insights from participants and to also ensure confidentiality without the involvement of a third person as a translator. Moreover, there was an expectation that most potential participants would be fluent in either language. This criterion excluded people who could not communicate in either of these languages. However, the insights from people who could not speak English or Vietnamese might be different from those who could. Therefore, the current study might have missed the insights from the former group. The study ended up with all interviews conducted in English.

Further suggestions for future research have emerged from this study's contributions and limitations. First, drawing on the comparative results of this study, subsequent studies could develop testable hypotheses. For instance, the hypotheses could focus on to what extent each type or each particular motivation influences the decisions to undertake international assignments of accompanied and unaccompanied expatriates. It would also be fruitful to weigh or compare the importance of each motivation and concern. There was a strong alignment between expatriates' concerns and considerations and those of their spouses. However, the degree of alignment and the intensity of each theme were unclear due to the nature of a qualitative study. Therefore, future research is encouraged to follow up these aspects with quantitative studies.

In relation to the functioning of family systems, the study's findings suggest that emotional bonding and the significance of familial relationships (between spouses and/or between father/mother and children) are different across cultures. Therefore, future studies could test the significance of these relationships to the functioning of families with different cultural backgrounds in the context of international assignments.

Quantitative analysis of how challenges in the life domain influence work outcomes and the well-being of unaccompanied expatriates would significantly extend our knowledge of this group. Furthermore, studies that extend the influential factors on expatriate families' experiences during international assignments by conceptualizing and quantifying these factors could open a new area for research endeavor on expatriate families. Such studies could also untangle the conflicted findings related to the influence of families on expatriates during international assignments in previous literature and potentially bear new theories for work-family interface in international assignments.

The last suggestion relates to the focus on organizational practices for expatriate families influencing expatriates' work outcomes. It is recommended that future studies adopt quantitative and/or experiential design to investigate how specific organizational practices (training, preparation, support) for expatriate families impact on expatriates' work performance, attitude and engagement during international assignments. While studies which investigate dyadic relationships between organizations and expatriates in IHRM literature are limited (Shen and Jiang 2015), the ones that address triadic relationships among organizations, expatriates and expatriate families are even more scarce. Meanwhile, this study found that there were such triadic relationships. Therefore, further investigation of this topic is worthwhile for future studies. These studies could also contribute to the on-going calls to treat families as stakeholders of organizations during expatriation (Gupta et al. 2012a, Lämsä et al. 2017).

## **6.5 Concluding remarks**

The current research was started with the personal interest and great excitement of the researcher when realizing the significant gap in the IHRM literature about long-term unaccompanied expatriates and their families in international assignments. Although this group makes up a large portion of the expatriate population worldwide and the incidents of split expatriation are increasing (Brookfield Global Relocation Services 2016), there is a

significant lack of knowledge about them. In fact, what knowledge exists is mostly based on short-term assignees in domestic contexts (Mayerhofer et al. 2004, Mutter and Thorn 2019) and as such, the application of knowledge about short-term assignees to long-term assignees might not be accurate. In response to these issues, the current study is one of the first to investigate unaccompanied expatriates and their families in international assignments. The study took a comparative approach to compare accompanying and split expatriate families on their motivations, considerations, challenges, work, and family outcomes.

Expatriates, their spouses, and HR professionals were interviewed to answer the question of how family matters, and how expatriates and their families experience international assignments in accompanying and split situations. The study identified that expatriate families play a significant role in various aspects of expatriates' international assignments. The study also fills critical gaps in the literature with regards to motivations to undertake international assignments, reasons to engage in the split situation, considerations, challenges, and work and family outcomes of expatriate families, as well as organizational views and practices for these families. Especially, insights about split families are highly valuable additions to the limited literature on this group (Cole and Nesbeth 2014, Mutter 2017). It is hoped that this study will initiate and encourage subsequent research on this sample.

Another aim achieved with the current study is to provide practical implications for practitioners and expatriate families. Specifically, the findings offer useful insights into recruitment and expatriate management. Practitioners could employ the study's knowledge to attract potential candidates and design policies and practices for expatriate families that can maximize expatriation success. The study was conducted in Vietnam which hosts a large expatriate community with different types of organizations, including MNEs, NGOs, governmental and inter-nation organizations. Therefore, the lessons learned from the study are not limited to any particular kind of organization and could be transferrable to other host countries. Furthermore, individuals such as future expatriates and expatriate spouses could benefit from knowing what to expect and how to improve their expatriation experiences.

## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1A: Demographic Information Email to Expatriates

1. What is your nationality?

What was your nationality at birth if different from your present nationality?

2. What is your gender?  Male  Female  Others ...

3. What age bracket do you belong to?

- 25 – 30  31 – 40  41 – 50  
 51 – 60  60 – 70  70 and over

4. Do you have children?  Yes  No

If yes, how many children do you have? What are their ages?

5. Did your spouse/partner and/or children accompany you on this assignment?

Yes  No

6. What is your position at your current assignment?

7. How many years have you been working with your current organization?

8. How long have you been in your current position?

9. How long have you been in Vietnam on this assignment? Have you previously lived in Vietnam? If yes, for how long, and what was the purpose of the stay?

10. In what language do you communicate most often? Are there any other languages that you speak? If yes, what is the level of proficiency in the secondary language(s)?

## **Appendix 1B: Interview Questions for Expatriates**

### **PREPARATION FOR THE INTERVIEW**

- Check the interviewee's attendance and appointment information
- Print the Participant Information Sheet and Participant Consent Form
- Check functionality of equipment

### **INTERVIEW RECORD**

Organization's name:

The interviewee's name:

The interviewee's position:

Date of interview:

### **PRE-INTERVIEW DIALOGUE**

- Starting up (introduction and chat about getting on to the interview)

“Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this research. Before we start, I would like to provide some information about the research and our interview today.”

