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Expatriate Management and Spouses: Challenges and Service Opportunities in Helsinki Region

School of Management
Master's thesis
Strategic Business Development

Vaasa 2023

UNIVERSITY OF VAASA**School of Management**

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Title of the thesis:	Expatriate Management and Spouses: Challenges and Service Opportunities in Helsinki Region		
Degree:	Master of Economics		
Discipline:	Strategic Business Development		
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Year:	2023	Pages:	64

ABSTRACT:

The aim this thesis is to identify the challenges faced by expatriates' spouses in the Helsinki capital region and how multi-nation companies (MNCs) and public sector can further assist the expatriates' spouse overcoming these challenges. The study also explores potential areas for improvement in supporting expatriates and their spouses through analysis global mobility of 3 different MNCs located in Helsinki capital region, the current service offering from public sector and municipalities, and the services provided by third-party relocation service providers.

The research methodology used in this thesis involves a literature review and empirical data collection. The literature review of the thesis focuses on existing literature on expatriate management, including literature on family adjustment models and theories, impact of family members on expatriate's performance, family members as a stakeholder for MNCs, as well as the current organizational practices for supporting the expatriates' spouses. Empirical data was collected through interviews with ten expatriate spouses living in Helsinki (who have relocated to Helsinki capital region due to their spouse's assignment and whom don't have a Finnish national spouse), as well as an analysis of global mobility policies of three different MNCs in the region, third-party relocation service providers, and services offered by city officials and public sector.

The findings suggest that expatriate spouses face several challenges when relocating to Helsinki, including feeling neglected, language barriers, difficulties related to finding a suitable career opportunity, and cultural differences and adjustment. Multi-national companies in the region have implemented various practices to support expatriates and their families. In addition, the MNCs have hired services from their-party relocation service provider to further assist the spouses. Furthermore, governmental parties provide the expatriates' spouse with integration programs, language courses, and social networking opportunity. However, there is still room for improvement in terms of providing more comprehensive support services that address the specific needs of expatriates' spouses.

The study recommends early consideration of family needs by MNCs from the beginning of talent attraction process. The study suggests increase of involvement of spouses in the recruitment process, relocation, and immigration process, and increase of interactive communication by MNCs, public sector and relocation service providers towards the expatriates' spouses. Finally, this thesis highlights the importance of providing comprehensive support for expatriates' spouses and early communication related to the current services and future possibilities before the relocation process has started.

KEYWORDS: (Expatriates' spouse, expatriate management, global mobility policies, spousal support, service development).

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Abbreviations

MNC – Multi-National Corporate

CAE - Company Assigned Expatriate

SIE – Self Initiated Expatriate

DE – Drawn Expatriate

FAAR - Family Adjustment and Adoption Response

ROI – Return on Investment

TWA – Theory of Work Adjustment

1 Introduction

International assignments and relocation of mobile employees have now been a trend that many businesses are familiar with (Gupta et al., 2012). The expatriates themselves and developed global mobility practices related to expatriate management are considered as competitive advantage to multi-national companies that operate globally. The employees that are chosen for international assignments are known to be professionals and work in demanding positions; therefore, the success of expatriates in their role will bring companies favourable benefits, and at the same time, the failure of international assignees can leave companies with great loss of financial and other resources (Gupta et al., 2012).

It is important to pay close attention to attracting and retaining expatriates. Expatriate management can be defined as recruitment and selection, preparation, pay and rewards, adjustments, and repatriation of expatriates (Machoda et al., 2018). Machoda and Davim (2018) mention that many expatriates relocate with their families. Accordingly, many corporations allow schooling fees and spouse allowance in their pay and reward schemes and global mobility practices focused on expatriate management. Expatriates must adjust to the changes in their work environment and the new way of living in the host country. At the same time, expatriates' families accompanying the employee to the new country cognitively adjust to the new living environment, meaning that they will gradually learn more about how the society works and how the practicalities are handled in the new country.

