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**Expatriate spouse adjustment: A study on  
challenges faced by Asian female expatriate  
spouses in Finland**

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**ABSTRACT :**

This study examines the personal, interpersonal and environmental adjustment challenges faced by Asian female expatriate spouses relocating to Finland. With globalization extolling the movement of skilled workers across borders, expatriate families, too, experience challenges rarely spoken of, especially by accompanying spouses. This research uses Shaffer and Harrison's (2001) Expatriate Spouse Adjustment Model to examine in depth the contemporary stages of adjustment, personal, interaction and cultural, and to determine how these dimensions contribute to the final adjustment equation. Focusing particularly on Asian expatriate spouses, who have been largely overlooked in extant expatriate adjustment literature, the study fills a research gap by investigating the cultural and emotional challenges they face when attempting to adjust to the life in a Finnish society which is a far cry from their own.

A qualitative research approach was used, and ten Asian female expatriate spouses participated in semi structured interviews. The results show that emotional isolation, homesickness and the harsh climate of northern Finland, where there are long winters, have a big impact on the personal adjustment and are particularly difficult to cope with during the long northern night. Finally, the Interaction adjustment dimension shows us how Finnish society is reserved and that the creation of 'expatriate bubbles' where expatriates socialize with other expatriates prevents them from integrating into the local community. Social interaction and cultural immersion were also severely impeded by language barriers where most people were using English but were unable to communicate with one another because of language barriers.

The study demonstrates that participants felt cultural dissonance as the collectivist cultural orientation of their countries of origin was at odds with the individualistic character of Finnish society. Participants experienced emotional difficulties because this did not really mesh with Finnish reality. Additionally, the study also introduces the consideration of temporal ambiguity (uncertainty about the duration of expatriate assignments) which, in addition to complicating the adjustment process via emotional instability and reduction of participants' willingness to invest in the new environment, created ambiguity about the end date of exclusivity.

Several theoretical implications for refining the Expatriate Spouse Adjustment Model are suggested by the research. Environmental resilience, quality of social networks, temporal factors and organizational support are seen as important key suggestions for the model. For the organizations, practical recommendations for strengthening the adjustment process of the expatriate spouse include provision of structured cultural orientation program, provision of language training, provision of mental health support. This study enriches the body of expatriate

management and offers insights into design improvements in support systems for expatriate families, such as those with non-Western backgrounds.

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**KEYWORDS:** Asian female expatriate spouses, Expatriate spouse adjustment model, Cultural and emotional challenges, Finnish society, Language barriers, Organizational support

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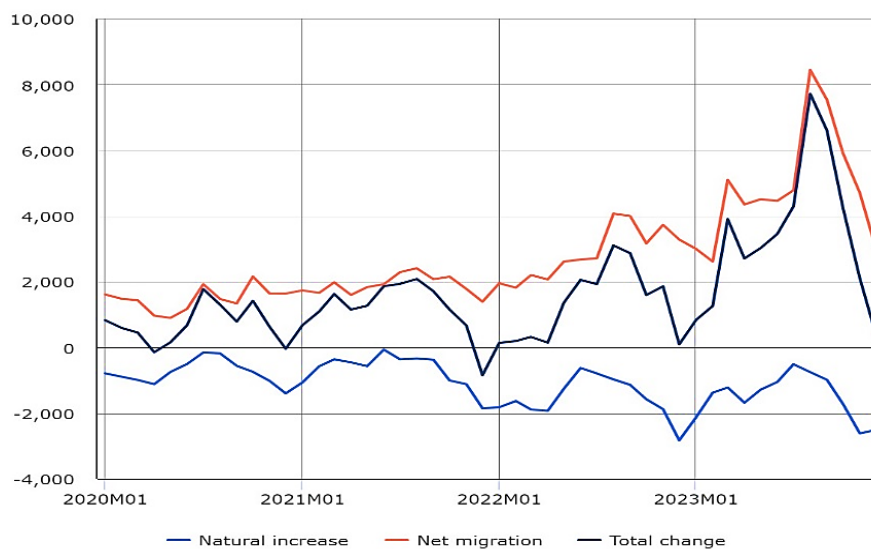
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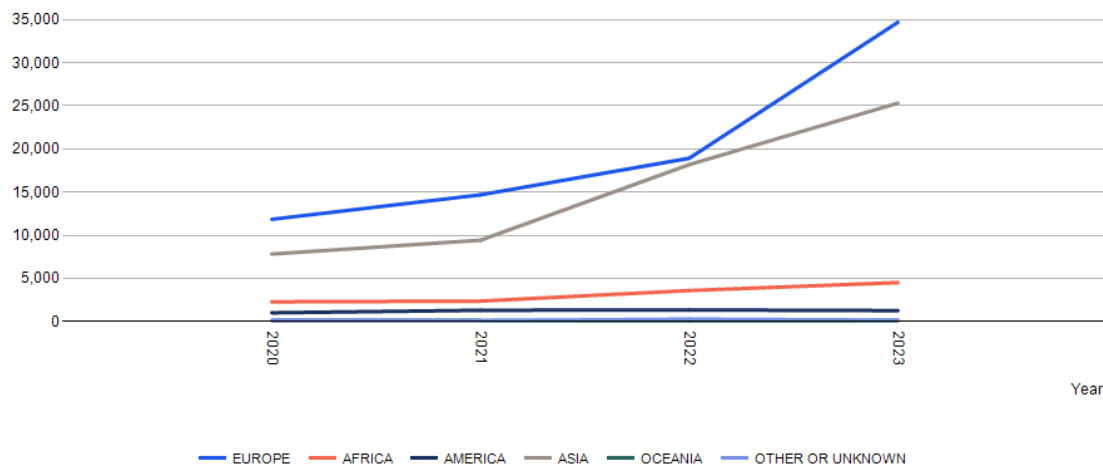
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## 1. Introduction

In recent years, living abroad has become a common trend. Abdulai et al. (2017) observe that people can now quickly move across borders and establish themselves in foreign countries. This trend is widespread in Asian nations where economic crises have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic by making it difficult to secure a better future for oneself and one's family. As a result, many Asians are opting to emigrate to developed countries, either alone or with their partners. Hunt & Gauthier-Loiselle (2010) state that expatriates are widely attracted to countries like Finland due to the lack of new talent, while Bélanger (2019) explains that immigration has rapidly increased since 1990. Preliminary data from Statistics Finland shows that as of December 31, 2023, Finland's population was 5,604,558, representing an increase of 40,588 people during 2023. The population increase was due to a migration gain from abroad and immigration exceeded emigration by 58,496 people, as shown in Figure 1. Additionally, the number of immigrants was 21,920, higher than the previous year (Statistics Finland, 2024). Moreover, as demonstrated in Statistics Finland website (2024), Asians are the 2nd highest immigrant group which has been migrate to Finland during 2020-2023 (Figure 2).



**Figure 1.** Population increases from 2020M01 – 2023M12 (Source: Statistics Finland, preliminary population statistics, 2023)



**Figure 2.** Total immigrants to Finland by nationality from 2020-2023 (Source: Statistics Finland, 2023)

Based on the 2012 Brookfield Global Relocation Services Survey, it was found that around 60% of expatriate executives are married and among them, approximately 81% are accompanied by their partners and spouses during their international assignments (Tahir, 2020). Although there is an increasing trend of women expatriates in foreign subsidiaries, the presence of male spouses accompanying female expatriates is still relatively low (Andreason, 2008; Tahir and Chamas, 2019, as cited in Tahir, 2020). While male spouses do exist among the expatriate community, they are not as prevalent as female spouses and for the purpose of this study, the term "expatriate spouses" will specifically refer to female partners accompanying male expatriates (Tahir, 2020, p. 402).

While expatriation offers new opportunities, it presents significant challenges, especially for accompanying spouses. According to Tahir (2020, p. 402), when someone adapts to a different culture, it is known as acculturation. Results show that the way expatriate spouses adapt is vital for the achievement of international assignments (Black et al., 1991; Shaffer & Harrison, 2001). The main theoretical approach in this research is adjustment theory and it investigates the process by which expatriates and their spouses adjust to unfamiliar environments. This work employs framework from expatriate spouse adjustment to analyse the conditions shaping adaptation experiences. Partner

adjustment theory will serve as a basis to comprehend the specific difficulties Asian female expatriate spouses encounter while they adjust to life in Finland. Firms are progressively assembling workforces that represent a variety of cultures in the modern world. Modern businesses contain individuals from a wide range of backgrounds according to Guirdham (2005), including diverse ranges of gender and age. In contemporary organizations and multinational firms' diversity is a key element.

Research regarding expatriate partners addresses problems such as social isolation and career setbacks (Mäkelä, Käsälä and Suutari, 2011). Evidence suggests that dual-career partners experience distinct challenges with one spouse typically relinquishing their career to back the expatriate's responsibilities (Ravasi, Salamin and Davoine, 2013). Barriers in language and restricted entry to local groups add to these difficulties for women particularly. This research fills this void by exploring the unique issues faced by Asian women married to expats living in Finland and sheds light on how cultural and organizational elements affect their integration.

## **1.2 Research gap and motivation of the study**

The author's personal journey as a migrant in Finland and belonging to an expatriate family inspired the research study. The study intended to analyse the issues confronted by female expatriate spouses of Asian descent living in Finland. Through discussions with expatriate spouses across different backgrounds and by analysing previous research the author noted the relevance of the issue and uncovered a lacking focus on the challenges of Asian women in Finland. The aim of the study is to offer detailed awareness of their experiences along with the influences on their assimilation into the Finnish community.

Although expatriate spouses truly need psychological and career help, they often lack adequate support and attention during their assignments (Copeland and Norell, 2002). Many obstacles confront international talents as they seek to join the Finnish labour market and this creates considerable concern. According to Cole (2011), obstacles involve language hurdles and complicated bureaucracy.

Caligiuri et al. (1998) identify failure in international assignments as often linked to expatriates and their spouses' difficulty in acclimating to different settings. As a result of these difficulties experienced by expatriate spouses can greatly affect their success and quality of life throughout their time abroad. (Bélanger. K, 2019). Addressing these difficulties is important to increase the effectiveness and endurance of expatriate assignments within the Finnish environment. The study intends to provide essential knowledge for scholars and practitioners in expatriate management through an analysis of the primary drivers behind successful and unsuccessful expatriate experiences. This study intends to deliver useful advice that aids Asian female expatriate spouses in assimilating into Finnish culture while expanding the current knowledge base.