- Provide the Participant Information Sheet (If that is an interview done through Skype, send the Participant Information Sheet through email before the interview)
- Review purpose of study and focus of interview

“This research aims to understand the thoughts and experiences of expatriates and their family members in expatriation process; and also to understand how organizations perceive and support expatriate families.”

- Discuss overview of topics in interview and how interview will proceed:

In this interview, I would like to have a conversation with you regarding the following topics:

- Your international assignment (s)
- Your motivations to accept this assignment, considerations of your family and adjustment of you and your family to this assignment
- Your work performance, organizational support for your family and how that support influences your work attitude and engagement

- Explain confidentiality and provide the Participant Consent Form

“As we discussed previously, I would like to ask about your thoughts about this assignment and how you have experienced it. Everything we discuss will be kept confidential, and you may decline to answer any question or withdraw from this research at any time. I will analyse the results from the interviews primarily by identifying recurrent themes across all participants. The anonymity of your responses will be carefully protected. After completion of the interview, I will send you the transcription of the interview for your review and acceptance.”

- Explain the audio-taping procedure and ask for permission to record the interview

- Answer any questions the participant may have upfront and ask the participant if there is anything they would like me to notice before the interview.

“Do you have any questions? Is there anything you would like me to notice (anything you would prefer not to be included in the interview or any other things I should keep in mind) before we start?”

## **A. YOUR PREVIOUS (IF ANY) AND CURRENT ASSIGNMENTS**

1. I would like to start our interview today by talking about your international assignment.

a. Can you give me a broad overview of your current position's tasks (e.g. your responsibilities, regions you are in charge of, general management, technical tasks)?

b. Is this your first international assignment?

c. If not, how many previous assignments have you been to? Were they organization-assigned or self-initiated assignments? How many international assignments had you completed? Can you specify the country/countries and your positions?

2. Can you please describe one of your typical working days or weeks?

## **B. MOTIVATIONS, CONSIDERATIONS and ADJUSTMENT**

3. How would you describe the roles of you and your spouse/partner in your family? For example, how does your family distribute the role of financially supporting the family or homemaking role?

Is there any change in these roles because of this assignment?

How about leadership role in your family? By leadership role I mean someone takes the role of a leader in your family who controls and directs the whole family. For some families, leadership role is shared between the husband and wife while some others have that role strictly taken by one person. How about your family?

4. What do you say about your family's discipline and rules? Are there any disciplines or rules that you think your family define for family members? Or do you think there are not really such disciplines and rules?

5. How the decision to accept the assignment was made?

Was it a decision made entirely by you?

Was it in consultation with your spouse/partner?

Were other family members involved?

Would you say that the involvement of the family in the decision is reflective of how you would expect decisions in your family to be made?

6. Could you tell me a bit about your family cultural background? (e.g. where were you born and raised? Your ethnicity?)

7. Did you attain any of your education in an overseas location or undertake an overseas internship?

8. When you considered this assignment, what were your motivations to accept it?

9. What were your considerations in relation to having the family accompany you?

If the expatriate is unaccompanied by their family, the question would be: What were your considerations in relation to not having the family accompany you?

10. Coming back to your typical day, can you tell me about your typical working day when you are at home? (waking up, having breakfast, preparing for lunch, any household work, going to work, coming home from work, what you do in evening)

11. How does your typical weekend go?

12. How would you describe the time and effort you have to spend on this assignment compared to your work in your home office or previous expatriate assignment?

13. What has been your experience of living in Vietnam?

Has your feeling changed over time (since you first came and after you have worked and lived here for some time)?

14. Have you had any challenges in adjustment with the assignment because of your family?

If yes, what are these challenges?

If no, could you please elaborate on why you think so?

15. What would you say about the time and effort you spend on your family life on this assignment?

Do your work demands influence that?

Has that changed overtime through this assignment?

16. What do you think about the adjustment process of your family?

If the expatriate is accompanied by family, the question would be: Has your family (your spouse and/or your children (if any)) faced any challenge adjusting to the life here, including adjusting to your work demands? Was there any change in their experience overtime? If no, can you please elaborate?

If the expatriate is unaccompanied by family, the question would be: Has your family (your spouse and/or your children (if any)) had any challenge adjusting to the life without you at home? Was there any change in their experience overtime? If no, can you please elaborate?

17. Is your spouse/partner currently employed?

Is that a part-time or full-time position?

Do you think the fact that your spouse/partner is (is not) in current employment can influence the adjustment process of your spouse/partner and your family?

Can you please explain why you think so?

18. When you have difficulties or challenges at work that may make you feel stressful, do you look for someone to share your feelings and your concerns?

What do you think about sharing them with your spouse/partner and/or your children?

How about good/exciting news? Who do you usually come first to inform?

What do you think about sharing with your family member about your daily things and vice versa (your spouse/partner shares with you about their daily things)?

Do you usually hear your spouse/partner sharing about their feelings, their concerns or excitement?

19. Do you think the expatriation influences your family's emotional bonding? Please elaborate (If yes, in which way and how the expatriation influences your family's emotional bonding? If no, why do you think so?)

### **C. WORK OUTCOMES, ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT AND WORK ATTITUDE AND ENGAGEMENT**

20. Comparing with your work back in your country, how would you rate your performance? Does your organization have specific performance objectives for you? If yes, have you had any difficulty accomplishing these objectives so far?

21. Do you believe the presence or absence of your family affects your work performance? Please elaborate

22. Did the organization consider your family situation in the recruitment, selection and training processes?

Did they ask you about your family in the recruitment process?

Was your family included in the selection process? For example, did the organization invite your family/your spouse/partner to an interview?

Was there any training provided to your family?

23. What kinds of support (career support, education support, social networking support. etc) the company provided you and your family when you accepted this assignment? What are the policies for your family (such as accommodation for your family, education for your children. etc) during this assignment?

Probing question: How would you rate that support? What do you think the company could have done better?