These adjustments can be how to make daily grocery shopping, new schooling systems for the kids, regulation of their apartment building and social events around them. Therefore, expatriates and their families must receive adequate support to adjust to their new living environment. A study shows that failure in international assignments can leave companies with great financial losses. These failures are often related to the non-adjustment of expatriates in the host country due to cultural-shock, family issues, and spouses' problems (Gupta et al., 2012).

As an increasing trend in work-based immigration can be identified, a closer look at expatriate management is required (Gupta et al., 2012). Finland is not left behind and is progressively following this global trend, as seen from the statistics from the Finnish Immigration Service and the continued to rise in work-based immigration. The reason behind the topic selection is the author's interest and professional career in global mobility and relocation practices.

This research paper aims to find the best practices to support expatriates' spouses who have relocated to the Helsinki region. The research focuses on identifying the challenges spouses face, specifically in the Helsinki region, the current and common practiced by multi-nation companies in the Helsinki region, and the support and services companies offer expatriates and their spouses through a relocation partner company.

1.1 Motivation of the study

The author is currently working as a senior global mobility advisor and employed by an international consulting company. The mentioned consulting company is constantly helping small and Finnish Multi-National Corporate (MNCs) relocate their international assignees and policies and practices related to global mobility. The consulting company aims to help Finnish companies to smoothen their operations regarding expatriate management and global mobility by providing services such as assistance with residence permit applications (work-based and family-ties), registrations with local authorities in Finland, tax and social security matters, settlement plans (apartment search, schooling for kids, and spousal support), and cultural training and spousal support.

This study aims to discover the challenges expatriates' spouses face during their partners' international assignment in the Helsinki region. The study addresses these challenges by suggesting new services (opportunity recognition) to help spouses adjust to the new liv-

ing environment. Developing such services aims to provide adequate support to expatriates' spouses to facilitate integration and avoid failure in international assignments based on family issues.

1.2 Research gap

The statistics from the Finnish Immigration Service presented earlier in research underline the increasing trend in work-based immigration to Finland and that many expatriates relocate to Finland with their family members. After work-based immigration, immigration based on family-ties stands in second place, with a total number of 17,476 in 2022. The trend in work-based immigration to Finland is coupled with the government's policies on attracting specialists and entrepreneurs to Finland.

In addition, in 2018, the Finnish government introduced a work-based residence permit for Intra-Corporate Transfer (ICT) to facilitate the mobility of employees of multi-national companies. At the same time, the data from the Finnish Immigration Service shows that nearly half of the residence permit applications based on family ties relate to a family member of a foreign national who is residing in Finland on work-based grounds (International Migration 2018-2019 – Report for Finland., 2019).

Furthermore, recent studies have discovered the impact of the spouses of expatriates on their success or failure. Based on recent research, scholars argue that expatriates' spouses may face challenges and difficulties during international assignments that they were unprepared for and did not receive enough support to overcome (Ramos et al., 2017). Based on research by Yu-Ping and Shaffer (2018), in the past 30 years, 80% of the expatriates were accompanied or relocated with their spouses during international assignments. In addition, according to Tung (1987), issues and difficulties faced by family members have been one of the top reasons behind the failure of international assignments.

As mentioned above, the literature provides the evidence on the importance of the impact of expatriates' spouse on success of their assignment in the destination country. There is extensive research related to matter and how expatriates' family members can influence the outcome of the assignment and how the family members adjustment in the host country and accordingly impact the adjustment of the expatriates. In this regard, the expatriates' spouse is considered as a stakeholder for MNCs.

The author has reviewed the literature related to the search and identified a gap on managerial advice for MNCs tackling the challenges faced by expatriates' spouses. In addition, the literature lack research on practices aimed at adjustment of spouses before travelling to the destination country. The author aims to provide development ideas for MNCs that could further contribute to the adjustment of the expatriates' spouse in Helsinki capital region.

1.3 Research problem and theoretical contribution

This research aims to study expatriate spouses' challenges, specifically in the Helsinki metropolitan area. The author aims to recognize the difficulties expatriate spouses face and compare the same against the current service offered by the private and public sectors. Below, the author will discuss the research question and objectives. The author aims to answer all the research questions by the end of the research and provide detailed and insightful theoretical and managerial contributions to the field. This research aims to develop services to facilitate the integration and adjustment of expatriates' spouses in the Helsinki region. Therefore, the author aims to answer the following questions by the end of this research.

