

**The influence of support given by the expatriate's organization on
the work life balance and relationship of expatriate couples in
Singapore**



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Preface

This master thesis is written as the final part in order to complete the Masters of Strategic Human Resource Leadership and obtaining the Master of Science degree at the Radboud University in Nijmegen. During my master year, I noticed that I was attracted to the course of international HRM and especially interested in expatriates. This interest was specifically encouraged by the recent relocation of my sister, brother-in-law and nephew. Since they relocated to Singapore, the idea rose to dedicate my Master thesis to expatriate couples in Singapore. In this way, I hit two birds with one stone. I could visit them and execute my research at the same time. And best of all, I really enjoyed interviewing all expatriate couples for my research and learning their motives to relocate to Singapore along the way.

However, without the support of certain people, I would have not been able to complete this master thesis. First of all, I would like to thank my supervisor Joost Bücken for his encouragement to go on this adventure. His feedback and support throughout the whole process was very valuable. Furthermore, I would like to thank my eldest sister and her husband for enabling me to conduct this research by opening their house and to bring me in contact with other expatriate couples. Moreover, I would also like to thank all fifteen expatriate couples for their time in taking part in my research. And finally, I am also very grateful for the support of my boyfriend, other sister and her husband and parents during this master thesis.

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Abstract

Over the last decades the interest and need for expatriate management and international assignments has increased. And since two-thirds of all expatriates is accompanied by their partner and/or children, it is important to take their perceptions into account as well. For dual-career couples, where both partners are committed to a career, it is even more challenging to go abroad. Organizational support for the expatriate partner can therefore be very important since the partner has an important role in the adjustment and performance of the expatriate. And when the expatriate partner is employed, has meaningful day activities and is well-adjusted to the host country, this will also positively influence the expatriate who will perform better in his/her assignment. Understanding the perceptions of the expatriate and the expatriate partner concerning the organizational support that they request, may deliver valuable insights into the current challenges that the expatriate couple faces. Singapore, in which this research has been executed, is considered the overall best place for expatriates by HSBC. The aim of this research is to understand the influence of the support given by the expatriate's organization on the work life balance and marital stress of expatriate couples in Singapore. This research is qualitative and makes use of semi-structured interviews, where both the expatriate and the expatriate partner were interviewed. Results showed that there is a gap between the perceived and needed support by the expatriate couples. The most prominent lack of support concerns housing support, support for the career of the expatriate's partner and support to reduce marital stress.

Keywords

Expatriates, Expatriate partners, Dual-career couples, Organizational support, Work-life balance, Marital stress, Singapore

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1. Introduction

Over the last decades, an exponential growth in globalization among organizations and markets has taken place due to faster, easier and inexpensive communications as well as the facilitation of goods, people and capital via regional economic integration (Baruch, Altman, & Tung, 2016). A consequence of this globalization is that organizations are rapidly expanding their businesses outside of their home country in order to enhance their competitiveness (Lai & Yang, 2017), which in turn increases their interest and need for expatriate management and international assignments (Bonache, Brewster, Suutari, & De Saa, 2010). The international assignments require organizations to develop global competencies, to implement global business strategies and to enhance their global competitive advantage (Kraimer, Bolino, & Mead, 2016). So, in order to be globally successful, organizations need to focus on effective expatriate management (Bonache, Brewster, Suutari, & De Saa, 2010). The international assignment typically covers a period for three years (Trompetter, Bussin, & Nienaber, 2016) and is appointed to an employee who will be transferred from their home country to a foreign country (McEvoy & Buller, 2013). Sinangil and Ones (2001) define these employees as highly skilled individuals, but these employees are better known as expatriates. Expatriates are sent to a foreign work environment for different reasons, such as gaining international management experience, filling a position abroad that could not have been filled by a local candidate or improving organizational development and getting control over the local unit (Edström & Galbraith, 1977).

Two-thirds of all expatriates is accompanied by their partner and/or children (Cole, 2011), who have an important role in the adjustment and performance of the expatriate Takeuchi (2010). On the one hand, when family members are well-adjusted to their host country and are supportive towards the expatriate, it appears that the expatriate adjusts well and performs better in their assignment (Lauring & Selmer, 2010). On the other hand, when family members are maladjusted to their host country, they have a negative influence on the adjustment of the expatriate. And when the expatriate is maladjusted, this can have a negative effect on their international assignment (Wilkinson & Singh, 2010). Therefore, maladjusted family members are a common reason for expatriates to end their assignment and return to their home country prematurely (Shaffer & Harrison, 1998).

According to Moore (2002), Richardson (2016) and Silberbauer (2016), the decision to accept the international assignment today and the willingness to stay in the host country also depends on the available career opportunities for the expatriate partner. It appears that if the organization abroad has no attention for these so-called dual career couples, who are both

committed to a professional career (Bird & Schnurman-Crook, 2005; Käsälä, Mäkelä, & Suutari, 2015), the expatriate is less willing to stay. This could imply that if the expatriate's partner manages to find a suitable job, it can have a positive effect on the adjustment in the host country and on the relationship of the dual career couple (Permits foundation, 2009). Since the careers of dual-career couples are often intertwined, it is recommended that both careers should be studied at the same time (Lesnard, 2008; Gaio Santos & Cabral-Cardoso, 2008).

When simultaneously studying both the expatriate and the expatriate partner, the context of the international career becomes more important, since the expatriation affects not only the expatriate, but the entire family and can therefore put the family in a difficult position (McLachlan, 2008). According to Wilkinson & Singh (2010), the international assignment can be problematic for the expatriate and their family, since stress is a central part of the international relocation. While there is a fulltime interaction between work and family (Lazarova, Westman & Shaffer, 2010), it is likely that this interplay can be problematic and can lead to marital stress and even marital breakdown (McNulty, 2015). Therefore, this study will focus on understanding both the perceptions of the expatriate and the expatriate partner regarding the influence of the support given by the expatriate's organization on their work life balance and marital stress.

The aim of this research is to understand the influence of the support given by the expatriate's organization on the work life balance and marital stress of expatriate couples in Singapore. To this aim, the following research question was formulated: *How does the support of the expatriate's organization influence the work life balance and relationship of the expatriate couple in Singapore?*

This study focuses on organizations in Singapore, since the sister and brother-in-law of the researcher recently moved from Amsterdam to Singapore. Therefore, one expatriate couple was already familiar, which makes it less difficult to approach other expatriate couples and to invite them in participating in this study. But besides that, Singapore is also considered the overall best place for expatriates (HSBC, 2018). Thereby, given the good health and safety conditions in Singapore, expatriates are less concerned about adjusting to the local environment. Therefore, Singapore is considered as a country where it is less difficult for expatriates to adjust (Wu & Ang, 2011). As a result, at least a quarter of the Singapore population is an immigrant (Beaverstock, 2012).

The academic contribution of this research complements the findings of McNulty (2011) and Bauer and Taylor (2001), since they suggested that more research is needed on the issues the expatriate partner is facing. They state that it could be beneficial to understand the

perceptions concerning the organizational support of the expatriate partner in order to gain some valuable insights into the current match or mismatch between the expatriate partner and the organizational support. McNulty (2011) agrees with the proposal of Bauer and Taylor (2001) who states that organizational support should not only include practical support, but also a certain amount of social support. According to Moeller, McNulty and Harvey (2014) more research is needed on dual career couples and their expatriation. Despite the research of Richardson (2016) who states that expatriates are more likely to retain when there is attention for dual career couples and career opportunities for the expatriate partner, there is still a limited attempt to fully understand the perceptions of the expatriate partner (Shaffer & Harrison, 2001). Cole (2011) also states that there is extremely limited knowledge available from the perspective of the expatriate's partner regarding what forms valuable organizational assistance. So, this research therefore contributes not only to the literature on the perceptions of expatriates but also adds to the literature on the perceptions of expatriate partners. Moreover, this research also contributes to the scientific research that already has been done in Singapore regarding expatriates (Wu & Ang, 2011).

The findings of this research can be relevant for different organizations that offer international assignments, since it provides insights into the difficulties that expatriates and their partners face when moving and living abroad. Moreover, this research also clarifies the needs of the expatriates and their partners regarding the organizational support that they both need. Organizations can therefore use these findings in order to refine their expatriate management to attract and retain expatriates to their organization.

This research consists of five chapters. Chapter 2 discusses previous research in order to summarize the most important results in the theoretical framework. The third chapter consists of the methodology, in which the respondents are discussed and the way in which the data is gathered. In the fourth chapter the results of the interviews are discussed and the final chapter discusses the findings, the limitations, the academic and practical relevance, the implications of this research, as well as suggestions for future research.

2. Theoretical framework

This chapter defines the central concepts of this research. In order to answer the research question, it is essential to define and further elaborate the central concepts of this research.

2.1 Expatriates

The concept of expatriates is quite challenging to define, since there are many existing definitions. Edström and Galbraith (1977) speak of an expatriate when someone is working outside of their home country. McEvoy and Buller (2013) define the term more specific, since they see expatriates as employees who are transferred for a short amount of time from their home country to a non-native country abroad. These definitions relate to the concept of the traditional organizational expatriate (OE). In the late 1990s a new concept in the field of expatriation emerged, the self-initiated expatriate (SIE). Self-initiated expatriates are professionals who were not sent abroad by their organization, but they were personally motivated to live and work outside of their home country (Doherty, Richardson, & Thorn, 2013). These individuals may, in contrast to the organizational expatriate, even have decided to quit their job and pay for the relocation themselves, without any support of an organization and often without a set period in mind (Harrison, Shaffer, & Bhaskar-Shrinivas, 2004; Suutari & Brewster, 2000).