### **1.3 Research question and research objectives**

This study aims to investigate the challenges that Asian female expatriate spouses face when they adjust to a global environment, with a specific focus on the Finnish context.

The research question of the present study is *What are key adjustment challenges faced by Asian female expatriate spouses during their adaptation process in Finland?*

Furthermore, four more specific research objectives were defined:

- Examine the adjustment challenges Asian female expatriate spouses face during their adaptation process in Finland.
- Examine the individual factors impact the adjustment of Asian female expatriate spouses to life in Finland.
- Examine the interpersonal relationships factors impact the adjustment of Asian female expatriate spouses to life in Finland.
- Examine the environmental factors impact the adjustment of Asian female expatriate spouses to life in Finland.

## 1.4 Definition of the key concepts

This study focuses on the adjustment challenges faced by Asian female expatriate spouses in Finland. Key concepts used throughout this research include the following.

- **Expatriate Spouse** - Refers to the partner of an expatriate who accompanies them on an international assignment. In this study, expatriate spouses are specifically female partners accompanying male expatriates. Although male spouses exist, they are less prevalent (Tahir, 2020, p. 402).
- **Adjustment** - Adjustment refers to the process through which individuals adapt to living in a foreign country, encompassing psychological, social and cultural adaptation (Shaffer & Harrison, 2001).
- **Individual Factors** – These are that factors related with personal traits and individual coping strategies. Personal traits include factors such as language fluency, employment status and self-efficacy that influence the adjustment of expatriate spouses to their new environment (Shaffer & Harrison, 2001; Zhang & Peltokorpi, 2016).
- **Interpersonal Factors** – The quality of relationships and social support systems is defined by interpersonal factors. Having strong interpersonal support plays a pivotal role when it comes to the spouse's adjustment in an international environment. These factors include family support, social networks, and interactions with host-country nationals (Andreason, 2008).
- **Environmental Factors** - Refers to external conditions in the host country that affect adjustment, including cultural novelty, living conditions and the certainty of assignment duration (Shaffer & Harrison, 2001).

## **1.5 Structure of the thesis**

This thesis is structured into five main chapters. The first chapter introduces the topic of the thesis and then structures the research with specific objectives and questions based on the research gap identified. This research sets the stage by stressing the value of analysing the issues Asian expatriate spouses confront in Finland. The thesis structure and study objective are both explained. Academic literature on various subjects including social network theory and organizational support for expatriates is thoroughly reviewed in this chapter. The review seeks to create a robust theoretical structure for the thesis. In the Methodology chapter the research design is detailed with the methods for data collection and analysis described. It also discusses ethical aspects concerning how participant confidentiality is maintained and the importance of informed consent. The research results appear within the Findings chapter organized into five separate sections that examine participant profiles cultural adaptation in Finland language barriers and communication issues social integration and networks and the crucial role of organizational support for Asian female expatriate spouses. Each part precisely evaluates the recorded data and reveals essential understanding of how this demographic adjust to the life in Finland. The findings are recapped and evaluated in the Discussion and Conclusion chapter while crucial realizations from the research are underscored. Finally, it explores the effects of these results and offers suggestions for future studies designed to better understand and resolve the issues experienced by Asian female expatriate spouses in Finland for both companies and individuals.

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The adjustment of expatriate spouses has been a subject of growing academic interest, particularly considering the increasing globalization of the workforce. As expatriates move abroad for career opportunities, their spouses often face distinct challenges in adapting to new cultural, social and environmental conditions. Theoretical models, such as Shaffer and Harrison's (2001) expatriate spouse adjustment framework, highlight the importance of individual, interpersonal and environmental factors in determining successful adaptation. These include language proficiency, social support networks and the ability to integrate into the local culture. The adjustment of expatriate spouses is closely tied to the overall success of the expatriate assignment, making it a critical area for research.

The cultural differences, combined with societal expectations regarding gender roles, present unique challenges for Asian women adjusting to life in a foreign country (Velgach 2009). This study focuses on understanding the specific adjustment difficulties faced by Asian female expatriate spouses in Finland, a context where cultural novelty and language barriers significantly impact their experiences.

Asian spouses rely heavily on the extensive and rich histories of their nations to inform their cultural identities (Velgach 2009). Although many nations in Asia possess a strong cultural heritage the notion of gender equality remains controversial. Employee work-family balance initiatives in Asian companies are commonly executed poorly resulting in increased tensions between work and family. As a result of this situation Asian expatriate spouses may face major challenges and feel a greater need to meet their marital commitments compared to their Western peers. According to Rajadhyaksha and Velgach (2009), the strong gender inequities present in many Asian countries coupled with societal pressures on women to embrace conventional gender roles may compel Asian

women to prioritize their partners' careers and deal with challenges related to work and family.

When spouses join their partners on assignments abroad, they greatly influence the success of those assignments. Recognized for a long time is the importance of how expatriate spouses adapt during the overall adjustment of their partners. If a spouse cannot adapt to their new environment, it significantly affects not only their own well-being but also the expatriate's job effectiveness. Evidence points out that spouses' inability to adjust significantly contributes to the early end of international assignments (Suutari and Mäkelä 2007; Shaffer and Harrison 1998; Tahir and Chamas 2019). The difficulties faced by expatriate spouses involve cultural transitions and shifts in employment which affect their emotional state and eventually determine the outcome of their partner's assignment.

Lately the increase in dual-career partners has intensified the challenges of moving abroad. When relocating internationally both partners in dual-career couples encounter specific hurdles (Nery-Kjerfve, 2023). Frequently one spouse has to forsake their career to help the other with their assignment overseas causing disappointment and stagnation in their own careers (Cole, 2012). Among Asian women living abroad as spouses of expatriates there is a common sense of duty to put their partners' careers and family obligations ahead of their own aspirations (Shortland, 2020). Expatriate spouses' adjustment processes reflect a complicated relationship among personal traits and cultural influences in dual-career settings.

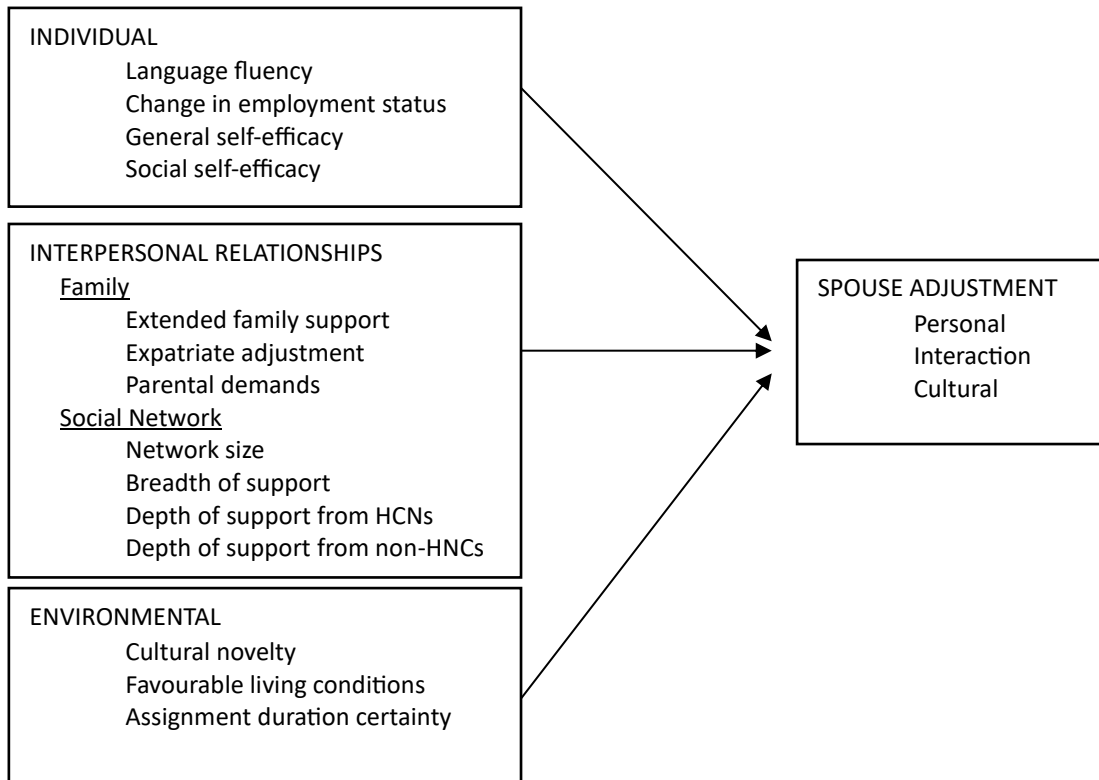
According to Tahir (2020, p.405), studies carried out previously demonstrate that the spouse's inability to adapt to the new setting plays a role in high expatriate attrition rates (Suutari & Mäkelä 2007; Dickmann & Cerdin 2018; Shaffer & Harrison 1998; Tahir & Chamas 2019). Still in some situations when the spouse fails to adjust expatriates may choose to leave prematurely without fulfilling their duties. In recent years expatriate turnover rates have fallen but the issue of early departures and lack of engagement

continues to present serious difficulties for businesses leading to significant financial burdens for the company and the spouses involved (Insch and Daniels, 2012). Understanding that the difficulties for trailing spouses vary depends on issues like gender, culture, language and the regulations of the host country is vital. The focus of this study is to examine the issues specific to Asian women trailing spouses living in Finland.

## **2.2 Expatriate spouse adjustment**

### **2.2.1 Expatriate spouse adjustment model**

Work, social environment, and overall living conditions are three key areas that affect an expatriate's ability to adapt to a foreign lifestyle (Mänty, 2018). The achievement of this adjustment relies on multiple aspects that influence these important sectors. Similarly, when examining the adjustment of expatriate spouses, three core dimensions are commonly recognized: through personal adjustment the spouse's psychological and emotional state is measured; the adjustment the spouse to build and sustain connections with locals and other expatriates represents interaction adjustment; and cultural adjustment centers on embodying the values and customs of the host society. According to Shaffer & Harrison (2001), these aspects of adjustment are influenced by a combination of individual factors (e.g., language proficiency and self-efficacy), interpersonal relationships (e.g., family support and social networks) and environmental actors (e.g., cultural novelty and living conditions), as depicted in Figure 2.