Do you think a company's support for family in the expatriation process can influence your attitude at work and engagement with the company? Please elaborate

#### **D. CLOSING REMARKS**

24. Other Reflections/Questions – Ask if participant would like to state anything further (on any related topic) or has any questions before ending the interview. [L]  
[SEP]

25. Follow Up Availability – Inquire about participant's availability to contact him/her to verify information from interview.

26. Contact methods – Ask participant for their preferable contact method (email or phone. etc)

## Appendix 2A: Demographic Information Email to Expatriate Spouse/Partners

1. What is your nationality?

What was your nationality at birth if different from your present nationality?

2. What is your gender?  Male  Female  Others ...

3. What age bracket do you belong to?

20 – 30  31 – 40  41 – 50  
 51 – 60  60 – 70  70 and over

4. Do you have children?  Yes  No

If yes, how many children do you have? What are their ages?

5. Do you accompany your spouse/partner on this assignment?

Yes  No

## **Appendix 2B: Interview Questions for Expatriate Spouse/Partners**

### **PREPARATION FOR THE INTERVIEW**

- Check the interviewee's attendance and appointment information
- Print the Participant Information Sheet and Participant Consent Form
- Check functionality of equipment

### **INTERVIEW RECORD**

Organization's name:

The interviewee's name:

The interviewee's position:

Date of interview:

### **PRE-INTERVIEW DIALOGUE**

- Starting up (introduction and chat about getting on to the interview)

“Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this research. Before we start, I would like to provide some information about the research and our interview today.”

- Provide the Participant Information Sheet (If that is an interview done through Skype, send the Participant Information Sheet through email before the interview)

- Review purpose of study and focus of interview

“This research aims to understand the thoughts and experiences of expatriates and their family members in expatriation process; and also to understand how organizations perceive and support expatriate families.”

- Discuss overview of topics in interview and how interview will proceed:

In this interview, I would like to have a conversation with you regarding the following topics:

- Your spouse/partner's international assignment (s)
  - Thoughts and experiences of this international assignment of you and your family as a whole
  - Your influence on your spouse/partner's international assignment
- Explain confidentiality and provide the Participant Consent Form

“As we discussed previously, I would like to ask about your thoughts about this assignment

and how you have experienced it. Everything we discuss will be kept confidential, and you may decline to answer any question or withdraw from this research at any time. I will analyse the results from the interviews primarily by identifying recurrent themes across all participants. The anonymity of your responses will be carefully protected. After completion of the interview, I will send you the transcription of the interview for your review and acceptance.”

- Explain the audio-taping procedure and ask for permission to record the interview
- Answer any questions the participant may have upfront and ask the participant if there is anything they would like me to notice before the interview.

“Do you have any questions? Is there anything you would like me to notice (anything you would prefer not to be included in the interview or any other things I should keep in mind) before we start?”

## **A. PREVIOUS (IF ANY) AND CURRENT INTERNATIONAL ASSIGNMENTS**

1. May we start with a question about your spouse/partner's international assignment?

Is it the first time your spouse/partner undertakes an international assignment?

If not, how many international assignments has he/she been to? How many had he/she finished?

2. Is this your first time accompanying/un-accompanying (if do not accompany) your spouse/partner on an international assignment? If not, how many international assignments have you gone together with your spouse/partner? How many assignments have you not accompanied him/her? Can you please specify the countries that you have been to or not been to?

3. How long have you lived in Vietnam (if accompany) on this assignment? Have you previously lived in Vietnam? If yes, for how long, and what was the purpose of the stay?

Or how long have you and your spouse/partner been apart due to this international assignment?

## **B. THOUGHTS AND EXPERIENCES OF INTERNATIONAL ASSIGNMENTS**

4. How would you describe the roles of you and your spouse/partner in your family? For example, how does your family distribute the role of financially supporting the family or homemaking role?

Is there any change in these roles because of this assignment?

How about leadership role in your family? By leadership role I mean someone takes the role of a leader in your family who controls and directs the whole family. For some families, leadership role is shared between the husband and wife while some others have that role strictly taken by one person. How about your family?

5. What do you say about your family's discipline and rules? Are there any disciplines or rules that you think your family define for family members? Or do you think there are not really such disciplines and rules?

6. How the decision to accept the assignment was made?

Was it a decision made entirely by your spouse/partner?

Was it in consultation with you?

Were other family members involved?

Would you say that the involvement of the family in the decision is reflective of how you would expect decisions in your family to be made?

7. What did you think when your spouse/partner received the offer for this assignment?

When your spouse/partner decided to go, did you encourage or discourage his/her decision?

8. What were your spouse/partner's considerations in relation to having the family accompany him/her?

If the expatriate is unaccompanied by their family, the question would be: What were your spouse/partner's considerations in relation to not having the family accompany him/her?

9. What factors do you think influence your spouse/partner's consideration of you/your family in the decision-making process? (your/his or her cultural background, his/her or your personality, your family situation, his/her priority for work/family etc.)

10. What were your reasons for deciding to accompany or not accompany your spouse/partner on this international assignment?

11. Did you have any concerns when you decided to accompany or not accompany your spouse/partner on this international assignment? If yes, what are they? If no, why did you not have any concerns?

12. How would you describe one typical weekday of yours? How about your typical weekend?

13. Do you have any challenges adjusting to the new life when going overseas with your spouse/partner (or remaining at home without your spouse/partner)?

If yes, what are the challenges? What have you and your spouse/partner done to overcome those challenges?

If no, can you please explain why?

What factor do you think influences your adjustment process (your personality, your previous international exposure, your spouse/partner's personality, the nature of the host country. etc)?

If the participant identifies that he/she has kid(s), follow-up questions would be: "How about your children? What do you think about their adjustment? Do you see them having any challenges to adjust?"

14. Are you currently employed?

Is that a part-time or full-time position?

Do you think the fact that you are or are not in current employment can influence the adjustment process of your spouse/partner and your family?

Can you please explain why you think so?