Next to the self-initiated expatriates, there are other forms of international assignments which are growing fast, such as short-term assignments, commuter assignments and frequent travelling (Bonache et al., 2010; Mutter & Thorn, 2019). Short-term assignments include assignments that normally last less than a year (Tahvanainen & Suutari, 2005). The employees are rarely accompanied by their partner and receive significantly less salary than the traditional expatriate. On the other hand, the goals for the short-term assignments are less difficult to set than for the long-term expatriate assignments (Bonache et al., 2010). Commuter assignments often consist of a business issue, most of the times in an unsafe country, where an employee is required to shuttle regularly between two places at once in order to manage the issue. Because of the unstable situation, the partner of the employee often stays at home (Bonache et al., 2010). Frequent travelling requires even less time in another country than short-term assignments or commuter assignments (Bonache et al., 2010). Frequent travellers may stay for several days at one location for all kind of purposes, such as market exploration, technology transfer and training and development (Nurney, 2001). Since they travel over short time spans, frequent travellers maintain their personal lives in their

home country and are therefore not accompanied by their partner when frequent travelling (Mayerhofer, Hartmann, & Herbert, 2004).

2.2 Dual career issues

Dual-career couples can experience some difficulties when accepting an international assignment. When relocating, the expatriate's partner often has to leave their employment and career behind in their home country, which can lead to a loss of self-worth, identity and power (Brown, 2008). Furthermore, the expatriate's partner can also experience some concern with the discontinuity of their career. Since the expatriate's partner has to place their career second to the career of the expatriate, psychological tensions can occur, which can only become worse if the expatriate's partner is unable to continue their career in the host country (Harvey & Buckley, 1998). This can also have an effect on the home situation, since the stress experienced by the expatriate's partner at home also has an effect on the work situation of the expatriate (Westman, 2001) and the willingness to continue their international assignment. Shaffer and Harrison (2001) therefore indicated that career support for the expatriate partner, can reduce the possibility that the expatriate withdraws from the international assignment. So, the expatriate is more willing to continue their employment, when the expatriate's organization provides sufficient career support for the expatriate's partner (Silberbauer, 2016). Therefore, provided support for the expatriate's partner by the expatriate's organization can increase the attraction and retention of expatriates (Richardson, 2016). Also, due to relocation, the expatriates couple becomes more isolated from their social lives, such as friends and family. This implies that the expatriate and the expatriate's partner have to depend more on each another than they did before relocation (Takeuchi, Yun, & Tesluk, 2002), which might cause some marital stress. Moreover, if the expatriate's partner is unable to find new employment, it can lead to a financial loss for the total income. This can be a problem if the costs of living, such as housing and schooling, do not outweigh the income (McNulty, 2015). Besides, since the dual-career couple is used to a certain lifestyle because of their double income in the home country, it can occur that the financial loss has an impact on the couple's satisfaction (Harvey & Buckley, 1998) and therefore on their relationship.

2.3 Different kinds of support by the organization

2.3.1 Organizational support

Organizations can offer a multiplicity of support to their employees and their families,

consisting of different practices and policies, both formal and informal (Clark, Rudolph, Zhdanova, Michel, & Baltes, 2017). According to Wayne, Grzywacz, Carlson and Kacmar (2007), organizational support factors should be positively related to the interplay of work and family life. They state that the devotion of an individual on one domain, work or family, provides certain assets, such as capital and efficiency gains, which contribute to a better functioning on the other domain. So, being an expatriate in a family-friendly organization, can cause feelings of positive affect on the work domain, which will positively increase the functioning of the family domain (Wayne et al., 2007). Thus, when an organization is supportive towards the expatriates needs to balance work and family life, the expatriate will benefit from it (Aryee, Srinivas, & Tan, 2005). According to Silberbauer (2016), concerns with the expatriate's family can be a threat for the expatriate, since the organizational support for the expatriate's partner and family impacts the retention of the expatriate. The Brookfield Global Mobility Trends Survey (2016) also showed that concerns with the family and the career of the expatriate's partner are the main reasons for declining the international assignment. Moreover, the main factor that causes the failure of the international assignment is dissatisfaction of the expatriate's partner (Cole & Nesbeth, 2014). Therefore, it appears important that an organization provides the correct organizational support, since the support has to be relevant in order to get the best results (McNulty, 2011). According to Haslberger and Brewster (2008), it is even more important to get the correct support, since the wrong support can worsen instead of improve existing problems.

Organizational support knows many different types. When comparing these types, it appears that practical organizational support is the most popular type of support, since it helps expatriate's partners adjust to their new environment. 80 percent of organizations provide practical support, such as language courses, cross-cultural training, home-sale assistance and a visit to the host country before the actual assignment takes place. Yet only 50 percent of organizations provide career support for the expatriate's partner, such as career counselling, addressing possible dual-career problems, resume preparation and job search. Moreover, less than 30 percent of organizations provide support for the expatriate's family in order for them to integrate into the host country. This support could consist of a sports membership, an introduction to other expatriates and access to networking groups for the expatriate's partner (McNulty, 2011). It therefore appears that organizations give extensive practical support, and less career and social support which is necessary for the expatriate and expatriate's partner to adjust to their new environment.

2.3.2 Career support

According to Moeller, McNulty and Harvey (2014), organizations make use of three ways in which they provide support for dual career couples. These ways are focused on helping the expatriate's partner maintain or switch careers by offering language training, educational aid and organizational sponsored work permits. Moreover, Dowling (2008), also mention several ways in which organizations can provide support for the career of the expatriate's partner. Organizations can for instance support the expatriate's partner in finding employment at another organization, which is called inter-company networking. Furthermore, organizations can also offer job-hunting assistance, including assistance with work permits and offering career counselling. Moreover, organizations can also offer the expatriate's partner employment at another agency, which is intra-company employment. And at last, organizations can also offer the expatriate's partner on-assignment career support, which includes organizing activities to develop the expatriate's partner career, paying for their education, improving their language and establishing contacts (Dowling, 2008). Punnet (1997) agrees with Dowling on the importance of establishing contacts. Punnet suggests that expatriate's partners need organizational support when it comes to making new contacts, for instance by introducing them to the right people in other organizations.

The career support organizations provide to expatriates seems to depend on the kind of expatriate, so whether the expatriate is an organizational expatriate or a self-initiated expatriate (McNulty & Vance, 2017). On the one hand, the organizational expatriate is provided traditional career management in order to establish a match between the needs of the organization and the expatriate, which will lead to continuing competitive advantage (Tharenou, 2013). Usually, the career of the organizational expatriate unfolds within one organization that strives to improve the progress of the expatriate's career by allocating them multiple assignments (Jokinen, Brewster, & Suutari, 2008). On the other hand, the career support provided to self-initiated expatriates is characterized by expatriates that take care of their careers themselves, outside of the organization (McNulty & Vance, 2017). Therefore, they leave the organizational security behind in order to be flexible and autonomous. Self-initiated expatriates may therefore possess an intrinsic desire to gain international experience by living and working in a foreign country (Bozionelos, Bozionelos, Kostopoulos, Shyong, Baruch, & Zhou, 2015). Therefore, it appears that the career of an organizational expatriate is completely controlled by the organization, whereas the career of the self-initiated expatriate is fully controlled by the individual. (McNulty & Vance, 2017). McNulty and Vance (2017) further suggest that expatriates are less relying on traditional organizational career support,

such as providing international skills and management experience, and are increasingly obligated to self-manage their career.

2.3.3 Lack of support

Even though it appears that organizations provide sufficient career support, this is often not the case. Lazarova, McNulty and Semeniuk (2015) identify that the support written down in the organizational policies, is often neither communicated or implemented, which is particularly the case for the expatriate's partner. The expatriate's partner often experiences demands, such as tensions at home, and expects support from the organization in order to decrease those demands, but that support is unfortunately inadequate (Lazarova et al., 2015). Therefore, McNulty (2015) argues for recognition of the expatriate's partner, since the partner is not only a great contribution to the success of the assignment, but the partner is also greatly affected by the expatriation policies of the organization that relate to issues among dual-career couples.

Not only the expatriate's partner experiences inadequate support, also the expatriate is not satisfied with the provided support. According to Bossard and Peterson (2005), former expatriates are often very disappointed when repatriating, since they notice that their organization does not value their international experience. Some expatriates even believe that it would have been better for their career if they had stayed at home (Bolino, 2007). Even though many expatriates believe that an international assignment guarantees a promotion (Stahl, Miller, & Tung, 2002), this causal relationship has yet to be confirmed (Knocke & Schuster, 2017).

2.4 Work-life balance

Since two-thirds of all expatriates is accompanied by their partner and/or children (Cole, 2011), it is important for the expatriate to maintain a good balance between work and family. This because the family has direct influence on the adjustment and the performance of the expatriate (Lauring & Selmer, 2010). Therefore, it is important that the expatriate has a good ratio between work and life (Takeuchi, 2010).

According to the research of Cho and Chew (2019), there are four themes when defining work-life balance. These themes are time management, psychological detachment, fulfilment at and outside work and diverse perspectives (Cho & Chew, 2019). Time management appeared to be the most important aspect when defining work-life balance. This is due to working long hours and therefore time needs to be managed in order to gain some

time outside of work. Psychological detachment implies that the employee is mentally not occupied with work when he is physically not present at work (Sonnetag, 2012). It appeared that this detachment is difficult, since the separation between work and nonwork is often blurry. This can be the case when employees have to collaborate with people in another time zone (Cho & Chew 2019), which implies that it could be possible that they need to work after office hours in the evening. The third theme, fulfilment at and outside work, is important when achieving work-life balance, since this can be achieved by putting the personal requirements together with the requirements from work. So, at one hand being able to meet the needs of work and at the other hand being able to spend time with the family (Cho & Chew, 2019). The last theme, diverse perspectives, appeared to be different for everyone, since the term work-life balance has a different meaning for everyone. It differs when you have a family or when you don't have a family. Therefore, the definition of one's work-life balance is also dependent on their life stage and personal values (Cho & Chew, 2019).