**Figure 3.** Spouse Adjustment to International Assignments (Shaffer & Harrison, 2001, 245).

The model depicted in Figure 2 includes the two separate aspects of expatriate spouse adjustment to international life that Black et al. (1991) identified: adaptation to interpersonal relationships and cultural differences. Interaction adjustment covers adapting to the social dynamics and relationships within the host country, while cultural adjustment involves adapting to various environmental factors such as local customs, habits and infrastructure (Shaffer & Harrison, 2001). A third dimension appeared called personal adjustment. Before examining into the specific factors that influence expatriate spouse adjustment, it is important to understand that these influences can be broadly categorized into three key areas: individual, interpersonal and environmental factors. Each of these categories plays a critical role in shaping the spouse's overall adjustment experience. Individual factors, such as language fluency and self-efficacy, affect personal adaptability. Interpersonal factors, including social networks and family dynamics, influence the spouse's ability to form meaningful relationships. Finally, environmental factors, such as cultural differences and living conditions, determine how well the spouse

adjusts to the host country's external conditions (Shaffer & Harrison, 2001). In the next sections we will discuss these categories in more detail.

### **2.2.2 Individual factors**

According to Shaffer and Harrison (2001), individual factors that influence adjustment include language fluency, changes in employment status and general and social self-efficacy. Zhang and Peltokorpi (2016) discovered that expatriate adjustment is heavily influenced by language fluency, which affects both work and non-work adjustment. This suggests that the issues encountered by spouses during non-work adjustment are similar, as firms often only provide language training for expatriates and not their spouses, who can have more immediate contact with locals (Adler 1997).

Individuals with insufficient language skills in a foreign environment were found to have fewer interactions with locals and were unable to develop extensive social networks with them, which is crucial for interaction adjustment (Zhang & Peltokorpi 2016). In addition, individuals had poor language skills that made it difficult for them to adjust to the cultural environment including food, recreation etc, that did not relate to work at all. Mohr and Klein (2004) highlight the importance of host-country language proficiency for general and interaction adjustment, while Shaffer and Harrison (2001) state that individuals who had a positive international experience had acquired at least an elementary level of the local language before moving. Takeuchi et al. (2007) further argue that spousal language proficiency is a positive predictor of general adjustment.

In most cases, when the expatriate spouse experiences a change in employment status, it represents a shift in their role from being employed to being unemployed (Shaffer & Harrison 2001). Expatriate spouses tend to feel bored with a great deal of free time and no meaningful role to fulfil in the foreign environment (Adler 1997). Often, the spouse has had to leave behind a significant career to accompany the expatriate abroad. Therefore, it is crucial for the adjustment that the spouse is offered involvement in the assignment beyond shopping and tourist excursions (Fish & Wood 1996).

Lauring and Selmer (2010) argue that the change in gender roles is an essential determinant of the outcome of the international assignment. In many cases, expatriate wives have had to leave their careers behind in their home country. Moreover, the wives who were used to being active and equal participants in the labour market felt uncomfortable being unproductive and lacking freedom in Saudi Arabia, where they could not work. Consequently, the expatriate wives were involved in social activities that gave them meaning, value and challenges to their everyday lives (Mänty, 2018).

As stated by Mänty (2018), self-confidence, also known as self-efficacy, is vital for successfully adapting to new cultures. People with high self-efficacy are more likely to persevere when trying out new behaviours, even if they don't succeed at first. This process of learning through both success and failure can reduce uncertainty and facilitate adjustment (Black et al., 1991). The spouse adjustment model in Figure 2 splits self-efficacy into two categories: general self-efficacy and social self-efficacy. General self-efficacy refers to performance, while social self-efficacy pertains to building relationships and networks (Shaffer & Harrison, 2001). However, the impact of self-efficacy on adjustment is debated since it is the most stable characteristic compared to other factors that are more influenced by external events (De Cieri et al., 1991).

### **2.2.3 Interpersonal factors**

The Shaffer and Harrison (2001) model for spousal adjustment categorizes interpersonal relationship factors into two groups. The first group includes family factors such as extended family support, expatriate adjustment and parental demands. The second group includes social network factors like network size, breadth of support, depth of support from host-country nationals (HCNs) and depth of support from non-host-country nationals (non-HCNs). In general, the extended family support is particularly crucial for the spouse's adjustment because they usually lack direct contact with extended family members and often don't have a work-related support system (Shaffer & Harrison 2001). However, Copeland and Norell (2002) state that spouses who depend

more on local sources of support adapt better than those who depend on extended family support. Moreover, friends have a more significant impact on the spouse's adjustment than any other social group, including children, spouse, or extended family (Mänty, 2018).

The adjustment of the expatriate spouse is critical for their emotional well-being and overall success in adapting to a new environment. When spouses are deprived of necessary support, either from the expatriate or external networks, they can experience significant emotional distress. McNulty (2012) highlights that excessive work-related travel by the expatriate can exacerbate the spouse's feelings of isolation, which in turn negatively impacts their adjustment process. The absence of strong support networks or extended family further intensifies this isolation, making it difficult for the spouse to cope with the challenges of the expatriate lifestyle and effectively adjust to life abroad.

Children are another factor that can impact the adjustment of the spouse. According to Kupka & Cathro (2007), international assignments can put tremendous pressure on the spouse, who can have to bear the brunt of parental responsibilities. This may culminate to the collapse of the family system. Children can have a dual impact on the spouse's adjustment. On the one hand, families with young children can face challenges dealing with necessities such as food and healthcare in a foreign environment. On the other hand, children can require the family to interact more with the locals, as they attend a local school or preschool. This can facilitate the development of social networks in the host culture which can aid in their adjustment (Mohr & Klein 2004, as cited in Mänty, 2018).

When it comes to the social circle of expatriate spouses, it usually includes non-host country nationals, such as other expatriate spouses and host-country nationals (Shaffer & Harrison, 2001). Mänty (2018) explains that expatriate spouses have more opportunities to engage in social relationships with locals with organizational support, mainly if the expatriate family lives in company-provided housing amongst other

expatriate families isolated from locals. This lifestyle increases the risk of expatriate spouses becoming socially isolated in the foreign culture, thus delaying adjustment (De Cieri et al., 1991). Nevertheless, it has also been demonstrated that the nationality of individuals in the social network does not necessarily impact adjustment. Women who spent more time with others of the same nationality adjusted similarly to those whose social network mainly consisted of host-country nationals. This finding challenges the notion that living in an 'expat bubble' is detrimental to adjustment (Copeland & Norell, 2002).

#### **2.2.4 Environmental factors**

Shaffer and Harrison (2001) have identified three environmental factors that impact the adjustment of expatriate spouses, including cultural novelty, favourable living conditions and assignment duration certainty. Cultural novelty pertains to the differences in customs and habits across cultures. Previous studies (Black & Stephens, 1989; Black & Gregersen, 1991b) have shown that cultural novelty significantly negatively affects spousal adjustment. However, even though it is not a common practice, Mohr and Klein (2004) highlighted that cultural training can help reduce the effects of cultural novelty on the adjustment of expatriate spouses to their international lifestyle.

Favourable living conditions refer to how well the accommodations match the living standards the expatriate family is accustomed to in their home country (Shaffer & Harrison, 2001). Black and Gregersen (1991b) suggest that different and inadequate living conditions can be a source of uncertainty and stress regarding tasks such as cleaning, shopping and food storage. Most expatriate spouses prefer a specified duration for the assignment as it enables them to feel more in control of what is happening and establish a role of behaviour (Shaffer & Harrison, 2001).

According to Andreason (2003) having support from the organizations in a host country is crucial at the adjustment period. Organizations often need to realize the importance of implementing specific activities to select, train and support expatriate employees and

their families. International assignment failures can be expensive, so organizations must ensure that expatriates and their families are adequately supported. As Kanstrén (2021) indicates, previous research has identified several challenges expatriate partners face, requiring support from sending or receiving organizations. Despite the importance of partner's career issues and the recognized value of company support for spouses, studies have revealed that both general support practices and career assistance including the professional and social support given by organizations are often poorly managed (Cole 2011; McNulty, 2012; McNulty & Moeller, 2018; Riusala & Suutari, 2000). In some instances, companies can provide fewer relocation and general support services than before, leaving partners alone and unprepared for the assignment (Kupka et al., 2008, as cited in Kanstrén, 2021). As a result, the situation they face can become unstructured and stressful (Haslberger & Brewster, 2008).

## **2.3 Cross cultural adjustment**

Cross-cultural adjustment plays a significant role in determining the success or failure of expatriate assignments and its impact extends beyond the expatriate to their accompanying spouse. Research has shown that the adjustment of the expatriate spouse is a critical factor in the overall success of international assignments (Shaffer & Harrison, 2001; Mäkelä & Suutari, 2015). For the accompanying spouse, cross-cultural adjustment involves adapting to the local culture, forming social connections and managing personal emotions in response to a foreign environment. This section examines cross-cultural adjustment through the lens of three key areas: personal adjustment, interaction adjustment and cultural adjustment.

### **2.3.1 Personal adjustment**

Personal adjustment refers to the emotional and psychological well-being of expatriate spouses as they navigate life in a foreign culture. Research by Shaffer & Harrison (2001) underscores the importance of emotional stability and self-efficacy in adjusting to a new country. For many expatriate spouses, the process of moving abroad results in feelings

of emotional isolation and homesickness, as they leave behind their familiar support systems and face the uncertainties of life in a foreign country (Mäkelä & Suutari, 2015).

The emotional toll of personal adjustment is often compounded by the lack of immediate social networks and challenges related to language barriers. Zhang & Peltokorpi (2016) emphasize that expatriate spouses with limited local language proficiency struggle to form meaningful social relationships, contributing to feelings of isolation. This is particularly evident in contexts like Finland, where the cultural and linguistic environment is starkly different from many Asian countries. For instance, Asian female expatriate spouses moving to Finland must navigate not only the challenges of a foreign language but also the psychological impact of cultural dissonance and unfamiliar social norms (Tahir, 2020).