15. How do you manage housework now? Do you have any support to deal with housework?

16. Do you get to see your friends regularly?

If accompanying spouse/partner, then ask: Have you made any new friend here? How often do you see them? How do you think that influences your adjustment process? Do you miss your family and friends back in your home country? If yes, was there any time you felt uncomfortable because of missing them?

If un-accompanying spouse/partner, then ask: How often do you get to see your friends and your relatives? How do you think that influences your adjustment to the life without your spouse/partner?

17. When you have difficulties or challenges that may make you feel stressful, do you look for someone to share your feelings and your concerns?

What do you think about sharing them with your spouse/partner and/or your children?

How about good/exciting news? Who do you usually come first to inform?

What do you think about sharing with your family member about your daily things and vice versa (your spouse/partner shares with you about their daily things)?

Do you usually hear your spouse/partner sharing about his/her feelings, his/her concerns or excitement?

18. How would you describe the demand of this global assignment on your spouse/partner?

Does he/she have to take on any new duties/responsibilities that you do not usually deal with?

Does he/she have any difficulties/challenges from this assignment, or he/she can deal with this assignment well?

How would you describe the time and effort your spouse/partner has to spend on this assignment compared to his/her work in your home office or previous expatriate assignment?

19. How do you think your presence/absence influences your spouse/partner's work performance?

What would you say about your support for your spouse/partner during this assignment? Was there anything you could do to support him/her?

20. What do you think about the time and effort your spouse/partner spends on your family life while on this assignment?

21. How do you think the expatriation influences your family's emotional bonding?

22. Did the organization invite you to participate in any selection or training processes?

What kinds of support (career support, education support, social networking support, etc) the company provided your family when your spouse/partner accepted this assignment?

What are the policies (such as accommodation, education fee for your children, etc) for your family during this assignment?

Probing question: How would you rate that support?

What do you think the company could have done better?

Do you think a company's support for your family in the expatriation process can influence an expatriate's attitude at work and engagement with the company? Please elaborate

### **C. CLOSING REMARKS**

23. Other Reflections/Questions – Ask if participant would like to state anything further (on any related topic) or has any questions before ending the interview. <sup>[[ ]]</sup><sub>SEP</sub>

24. Follow Up Availability – Inquire about participant's availability to contact him/her to verify information from interview.

25. Contact methods – Ask participant for their preferable contact method (email or phone, etc)

## **Appendix 3: Interview Questions for Human Resource Managers/organizational representatives**

### **PREPARATION FOR THE INTERVIEW**

- Check the interviewee's attendance and appointment information
- Print the Participant Information Sheet and Participant Consent Form
- Check functionality of equipment

### **INTERVIEW RECORD**

Organization's name:

The interviewee's name:

The interviewee's position:

Date of interview:

### **PRE-INTERVIEW DIALOGUE**

- Starting up (introduction and chat about getting on the interview)

“Thank you very much for your kindness in accepting to participate in this research. It's my pleasure to interview you. Before we start, I would like to provide some information about the research and our interview today.”

- Provide the Participant Information Sheet (If that is an interview done through Skype, send the Participant Information Sheet through email before the interview)
- Review purpose of study and focus of interview

“This research aims to understand the thoughts and experiences of expatriates and their family members in expatriation process; and also to understand how organizations perceive and support expatriate families. By family I mean the nuclear family of an expatriate which includes his/her spouse/partner and/or children”

- Discuss overview of topics in interview and how interview will proceed:

In this interview, I would like to have a conversation with you regarding the following topics:

- Your organization's consideration of expatriate family in recruitment, selection and training processes

- Your organization's thoughts of expatriate families
- Your organization's programs to support expatriate families
  - Explain confidentiality and provide the Participant Consent Form

“As we discussed previously, I would like to ask about your thoughts about this assignment and how you have experienced it. Everything we discuss will be kept confidential, and you may decline to answer any question or withdraw from this research at any time. I will analyse the results from the interviews primarily by identifying recurrent themes across all participants. The anonymity of your responses will be carefully protected. After completion of the interview, I will send you the transcription of the interview for your review and acceptance.”

- Explain the audio-taping procedure and ask for permission to record the interview
- Answer any questions the participant may have upfront and ask the participant if there is anything they would like me to notice before the interview.

“Do you have any questions? Is there anything you would like me to notice (anything you would prefer not to be included in the interview or any other things I should keep in mind) before we start?”

## **A. PRE-ASSIGNMENT PRACTICES**

1. I would like to start our discussion today with your organization's recruitment process of expatriates.

Does your company ask/specify the family status of a potential expatriate in your recruitment process? Please elaborate.

2. How about the selection process?

For example, if you have two potential candidates who are different on family status (one is single while the other is currently married), what are your considerations/the criteria you look at when you have to select one of them?

If you consider a potential candidate who has a family, do you ask the expatriate about their intention to bring his/her family with him/her? Could you please elaborate on the reasons why you ask or do not ask?

Do you think it is necessary to consider the suitability of a potential expatriate family? By suitability I mean the adaptability of that family, and that family will not likely be a reason for an expatriate failure. If yes, do you have any measure to check the suitability of an expatriate family for the international assignment? For example, do you directly interview the expatriate family or you just ask the potential candidate about their family? If no, can you please explain why you think so?

If you have any measure to check the suitability of the expatriate family, what do you look at? Is there any difference between accompanying and un-accompanying (or split) expatriate families? (By accompanying families, I mean the expatriate families who go together with expatriates on an international assignment, and un-accompanying (or split) families are expatriate families who remain in their home country why the expatriates go overseas for the international assignment.)

To what extent do you think the suitability of a family would influence your organization's decision of a potential candidate?

3. I would like to hear about the training process for expatriate families.

Do you have any kinds of training (language courses, cross-cultural training. etc) or induction such as pre-visit to host locations for accompanying expatriate families?