Question 1: What challenges do expatriates' spouses face in the Helsinki region?

This question aims to discover the difficulties that expatriates' spouses face and provide a map of the issues that could be solved by developing new services. To answer this question, the author will interview ten expatriates' spouses to discover their challenges

in the Helsinki region. The research method will be explained in more detail in Chapter 3.

Question 2: How do companies and the public sector respond to expatriate family issues through specific expatriate-oriented practices?

This question aims to discover the common and current practices implemented by all parties (Finnish multinational companies, third-party service providers and the public sector) addressing spouses' needs, challenges, and integration adjustments. The author uses secondary data to answer this question by analysing websites, annual reports, global mobility policies and frameworks, and global mobility surveys published by all parties, as mentioned above.

Question 3: How could companies (either internally or with help relocation partner company) address expatriate family issues by developing different services to facilitate the integration and adjustment of expatriates' spouses in the Helsinki region?

This question aims to contribute to developing new services that can benefit all the parties involved in expatriate management. By answering this question, the author aims to facilitate integration and adjustment of expatriates' spouses in the Helsinki region and further prevent repatriation of expatriates due to unhappy family members and, in particular unhappy spouses in the Helsinki region. The author aims to combine the results of the interviews, secondary data, and literature review with trends in service business development and introduce new services that businesses can carry out.

1.4 Thesis structure

The author has carried out an inductive research structure. The author starts the research with an introduction, the research's motivation, identifying the research gap, a literature review and theoretical background, data collection, data analysis and findings and disunion.

The research has six chapters: Introduction, literature review, methodology, findings, discussion, and conclusion. The first chapter of the research introduces the research, the motivation of the study, identifying the research gap, and the research questions and structure. In the second chapter, the author provides an in-depth theoretical background and literature review on expatriate management, expatriate family and challenges, and the role of third-party service providers.

In chapter 3, the author will introduce the implemented research method and will discuss the reasoning behind the choice. In addition, the author provides information on data collection from primary and secondary sources, case selection, and data analysis methods. In chapter 4, the author will illustrate the primary and secondary data research findings. Chapter 5, "Discussion", includes the author's discussion on finding and providing ideas for new services and service development for third-party service providers in immigration and relocation in the Helsinki capital region.

In the final chapter, the author will discuss the conceptual implications of the study by drawing attention to the research findings against the theoretical background and literature review. In addition, the author will discuss the managerial and policy implications of the research in the form of providing suggestions and policies for the further development of policies by the public sector and multi-national companies in the Helsinki capital region. The author will finalize the research by providing insights and ideas for future research and limitations on the study.

2 Literature review

In the below chapter, the author explores the existing literature and theoretical background on expatriate management, expatriate families, and challenges. The author aims to discover the main challenges an expatriate family faces and solutions to address these challenges.

2.1 Expatriate management and global mobility

Internationalization and gradual increase in international activities despite the global economic crisis have increased companies' reliance on expatriates and the values such as a strategic market entry and development of international competences that expatriates can bring to the company (Brewster et al., 2014). According to Bussin, Nienaber, & Trompetter (2016), an expatriate is an employee recruited to perform work activities in a country different from their country of residence.

As global businesses are getting more competitive, the expatriates and efficient management of expatriates has been considered as companies' competitive advantage. Therefore, it is necessary to pay close attention to management practices related to expatriates, as the success of these employees can bring significant value to the company and the individuals involved, the early return or failure of expatriates can leave the organizations with significant losses (Ramos et al., 2017).

Expatriates are known to be working in more crucial roles and have higher-level salaries. They have an important role within the organization, and the impact of expatriates' international assignments is immense. In this regard, there has been extensive research on the topic in recent years, and expatriate research continues to grow. (Brewster et al., 2014). In addition, considering the high cost of expatriates, there is pressure to effectively manage expatriates and their family members (Halsberger et al., 2013).