2.5 Marital stress among dual-career couples

Only a few studies have given attention to marital stress among dual-career couples (Pascoe in McNulty, 2011). Within those studies, it was found that marital factors, for both expatriate and expatriate partner, were related to the adjustment to the host country (James, Hunsley, Navara, & Alles, 2004). According to the social role theory adjusting to the host country is particularly difficult for unemployed men since they see their work as a big element of being a man (Eagly in Cole, 2012). These expectations about a specific societal gender role produce certain urgency for men to find employment (Forret, Sullivan, & Mainiero, 2010). And even when employment is found, this is often at a lower level than in the home country. Men can therefore experience lower self-esteem, which can eventually both lead to a depression and stress at home (Harvey & Buckley, 1998). Thereby, many organizations only drafted their support policies specifically for women (Cole, 2012) and may therefore not applicable for men, which makes it difficult for men to receive organizational support in order to cope with their loss in self-esteem.

In line with Torbiorn, Thompson (in McNulty, 2011) found that all expatriates' partners value a good marriage when living an international life. According to Cole (2012), support for dual-career issues and marital tensions, in order to reduce marital stress, is not often provided although it is perceived as very important by expatriate's partners. It appears that making long days at the office is a main cause of marital stress, since working many

hours a day prevents the expatriate to spend time at home with their partner (Brown, 2008). Therefore, time conflicts seem to be a cause for marital tension. Next to time conflicts, there are other causes that contribute to marital stress, such as isolation and loneliness (De Verthelyi, 1995). In contrast to the expatriate who instantly receives a new social network when starting the international assignment, the expatriate's partner rarely has a job and therefore lacks a social network when arriving in the host country. These differences can lead among the expatriate's partners to the development of feelings of insecurity and vulnerability (Van Erp, Giebels, Van Der Zee, & Van Duijn, 2011). Therefore, deciding to relocate can either only strengthen the relationship of the dual-career couple, since they are now more dependent on another, or it can weaken the relationship, since the expatriate's partner feels isolated and that can eventually lead to getting a divorce (Imundo in McNulty, 2011).

2.6 Summary

This section provided insights into the existing literature with regards to expatriates, dual career issues, the kind of support provided by the expatriate's organization, work-life balance and marital stress among dual-career couples. First, general literature concerning expatriates was explained by providing the different forms of international assignments, such as organizational expatriates, self-initiated expatriates and even short-term assignments, commuter assignments and frequent travelling. Subsequently, dual career issues regarding the expatriates couple were discussed. Thereafter, the different kinds of support provided by the organization were discussed, such as organizational support, career support and also the lack of support. Subsequently, the work-life balance of the expatriate couple was discussed where time management was seen as the most important factor when defining work-life balance. Finally, marital stress among dual-career couples was discussed, since this stress is related to the adjustment to the host country. And according to the social role theory, adjusting to the host country is particularly difficult for unemployed men.

3. Methodology

This chapter describes the method used in this research. The first paragraph presents the research design including some sub-questions in order to answer the research question. In the second paragraph, the sample is outlined. The third paragraph explains the instruments. The fourth paragraph specifies the data collection process and in the last paragraph is explained how the research quality indicators will be met.

3.1 Research design

The aim of this research is to understand the influence of the support given by the expatriate's organization on the work life balance and marital stress of expatriate couples in Singapore. As this research strives to understand the beliefs, values, actions and decisions of both the expatriate and the expatriate partner, the design of this research is qualitative (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2013). An advantage of qualitative research is that by asking open-ended questions, it is possible to fully capture the emotions of the respondents, in contrast to quantitative research (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Moreover, this research is also inductive, since it is an exploratory research (Kenealy, 2012) that seeks to build theory out of interviews (Ritchie et al., 2013).

This research will gather data by having semi-structured interviews and can be seen as a cyclical process in which the data collection and analysis will take place alternately and are continuously guided by reflection. The interviews will be held separately among the couples in order to guarantee anonymity. Furthermore, this research is cross-sectional, since it only gathers data over a short period, namely from July till September 2019. In order to answer the research question '*How does the support of the expatriate's organization in Singapore influence the work life balance and marital stress of the expatriate couple?*', several sub-questions were drafted:

1. What kind of support does the expatriate's organization provide to the expatriates/expatriates' partners, if any?
2. What are the challenges that expatriates/expatriates' partners face and what kind of support do they need from the expatriate's organization to overcome those challenges, if any?
3. In the perception of the expatriates and the expatriate's partners, is there a lack of support received by the expatriate's organization?

4. What is the influence of the support given by the expatriate's organization on the work life balance of the expatriates and expatriate's partners?
5. What kind of effect does the expatriate life have on the expatriate's couple relationship?

3.2 Sample

As this research focuses on the perceptions of both the expatriate and the expatriate's partner, the target group are expatriate couples whereby the expatriate is employed in Singapore. A target group that contains expatriates from different organizations, gives an opportunity to find the similarities and differences between these organizations regarding the support provided to both expatriate and expatriate partner.

One expatriate couple, that was relocated from Amsterdam to Singapore, is already familiar, since they are the sister and brother-in-law of the researcher. Therefore, this dual-career couple was less difficult to approach. They subsequently recommended other dual-career couples, also located in Singapore, that are willing to participate in this research. The other 14 expatriate couples, were therefore reached out via snowball sampling. These expatriate couples can be found in Table 1, where EX1 stands for expatriate 1 and EP1 stands for expatriate partner 1 and together they are expatriate couple 1.

Due to time constraints, the original number of interviews was held at 20, which gives a total of ten expatriate couples. However, after 20 interviews the point of data saturation was not achieved yet. Therefore, another 10 interviews with 5 expatriate couples were held. The respondents had 8 different nationalities. The youngest respondent was 23 and the oldest was 53. The length of stay varied between 5 months and 5 years, but most respondents stayed 2 – 3 years. Among the expatriates there were 11 males and 4 females and among the partners there were 10 females and 5 men. 10 expatriate couples had children and 7 expatriate partners were unemployed at the moment of the interview. These characteristics can be found in the table below.

Respondent	Gender	Age	Nationality	Children	Employed	Length of stay
1. EX1	Male	34	Dutch	Yes	Yes	2 years
2. EP1	Female	32	Dutch	Yes	No	2 years
3. EX2	Male	32	Dutch	No	Yes	2 years
4. EP2	Female	32	Dutch	No	Yes	2 years

5. EX3	Female	30	Dutch	No	Yes	2 years
6. EP3	Male	34	Dutch	No	Yes	2 years
7. EX4	Female	31	Dutch	No	Yes	1 - 1,5 years
8. EP4	Male	33	Dutch	No	Yes	1 - 1,5 years
9. EX5	Male	53	Dutch	Yes	Yes	5 months
10. EP5	Female	36	Dutch	Yes	No	5 months
11. EX6	Male	38	Dutch	No	Yes	3 years
12. EP6	Male	36	Dutch	No	Yes	3 years
13. EX7	Male	45	Dutch	Yes	Yes	Unknown
14. EP7	Female	33	Polish	Yes	No	Unknown
15. EX8	Male	37	German	Yes	Yes	2 years
16. EP8	Female	39	Chinese	Yes	No	2 years
17. EX9	Male	31	Dutch	Yes	Yes	2 - 5 years
18. EP9	Female	32	Dutch	Yes	Yes	2 - 5 years
19. EX10	Male	24	Dutch	No	Yes	2 years
20. EP10	Female	23	Dutch	No	Yes	2 years
21. EX11	Female	43	Dutch	Yes	Yes	6 months - 1 year
22. EP11	Male	45	Scottish	Yes	Yes	6 months - 1 year
23. EX12	Male	35	British	Yes	Yes	3 years
24. EP12	Female	38	British	Yes	No	3 years
25. EX13	Male	33	Dutch	Yes	Yes	3 years
26. EP13	Female	34	Dutch	Yes	Yes	3 years
27. EX14	Male	42	American	Yes	Yes	3 years
28. EP14	Female	37	American	Yes	No	3 years
29. EX15	Female	36	Polish	Yes	Yes	1 year
30. EP15	Male	39	Belgian	Yes	No	1 year

Table 1: Characteristics of the sample (Author, 2020)

3.3 Instruments

Whereas structured interviews contain a predetermined list of interview questions in order to manage the interviews equally, this research collects data through semi-structured interviews, which allow the interviews to vary between the participants (Fylan, 2005). The semi-

structured interviews will be held with the use of an interview script (Appendix A) that is developed beforehand, based on the research- and sub questions of this study. The interview script forms a guideline for the interview, but also provides an opportunity to diverge from the script when that appears logically. Based on the answers of the participants, it is therefore possible to discuss new questions and ideas during the interview. The participants are therefore encouraged to make use of this opportunity and discuss their own perceptions.