### **2.3.2 Interaction adjustment**

Interaction adjustment involves the process by which expatriate spouses build and sustain relationships within the host country. This dimension of adjustment is shaped by interpersonal factors, such as family support, social networks and the ability to engage with host-country nationals. Research by Shaffer & Harrison (2001) identifies social networks as crucial to the overall well-being of expatriate spouses, particularly those who rely heavily on social interaction for emotional support.

In Finland, the reserved nature of Finnish society poses a unique challenge for expatriate spouses attempting to form social connections. Finnish cultural norms prioritize personal space and privacy, which contrasts with the more collectivist and community-oriented cultures found in many Asian countries (Black & Gregersen, 1991b). This cultural gap can make it difficult for expatriate spouses to build meaningful relationships with locals, as they often feel excluded from social circles.

The literature suggests that many expatriate spouses retreat into "expatriate bubbles" as a result of these barriers to local integration. Shaffer & Harrison (2001) describe how

expatriates often form insular communities of fellow expatriates, where they rely on one another for social interaction and emotional support. While these communities provide a necessary support system, they can also limit the expatriate spouse's ability to fully integrate into the local culture.

Language barriers further exacerbate the challenges of interaction adjustment. Finnish, with its complex grammar and limited global reach, presents a significant obstacle for many expatriate spouses. Studies have shown that expatriates with limited language proficiency are more likely to experience social isolation and find it harder to engage with host-country nationals (Zhang & Peltokorpi, 2016). This aligns with the experiences of respondents, who expressed frustration with their inability to communicate effectively in Finnish.

### **2.3.3 Cultural adjustment**

Cultural adjustment is the process by which expatriate spouses adapt to the cultural norms, values and practices of their host country. This dimension of adjustment is heavily influenced by environmental factors, such as cultural novelty and the degree of difference between the host and home cultures (Shaffer & Harrison, 2001). The greater the cultural distance, the more challenging the adjustment process becomes (Black & Gregersen, 1991b).

For Asian female expatriate spouses in Finland, the cultural novelty of Finnish society poses a significant challenge. Finnish culture, characterized by its emphasis on independence, self-reliance and personal privacy, contrasts sharply with the more collectivist and familial-oriented cultures of many Asian countries. This cultural gap often leads to feelings of alienation and dissonance, as expatriate spouses struggle to reconcile their expectations with the realities of Finnish society (Mäkelä & Suutari, 2015).

The emotional impact of cultural dissonance is well-documented in the literature. Research by Shaffer & Harrison (2001) emphasizes that cultural differences, when not

properly managed, can lead to long-term emotional and psychological strain. This is particularly true for expatriate spouses from cultures that prioritize social interaction and community engagement, as they may feel excluded or marginalized in more individualistic societies like Finland (Black & Stephens, 1989).

Language barriers also play a significant role in shaping cultural adjustment. The inability to speak Finnish fluently prevents many expatriate spouses from fully engaging with the local culture. Zhang & Peltokorpi (2016) argue that language proficiency is a key factor in successful cultural adjustment, as it allows expatriates to navigate the subtleties of local customs and social interactions. Without this proficiency, expatriate spouses may find themselves isolated from the broader cultural context, leading to feelings of exclusion and frustration.

## **2.5 Summary and theoretical framework**

The literature review has highlighted the complexity of expatriate spouse adjustment by emphasizing how it plays a pivotal role in the success or failure of international assignments. Spouse adjustment model have been examined to understand the factors influencing the adjustment of expatriate spouses, particularly those from non-Western cultures such as Asian expatriate spouses. Research by Shaffer & Harrison (2001) and Black & Gregersen (1991) consistently demonstrates that expatriate spouse adjustment is influenced by a combination of individual, interpersonal and environmental factors. These factors collectively shape the spouse's ability to adapt to new cultural, social and practical environments.

The theoretical structure for this study is established by the spouse adjustment model created by Shaffer and Harrison (2001). This model highlights three key dimensions of adjustment: adjustment involving personal factors and interpersonal experiences. In personal adjustment the emphasis is on the psychological state of the spouse within the host country. The spouse's adjustment regarding relationships with nationals and other expatriates is defined as interaction adjustment. The adaptation to host country norms

and values is referred to as cultural adjustment. Individual traits like language ability and self-assurance along with social influences such as family help and social circles affect each dimension.

The research points out the specific problems experienced by Asian expatriate spouses influenced by cultural traditions and gender systems (Shaffer & Harrison, 2001; Mäkelä & Suutari, 2015). Asian spouses often confront more significant tension to meet their partner's professional and cultural responsibilities and tend to give up their goals and careers for the sake of supporting their partners overseas (Lauring & Selmer, 2010). Cultural factors indicate that customizing methods is essential to help Asian expatriate spouses adjust in global settings. Applying the spouse adjustment model will help this study analyse the influences of individual and interpersonal dynamics on Asian female expat adjustment in Finland. This study seeks to uncover a detailed insight into the adjustment experiences of this exclusive community and enhance both theory and practice in the domain of expatriate management with this model as its foundation.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research design**

In this chapter, using the framework outlined by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, (2019). this study's research design leads researchers through the various choices of methodology. From philosophy through technique each part of the research onion contributes to a well-defined process for crafting a strong research approach. The challenges that Asian female expatriate spouses experience in Finland are analysed through a qualitative research method in this study.

##### **3.1.1 Research philosophy - Interpretivism**

The outermost layer of the research onion centres on the study's philosophical basis that directs the essential principles behind the research (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). An interpretivist philosophy underpins this research. Interpretivism fits qualitative inquiries well because it enables researchers to decode the subjective interpretations that individuals relate to their life situations (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). Adopting an interpretivist approach in this research is fitting because it intends to identify the specific issues confronted by Asian female expatriate spouses moulded by their distinct personal experiences and cultural contexts. The adaptation journey does not have a universal solution; an interpretive philosophy allows the investigator to deeply analyse these experiences by emphasizing how participants view their own difficulties and strategies (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019).

##### **3.1.2 Approach to theory development - Abductive**

This research follows an abductive approach to theory development which allows for the simultaneous consideration of existing theory and new insights derived from empirical data. While the initial intention was to employ an inductive method, it became clear that abductive reasoning better suited the nature of this study. The expatriate spouse adjustment model (Shaffer & Harrison, 2001), which serves as the foundational

framework for this research, provides a basis for understanding expatriate adjustment, but the unique experiences of Asian female expatriate spouses in Finland introduce new dimensions that are not fully captured by the model.

Abductive reasoning facilitates the integration of theoretical insights with the emergent findings from the participants' narratives, emphasizing the dynamic interplay between theory and data. This approach enables the researcher to adapt the theory to accommodate unexpected patterns in the data by making it particularly valuable in qualitative research where the aim is to explore complex, context-specific phenomena (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019).

### **3.1.3 Research strategy - Case study**

The next layer involves choosing the research strategy. For this research, a case study strategy has been selected. The case study method is commonly used in qualitative research to provide an in-depth examination of a specific context, population, or phenomenon (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). Since this research focuses on the unique challenges of Asian female expatriate spouses, Finland is the bounded system in which these individuals experience adjustment. The case study approach allows the researcher to gather detailed insights into how participants navigate their expatriate experience by making it a fitting strategy for exploring complex, context-bound issues (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). It is particularly useful when investigating real-life situations where the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly defined which is applicable in this study (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019).

### **3.1.4 Choice of methodology - Mono-method qualitative**

This research follows a mono-method qualitative design. As the study aims to gather in-depth, nuanced data from participants, semi-structured interviews are employed. The qualitative approach is suitable because it allows the researcher to explore the adjustment challenges faced by Asian female expatriate spouses in their own words by

uncovering their thoughts, feelings and experiences without the constraints of structured or closed-ended questioning (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). Semi-structured interviews offer flexibility which is enabling the interviewer to probe further based on participants' responses while also maintaining a consistent focus on the research objectives (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019).

### **3.1.5 Time horizon - Cross-sectional**

The time horizon selected for this study is cross-sectional. A cross-sectional study examines a particular phenomenon at a single point in time which is suitable for this research, as the aim is to capture the current adjustment experiences of Asian female expatriate spouses in Finland (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). To this end, the data were collected over a given period to establish patterns and difficulties that can be observed without having to conduct the analysis over time (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019).

### **3.1.6 Techniques and procedures - Semi-structured interviews**

Shown below section is the innermost layer of the research onion showing the methods and approaches used to collect data of Semi-structured interviews. This way makes it possible to gather qualitative data since the participants can explain their journey in their own words (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). The interview schedule had contained pre-stated questions, but the interviewer allowed to follow through on emergent themes in each interview. This technique is quite useful in identifying the complicated and personal experiences of the concerned people.

## **3.2 Data collection**

The participants of this qualitative study were interviewed using semi-structured questions. This approach effectively reflects the detailed and complex journey of Asian female expatriate spouses residing in Finland. Semi-structured interviews give the researcher the ability to focus on specific area of interest while at the same time have

the chance to follow up on specific point that a given participant may have raised (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). This procedure enables the identification of the key themes of the study while at the same time giving participants an opportunity to raise other important concerns regarding the study.

### **3.2.1 Sampling strategy**

This population of the present study consists of Asian women whose husbands are employed with their companies and assigned to work in Finland. Expatriate spouses from nations such as India and Vietnam were the main subject of this study due to the differing cultural backgrounds they bring within the Asian context (Allen 2019). In this study the author had use purposive sampling technique to select participants who possess adequate understanding of the area of study and who can provide in-depth information.

Ten participants were chosen for the interviews. In qualitative studies the trend for small samples is common since the aim is to thoroughly investigate rather than create generalizations. Gathering 10 subjects were supply necessary insights for examining crucial research themes and make the analysis process doable within qualitative frameworks. Additionally, this size is likely to reach data saturation, the point where no new information or themes emerge from the interviews (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006).

### **3.2.2 Interview process**

The interviews were conducted either face-to-face or via online platforms such as Zoom, depending on the availability and preferences of the participants. Each interview will last approximately 30 to 45 minutes that was provided sufficient time for participants to discuss their experiences in detail without becoming fatigued. The semi-structured format allowed the interviewer to follow an interview guide by ensuring that key areas related to the research objectives are addressed (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019).