According to Brewster et al. (2013), the research on expatriate management and global mobility may focus on different areas of the topic. For example, the research may focus on different types of expatriates, different types of international assignments, different kinds of organizations in addition to the MNCs (multinational companies with employees in several companies) and different goals of the international assignment that could help in characterizing the international assignments.

Suutari and Brewster (2001) add that research on global mobility, and international assignments has recognized different patterns for highly qualified expatriates employed by MNCs. These principal reasons can include insufficient availability of technical skills in some geographical areas, management of local and international operations, and considerable role of skilled and senior employees in the firm's internationalisation.

In expatriate management and global mobility research and studies, expatriates are commonly described as employees who are sent on short or long-term (often between one to five years) assignments by their employer. The expatriates are known as Company-Assigned- Expatriates (CAEs). The benefit of CAEs and internal transferees is that these employees are suitable candidates for managing oversea subsidiaries, are familiar with the firm's strategy and culture, and are loyal to the firm (Tharenou, 2013).

In addition to CAEs, the expatriates can also be divided into other groups, such as Self-Initiated- Expatriates (SIEs), including both Intra-SEIs (within the organization) and Inter-SEIs (between organizations) and Drawn Expatriates (DEs) (Andresen et al., 2014).

		Organisational mobility	
		Internal mobility (within organisation)	External mobility (between organisation)
Initiative (First key binding activity)	Individual	Intra-Self-initiated Expatriate e.g. Global Career Activists applying to internal vacancies	Inter-Self-initiated Expatriate e.g. Dependent workers: Foreign Recruittees Independent workers: Entrepreneurs
	Organisation	Assigned Expatriate e.g. Traditional Organizational Expatriates	Drawn Expatriate e.g. Global Top-Executives approached by companies

Current work contract partner
 New work contract partner

Figure 1. Typology of internationally mobile employees (Andresen et al. 2014: 2307)

According to Anderson et al. (2014), the main reason activity connected with relocation of SIEs is the individual's interest, meaning the expatriation is self-initiated, and the individual initiates the expatriation by either seeking career opportunities within the firm (Intra-SIE) or opportunities outside of the organization (Inter-SIE). In contrast, the assignee's current employer makes the first binding activity for AEs, and the AEs assignment is often internal, where the employee is relocated to a new location. In the case of DEs, the assignee is approached and contacted by the organization, which provides the assignee with a new opportunity. Thus, the first activity is not initiated by the assignee.

2.1.1 Dimensions of expatriate adjustments and outcomes

Recent studies have demonstrated different factors and purposes for deploying CAEs and SIEs by MNCs in different geographical locations. There are five main key purposes for the deployment of CAEs, including an organization setting up a new business in a new overseas location, filling the skill gap, helping high-level employees to develop their international competencies, promoting the organization's culture and values, and ensuring

their presence of managers and skilled employees overseeing and controlling the operations in firm's main office location (Tharenou, 2013).

At the same time, SIEs are suitable candidates for MNCs when the firm is recruiting technical, specialist, and mid-level manager employees. In addition, SIEs have lower payroll costs for the firm, providing an advantage in recruiting new talent when it is difficult for MNCs to find suitable local talent (Tharenou, 2013).

However, while expatriates can provide MNCs with competitive advantages and contribute to overcoming some challenges, it also brings MNCs several challenges. First, expatriates are much more expensive (3 to 4 times more) than recruiting local talents (higher salary level, compensation, and administrative work). Second, the expatriates are required to learn their new tasks and work environment, which can lead to lower performance levels, especially during the early stages of the work. Thus, paying close attention to expatriate management, expatriate adjustment and outcome (Suutari & Brewster, 2001).

According to Wang and Varma (2019), expatriate research has highlighted that expatriates face more significant adjustment challenges in destination countries with distant cultures from expatriates' home country culture. The research acknowledges that the more significant the cultural difference between home and destination country, the greater the chance of assignment failure. Expatriates face more challenges and difficulty adjusting to the new culture than the new position. Similarly, recent studies have focused on employees' and family members' well-being in connection to the cultural adjustment in the host country (Waibel et al., 2018).