3.4 Data collection

Different actions will be taken in order to collect the data. First, contact will be made with the participants through various channels, such as email and WhatsApp. These participants will receive some background information about the research and the type of questions that they can expect. If they are willing to participate, an appointment will be scheduled by email or WhatsApp. Secondly, the semi-structured interviews will be conducted in Singapore at a location the expatriate or expatriate partner prefers, such as the office or at home. The interviews will all be held in English and the length of the interview will approximately be 30 minutes. Every interview will start with an introduction of the research including the topics that will be discussed during the interview. Furthermore, the researcher will also make sure that the participant is comfortable by reassuring anonymity. Moreover, the researcher will also ask approval for recording the interview. The advantage of recording an interview is that the researcher is not distracted by other practices such as taking notes, but is able to focus on asking the questions and listening to the answers the participant is giving (Anderson, 2004). The interview will end by thanking the participant for their participation and time. Finally, the interviews will be transcribed and if requested, the researcher can send the transcribed interview via email to the participant for a proof read before the content of the interview is used for analyzation.

3.5 Data analysis

After transcribing the interviews, the transcriptions will be given a certain number (e.g. the interview with expatriate 4 will be called interview EX4). Hereafter, the transcripts were coded inductively, which implies that the interviews were analysed without using existing theory (Boeije, 2014). With the help of the coding program Atlas.ti, the data was coded inductively in three phases, namely open coding, axial coding and selective coding (Boeije, 2014). The coding process started by making use of open coding, where every part of the interview was studied in order to decide which code is applicable to that part (Boeije, 2002).

The open coding enabled the researcher to get to know the data well. It also made the data manageable and thematization was added. After completing the open coding, the axial coding process started where codes were sorted and matched in relevant categories in order to determine the number of codes. The codes make it possible to further conceptualize the subject (Boeije, 2002). Subsequently in the third phase of coding, the selective coding, the researcher made connections between the categories (Boeije, 2014), whereby the coding process went from very broad to fairly specific. The coding scheme can be found in Appendix B.

3.6 Research quality indicators

Internal validity concerns the question whether the researcher has measured what he/she aimed to measure beforehand (Boeije, 2014). In order to increase the validity of this research, open questions were asked during the interview in order to enable the researcher to ask for explanations. Thereby, the respondents were guaranteed anonymity, which was aimed on the prevention that the respondent would give socially correct answers. This ensured that the questions were understood correctly, which contributed to an increased validity (Anderson, 2013).

Reliability concerns the question whether the same results are found when the research is replicated (Boeije, 2014). This research strived to enhance the reliability by making sure that the participants were comfortable, for instance via small talk (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Thereby, since the research made use of semi-structured interviews, the interview was also partially standardized, since the questions were asked in the same order during all interviews.

External validity concerns the extent to which the results of a research are applicable to other people, organizations and situations, which were not taken into account in the study (Boeije, 2014). The external validity of this research was limited, since the respondents were mostly Dutch and only a few other nationalities were involved. These were Chinese, Polish, Belgian, German and Scottisch.

3.7 Research ethics

Research ethics is about the ethical rules when conducting a research. The ethical rules include voluntary participation, confidentiality and bringing no harm to the respondents. Voluntary participation means that no respondent was forced to participate in the research and that the purpose of the research is clearly communicated to the respondent (Babbie, 2017). In

this research, the respondents were reached out via snowball sampling. Even though the respondents were asked to participate in this study, they always had the ability to decline. Subsequently, confidentiality in this research is guaranteed by the researcher in terms of reassuring anonymity to the respondent. Therefore, the interviews with the expatriate and the expatriate partner were also held separately. Moreover, the name of the respondent and information about their organization was only visible for the researcher. Therefore, it has been prevented that a link could be made between the respondent and the expatriate's organization. This also means that the researcher is not able to link responses from a respondent to a certain organization. This would not only increase the reliability of the outcome, but the concerning organization can then also take action based on the answers of the respondents. Furthermore, no harm was brought to the respondents by the researcher. This means that the respondents were not injured or in any way embarrassed by their given answers (Babbie, 2017). Even though the respondents were encouraged to express their thoughts and opinions and their partner did not know what was said during the other interview, they always had the possibility to withhold information.

4. Results

This section of the thesis shows the results of the interviews done with expatriates and their partners in Singapore. Although the interviews with the expatriate and the expatriate partner were held separately in order to guarantee anonymity, the analysis will bind their views together. Since this research strives to simultaneously study both the expatriate and the expatriate partner, it is best to present their results as an expatriate couple instead of analysing them separately. In this way, the context of the international relocation becomes more important, since the expatriation affects not only the expatriate, but the entire family and can therefore put the family in a difficult position.

The results are based on the sub-questions defined in the methodology and on the coded interviews and are therefore divided into five parts. In the first section, the provided support by the expatriate's organization is discussed. The second part highlights the support that is needed from the expatriate's organization. The third part exposes the possibility of a lack in support provided by the expatriate's organization. The fourth part discusses the influence of the perceived support on the work-life balance and the fifth part looks at the effect of the expatriate life on the relationship.

4.1 Provided support by the expatriate's organization

The expatriates and expatriate partners were asked what kind of support the expatriate's organization provides. And since this research is inductive and seeks to build theory out of the interviews, the different kinds of support that were retrieved from the interviews through coding, were bundled together to specific factors. These factors enable to answer the first sub-question: *What kind of support does the expatriate's organization provide to the expatriates/expatriate's partners, if any?* The factors are explained below in order of relevance.

4.1.1 Visa support

All expatriate couples indicated that they had received organizational support with arranging their visa for Singapore. Since it is in Singapore obligatory to have an employer's pass in order to enter the country and to be able to work, all organizations applied for an employer's pass for their expatriate. The only thing that the expatriate couples had to do was handing all the necessary documents to the organization. One expatriate explained:

“It is a lot of paperwork and they take care of the rest and if something is wrong, they come back to you. No, that's well organized and a straightforward process. And also, you're not mobilized until you get approval that you have your employment pass”
[EX4]

Almost all expatriate couples received also visa support for their partner and family. When the expatriate couple is married, the partner receives a dependent's pass, which enables the partner to work in Singapore as well. This is also the reason why three expatriate couples decided to get married before they moved to Singapore.

“I can work. Actually, that's one of the reasons why we would get married right before coming here” [EP15]

4.1.2 Housing support

Thirteen expatriate couples indicated that they had received some sort of housing support from their organization. This housing support was often provided by the organization in terms of a housing allowance or allocating an apartment to the expatriate couple.

“We're just told this is where we were living. We were sent an e mail and it had an address to this place and some pictures. So, we did not do any shopping around”
[EP14]

Whereas some expatriate couples also got a list of possible apartments and had the opportunity to keep their preferences in mind. In this case, the couple had the possibility to check the neighbourhoods and make a considered decision.

“They provided me, with two three options which I got like informative brochures and pictures with some like information about location and convenient stuff like this and then I made my choice” [EX8]

Six expatriate couples were even linked to a real estate agent who was hired by the organization to find them an apartment.

“So, we’ve got a guy attached to us actually and he was responsible for finding a house. So, to him we had to indicate by a form which preference we had for a house. Which area and how should it look like. Based on that, they came with a selection of 15 houses or so” [EX6]

4.1.3 Transportation support

When relocating to Singapore, eleven expatriate couples received transportation support from the expatriate’s organization. This could be in terms of providing a container to ship some furniture, but some organizations also hired a moving company that was responsible for packing all the belongings that the expatriate couple wanted to bring to Singapore. One expatriate partner explained:

“So, first of all they were all arranged to remove your belongings so, there is a company coming in your house. They will pack everything, so you are not even allowed to get a lamp off the ceiling because then it’s not insured. So, you just get out of your house. They will pack everything put it in a container and ship it to Singapore” [EP9]

And some organizations even hired a moving company in Singapore that was responsible for picking up the container and placing all the furniture in the apartment of the expatriate couple. One expatriate indicated:

“So, they subcontract the packing, the shipping and the unpacking {...} Also, they detached all the things, like the table you know, and they when it arrives, they install everything again. {...} You only have to point out where you want to have it but they bring it until the door and in your house, they put it where you want it and installed everything” [EX6]

4.1.4 Financial support

Fourteen couples also received some kind of financial support from their organization. With nine couples, the expatriate’s organization paid for their insurance. One expatriate couple recently found out that this financial support was essential, since their daughter had an accident and had to be taken to the hospital. The expatriate explained:

“Health insurance is completely covered for the whole family and it's a very good insurance. And I know it right now, because the bill for my daughter was so expensive and it was completely covered. So, then you realize that you really need it” [EX15]

Eight couples also received financial support in the form of plane tickets to fly to Singapore and also back to their home country at the end of their assignment. And some couples also have the possibility to go back to their home country once a year at the expense of the expatriate's organization.

“So, you get tickets booked, business class, for the whole family coming here and going back after the assignment. Plus, one time in your one-year contract, you can go back to your home country” [EX15]

There were also three expatriate couples who received organizational support with their taxes. Since most expatriate couples relocated during the year, they had to pay taxes in their home country as well as in Singapore that year. And that was often perceived as extremely challenging. One expatriate clearly indicated this:

“So, another thing they provided which I was really happy about was tax help. So, Dutch tax law is really bonkers. It is really crazy difficult” [EX4]

Another expatriate confirmed this by saying:

“So, they've also offered to help us with tax because that's a challenging thing {...} I've always thought wow it must be really complex if you're in the country part of the year and then you're overseas and you know how does that work. And no that we are in that situation, I'm thinking wow it's going to be really tough this year, but they also offer support with tax advice because of your circumstances” [EX11]

Moreover, five expatriate couples indicated that they, next to the plain tickets, also receive other forms of financial support. With one couple, the organization provided them a taxi pass, which has a budget that they can use up to. Another couple, who recently had a baby, received an allowance for having a family. And next to that, with three couples the expatriate's

organization also provides financial support in terms of covering the utility bills of the expatriate couple.