These areas include, general adjustment challenges, individual factors influencing adjustment (such as language proficiency, employment status and self-efficacy), interpersonal relationship factors (such as family support, social networks and interactions with host-country nationals) and environmental factors (such as cultural novelty, living conditions and assignment duration).

### **3.2.3 Data recording and transcription**

With the informed consent of each participant, all interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accuracy in capturing the data. Recording the interviews allows the researcher to fully engage in the conversation and probe deeper into the responses without being distracted by note-taking (Mwita, 2022). After the interviews, the recordings were transcribed verbatim. Transcribing the data ensures that every detail of the participants' responses is captured by allowing for a more thorough analysis (Allen, 2018).

### **3.2.4 Data management and confidentiality**

In line with ethical guidelines, all the data which were collected treated with strict confidentiality. The purpose of the research and how the data they give to us will be used were informed to the participants before the interviews occur. To preserve the anonymity of the participants' identities, all transcripts had omitted any personally identifiable information, and the researcher assigned pseudonyms (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). The audio recordings and transcriptions were housed securely in a password protected database, to be accessible only to the researcher. Informed consent will be obtained from all participants before interviews. In addition, they were given with a clear explanation of their right to withdraw their participation in the study at any given time without incurring any repercussions to themselves (Allen, 2018). The data were stored while the research project is on and shall be securely destroyed when the study comes to an end.

### 3.3 Data analysis

This is a complex analysis of qualitative data which involves application of a systematic approach to obtain responses from participants and themes, patterns and meanings from these responses. Thematic analysis method was employed in this study as a method that is regularly used in qualitative research in the identification, analysis and reporting of patterns in data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is adaptable and appropriate for the analysis of semi structured interview data through the use of thematic analysis the researcher have the ability to explore the intricacies of participants' experience in a way which is structured yet open to new and perhaps unanticipated, insights (Allen, 2018). Data familiarization is the first step on the process of data analysis (Allen, 2018). The author had read each transcript, verbatim, multiple times after each interview. This is an important step in getting deep insights in the participants' responses. If one familiarizes himself with the data, the researcher is able to notice the first ideas and themes one can extract from the text (Allen, 2018). During the data transcribing, a helping hand was provided for initial thoughts and comments that will eventually serve as the basis for more formal coding later in the process. After familiarisation the following step is coding (Allen, 2018). In coding, labels or tags are assigned to relevant data to specific pieces of data depending on the research questions. This research had used both inductive and deductive coding approaches. Inductive coding implies that codes were extracted directly from the data without imposing pre-fixed categories and enabled the emergence of new insights (Allen, 2018). Furthermore, deductive coding was used to categorize data based on predefined themes such as individual, interpersonal and environmental factors, as outlined in the research objectives. By combining approaches, however, these approaches ensure that analysis remains flexible, providing the opportunity to identify both expected and unexpected themes (Allen, 2018).

After that the data is done being coded, themes must be identified. A theme pulls out something important about the data in relation to the research question and is therefore some kind of repeated response or representation of meaning within the dataset (Braun

& Clarke, 2006). By this point the author of this thesis was lump codes into broader themes. The next step here is to review and refine themes (Allen, 2018). It means checking out if the themes work in association with the coded data as well as the whole dataset. The author had reviewed the themes in order to ensure that they reflect the data. Some themes can also need to be redefined, recombined, or split into sub-themes for making better sense of the data (Allen, 2018).

Following the refinement of themes, the final thematic map was constructed (Allen, 2018). This visual representation of the themes and sub-themes helped to illustrate the relationships between different aspects of the data. The thematic map was guiding the final stage of analysis which is interpreting and reporting the findings (Allen, 2018). At this point, the author had move beyond merely describing the data and begun to interpret what the data means in relation to the research questions and the broader literature on expatriate spouse adjustment. The findings were discussed in terms of their theoretical and practical implications by highlighting any new insights or contributions to the field (Allen, 2018).

### **3.4 Ethical considerations**

Ethical considerations are a vital part of any research project, particularly those involving human participants. In this study, several ethical protocols were followed to ensure that participants' rights are respected and that the research adheres to the highest ethical standards. This is especially important given the personal and potentially sensitive nature of the data being collected as the study focuses on the experiences of Asian female expatriate spouses navigating cultural, interpersonal and environmental challenges in Finland.

To secure ethical standards we must confirm that every participant offers informed consent. An informed approach had happened prior to interviews as part of the study design. In a participant information sheet where the study aims and expected topics of discussion were included along with the expected participation length and participant

rights. The information sheet will emphasize that involvement is optional and that individuals can leave the study at any time without explanation and without suffering any adverse effects.

When the participants finish looking at the information sheet they requested to agree to the consent form. This document was assured that they recognize the study's aspects and their engagement and that they are willing to join. Asking participants for clear agreement to record their interviews were necessary. The form was confirmed that the recordings and transcripts anonymized, and that confidentiality of personal data were maintained.

Confidentiality and anonymity are important in this study where participants were assured that their identities are always protected. To achieve this, pseudonyms were assigned to each participant and any potentially identifying information was removed from the interview transcripts. The pseudonym system ensures that while the data can be analysed in depth, the privacy of each participant is maintained (Mwita, 2022). All digital data, including the audio recordings and transcripts, were securely stored in a password-protected database that is accessible only to the researcher. Data was retained only for the duration of the study and had securely destroyed once the thesis is complete as suggested by Mwita, (2022).

Another important ethical consideration is participant welfare. Although the interview topics are not inherently distressing by discussing personal experiences of adjustment, isolation, or cultural differences could evoke strong emotions for some participants (Bella, 2017). To mitigate any potential distress, the interviewer will adopt a sensitive and empathetic approach by ensuring that participants feel comfortable throughout the process (Allen, 2018). Participants were reminded that they can pause or terminate the interview at any time if they feel uncomfortable. Individuals were allowed to request information concerning the study both prior to and after the interview to keep themselves updated.

This investigation was stick to ethical standards concerning the security and protection of data. All personal information received were managed consistent with applicable data privacy regulations like the GDPR. According to this regulation personal data should be processed in a legal and ethical way and should be collected for defined purposes. To comply with these rules the author processed the data properly and created effective measures to secure it from improper access or harm. Obtaining ethical consent from the university ethics committee comes first before the study can collect data. The research design adheres to both legal and institutional ethical standards.

### **3.5 Trustworthiness of the Study**

In qualitative research by ensuring the trustworthiness of the study is important and this includes establishing credibility, transferability and dependability (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). In the context of this research on the adjustment challenges faced by Asian female expatriate spouses in Finland, several steps were taken to ensure the study's reliability and validity as per the guidelines by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, (2019).

Credibility was enhanced by engaging deeply with participants through semi-structured interviews. The open-ended nature of the questions allowed participants to share their experiences in their own words, which helped capture the nuances of their adjustment journey. Triangulation of data from different respondents ensured that the findings reflected a broad perspective on the key adjustment factors (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). Member checking, where participants were asked to verify the accuracy of the transcriptions and interpretations, further bolstered the credibility of the data.

Transferability was addressed by providing rich descriptions of the context in which the research was conducted. Detailed accounts of the respondents' backgrounds, the Finnish environment, and the specific challenges faced by Asian expatriate spouses allow readers to assess the applicability of the findings to similar contexts. This level of detail ensures that the study's insights can be applied to other expatriate groups or international contexts where cultural adjustment challenges are pertinent.

## 4. Findings

The purpose of this thematic analysis is to investigate the central issues that Asian foreign female expatriate spouses encounter when adapting to life in Finland, and the factors that explain the challenges that they are facing with adaptation. Contributions from participants describing their journeys of adjustment to a new cultural and social environment serve as data. Following Shaffer & Harrison's (2001) spouse adjustment model, first the challenges of expatriate spouses' adjustment is reported; then the three key factors that explain their adjustment: individual characteristics, interpersonal relationships and environmental conditions were focused.

### 4.2 Challenges faced by Asian female expatriate spouses

#### 4.2.1 Personal adjustment

Expatriate Asian females experience emotional isolation when relocating to Finland. On arrival, most participants expressed feelings of loneliness and homesickness. For instance, Respondent 1 detailed their emotional displacement as being overwhelmed by "*loneliness and homesickness.*" The roots of this emotional isolation are not just physical in that distance from home, but also in the fact that it lacks immediate social networks and forming new ones in Finland. It was made more difficult for us emotionally by the peculiar climatic and cultural conditions. Many participants, like Respondent 5, reported having a "*breakdown*" in the early months of relocation, which illustrates the profound psychological impact of adjusting to a new environment with little support. This is supported by Mäkelä and Suutari (2015) research who suggest that the lack of professional and social networks aggravates their emotional challenges. Participants mentioned that living in Finland, where they feel isolated, their emotional isolation was heightened by the harsh climate and long, dark winters. Another theme was on persistent emotional strain. Years after their first relocation, many respondents were still emotionally unsettled. Respondent 9 mentioned, "*Emotionally, I am not yet settled,*" reflecting the ongoing nature of emotional adjustment. As indicated by Shaffer &

Harrison (2001), emotional adjustment as a critical part of the entire adaptation process partly determines the mode in which the expatriate spouse engages in social interaction and cultural integration.

#### **4.2.2 Interaction adjustment**

Interaction adjustment revolves around the inability to create effective and helpful social networks within the society. A major factor in social integration was seen to be Finnish society's reserved nature. Several went so far to say that they had trouble connecting with locals on a personal level. Respondent 2 succinctly noted, "*Locals are difficult to build connections with,*" a sentiment that aligns with research showing the social distance created by more introverted and individualistic cultures like Finland. The result of these barriers often led to the formation of "expatriate bubbles," where most social interactions occurred within expatriate communities rather than with locals. Respondent 3 stated that "*most of my friends are other expatriates,*" illustrating how the reliance on expatriate networks limits deeper cultural immersion. While these expatriate communities offer an emotional lifeline, they also make the problems of social fragmentation worse and don't allow access to full integration into Finnish society. Language barrier was another big inhibitor in adjusting for interaction. A big majority of participants indicate that they had difficulties communicating with locals because they were not proficient enough in Finnish. While many Finns speak English, no Finnish skills meant social isolation and limited social interactions. However, according to Zhang & Peltokorpi (2016), successful social and cultural adjustment requires language proficiency. Respondent 6 reflected on this by noting that the language barrier "limits my ability to really connect" with locals.