A recent study by Wang and Varma (2019) shows supporting and corresponding evidence between the selection of assignees and the success rate in international assignments. For instance, the researchers have identified the big five personality traits (extraversion, agreeableness, openness, conscientiousness, and neuroticism), knowledge of

the local language of the host country, previous international assignment experience and international competence are considered to directly impact the cultural adjustment of expatriates and their family members and result in successful assignments.

Variables such as expatriate performance are of high value for MNCs and expatriate adjustment (Selmer & Luring., 2015). Furthermore, expatriates' performance and retention are directly related to the adjustment of expatriates and their family members, and the MNCs focus on addressing challenges related to expatriate performance management precisely and carefully (Davies et al., 2015).

In addition, research has identified that improvements and close attention to expatriates' performance and adjustment can contribute to MNCs' performance in international markets. Furthermore, due to the growing global business competition, MNCs must be able to measure and focus on expatriates' performance. Thus, while scholars continue studies on expatriates' performance, MNCs have allocated resources and extra attention to understand the different factors affecting expatriates' performance and adjustment (Bhatti et al., 2013).

Expatriates are often assigned to overseas positions requiring special expertise and diverse roles such as strategic management, development processes, and working in a firm's different branches; researchers have recognized the link between expatriate performance management and success in international assignments. MNCs must provide expatriates with clear objectives and goals for the entire international assignment, thus emphasising expatriate performance management (Wang et al., 2019). The below figure shows the Relationship between cultural distance and premature return at high and low levels of performance management practice.

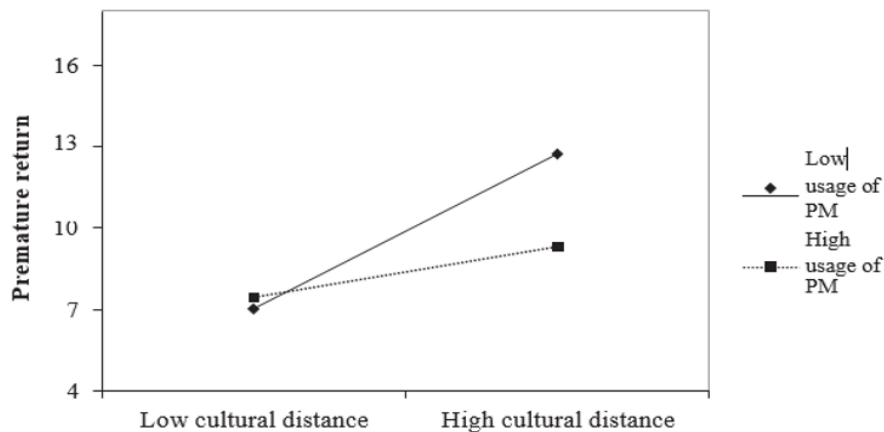


Figure 2. Relationship between cultural distance and premature return at high and low levels of performance management practice (Wang et al., 2019: 2224)

As illustrated in the above figure (using a two-wave data collection method), a connection between expatriate adjustment, cultural distance, and performance management can be seen. The figure further illustrates, first, the direct connection between cultural distance and maladjustment and early repatriation of the expatriates. Second, using methods in expatriate management, such as selection and performance management methods, have a negative relation to maladjustment. Third, expatriate management methods decrease the relationship between cultural distance and adjustment challenge rate so that cultural distance is firmly related to maladjustment (Wang et al., 2019).

2.1.2 Expatriation and return on investment

According to a recent study by Nowak and Linder (2016), international assignments can be seen as a considerable cost for MNCs, and it may be challenging to understand the benefit of the expatriations and added value. Thus, researchers and managers have proposed and practised several management approaches to understand better the cost and benefits of international assignments. In addition, scholars have developed and suggested ideas that could help companies and managers better understand the expatriation cost and benefits and its Return on Investment (ROI).

Considering the impact of expatriation and the competitive advantage of international assignments for MNCs and when competing in international markets, expatriate management and a clear view of ROI can be considered a strategic key in successfully managing international assignments. In this regard, MNCs should consider different aspects of expatriate management, including “planning, selection and recruitment, relocation, training, compensation, performance management, and repatriation” (McNulty & Inkson, 2013, p.22).