How about un-accompanying expatriate families? Does your organization have any training for them? Do you think it is useful to include them in the training process? If yes, what particular training should your organization provide them? If no, could you please explain why you think so?

## **B. DURING ASSIGNMENT PRACTICES**

4. Now I would like to move on to talk about the assignment process. I would like to ask you about your thoughts of expatriates going on overseas assignments with their family and without their family. What kinds of challenges in each case do you think the expatriate might have?

5. What do you think about the influence of expatriate family on the expatriate's perceived performance, work attitude and engagement?

Probing questions:

Looking at the expatriates that your organization has employed/is currently employing, do you think their family influence their work performance? If yes, could you please give me an example? If no, could you please tell me why so?

How about work attitude and engagement? Have you seen any example of a family influencing an expatriate's work attitude and engagement? If yes, do you think there is anything your organization can do to make the influence as positive as possible?

Do you think that family accompanying or un-accompanying them affects expatriate's perceived performance, work attitude and engagement? If no, could you please tell me why you think so?

If yes, could you please tell me in which way do you think an accompanying family can affect an expatriate's perceived performance, work attitude and engagement? How about un-accompanying family?

6. Does your company have any current program to support the expatriate families?

If no, could you please explain why?

If yes, what are the policies for expatriate families?

Do you have different policies for accompanying expatriate family and split expatriate family? If yes, could you please elaborate on these policies? If no, could you please explain why?

7. We have talked about the current practices in relation to expatriate families of your company. Do you think there is anything more that your company could do to facilitate smooth expatriation processes for expatriates and their family? Is there any challenge for your company to do so?

### **C. CLOSING REMARKS**

1. Other Reflections/Questions – Ask if participant would like to state anything further (on any related topic) or has any questions before ending the interview.
2. Follow Up Availability – Inquire about participant’s availability to contact him/her to verify information from interview.
3. Contact methods – Ask participant for their preferable contact method (email or phone. etc)

## Appendix 4: Participant Information Sheet for Expatriates and Expatriate Spouses/Partners

### PROJECT TITLE:

*“How does family matter? Investigating the experiences of expatriates and their family in international assignments”*

**UTS HREC APPROVAL NUMBER: ETH17-1695**

### WHO IS DOING THE RESEARCH?

My name is *Thao Quyen Dang*, and I am a PhD student at University of Technology Sydney. My supervisor is Associate Professor Hussain Gulzar Rammal

(Email: [Hussain.Rammal@uts.edu.au](mailto:Hussain.Rammal@uts.edu.au))

### WHAT IS THIS RESEARCH ABOUT?

This research is to understand how family matters in global assignments in two situations. The first situation is accompanying family in which expatriate families go on global assignments with the expatriate. The second situation is un-accompanying family in which expatriate families do not go with expatriates while they are undertaking global assignments.

### FUNDING

Funding for this project has been received from UTS-VIED (University of Technology Sydney – Vietnam International Education Cooperation Department) scholarship

### WHY HAVE I BEEN ASKED?

You have been invited to participate in this study because *you are an expatriate, and you currently have a spouse/partner or you are a spouse/partner of an expatriate working in Vietnam.*

### IF I SAY YES, WHAT WILL IT INVOLVE?

If you decide to participate, I will invite you to participate in an interview with me.

I will ask you to participate in a 1 to 2 hours semi-structured interview that will be audio recorded and transcribed.

I would like to ask you about the following topics: 1) your family; 2) how you and your family experience this international assignment; 3) the policies and practices of the employer in relation to your family.

## ARE THERE ANY RISKS/INCONVENIENCE?

Yes, there are some risks/inconvenience.

You may have concerns about how information you share with me will be analysed or disseminated through publications or with other participants. All information you provide will be kept confidential, and only I can access your identifiable information. Your information will be de-identified. Specifically, once the data are collected, each interview will be coded using numbers and letters without any identifiable information.

You may feel vulnerable when being asked about something related to your personal life, your difficulties at work or having to comment on policies and/or supporting programs of your organization. You may also feel emotional when discussing about your family life. You do not need to answer any question you feel uncomfortable with.

## DO I HAVE TO SAY YES?

Participation in this study is voluntary. It is completely up to you whether or not you decide to take part.

## WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF I SAY NO?

If you decide not to participate, it will not affect your relationship with the researchers or the University of Technology Sydney. If you wish to withdraw from the study once it has started, you can do so at any time without having to give a reason, by contacting *me at* [REDACTED]@student.uts.edu.au or +84 [REDACTED] (Vietnam) or +61 [REDACTED] (Australia).

If you withdraw from the study, *the study tapes will be erased; the transcripts will be destroyed and none of your detailed will be kept.* However, it may not be possible to withdraw your data from the study results if these have already had your identifying details removed.

## CONFIDENTIALITY

By signing the consent form you consent to the research team collecting and using personal information about you for the research project. All this information will be treated confidentially.

1. All research materials (interview recordings, transcripts) will be securely stored in a locked cabinet. Electronic data will be protected by passwords to ensure the security.
2. At consent, you will be allocated a study specific code. These codes will be secured in a separate file from your name and contact details. Only de-identified information will then remain and be linked to the study specific code.

You may choose a convenient location to conduct the interview with the researcher to ensure your comfort of privacy and confidentiality.

3. The data collected will be analysed thematically and narratively, and will not be linked to individual identifiable information. However, it is possible that specific statements and comments from you will be used to highlight salient points. It is also possible that the investigator might be able to recognise you from your statements, thereby making you identifiable. Nevertheless, given that these statements will not be linked to names or

identifying information, and the likelihood for such recall to occur will diminish over time, the potential risk of you being identified from the inclusion of such statements is likely to be negligible. In published works, all references to you and other participants will be in the form of the specific code.

Your information will only be used for the purpose of this research project and conference papers, journal articles, and books. It will only be disclosed with your permission, except as required by law. In any publication, information will be provided in such a way that you cannot be identified.