#### **4.2.3 Cultural adjustment**

In the case of Asian female expatriate spouses, the experiences are marked by a cultural adjustment that consists of a mismatch between their home cultures and Finnish society. Cultural novelty, it views, is problematic for expatriate spouses when faced with an

unknown cultural atmosphere. Respondent 6 discussed how they struggled with *"the quiet, reserved nature"* of Finnish society, which values personal space and limits spontaneous social interactions. This view is upheld by Shaffer & Harrison (2001) who assert that a cultural distance does have an effect on adjustment however this effect is especially keen felt amongst expatriates from more socially interactive cultures.

Another recurring theme was that of cultural dissonance, the general discomfort one feels when the expected intrapersonal meanings of something aren't confirmed at the interpersonal level. Respondent 8 mentioned difficulties in adjusting to Finland's emphasis on self-reliance and independence, which contrasted sharply with their home culture's more collectivist orientation. Several respondents echoed Black et al. (1991) findings that a more difficult adjustment process is associated with greater cultural distance.

Emotional and social discomfort resulting from cultural dissonance added to the difficult adjustment process. Some participants did eventually adjust to Finland's cultural norms, but many others would feel alienated and emotionally disconnected. Respondent 9 remarked, *"I continue to find it hard to understand how Finns prefer their independence and introversion,"* which reflects the broader challenge of reconciling these cultural differences.

### **4.3 Individual factors impacting adjustment**

#### **4.3.1 Personal characteristics**

Asian female expatriate spouse adjustment is influenced by individual characteristics, that is, emotional resilience, self-efficacy and language proficiency. Respondents often noted emotional resilience, or the ability to withstand and recover from challenges, as an important factor in helping them cope emotionally and psychologically with relocation. One respondent noted, *"Emotionally, I am not yet settled, but I push through every day,"* reflecting the ongoing emotional challenges that require continuous

resilience. Participants' ability to adjust was greatly influenced by levels of self-efficacy, especially in social contexts. The more confident those people were in their ability to deal with new situations of what psychologists would call self-efficacy as the better they adjusted. Respondent 6 shared, *"I rely on my own ability to navigate daily challenges now, without constantly leaning on my spouse,"* which underscores how self-efficacy positively impacts their capacity to integrate into Finnish life. Another critical factor was language proficiency.

Many respondents mentioned the struggle of not knowing Finnish, with one stating, *"The language barrier limits my ability to connect,"* emphasizing the profound impact language has on both social and personal adjustment. However, most were able to get by with English in communication, but the fact that they couldn't have a more natural conversation in Finnish, impeded them with participation in social and cultural activities. As put forward by Zhang & Peltokorpi (2016), language fluency is a turning point in the ability to deal with the personal issues and work-related challenges of expatriation.

#### **4.3.2 Coping strategies**

Another important determinant in adjusting was developing effective coping strategies. Respondents often referred to *"small wins"* such as establishing daily routines and practicing self-care to create stability in an unfamiliar environment. *"There is a little morning routine that I've come to precisely that little thing that allows me to hang out in this place. Gives me some semblance of sanity, some semblance of normalcy to the newness which seems to hang out in every moment as I move,"* shared Respondent 4. Self-care habits such as carrying hobbies, daily exercise, or creating some private rituals were big help when we needed to take care of our emotional wellbeing as well.

While often external circumstances were overwhelming, these routines gave participants back a sense of control. One respondent commented: *"I make sure I make time for myself, walks or reading in the evenings, whatever, have done that to try to alleviate the emotional distress of being isolated and of pressure to adjust."* And besides,

practical daily achievements that led to independence also helped build resilience. Respondent 7 mentioned, "*Learning to navigate public transport on my own felt like a huge win,*" illustrating how these small victories not only provided a sense of autonomy but also reinforced their ability to cope with the broader challenges of living in a foreign country. According to research, it seems that regular practice of these coping strategies improves the emotional stability and adjustment of expatriate spouses greatly (Shaffer & Harrison, 2001).

## **4.4 Interpersonal factors impacting adjustment**

### **4.4.1 Spousal support**

For several respondents, spousal support (financial and emotional) was a key factor in ease of adjustment, including emotional stability during moments of difficulty. As one respondent remarked, "*My spouse has been very supportive emotionally, which helps when I feel isolated*". Shaffer & Harrison (2001) describe this emotional anchoring to buffer the negative effects of social isolation suffered by expatriate spouses.

A lot of responder's times were responding that without their spouse's emotion this time it would be very hard to survive, maybe against some other challenges of daily life here in Finland. However, this strong reliance on spousal support was coupled with a dependency dilemma such that participants demanded so much emotional and logistical support from their spouse because they became so dependent upon them. "*I couldn't get through daily tasks without my spouse, as they help me with language,*" replied one. Sometimes, however, it seems limiting'. Other respondents have repeated this tension between needing to be supported and needing to be independent. Takeuchi et al. (2002) argue that if expatriate spouses do not learn to cope themselves, long term adjustment could be impeded since the spouse may come to depend excessively on them.

This further intensified the emotional isolation, as several respondents reported feeling emotionally separated from their culture in home networks. One respondent poignantly

noted, *"Family back home was my emotional safety net, and I miss that"*. Individuals from collectivist cultures rely heavily on extended family as a source of emotional and practical support, since extended family are involved in many important life events. If respondents in Finland did not have this familial support, many said that they felt emotionally exposed and leaned on their spouse even more than before for both emotional and practical support.

#### **4.4.2 Social networks**

A frequent topic amongst the participants was bubble expatriate phenomenon, with a number of participants finding that they were surrounded by other expats rather than locals. *"There are a lot of the other expatriates who are my friends,"* one participant said. As an expatriate bubble, it provided a necessary social network but overturned the respondents' opportunities to engage with the local culture.

The literature is in line with the phenomenon that expatriate communities offer emotional and social familiarity, but that they can also be a barrier to learning the full culture (Takeuchi et al., 2007). A reliance on fellow expatriates created a comfort zone, but it was also a problem in maintaining local friendships. The reserved nature of Finnish society made it difficult for respondents to make the connection that would foster deeper bonds with local people. One respondent commented, *"Locals are friendly but distant,"* which highlights the difficulty in moving beyond superficial interactions. Black & Gregersen (1991) argue that expatriates tend to have difficulty also breaking into the local social circle in more introverted cultures such as Finland.

Therefore, respondents tended to disassociate from the host culture and were too dependent on their expatriate network to interact with people. For the further issues in establishing local relationships that become accentuated by language barriers. One respondent shared, *"The language barrier limits my ability to really connect"*. However, speaking English widely in Finland, being unable to communicate in Finnish is a barrier that makes going deeper into social engagement with locals something you won't be

able to do. Chinese respondents were also excluded linguistically, as discussed by Zhang & Peltokorpi (2016), which made it difficult for respondents to develop social networks, exacerbating emotional isolation and reinforcing dependence on expatriate communities.

## **4.5 Environmental factors impacting adjustment**

### **4.5.1 Living conditions**

Finland's living conditions, specifically the long cold winter, was a difficult thing for them as Asian female expatriate spouses in this study. Some respondents noted the Finnish winter as being harsh and a further reason for their sense of isolation and emotional pressure. As Respondent 8 noted, *"The living conditions are good, but the long winters and short days really affect my mood,"* highlighting how environmental conditions directly impacted their mental well-being. From warmer climates, the respondents arrived at a totally different physical environment in Finland and adjustment was hard. The winters were cold and dark and so left them feeling disconnected emotionally from their surroundings.

Winter months increased feelings of loneliness for many respondents which all lead to lowering of mood and motivation. It is consistent with the findings of other research that demonstrated that when people are not accustomed to periods of darkness and cold, they can be especially affected by Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) (Lauring & Selmer, 2010). This was reflected in Respondent 9's comment: *"The long winters make me feel more isolated,"* underscoring the connection between environmental factors and emotional distress.

Adapting to Finland's physical environment is a key factor in expatriate life, and the inability to adjust to these adverse living conditions was found to be both physical and psychological challenge. Black & Gregersen (1991b) have earlier shown that environmental factors, i.e., climate and housing, greatly influence expatriate adjustment.

But according to respondents in this study the organizations did not often provide enough support to help them cope with the mental impact of the environment.

#### **4.5.2 Organizational support**

Another key environmental factor which affects expatriate adjustment of the spouses was organizational support. Although most responders received logistical support (housing, setting up utilities etc.) the latter struggled with the lack of concrete cultural orientation and language classes, both needed for a better social and cultural integration. Respondent 6 said that there was not any structured cultural orientation, *"I had to figure it all out myself,"* this comment shows the organizational gaps in ongoing support of expatriate spouses.

With the lack of structured orienting, alienation from the local community thus ensued. With no cultural guide or systematic training, expatriate spouses embarked on their own, in navigating the complex cultural dynamics. Thus, the literature proposes that the cultural training is crucial to the successful adjustment when moving to the country that has great cultural differences (Shaffer & Harrison, 2001). Without this help, many respondents found it difficult to integrate with Finnish society, and their emotional and social isolation was even worse. Another area where respondents felt organisations came up short was with language training.

A few of the participants noted they need help learning Finnish and explaining that this was very important in order to process that adjustment. Respondent 9 said, *"I wish the company had had language lessons." "If they had been, they would have made engagement with local communities much easier"*. Because there was no language training, expatriate spouses were often unable to fully integrate into Finnish society and therefore they relied on their spouse or other expatriates in order to translate or help them through the daily needs of life. Strengths and weaknesses of expatriates Language proficiency is important for expatriates to be a success, according to Zhang & Peltokorpi (2016).

However, in this study, the absence of supplementary language training exacerbated the spouses' social and cultural integration within Finland, while marginally favouring the use of expatriate networks as an alternative rather than enhancing integration within the Finnish local community. This demonstrates a major gap in expatriate management process where support is provided in this respect is very limited, resulting in prolonged adjustment difficulty.