4.1.5 Onset support

When arriving in Singapore, five expatriate couples received immediate onset support. They received this support by taking part in an organized tour to discover Singapore. During this tour, they were shown where they could do their groceries, where to take the MRT, where the nearest hospitals were and where the nice restaurants are. This onset support was received as very positive. One expatriate stated about this tour:

“So, I think that was really good, really nice, even though it was just a single day. It was quite enjoyable” [EX4]

4.1.6 Career support

Among the 15 expatriate couples, 4 expatriates received some kind of career support. They received career support through the opportunity of following training courses. One expatriate participates yearly in four leadership trainings. Two expatriates were offered a cultural training, where only one expatriate participated. And the fourth expatriate has the opportunity to follow online training courses, but has not taken part yet. The respondent explained:

“So, my company has quite a big kind of training platform where they try to enable growth within the company itself. I have not yet fully actively pursued any training, since the lack of time really. But generally, they give you that opportunity” [EX8]

Next to the expatriates, four expatriate partners also received some sort of career support from the expatriate’s organization. For one partner this support was provided through a cultural training, for another by a CV check. The third partner had the opportunity to talk with a career coach and the fourth partner received a budget specifically indented to pursue her career. The partner explained:

“It’s not that you’re getting it, you really have to prove that you really did something when it was useful for your career. But this could also be having a babysitter, like paying a babysitter so that you can go out for events or anything” [EX9]

4.1.7 Partner support

Next to career support for the expatriate partner, two expatriate's organizations also provided some organizational support for the partner. One partner is linked to a community liaison officer, who organizes all kind of events for the partners, such as a shopping trip to buy some furniture. The other partner also received some organizational support, but this support was a bit old-fashioned since it was meant for the man being the expat, and the woman being the expat partner. He explained:

“But there was one service for the spouse to see how they would spend their time purposefully or usefully. But it's just like when I was reading this in this text or in this brochure it just didn't appeal to me. It seemed very much geared towards women also and it was about will you spend your time taking care of orphaned children or something” [EP15]

4.2 Support needed from the expatriate's organization

After discussing what support was provided by the expatriate's organization, the expatriate couples were asked what kind of support they needed from the expatriate's organization. This appeared to be a difficult question, since some expatriates and expatriate partners had not thought about receiving other support from the expatriate's organization. The different kinds of support needed, after coding, were clustered to specific factors. These factors enable to answer the second sub-question: *What kind of support do the expatriates/expatriates' partners need from the expatriate's organization, if any?*

4.2.1 Introduction to a network

Eight expatriate partners indicated that being introduced to a network or being part of a network would have been very helpful to get to know some people in Singapore. Whereas the expatriate automatically had a network through their colleagues and did not need any help with establishing a network, the expatriate partners often found it difficult to create a network. One partner would have liked to get more acquainted with the network of her husband. She said:

“Yeah if there are any company events that for example they could organize for the partners and then I can join in. I think that would be quite helpful” [EP7]

Another partner would have liked some financial support with establishing a network. She suggested:

“Maybe by giving you a little discount on the Holland club for instance. Maybe paying half of the membership. With that you can get a network and now you have to do it by yourself” [EP5]

A third partner also faced some difficulties with establishing a private network. He was taking care of the children at home and therefore not able to make contacts. He explained:

“Making it easier to expand your local network. I am talking about the non-professional network that is not directly related to the job of the spouse. That is definitely something interesting. That would be nice” [EP15]

4.2.2 Coaching

An issue which partners face when finding employment in Singapore, is that they have zero knowledge about the way things work in Singapore. It takes a lot of time to figure just the basic information out. One partner indicated that it would have been very helpful if the expatriate’s organization had provided a couple sessions with a career coach, just to get started. Another partner agrees with her. She further elaborated on a career coach:

“Yeah that would have been great. Someone who could have told me how things work in Singapore and what to expect. Because also what I did not know, was that it would be so difficult to be able to be hired in Singapore {...} here you apply and when they don't invite you for an interview, they just ignore you. It's not like thank you, we looked into your resume and we've decided not to interview you. You just hear nothing. In the beginning you are like what's this, did they not receive it or what's wrong with me. And I think if someone could have explained me little bits beforehand, that would have saved a lot of frustration. Because it's already overwhelming and then when you're struggling also in that area to find a job then yeah, it's even more overwhelming” [EP13]

A third partner experienced the same problem. She stated:

“I have a lot of experience with sending Linked In messages and going through all these online wizards where you have to fill in all your skills and upload all your educational proof. Never heard of them. And I had that with two other companies. So, I looked for specific jobs on Linked In, matching my resume, but got no response”
[EP1]

4.2.3 Language training

Most expatriate couples indicated that language was not a major challenge, since almost everyone in Singapore could speak English. One expatriate partner, who has a Chinese nationality, indicated that language was a challenge for her. She elaborated on that by stating that having a professional job would be difficult because of the language and therefore she would have liked a training in business English. A second partner also experienced some difficulties with business English and stated the following about a business English training:

“But in the end, real business English, writing and speaking in terms of using the right grammar, that would have been very helpful and it still is. I think it is always good to be trained in a foreign language. You can always learn something” [EP1]

4.2.4 Hiring the expatriate partner

Two expatriate couples would have liked the expatriate’s organization to offer their partner a job, since there are multiple options to do so. One expatriate partner explained:

“What they sometimes do is that they provide the housing budget not to the landlord, but they pay it to the partner of the expatriate. So, he can show that as local income. And then he will pay the same amount of money straight to the landlord. So, it's just a cash flow running that helps to get this visa {...} Like ... for instance, Dutch bank that also have Dutch expatriates in Singapore and when there are difficulties to get the partner visa or whatever which is required, they have opportunities to kind of employ the partner. And on that way provide this person the visa as well” [EP6]

In this case, the expatriate partner does not have a dependent's pass, since they are a same-sex couple. Therefore, the expatriate partner does not receive a permanent visa, only a tourist visa. When the expatriate's organization would hire him, he would receive an employer's pass, which means automatically that he receives a permanent visa.

4.3 Lack of support received by the expatriate's organization

The expatriate couples were asked if they experienced a lack of support from the expatriate's organization. The different kinds of organizational shortcoming were bundled together to specific factors. These factors enable to answer the third sub-question: *In the perception of the expatriates and the expatriate's partners, is there a lack of support received by the expatriate's organization?* The factors are explained below in order of relevance.

4.3.1 Lack of housing support

Eleven expatriate couples indicated that they had experienced a lack of housing support from the expatriate's organization. Most couples experienced a lack in the sense that they did receive some housing support, but this support was often very inefficient. One expatriate elaborates:

“You know what, actually we realize that you get lots of support. But when it came to like, for example finding a house, you get this advice on the phone and you have this agent and she's bringing you to all the places and making interview with you. So, you spend lots of hours but at the end, we had to do with ourselves. So, it's not really like super helpful, you know” [EP15]

And another expatriate had to fill in a form, which was necessary for the organization to find the expatriate couple the best apartment according to their preferences. She explained:

“And she says where's this form I really need it. Yeah okay, I'll send it to you now. So, I send it to her and within five minutes I get a response. These are the three apartment options and I opened it and it had nothing to do with my preferences” [EX4]

Another expatriate took the housing arrangements under her own hands, since her organization was very slow with providing them options for housing. And since she had a son, which needed day-care, she experienced a lot of stress because of it.

“So, you still have the stress from like do I find the right day-care. But we couldn't look for day-cares unless they did give us some apartment options and that came very, very late. And then I arranged a trip here. So, I took the initiative with myself. So, I basically looked at all the apartments. We gave them some apartment options and that was it. Officially you get help with that, but it wasn't there” [EX11]

4.3.2 Lack of career support

With most expatriate couples, it was the expatriate partner who experienced a lack of career support. The partner would often have liked to receive some support from the expatriate's organization when establishing a network or when searching and applying for a job. A career coach would then definitely have helped them to get started. One expatriate stated:

“Especially I think, business and network wise it's going to be difficult in the beginning to know where to look {...} And you can really use someone who points out to you, like for this you go there, for that try there” [EP13]

There was also an expatriate that experienced a lack of career support because of his relocation to Singapore, even though he stayed within the same company. He stated:

“So, there was no support from the company, because obviously they didn't like the fact that I was leaving the company in Amsterdam {...} Obviously, it is one global company with different business entities, so for them there is no advantage of me relocating to Singapore [EX1]

4.3.3 Lack of partner support

Eight expatriate couples, who did not receive some kind of partner support, indicated that this support would be more than welcome. For instance, with building a network, receiving career counselling, finding a job for the expatriate partner. One expatriate partner did receive some partner support, but since this support was more focussed on women as the expatriate partner,

he did not make use of it. There was also one expatriate couple where the expatriate partner was not even allowed to come to Singapore. She stated:

“I think it's quite ridiculous that your spouse is not allowed to come with you. I think we are the first that are doing it this way {...} So, I find it a little bit strange that you're not really allowed. He really had to push some boundaries to get us here”
[EP5]

Since the expatriate partner was in the beginning not allowed to come along with the expatriate to Singapore, the expatriate's organization did not offer any support to the expatriate's partner. Therefore, the expatriate had to pay everything out of his own pocket in order to make it possible that his partner accompanied him to Singapore. She further elaborates:

“Yes, his flight, his stay, his visa, everything. Living here is divided in what the costs are for him and what the costs are for me and our daughter. Applying for a dependent pass, we had to pay all by ourselves” [EP5]