#### WHAT IF I HAVE CONCERNS OR A COMPLAINT?

If you have concerns about the research that you think I, my supervisor or my local manager can help you with, please feel free to contact me at [REDACTED]@student.uts.edu.au (or +84 [REDACTED]) or my supervisor – Associate Professor Hussain Rammal at [hussain.rammal@uts.edu.au](mailto:hussain.rammal@uts.edu.au) or my local manager (Rector of Thang Long University) – Dr Phu Huy Phan at +84 [REDACTED]

#### NOTE:

This study has been approved by the University of Technology Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee [UTS HREC]. If you have any concerns or complaints about any aspect of the conduct of this research, please contact the Ethics Secretariat on ph.: +61 2 9514 2478 or email: [Research.Ethics@uts.edu.au](mailto:Research.Ethics@uts.edu.au), and quote the UTS HREC reference number. Any matter raised will be treated confidentially, investigated and you will be informed of the outcome.

## Appendix 5: Participant Information Sheet for Human Resource Managers or Organizational Representatives

### PROJECT TITLE:

*“How does family matter? Investigating the experiences of expatriates and their family in international assignments”*

**UTS HREC APPROVAL NUMBER: ETH17-1695**

### WHO IS DOING THE RESEARCH?

My name is *Thao Quyen Dang*, and I am a PhD student at University of Technology Sydney. My supervisor is Associate Professor Hussain Gulzar Rammal.

(Email: [Hussain.Rammal@uts.edu.au](mailto:Hussain.Rammal@uts.edu.au))

### WHAT IS THIS RESEARCH ABOUT?

This research is to understand how family matters in global assignments in two situations. The first situation is accompanying family in which expatriate families go on global assignments with the expatriate. The second situation is un-accompanying family in which expatriate families do not go with expatriates while they are undertaking global assignments.

### FUNDING

Funding for this project has been received from UTS-VIED scholarship

### WHY HAVE I BEEN ASKED?

You have been invited to participate in this study because you are in charge of managing expatriates at your organization, or you understand the management of expatriates at your organization.

### IF I SAY YES, WHAT WILL IT INVOLVE?

If you decide to participate, I will invite you to participate in an interview with me.

I will ask you to participate in a 30 minute or 45 minute semi-structured interview that will be audio recorded and transcribed. I would like to ask you about your organization’s practices (recruitment, selection, and training) and supporting programs in relation to expatriate families.

### ARE THERE ANY RISKS/INCONVENIENCE?

Yes, there are some risks/inconvenience.

You may have concerns about how information you share with me will be analysed or disseminated through publications or with other participants. All information you provide

will be kept confidential, and only I can access your identifiable information. Your information will be de-identified. Specifically, once the data are collected, each interview will be coded using numbers and letters without any identifiable information. Furthermore, I would only seek for your personal opinion without linking the information you provide to your organization.

You may feel vulnerable when being asked to comment on policies and/or supporting programs of your organization. You do not need to answer any question you feel uncomfortable with.

### DO I HAVE TO SAY YES?

Participation in this study is voluntary. It is completely up to you whether or not you decide to take part.

### WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF I SAY NO?

If you decide not to participate, it will not affect your relationship with the researchers or the University of Technology Sydney. If you wish to withdraw from the study once it has started, you can do so at any time without having to give a reason, by contacting me at

██████████@student.uts.edu.au or +84 ██████████ (Vietnam) or +61 ██████████ (Australia).

If you withdraw from the study, the study tapes will be erased; the transcripts will be destroyed and none of your detailed will be kept. However, it may not be possible to withdraw your data from the study results if these have already had your identifying details removed.

### CONFIDENTIALITY

By signing the consent form you consent to the research team collecting and using personal information about you for the research project. All this information will be treated confidentially.

1. All research materials (interview recordings, transcripts) will be securely stored in a locked cabinet. Electronic data will be protected by passwords to ensure the security.
2. At consent, you will be allocated a study specific code. These codes will be secured in a separate file from your name and contact details. Only de-identified information will then remain and be linked to the study specific code.

You may choose a convenient location to conduct the interview with the researcher to ensure your comfort of privacy and confidentiality.

3. The data collected will be analyzed thematically and narratively, and will not be linked to individual identifiable information. However, it is possible that specific statements and comments from you will be used to highlight salient points. It is also possible that the investigator might be able to recognise you from your statements, thereby making you identifiable. Nevertheless, given that these statements will not be linked to names or identifying information, and the likelihood for such recall to occur will diminish over time, the potential risk of you being identified from the inclusion of such statements is likely to be negligible. In published works, all references to you and other participants will be in the form of the specific code.

Your information will only be used for the purpose of this research project and conference papers, journal articles, and books. It will only be disclosed with your permission, except as required by law. In any publication, information will be provided in such a way that you cannot be identified.