#### **4.5.3 Temporal ambiguity**

There was also another major environmental factor that influenced the adjustment process of expatriates, which is, the uncertainty of the duration of the expatriate assignment. Many respondents reported feeling as though they were in "*limbo*," unsure of how long they would remain in Finland. Uncertainty in this aspect made it hard for them to put all of their hearts and minds into the adjustment process above all else. Respondent 10 said, "*It's difficult to settle in fully because we don't know how long we'll be here*". "*Emotionally, I don't know if I should invest or if we will just be moving again soon*". They were also caught by temporal ambiguity, which systematically affected their willingness to invest resources in their local environment and in building lasting relationships. Shaffer & Harrison (2001) further support the idea that it takes time to adjust to an organization and you have to engage yourself fully to the host culture when the assignment is of a longer duration, or the duration is yet to be finalized for expatriate and his family.

This was confirmed by Respondent 6, who shared, "*Knowing that this is just for a few years helps me cope*," highlighting how temporal certainty can provide emotional relief and assist in managing the complexities of adjustment. The uncertainty about assignment duration also impacted the respondents' sense of belonging and their ability to make Finland feel like "*home*." Many expatriate spouses, on the other hand, were uncertain about living in the local community in the near future, and for this reason, they

were less willing to invest in long term relationships or cultural activities that might help reduce their emotional isolation.

The absence of clarity complicated making the sense of permanence necessary for adjusting success in the foreign country. The emotional pain of temporal ambiguity embodies, and is part of, the larger challenges of expatriate spouses when changing cultures. Because there are no timelines and no organizational communication about the period of time they will stay at Anchor, many never fully immerse in their new environment which is a cycle of emotional and social disconnection ensues.

#### **4.6 Synthesis**

Based on the interviews, the author found that Asian female expatriate spouses have trouble in their adjustment to life in Finland. This analysis categorizes the challenges into personal, social and environmental dimensions based on the dimensions part of Shaffer & Harrison's (2001) spouse adjustment model that allies the process of adjustment.

Emotional isolation and persistent emotional strain proved to be the predominant issues faced by respondents and, as such, personal adjustment becomes a central theme. Relocating to Finland brought many of participants to experience deep feelings of loneliness and homesickness, mostly owing to the lack of existing social networks. These emotional challenges were harshened because these psychological battles also had to be fought in the Finnish winters with long times of darkness, making one feel even more isolated, further connecting you with your own recall. The findings are in line with research by Mäkelä & Suutari (2015), which showed how important environmental factors are when complicating expatriate adjustment. Because of this, emotional resilience becomes a vital personal trait with which some expatriate spouses are better equipped to handle these challenges, nevertheless, many respondents continue to experience emotional strife.

These expatriate spouses also have to find a way to adjust to interactions, especially the construction of functional social networks. There was cited in Finnish society's reserved nature as a barrier to be getting to make profound social connections, with many respondents saying they were squarely unable to break the ice with Finns. This led to the formation of "expatriate bubbles," where social interactions were largely confined to other expatriates. Although these expatriate communities acted as a source of much needed emotional support, they also denied individuals the opportunity for a more thorough assimilation into the culture of their new country, thereby further isolating these new arrivals socially. The language barrier complicated these difficulties as participants did not know Finnish and communication was hard. In line with research by Zhang & Peltokorpi (2016) have added that language proficiency is important in helping one social and cultural adjustment.

Another significant theme was cultural adjustment, where many respondents had difficulties reconciling the cultural differences between their home countries and Finland. The idea of cultural novelty through exploring unusual cultural surroundings that was mentioned quite often, especially regarding Finland's focus on personal space and independence, so alien against many of the respondents' home cultures, which are more social and collectivist. The emotional discomfort resulting from these cultural clashes heightened the adjustment difficulty – that is, cultural dissonance. These results are consistent with the work of Black et al. (1991) who claim that the more cultural distance exists, the harder it will be for expatriates to make the necessary adjustments.

Other individual factors influencing adjustment were personal characteristics including emotional resilience, self-efficacy and language proficiency. Those who exhibited higher levels of self-efficacy, especially with reference to self-managed daily challenges, were able to integrate well into Finnish life. Respondents also emphasized how important coping strategies, such as establishing daily routines as well as practicing self-care, to help stifle the emotional strain that came with relocating. Small wins like getting a grip

on local transportation or evolving personal rituals meant that respondents felt in control, things completed and emotionally resilient.

Spousal support, for example, was reported to be both a lever for adjustment and an adjustment handicap. Spousal support was an important route to emotional stability, but many respondents struggled with a dependency dilemma, between too much reliance on a spouse for both emotional and logistical needs. Spousal support was especially important because of the lack of extended family to ease emotional isolation. Second, however, this strong dependence constrained respondents' development of independent coping strategies, as documented by Takeuchi et al. (2002).

Then lastly, environmental factors such as living conditions, organizational support and temporal ambiguity contributed to the adjustment outcomes. From their harsh Finnish winters, mental wellbeing was negatively impacted with several respondents reporting that the long periods of darkness made them feel isolated. Moreover, as the organizations hadn't been providing structured cultural orientation and language training, the respondents had to find their feet on Finnish cultural differences and language by themselves. The emotional instability was also the result of temporal ambiguity or uncertainty regarding the duration of expatriate assignment making it difficult for respondents to expend the effort towards adjustment.

## **5. Discussion and Conclusion**

### **5.1 Discussion**

This study explored the adjustment experiences of Asian female expatriate spouses living in Finland by focusing on several key factors that influenced their personal, interaction and cultural adjustment. The research revealed that expatriate spouse adjustment is a multi-faceted process, with personal, interpersonal and environmental dimensions all playing crucial roles. Some key issues like emotional isolation and social fragmentation were based on Shaffer and Harrison (2001). Each of these themes contributes to the broader narrative of how expatriate spouses navigate the challenges of living in a new country, often with limited support systems.

One of the most significant findings of the study was the profound impact of emotional isolation on the respondents' overall adjustment process. It was identified that a significant portion of participants described that they really felt lonesome and homesick on the off chance that they didn't have family supporting them on the initial phase of their shift. These emotional challenges were also amplified by the difficulties of forming new connections in a culturally different and reserved society and a lack of familiar social networks. It appeared that this emotional difficulty had never been changed in years and that a number of the respondents have not totally got rid of the isolation feeling even in so many years after coming to Finland.

The role of family and spousal support also emerged as a key factor in the adjustment process. Many respondents relied heavily on their spouses for emotional and logistical support, often depending on them to navigate everyday tasks such as language barriers and interactions with locals. Sometimes this dependence led to many of its participants not being able to experience the independence they needed to claim their autonomy in a new setting. The data suggests that while spousal support is crucial, it is not always sufficient to address the broader emotional and social needs of expatriate spouses.

Another important finding was the difficulty expatriate spouses faced in forming meaningful social networks with host-country nationals. The shy characteristics of Finnish people made it hard for expats to engage with others according to multiple participants. This social distance made it challenging for expatriate spouses to integrate into the local community, leaving many reliant on other expatriates for their social support. This phenomenon, often referred to as the creation of an “expatriate bubble,” limited their ability to engage in cultural immersion, as their primary social interactions occurred within the expatriate community rather than with locals.

Language proficiency was another central theme in the study. Many of the participants indicated that their poor abilities in Finnish strongly impeded their relations with residents and their daily routines. Although many Finns speak English, the inability to communicate in Finnish made expatriate spouses feel like outsiders. This linguistic exclusion not only prevented deeper social participation but also reinforced emotional isolation and dependency on their spouse.

The study also revealed significant gaps in organizational support, which intensified the difficulties faced by expatriate spouses. Even though the respondents received logistical help for their housing and relocation, support for cultural integration and language learning was still felt absent. This finding suggests that while organizations can address the immediate logistical needs of expatriates, they often neglect the more complex social and emotional dimensions of adjustment. Finally, the study discovered that the main problem was adapting to life conditions in Finland, especially during the long winter. Some said they were driven farther into loneliness by the barren climate and absence of sun and found it harder to stay positive. The uncertainty about the length of their spouse's assignment further complicated the adjustment process.

## **5.2 Theoretical implications**

The theoretical framework applied in this study is the Expatriate Spouse Adjustment Model proposed by Shaffer and Harrison (2001), which consists of three core dimensions

of adjustment which are the personal, interaction and cultural. The core of expatriate adjustment theory rests upon these dimensions; how the expatriate spouse copes with the challenges of a move to a foreign country. Alongside but also informing the current analysis, this study reinforces the relevance of the Shaffer and Harrison (2001) model and supplies fresh theoretical insights through investigating the case of expatriate spouses, specifically Asian female expatriate spouses in Finland, a context where important nuances of the original model are not fully accounted for. I would therefore propose some groundwork for the model's refinement, for it to apply to non-Western expatriates.

Personal adjustment, defined as the emotional and psychological stability of expatriate spouses, was the first dimension of the model. Participants in the present study often cited feelings of emotional isolation and homesickness, exacerbated by Finland's long, dark winters and cultural differences. Though Shaffer and Harrison (2001) cover emotional adjustment generally, this study puts forth the argument that environmental factors, most notably climate, should be viewed as an antecedent in environmental factors. Also, people from warmer Asian countries reported to be finding Finnish climate very hard to adapt, which aggravated feelings of isolation. This research extends theoretical development by arguing that the personal adjustment dimension should be expanded to include environmental resilience (the ability to cope with unfamiliar physical and geographical conditions) as an important element of expatriate spouse adjustment.

The second dimension is interaction adjustment, the expatriate spouse's capacity to stretch (or adjust) in the host country by integrating into social relationships. This study finds that immobile expatriates develop into isolated bubbles of expatriates who interact primarily with other expatriates rather than with locals. Despite providing emotional support, it prevents greater cultural integration. The Expatriate Spouse Adjustment Model fails to distinguish between different forms of social networks, but this study demonstrates that, indeed, the type of social interaction that expatriates engaged in,

consisting of interactions mostly with other expatriates or locals, greatly affects adjustment. Thus, the study recommends that the quality of social networks and their influence on adjustment should be added as an important component in improving the model since social isolation within the expatriate community might impede complete cultural immersion and long-term adjustment.

Cultural adjustment is the third dimension of the model, that is, the process by which expatriate spouses adapt to the cultural norms and values of the host country. Participants, majority from collectivist Asian cultures, have been the victims of cultural dissonance stemming from the individualist and private nature of Finnish society. This squares with the model's contention that cultural novelty where the extent to which home and host cultures differ which matters for adjustment. Yet this study proceeds to show that the contradiction between collectivist and individuality poses huge obstacles in Finland to Asian expatriates' assimilation into Finnish society. So, this research suggests that the emphasis of this model should be on cultural compatibility, especially in cases where the cultural gap between the expatriate's home country and the host country is quite clear cut.