4.3.4 Lack of personal support

Many expatriate couples also indicated that their organization lacked a bit of proactive behaviour. The expatriate's organization often knew in what situation the expatriate couples were, and still they waited on the expatriate couples to take initiative. One partner stated:

“But just a little bit more attention would be appreciated and would be better {...} There's not too much interest in what I do, which could be better. I think that's also one of the points that they could improve” [EP3]

And even when the organization provided some help, the information was often not useful at all. One expatriate elaborates:

“And the help that you receive or the information flow that you receive before moving out is quite horrendous and not helpful at all. Often wrong and they don't realize that when you actually move with the family that this has some consequences. So, it has consequences on the work of my husband, it has consequences for my son. Even like

cancelling day-care if you move dates, you have to cancel day-care one month before”
[EX11]

Most couples also felt that the expatriate’s organization missed quite a few personal touches. One expatriate really missed that personal approach. She felt as if she was asking weird questions, which were absolutely normal questions she thought. She elaborated:

“A bit more personal approach. So, the system works. The processes are there. It's all globally standardized. But you're not moving globally. You're moving from country A to B under personal circumstances and those are not super special circumstances. I'm quite normal I am moving, I am married. How does this apply to me? It's not a weird question {...} The responses I got were almost hostile. You're not supposed to, you should not bring your husband, really like that, while they talk about a very personal choice. And by the way that is also a choice I'm not making on behalf of the company; I'm not sponsoring him” [EX4]

One expatriate also felt very unsupported in his work. He had the feeling that every little thing that did not go well was for him to be blamed on. That he got blamed for mistakes that other people made, which made him personally feel not supported by his organization.

“And all of a sudden, they say yeah you got a bad review. And I said why {...} they said, yeah well, but still things are not going good in Asia. And I said yeah okay but that is not for me to blame. {...} So, I do feel, to be honest, I do feel a backstabbed quite a bit by some people in management because it was very easy for them to clear their own path by you know blaming things on me” [EX13]

4.3.5 Lack of visa support

When it comes to a lack of support in terms of applying for the visa, five expatriate couples experienced this lack. One expatriate couple had to apply for the dependent’s pass themselves since the expatriate’s organization did not support the partner in any way. This appeared to be a very slow and bureaucratic process and the visa would have been processed much quicker if the expatriate’s organization had applied for the visa. The other four couples did receive visa support, but believe that this could have been much more efficient and therefore experienced a lack of support. One expatriate partner elaborates:

“To us it would make a lot more sense that we would know, from the very beginning, exactly what documents we have to request from the local governments and not sort of find out gradually. Now that you've entered these documents, actually we also need that. So, there was a bit of frustration” [EP15]

4.3.6 Lack of transportation support

Only two expatriate couples experienced a lack of transportation support from the expatriate's organization. The first expatriate couple received a specific weight limit that they could use for transportation. The expatriate partner stated:

“In terms of transport, the 100 KG was very limited, and we definitely needed more. So, more support in that respect would have been nice” [EP4]

The second expatriate couple did receive transportation support in terms of a moving company that would collect their belongings and ship them to Singapore. Only the process of defining what will be shipped was very time consuming and could have been much more efficient. The expatriate outlines the situation:

“I had to describe every single item that I wanted to move. So, I wrote things up like 10 dresses, you know, things like that and they returned it to me and said, for example a box of Duplo, no, for insurance purposes you have to write down every single model of Duplo. So, I also spent several hours going the internet, looking at the different models of Duplo they had. Putting the models and the pricing of it and I had to estimate the price. I mean that's ridiculous. I spend eight hours of listing down this stuff and I was like what am I doing {...} And we're thinking like, actually, if we get a moving service, we don't expect to put so much work in making all these lists and it just seemed ridiculous actually. Creating this list took like hours {...} It seemed like we were doing their work a little bit” [EX15]

4.3.7 Lack of onset support

Three expatriate couples would have liked to have received more onset support from the expatriate's organization when they arrived in Singapore. Since it is a completely new city,

you don't know where to look for groceries or how and where you should open a bank account. And that can be quite stressful. One expatriate partner elaborated:

“Yeah, I think it is more actual support, more support on how to do things in Singapore {...} Even with like opening a bank account. Where do you go, which bank do you choose? Is it easy or difficult to open a bank account? So just small stuff. Things that you just want to have out of the way to make sure everything is arranged, so you can just enjoy it a bit more” [EP3]

Another expatriate partner agrees on this point. In the beginning it is a lot already and some onset support would definitely be helpful. She stated:

“Exactly right now after four years I know exactly where to find where's what, whether it's groceries or people or services but in the beginning it's just so overwhelming. And you can really use someone who points out to you, like for this you go there, for that try there” [EP13]

4.3.8 Lack of financial support

Three expatriate couples specifically noticed a lack of support from the expatriate's organization. Two couples experienced a lack of support with arranging their insurance. Since Singapore is for the expatriates couple a new country with new laws and new policies, it can be quite a challenge to figure out which insurance suits best and covers the right healthcare. Both couples had little support and would have liked to get more support. One expatriate elaborates:

“When it comes to insurances and other policies and stuff like that, where you are completely foreign to that country, it might have been nice to know. Yeah but there was very little support on that end {...} So that's I think is the only thing that I really would love to have more information on this entire insurance thing [EX8]

One expatriate also thought that the expatriate's organization could have offered more tax support. She had to do her own taxes and constantly heard that it was not sufficient and they gave it back to her, which caused a lot of frustration.

4.3.9 Lack of cultural support

When it comes to a lack of cultural adjustment support, there were two expatriate couples who experienced this lack. The first couple was supposed to receive a cultural adjustment course when arriving in Singapore, but that course took never place. With the second couple, the expatriate indicated that he would have liked to gain more knowledge on the Singaporean culture. For him it is a new culture and learning about the culture can also be beneficial for your career. He stated:

“Yeah, I think about the Singapore Chinese cultures. The Indian culture obviously I know quite well. The Western culture I know quite well. But the Chinese culture in Singapore is also different again. I think that will be quite useful {...} I mean if you know how to build better with different cultures it will help you in your career obviously [EX7]

4.4 Work-life balance of the expatriate couples

After discussing the perceived and needed support by the expatriate’s organization, the expatriate couples were asked about their work-life balance. This in order to answer the fourth sub-question: *What is the influence of the support given by the expatriate’s organization on the work life balance of the expatriates and expatriate’s partners?*

According to most expatriate couples, it is not that hard to maintain a good balance between work and private life in Singapore. Where most couples had a pretty busy social life with zero free time in their home country, they have far more private time in Singapore. In their home country they had to attend birthdays, visit their family and meet their friends. Whereas in Singapore, they don’t have any family and only a handful of friends which they don’t know very long so there is not a lot of pressure to meet them regularly. One expatriate explained:

“The thing is when I lived in the Netherlands, I had my fraternity, other friends, study friends, family, school, work, all of that together. So, my agenda was 7-days a week, like 18 hours a day full. Like going out for a drink, go to the gym, play golf. It was a lot. Now you have a lot more time for yourself if you want to go out, you go out {...} If you don't, then you don't. Because the friends that you have here, you known for relatively short time. You do not always feel this social pressure to be somewhere, so you can choose to be somewhere if you feel like doing that” [EX10]

Another expatriate is also very aware of his private time and therefore likes to go home after work instead of having a drink with his colleagues. He stated:

“Work is work and your private time is spent with your family. So, I just like split those two things. So, within the company you have less social interaction after work. During work of course you have your things, but after work there's not a lot of interaction” [EX2]

On the other hand, missing friends and family also means that it is just the two of you in Singapore, which means that you spend a lot of time together after work. This can also create a lack of me-time and therefore a disbalance in the private time spent. An expatriate elaborated:

“It's more that he's at home and he's doing his thing and then when I arrive at home, mostly we have food and then I want to do some sporting. My agenda is a bit more dense. It also means that in the evening, you talk a bit and give each other attention but actually you also want to sit back every now and then. So, the me-time is every now and then a bit missing, but if that is what it takes, that is what it takes” [EX6]

Next to the expatriate couples who have gained more private time because of their relocation, there are also couples who achieved the opposite. Whereas the expatriate had more time with her family in the home country because of her part-time job, she has now less time with them because she is working full-time. This also creates a disbalance in the household, because her husband was not used to do the main caregiving for their son. She explained:

“I work way more. So, again there is a bit of strain on him. He is, I find, lucky enough to spend more time with our son, because that is something, I had to give up here. So, I worked part time but that's not possible. So, I had to give that up and he is doing now the main caregiving for our son. And that's something I really find a pity, because I would have liked doing that. Yes. So, I don't see it as an extra burden, but I think he does. So, I think in that sense, we think differently about it” [EX11]

And there is also an expatriate couple where the expatriate wishes for his partner that she would have a bit more of a proper work-life balance, since she is now only taking care of the child and has very little other things to do. He elaborated:

“I mean she's now for a long time at home and just taking care of the kid, which I think, of course for the kid it's pretty good. But for her it's probably also very stressful in a way she doesn't have much change of that. Which I wish her to have a bit more freedom of doing other things and going a bit more out, also probably meeting other people, like other families or whatsoever. To have a better kind of exchange which is at the moment very little” [EX8]

Another expatriate agrees on this point, by expressing that he would like his wife to find a job. In this way the mixture between work and life is better in balance and this would also have a positive effect on the relationship. He explained:

“I like it for her, but I think she herself prefers to have a job as well. And for the relationship I think it is good that you both develop yourself and employ yourself, have a good mix of household work, living as a family together and at the same time having a job, progress professionally as well” [EX1]

His partner could not agree with him more. She also prefers to have a good mix of work, household and being husband and wife. She loves to work and that is something that is missing now in her life, since her temporary assignment finished. She elaborated:

“Very important, because I have always worked, also after I became a mommy. One could say so that I need to work. Of course, it is challenging. Especially when you are both working full-time. To be honest, both working more than full-time. So, last months, or during the six months of the assignment, my husband has been doing a lot more household work than he did before, because I had more time, but for me that was not necessarily a problem. I think it is good to keep that in balance, the household and the role between you as a wife and your husband” [EPI]

4.5 Relationship of the expatriate couples

Next to their perceptions about their work-life balance, the couples were also asked how they perceive their relationship after being relocated to Singapore. They were asked if they experienced some kind of marital stress because of it and if they ever felt isolated or lonely in Singapore. This was in order to answer the fifth sub-question: *What kind of effect does the expatriate life have on the expatriate's couple relationship?*

4.5.1 Marital stress

In the first few months after relocation to Singapore, three expatriate couples experienced quite some marital stress. Of course, Singapore has lots of nice things to offer, but when things go sideways, it is just the two of you. An expatriate explained:

“Well I mean, like holidays and partying and all, seems to be a bit nicer. But when things go to shit, I mean you're here only with the two of you at the other side of the world {...} It's quite tough I believe. I think in general if you look at the whole expatriate situation. The highs are higher, you know, like the nice moments are a lot nicer but the lows are also lower. So, it does put quite some stress on our relationship, I would say {...} And also, I think what we also underestimated a bit, was the fact that when you are getting a kid, it also affects your relationship. And I think the combination of getting a kid with all of the uncertainties has put quite a lot of pressure on our relationship at least in the past year I would say [EX13]

His wife also experienced some pressure on her relationship because of the relocation.

Whereas her husband had a job and experienced the whole process as an adventure, she was at home and feeling very alone. She elaborated:

“In the beginning, we had quite a lot of fights when we arrived {...} because for my husband the experience was so different right already {...} I was just really unhappy and frustrated and he was in such a different place. And it's difficult to explain to someone {...} So, you know, we were experiencing the adventure in a different way. We had a lot of fights and then we got into a phase that we were, I think when I started working especially, and also because we settled in after about four months, you get to know your way around. And then the relationship also became better [EP13]

Another expatriate couple also experienced some marital stress because the expatriate had an amazing time at work and the expatriate partner was really unhappy in the beginning, since she did not have a job by then. She often felt that he just didn't understand it. The partner explained:

“Yeah, for me it is stressful because it's hard for him to understand me sometimes. So, then you have difficult conversations or you need to have the same conversations a couple times for him to better understand what I'm talking about and why I am bringing it up so many times. So, I think that's the difficult part about it” [EP10]

Her husband did notice those feelings, but he wasn't always able to speak with her about it because of his busy job. And it also put him in a difficult situation because he was really growing at work, while his wife was feeling very sad at home. He elaborated:

“It can have a very big impact, even the fact that my wife was looking for a job and sometimes she was very frustrated, disappointed of course. This comes with some emotions and you got to cope with that, which means also speaking about them and due to my busy job, I had to fly around here often, so you got to balance that and that you support each other. I think it can have beautiful effects if it goes well, when you both have a job and you're working and all that, like we are. But if one person is really growing and working and the other one is not really happy; I think it can drive a wedge between the two of you” [EX10]

A third expatriate couple experienced the same kind of marital stress. Whereas the expatriate quickly built an entire network out of colleagues, her husband was home alone, taking care of the children. The expatriate said:

“So, the good thing is that we got married after 14 years. So, that's good. And I mean before leaving and the first week was so like wow, wow, wow fireworks. But then the honeymoon stops. Literally. Because it was really like, we experienced some difficulties” [EX15]

Her husband elaborated on that a bit further. The honeymoon literally stopped because their daughter had an accident. And whereas her husband as the expatriate partner was taking good

care of the children all day, the accident happened when the expatriate came home and wasn't really paying good attention. This put quite a lot of stress on the relationship, because he really had trouble with accepting the fact that his wife provoked the accident and that he did not have a network to talk about it and he did not want to cause stress with his friends and family in his home country. He elaborated on that:

“There was of course the stressful situation with the accident that happened with our daughter. And for me it was difficult because I didn't have a peer group to sort of ventilate. And that put some stress, some pressure on our relationship. My whole world is basically my wife and children. And then one child gets hurt. And I'm not the person to look for who was guilty or not but it happened because of some situation that my wife provoked. And I had some difficulty in my head dealing with that. So, this put some stress because of course you want it to be perfect and we want to have a perfect life here {...} And to say that it's smooth sailing, no, it's not that easy. It is difficult. Because there is stress and stress sometimes gives conflict” [EP15]

4.5.2 Feelings of isolation and loneliness

Ten expatriate couples admitted that they have had feelings of isolation and loneliness in Singapore. Especially in the first few months when the couple wanted to discuss something important with a friend. Even though they made some new friends, these conversations remained quite superficial. One expatriate explained:

“Sometimes you think okay it's nice to have friends which you already know for a long time. So, you can discuss things that you don't want to discuss with other people you just met. You do feel that the people you meet here, especially in the beginning, all your conversations are where you're from, what kind of work do you do, kind of sports” [EX9]

Another expatriate indicated that he did not even feel lonely because he missed his friends and family, but he mostly felt lonely when his relationship was not going so well. He said:

“The only moments, to be honest, I felt really lonely was when things in my relationship didn't went so well. That was when I felt really lonely and unhappy” [EP13]

His wife experienced the same feelings. She was mostly at home in the beginning, feeling sad, while her husband was at work and did not really pay attention to her feelings. She stated:

“So, really lonely in the beginning when we arrived, because I was just stuck in the house trying to arrange everything and he was travelling and going out {...} I've also felt lonely because I felt that he didn't really listen to my needs {...} So, yeah, I felt very lonely then because I felt I had no one who I could really talk about it” [EP13]

One expatriate even went to Singapore before his partner arrived. And because there was no one with him in Singapore, he felt a bit like missing out and being isolated till the point where he even thought, wat am I doing here again. He elaborated:

“Yeah, in that sense if you start here. My partner was still in Holland, I was doing a lot of travelling and a lot of work and that felt like oh my goodness. So, everybody at home is having fun and having the family. And I'm here just busy with work. When you fly then to Singapore and nobody is there, you think like why the hell am I going here, why did I choose in my life to go there” [EX6]

One expatriate partner also had the feeling of missing out. In the Netherlands she was very close with her friends and now she has to miss all the activities that she used to do with them. She explained:

“Yes. It's different. Especially now, because everyone's going on holidays together or going to festivals. And then you have the feeling of missing out” [EP10]

And even though her husband noticed her feelings, there was not much that he could do. He stated:

“Yeah, I think the difficult thing with homesickness is that there is no medicine otherwise then going back to your country. So, there is nothing that I can do” [EX10]

Another expatriate also missed his close friends in his home country. But he chose not to invest time in making new friends in Singapore, but to just invest in the relationships that he already had. He elaborated:

“Of course, sometimes I miss my friends and the rather closely-knit social life that I had in the Netherlands {...} There’re two sides to this, I think. On one hand you know that you’re going back, so you keep investing in those relationships that you have there. And on the other hand, at least I am, not investing that much time in new relations here because I know it’s only temporary” [EX5]

Also, one expatriate partner felt really lonely after the accident happened with his daughter, since he did not want to involve his close family and friends in the matter. He said:

“And then I missed a little bit support of the family also and I would actually be close to the family in that time {...} Then I did feel lonely in a sense also that I was on my own and I couldn’t really, because of the nature what happened, I couldn’t really talk about it with my wife or with the children, so in that sense I did feel maybe a little bit lonely at the time” [EP15]

Another partner has the same feelings. When she wants to discuss something with her friends, she finds it difficult that they are not physically there. She mentioned:

“Sometimes I feel that I want another opinion on something and then you have to call your friends in the Netherlands and that is different to discuss it over the phone. So, I sometimes now feel more lonely than in the beginning. So as long as you are happy, everything is fine. But you notice it sometimes when you have a problem and then you have to call” [EP2]

5. Conclusion and discussion

This thesis aimed, by using the semi-structured interviews done with expatriates and their partners in Singapore, to answer the research question: *How does the support of the expatriate's organization influence the work life balance and relationship of the expatriate couple in Singapore?* In the following chapters the findings of this thesis will be compared with the existing literature, theoretical and practical implications will be presented, the limitations of this thesis will be discussed and recommendations for future research will be done.

5.1 Conclusion

The findings of this research show that the support provided by the expatriate's organization consists of visa support, housing support, transportation support, financial support, onset support, career support and partner support. The needs of the expatriate couple concerning the support from the expatriate's organization are mostly focussed on supporting the expatriate's partner with finding a job. For instance, by introducing the partner to a network, provide coaching, a language training or another satisfactory, relevant time spending activity. And when it comes to the lack of support received by the expatriate's organization, there seems to be a lack when it comes to housing support, career support, partner support, personal support, visa support, transportation support, onset support, financial support and cultural support. Furthermore, it appeared that it can be hard for the expatriate couple to maintain a good balance between work and private life. And the relationship of the expatriate couple was in some cases exposed to marital stress and feelings of isolation and loneliness.