#### WHAT IF I HAVE CONCERNS OR A COMPLAINT?

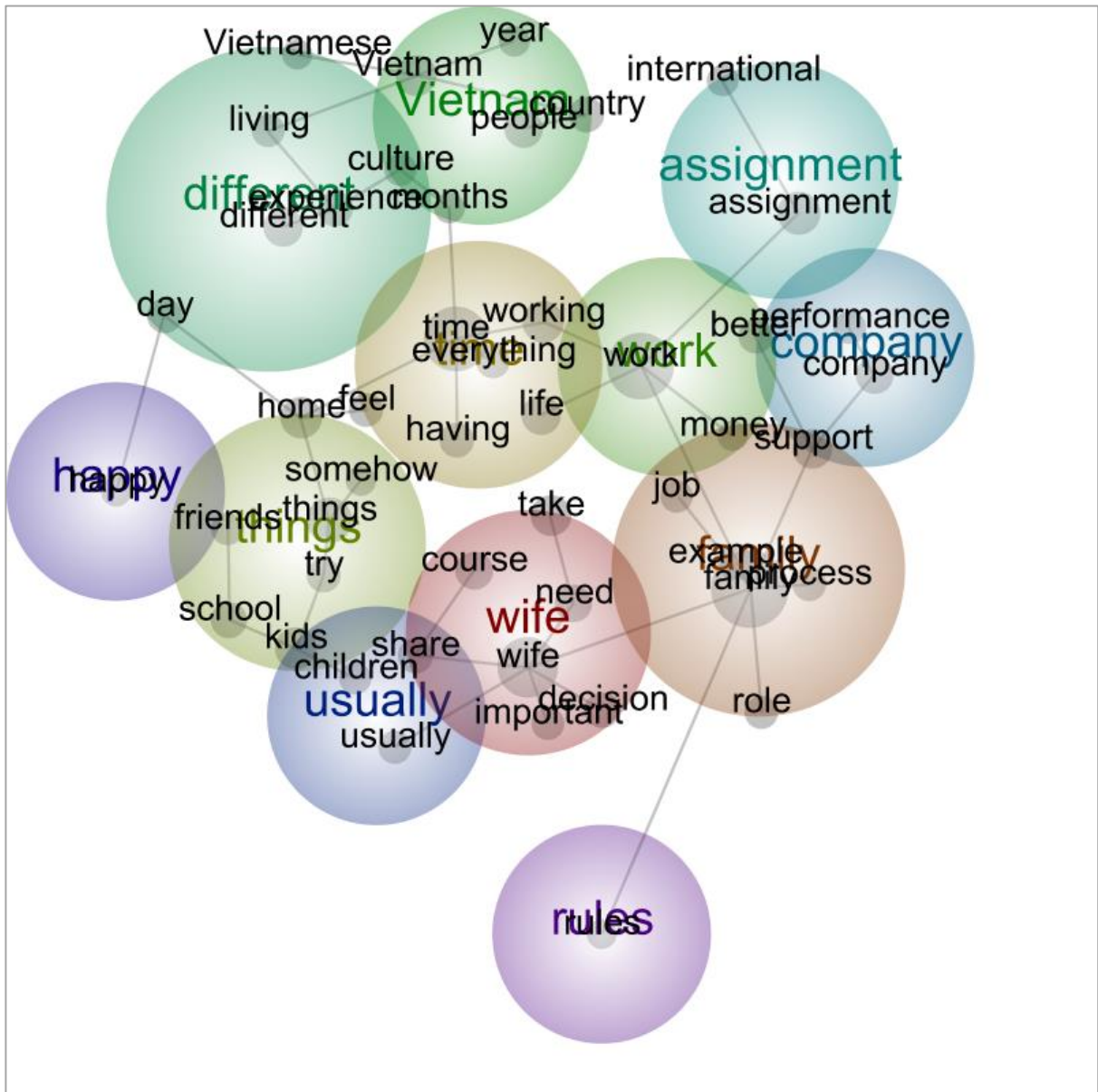
If you have concerns about the research that you think I, my supervisor or my local manager can help you with, please feel free to contact me at [REDACTED]@student.uts.edu.au (or +84 [REDACTED]) or my supervisor – Associate Professor Hussain Rammal at [hussain.rammal@uts.edu.au](mailto:hussain.rammal@uts.edu.au) or my local manager (Rector of Thang Long University) – Dr Phu Huy Phan at +84 [REDACTED]

#### **NOTE:**

This study has been approved by the University of Technology Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee [UTS HREC]. If you have any concerns or complaints about any aspect of the conduct of this research, please contact the Ethics Secretariat on ph.: +61 2 9514 2478 or email: [Research.Ethics@uts.edu.au](mailto:Research.Ethics@uts.edu.au)], and quote the UTS HREC reference number. Any matter raised will be treated confidentially, investigated and you will be informed of the outcome.

## Appendix 6: Conceptual Maps of Insights from Interviews

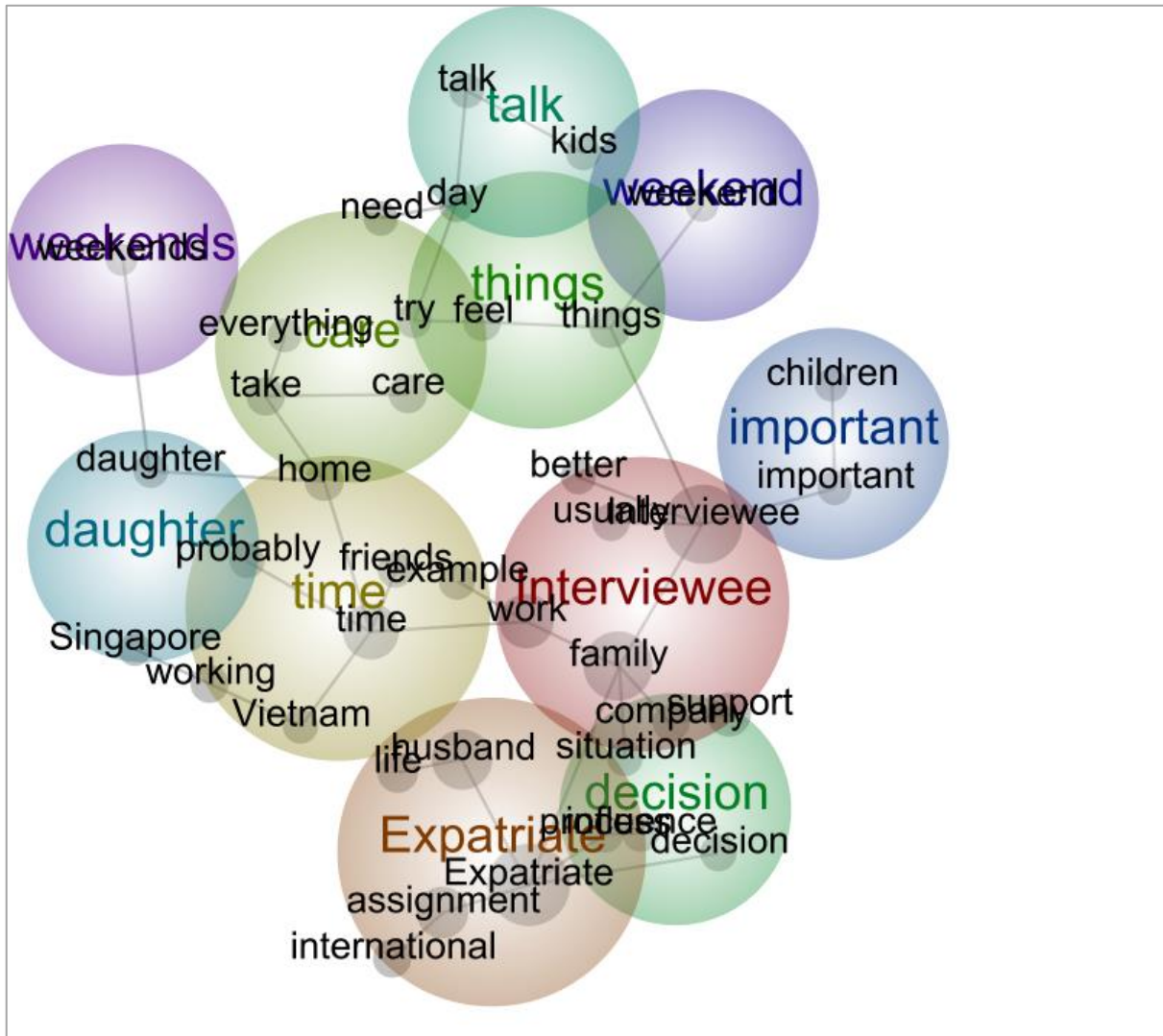
### Appendix 6.1: Concept map of insights from accompanied expatriates