This study is a novel theoretical contribution to the body of literature on expatriate spouse adjustment through the introduction of temporal ambiguity as a key factor in the dependent variable. Several participants had uncertainty about how long they would stay in Finland, and this factor, added to the emotional instability, deprived them of the motivation to go to the 'full length' to adjust to Finland. One place that this construct is not explicitly drawn in to the original Shaffer Harrison model is the explanatory influence of factors that exist in the assignment (factors other than the uncertainty in the assignment duration). It suggests that the model might benefit from inclusion of temporal factors, as ambiguity about the duration of expatriate assignments strongly affects the spouses' willingness and ability to integrate with their new environments.

Finally, the study provides insight into the organizational support side of things and how organizational support is lacking, especially regarding cultural orientation and language training. The model looks at living conditions as an environmental factor but doesn't fully deal with how inadequate organizational support can aggravate adjustment difficulties. The results indicate that the model should capture the generosity and quality of organizational support given to expatriate spouses, especially in orienting them to cultural and linguistic differences. Structuring cultural integration and language training programs increase the organization's ability to enhance new employees' adjustment by reducing their feelings of isolation and helps them get better social and cultural immersion.

### **5.3 Implications for practice**

The findings of this study have several important implications for organizations, expatriate management and policymakers. Given the emotional strain and social isolation experienced by many expatriate spouses, organizations need to take a more holistic approach to supporting expatriate families (Sterle et al., 2018). While housing and relocation aid are significant factors organizations need to expand their efforts with inclusive cultural and social integration programs. Employers should provide cultural orientation sessions and language classes not just for expatriates but also for their spouses. This would enable spouses to feel more engaged with the host culture and reduce their dependency on their partner for navigating daily life (Sterle et al., 2018).

The importance of language training stands out as a variety of respondents indicated that their limited Finnish skills obstructed their social and personal independence. Offering free or subsidized language courses would not only help expatriate spouses communicate more effectively but also facilitate their participation in local social activities and deepen their cultural understanding (Abdullah and Jin, 2015). With structured language learning available respondents would likely have felt better integrated.

Another key area for improvement is organizational support for expatriate spouses' emotional and social well-being. This could include providing access to counselling services or mental health resources to help expatriate spouses cope with the emotional challenges of relocation (Filipič Sterle, Vervoort and Verhofstadt, 2018). As the data shows, many spouses experience prolonged emotional strain, with feelings of loneliness and homesickness persisting long after the initial adjustment period. Counselling services could offer much-needed support in navigating these emotional difficulties and reduce the emotional burden on the spouse (Filipič Sterle, Vervoort and Verhofstadt, 2018). Organizations should also consider creating community-building programs or social networks specifically for expatriate families. These programs could facilitate connections between expatriates and locals, helping to bridge the social distance that often exists between expatriate spouses and the host community (Bayraktar, 2019). By organizing social events, cultural exchange programs and local mentorship initiatives, employers can help expatriate spouses build meaningful relationships with locals, reducing the sense of social fragmentation and exclusion (Bayraktar, 2019). Organizations need greater transparency to the length of assignments for organizations. The study found that temporal ambiguity with the uncertainty about how long an expatriate family would stay in Finland significantly affected expatriate spouses' willingness to invest in the adjustment process. By offering clear information about the expected duration of assignments and providing opportunities for expatriate families to plan their futures, organizations can reduce the emotional instability caused by limbo (Lazarova, McNulty and Semeniuk, 2015).

#### **5.4 Limitations and recommendations for future research**

While this study provides important insights into the adjustment experiences of Asian female expatriate spouses in Finland, there are several limitations that must be acknowledged. In turn, these restrictions limit the applicability of results and methods of data collection. Furthermore, the study opens up avenues for future research that can build on its findings to offer a more nuanced understanding of expatriate spouse adjustment in diverse contexts. The specific character of the sample is a major constraint

on this research. The study focused solely on Asian female expatriate spouses living in Finland while providing rich and detailed data about this demographic, limits the broader applicability of the findings. Cultural factors significantly influence expatriate adjustment, and the experiences of Asian expatriate spouses might differ from those of expatriates from other cultural backgrounds. For example, respondents in this study faced challenges such as cultural dissonance and linguistic exclusion in a Finnish context, but expatriate spouses from Western countries or different regions might experience these challenges differently based on their cultural proximity to Finnish norms. Therefore, future research should aim to include a more diverse sample of expatriate spouses, encompassing various nationalities, cultural backgrounds and genders. This would allow for comparative analyses and the identification of cross-cultural patterns and unique challenges that different groups face during their adjustment process (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). A second limitation of this research is that it relies heavily on qualitative data and that the sample's representation in cultural and geographical terms is not diverse. While the in-depth interviews provided valuable insights into the lived experiences of expatriate spouses, the absence of quantitative data limits the ability to generalize the findings to a wider population (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019).

Though qualitative methods yield rich, concrete individual insights, they are of little use in discovering overall trends or statistically significant relations. Researchers should use qualitative and quantitative methods simultaneously to collect data in future studies. By using surveys alongside interviews, researchers could collect data on a larger scale, allowing for statistical analysis that identifies the prevalence of certain issues, such as language barriers, social fragmentation and dependency on spouses. This would not only add depth to the understanding of expatriate spouse adjustment but also provide quantitative evidence to support the qualitative findings (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). A mixed-methods approach would also help in examining the relationship between variables, such as how the level of organizational support correlates with the overall success of the expatriate spouse's adjustment.

Another limitation of this study is its focus on the spouse as the primary unit of analysis. While this focus is critical given the unique challenges that expatriate spouses face, it does not account for the broader family unit and how each member contributes to the adjustment process (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). During expatriation entire families often move and children in these families can struggle significantly to adjust to a new cultural and social landscape (Lazarova, McNulty and Semeniuk, 2015). A particular lack of research has been documented regarding the experiences of children of expatriates or dual-career couples who both can be facing career and personal challenges, which is a lacuna in the current literature (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). The next studies should examine the adjustment of the whole family of expatriates to the new culture to understand how family members can affect each other's adjustment (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). Further, future studies of dual-career expatriates may investigate the effects of the dependent variables on the psychological and social health of both partners.

Furthermore, the research was conducted on the early stage of the expatriate adaptation process while the post-arrival experience of expatriate spouses was not examined. Even though some of the respondents reported having some current difficulties, such as stress or cultural adaptation, the study did not explore how these difficulties develop over time or how the expatriate spouses become stable or, conversely, permanently displaced. Future research could involve following expatriate spouses over several years and examining the effects of their adjustment curve and long-term effects of organisational support (or lack of) for language learning and social networks (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019).

The study also showed that there were areas of organizational support that were lacking, and this includes cultural orientation and language training that most of the respondents stated were important to them. Future research should examine the extent to which particular organizational practices, for example mentoring, cross cultural training, family

support services aid expatriate spouses' adjustment. Moreover, future study could establish whether interventions specifically designed for particular profile, for instance, expatriate spouses from high context cultures or those from non-English speaking countries, are more useful than general solutions (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019).

Finally, participants also cited temporal ambiguity as a key theme in the current study, as they complained about the lack of information on the duration of the tour of their spouse. This sense of emotional limbo made it difficult for expatriate spouses to fully commit to adjusting socially or culturally (Filipič Sterle, Vervoort and Verhofstadt, 2018). While this study briefly touched on the effects of temporal ambiguity, future research could investigate in greater depth how assignment length certainty impacts expatriate spouses' emotional stability, investment in social networks and overall mental health (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). Studies could also explore how organizations communicate assignment duration and the effects of that communication on expatriate families' psychological well-being.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1. Interview questions

Aspect (from Shaffer & Harrison model)	Interview question
1. Personal adjustment	Can you describe how living in Finland has affected your emotional and psychological well-being since arriving here as an expatriate spouse?
2. Interaction adjustment	How have your relationships with both locals and other expatriates impacted your ability to adjust to life in Finland?
3. Cultural adjustment	What cultural differences between Finland and your home country have been the most challenging for you to adapt to and how have you dealt with these challenges?
4. Language proficiency (Individual factor)	How has your fluency (or lack thereof) in the Finnish language affected your day-to-day interactions and overall adjustment process?
5. Change in employment status (Individual factor)	How has your employment status (whether employed, unemployed, or transitioning) influenced your personal adjustment to life in Finland?
6. General self-efficacy (Individual factor)	How confident are you in your ability to cope with the challenges of living in Finland and what strategies have you developed to manage these challenges?
7. Social self-efficacy (Individual factor)	How confident are you in forming new relationships and engaging with both locals and other expatriates in Finland?
8. Family support (Interpersonal factor)	How has the support you receive from your spouse and family impacted on your adjustment experience?
9. Social networks (Interpersonal factor)	Have you been able to establish a social network in Finland and in what ways has this network supported or hindered your adjustment?

10. Support from host-country nationals (Interpersonal factor)	How has your interaction with Finnish locals impacted your cultural and social adjustment?
11. Support from non-host-country nationals (Interpersonal factor)	How have relationships with other expatriates (non-Finns) influenced your adjustment process in Finland?
12. Cultural novelty (Environmental factor)	How has the novelty or unfamiliarity of Finnish culture impacted your ability to adjust to life in Finland, particularly when it comes to everyday practices and social norms?
13. Living conditions (Environmental factor)	In what ways have your living conditions in Finland (e.g., housing, healthcare, infrastructure) influenced your personal adjustment?
14. Assignment duration Certainty (Environmental factor)	How does knowing the length of your spouse's assignment in Finland affect your ability to adjust and plan for the future?
15. Personal identity (Individual adjustment)	How has the process of adjusting to life in Finland affected your personal identity and sense of self?
16. Work-life balance (Individual adjustment)	How do you manage balancing your personal life and potential work responsibilities while adjusting to life in Finland as an expatriate spouse?
17. Social role (Interpersonal adjustment)	How have you navigated the change in your social role (e.g., from a working professional to a non-working spouse) in the context of Finnish society?
18. Organizational support (Environmental factor)	Has your spouse's organization provided any support for your adjustment and if so, how effective has that support been in helping you adapt to life in Finland?