5.2 Discussion

This research contributes to need for scientific research on expatriate couples, since Kanstrén (2019), Cole (2011), McNulty (2011) and Bauer and Taylor (2001), suggested that more research was needed on the perception of the expatriate partner in order to understand their perceptions concerning the perceived organizational support.

First, the expatriate couples were asked what kind of support the expatriate's organization provides. McNulty (2011) stated that 80 percent of organizations provides practical support, 50 percent provides career support and 30 percent provides support for the expatriate's family. In this research it became clear that not all these percentages are achieved. The percentage on practical support is achieved, since almost all organizations provided

practical support in terms of visa, housing, transportation and financial support. Whereas all 15 couples received visa support, only 13 couples received housing support, 11 couples received transportation support and 14 couples received financial support. Concerning career support, only 4 expatriates and 4 expatriate partners received some kind of career support. So, about 25% of the expatriate couples received career support instead of the 50% that McNulty (2011) stated. Concerning support for the expatriate's family, in this research only two organizations provided some kind of organizational support for the expatriate's family. So, instead of the 30% stated by McNulty (2011), only 13% of organizations provided support for the expatriate's family.

When looked at the support needed, it appeared that more career support is needed, especially for the expatriate's partner. According to Dowling (2008), organizations have plenty of ways to offer career support to the expatriate partner. They can for instance do this in terms of introduction to a network, language training, offering career counselling and even offering employment. Eight expatriate partners indicated that being introduced to a network would have been very helpful, two expatriate partners would have liked to receive a language training and two other expatriate partners would have loved to have received some counselling. This is in line with the research of Bauer and Taylor (2001), since they stated that organizational support should not only include practical support, but also social support, such as an introduction to a network. This research shows that these specific types of career support are very welcome, but hardly offered. Many couples indicated that the reason for this lack of support was because there even was none or little career support provided to the expatriate by the expatriate's organization, let alone for the expatriate's partner.

As Lazarova, McNulty and Semeniuk (2015) stated in their literature, support that is written down in organizational policies, is often neither communicated or implemented. In this research it became clear that organizations did have some practical support policies for the expatriate couples. But even though this support was communicated to the expatriate couple, the provided support was often perceived as inefficient. For instance, eleven expatriate couples received housing support, but experienced at the same time a lack of housing support. Most expatriate couples received housing support from the expatriate's organization in terms of an assigned real estate agent or assigned person in the organization. But the communication with those parties was often perceived as very slow and inefficient. The real estate agent showed apartments to the expatriate couple that were not in line with their preferences and the assigned person from the expatriate's organization took forever when providing options for apartments. Therefore, the expatriate couples decided to speed up

the process and take matters into their own hands by looking for an apartment themselves. So, even though the expatriate's organization offers practical support, this support is very inefficient.

When it comes to the work-life balance of the expatriate couple, Lauring & Selmer (2010) stated that it is important for the expatriate to maintain a good balance between work and family, since the family has a direct influence on the adjustment and the performance of the expatriate couple. Also Takeuchi (2010) stressed the importance of a good ratio between work and life. In this research, it appeared that it was often difficult for the expatriate couple to maintain a good work-life balance. Some couples experienced a disbalance, since the expatriate often made long hours and the partner was at home taking care of the child(ren) and the household. One partner said that it made her feel less appreciated and taken for granted, because if she would not have come along to support him, he would never have been able to work there. She felt as if her opinion was not important. Therefore, most expatriates also wished for their partner to find a job as well, since that would provide them a better work-life balance. One expatriate stated that he wished for his partner to have a better kind of variety between being at home and taking care of the child and doing something for herself, which is at the moment very little. And even when the partner managed to find a job, the dual-career couple still found it difficult to maintain a proper work-life balance, since both were employed and still had to take care of the child(ren) and the household.

As James, Hunsley, Navara and Alles (2004) stated, marital factors are related to the adjustment to the host country. And since Torbiorn and Thompson (2011) found that all expatriate partners value a good marriage when living an international life, it is important to experience as little marital stress as possible. In this research, a non-working male partner who did experience marital stress, stated that he even thought about going home because he had no job, no colleagues or friends to talk to. These feelings are in line with the social role theory, which emphasizes that adjustment to the host country is particularly difficult for unemployed men since they see their work as a big element of being a man (Eagly in Cole, 2012). Moreover, the little support that he received from his wife's organization was in his eyes more directed towards women being the trailing spouse, since it was voluntary work focussed on taking care of orphaned children. This is in line with Cole (2012), who stated that many organizations draft their support policies specifically for women, which makes it difficult for men to receive useful organizational support. And as roles are changing rapidly and women are more used to a career as being part of a dual career couple today; the feeling

that the man possesses of being not needed and supported properly, will only grow the coming years.

Cole (2012) also stated that organizational support is often not provided for expatriate couples, although it is perceived as very important. This research confirms his findings, since all expatriate couples indicated that they did not receive any support with reducing their marital stress, even though some couples said that it would have been very helpful to speak with an independent person. Thereby, a few expatriate partners also experienced feelings of isolation and loneliness, since the expatriate was, through his/her employment, directly part of a network and the expatriate partner was feeling lonely and experienced feelings of sadness at home. This is in line with the research of Van Erp, Giebels, Van Der Zee and Van Duijn (2011), who stated that in contrast to the expatriate who instantly receives a new social network when starting the international assignment, the expatriate partner lacks a social network, because they rarely have a job and therefore develop feelings of insecurity and vulnerability. Furthermore, the isolation of the expatriate's partner due to the stark contrast between working more than full time by the expatriate, often including evening activities, and the very low activity load of the partner, can lead to alienation, homesickness, and even worse to a divorce (Imundo in McNulty, 2011).

5.3 Managerial recommendations

This research has shown that only a few expatriates and expatriate partners receive career support from the expatriate's organization. Even though many researches have shown the importance of providing support for a so-called dual career couple, organizations still lack this kind of support. Therefore, it is recommended that the organization should invest more in providing career support. This research indicates that mostly the expatriate partner has a need for an introduction to a network. The organization can, for example, do this by organizing a drink where they can meet other people. Additionally, the expatriate partners also indicated that they would benefit from career coaching, since they have zero knowledge about how things work in Singapore and that makes finding employment very difficult. Finally, the organization can also offer the expatriate partner employment, even when it is at another organization.

The findings of this research are also relevant to different organizations, since these organizations could apply the findings of this research to improve their effective expatriate management. Since the main factor for failure of the international assignment is

dissatisfaction of the expatriate's partner (Cole & Nesbeth, 2014), it is important for organizations to provide the correct support for the expatriate couple. This research shows that the expatriate couple mostly experiences a lack in efficient support. The most provided forms of support are practical support, which are not adjusted to the specific situation of the expatriate couple. Therefore, the provided support does not meet the needs of the expatriate couple. The need for housing, career and partner support appeared most essential. Especially for the organizations in the region of Singapore, these are valuable insights into how to attract and retain the expatriate couple.

5.4 Limitations and recommendations for future research

There are some limitations to this research that should be discussed and can be taken into account for future research. The first limitation concerns the generalizability of this research. Fifteen expatriate couples participated in this research, where almost 80% of the respondents was between 30 and 40 years old, the group between the 20 and 30 years old and the group over 40 years old was relatively small. Moreover, since the respondents were found through snowball sampling because of the researchers' sister, this also had an effect on the generalizability of this research. Since she recommended the expatriate couples, this led to a non-optimized sample. A more balanced, objective and bigger sample would therefore increase the generalizability and heterogeneity of this research.

The second limitation concerns the internal and external validity of the study. This research only collected data with the help of 30 interviews. When data is collected through multiple collection methods, more objective and different insights would have been found. So, in order to improve the internal and external validity of this research, future research should focus on other data collection methods, such as observations or analysing organizational documents.

The third limitation concerns the language of data collection. Since the interviews were held in English, which was not the native language for the majority of the expatriate couples, it could have been that the expatriates and the expatriate partners were not always able to fully express their emotions and thoughts.

The fourth limitation concerns the possibility that the respondents have given socially desirable answers during the interviews. Even though the interviews between the expatriate and the expatriate partner were held separately, it might have been difficult for the respondents to express their deepest feelings and thoughts about their relationship since it is a sensitive subject.

The fifth limitation concerns the set-up of this research. Since this research was cross-sectional, since the interviews were only gathered over a short period of time, namely from July till September 2019. The expatriate couples therefore looked mostly at their current situation and what kind of support they had missed at that moment. Therefore, it can be very interesting to research if the needs for support change over time. This can be done by conducting a longitudinal research in the future.

The sixth limitation concerns the inter-rater reliability (Boeije, 2014). In this research, only the researcher coded the data. In order to make the results of the research more reliable, it is recommended that multiple researchers code the data. So, future research can therefore focus on multiple researchers that code the data and discuss it with each other.

Finally, since this research strived to understand the perceived, needed and the discrepancy between these two forms of support, future research could focus on for instance what kind of influence the absence or presence of organizational support has on the happiness of the expatriate couple, when attracting or retaining the expatriate couple.

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Appendix A: Interview script

1. Introduction
 - a. Introduction of research
 - b. Introduction of researcher
 - c. Guarantee anonymity of participant
 - d. Ask permission for recording the interview

2. Background of the participant
 - a. Name
 - b. Age
 - c. Children
 - d. Nationality
 - e. Duration of international assignment

3. Career
 - a. Current and previous employment (where, level, time)

4. The kind of support that is needed
 - a. Work permits
 - b. Language training
 - c. Establishing a network

5. The kind of support that is received

6. Lack of support

7. Work-life balance

8. Relationship
 - a. Marital stress
 - b. Loneliness and isolation

Appendix B: Coding scheme