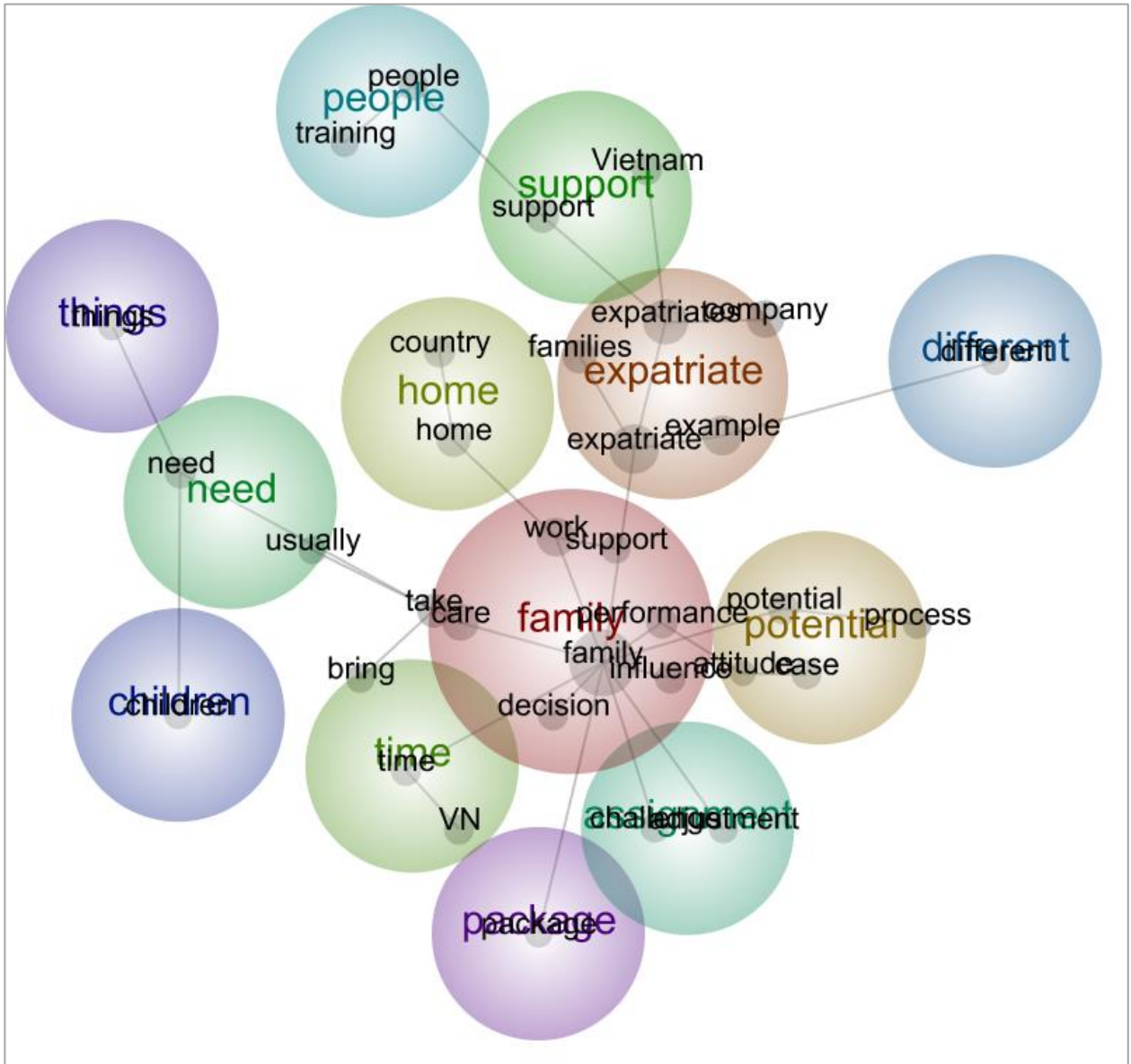




Appendix 6.4: Concept map of insights from un-accompanying expatriate spouses



Appendix 6.5: Concept map of insights from human resource professionals



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