According to McNulty and Inkson (2013, p.60), family members' relocation, practicalities, and adjustment are considered one of the biggest challenges for global mobility managers who work with internal assignments. Topics such as expatriate family adjustment and satisfaction, along with the expatriate's spouse's career in the host country, are among the main concerns of global mobility managers. In addition, the authors highlight that family members' maladjustment is directly related to poor ROI.

2.2 Impact of family and family adjustment

As expatriates' spouses' impact on expatriate management has been proven over the past years, spouses can be a great asset or a heavy liability for multi-national organizations. According to Yu-ping and Shaffer (2018), the influence on spouses in expatriate success and failure has been discovered that if the spouse is well-adjusted to the new living environment, the expatriate will adjust easier and perform better. On the contrary, the maladjustment of spouses can result in failure on the expatriate assignment, lead to early return and psychological withdrawal, and, in some cases, bring up marriage-related issues and divorce.

Between 16 to 40 percent of the expatriate's failure is related to the maladjustment of spouses, which emphasise the importance of the adjustment of the spouses and its influence on expatriate performance and success in their career; It is determined that This issue can increase as while attention is paid to the adjustment of the expatriates, there

is no, or very little, consideration taken to support the spouse in their adjustment. (Fish & Wood., 1997).

To cope with the new living environment in the host country and to facilitate the adjustment of expatriates' spouses, scholars have suggested that there is a need for a separate training and integration program designed to support the spouses. In addition to cultural adjustment, the language barrier can add to the challenges spouses face in the host country. The spouses' language barrier can impact their social contacts and making new friends (Gupta et al., 2012).

To address these issues and to support the spouses and, as a result, increase the success of the expatriates, organizations are currently offering supportive spousal packages which are aimed to help the spouses to cope with the cultural adjustment, language barriers, and daily life challenges in a new country. The support from the companies can be in the form of cultural and language training and, in some cases, a pre-visit to the host country to reduce the stressors and strain resulting from relocation (Gupta et al., 2012). The adjustment of expatriates' spouses and their well-being is a significant factor in their success during their international assignments (Ramos et al., 2017).

2.2.1 Role of Family and Expatriate's Performance

According to Chen and Shaffer (2018, p.21), "about 80 percent of today's expatriates relocate with a spouse or a partner". Recent studies have proven that many expatriates will return to their home country and have premature returns due to dissatisfaction with their spouses. In addition, the studies emphasise that the higher rate of adjustment of the spouse is a directly higher rate of adjustment of expatriates themselves, and the adjustment of expatriates and spouses correlates with expatriating to remain at their international assignment, avoid a premature return, and potentially result in higher success rate in international assignments (Passakonjaras, 2019).

Recent studies show that family factors are recognized as one of the main factors and major causes of the failure of international assignments and expatriation. The studies report that a family expatriate's partner's inability to adapt to the new living environment can negatively impact expatriates' performance and determine the overall success of international assignments. Trailing spouses' maladjustment can be seen as a multidimensional phenomenon, including identity crisis, career challenges, and other social challenges that, if not addressed, can result in the inability to adjust in the host country and influence expatriates' adoption and performance. In addition, dual-career challenges can further distress expatriates and their spouses (Cole & Nesbeth, 2014).

Expatriates' adjustment is an important factor for success in IAs and is crucial for MNCs. Subsequently, expatriates' family adjustment is considered a key factor leading to a better adjustment of expatriates and a direct correlation with their increased performance level. The relationship between expatriates' adjustment and their performance can be explained by the Theory of Work Adjustment (TWA). TWA suggests that when positive individual and environmental factors are met, expatriates' adjustment will increase, which is directly correlated with the expatriates' performance (Lee & Kartika, 2014).

2.2.2 Family as a stakeholder in the company

Based on a recent study by Goede & Holtbrügge (2021), family members are considered the main factor among employees to refuse international assignments and a significant factor in premature repatriation. Given the high level of family members' impact on international assignments, researchers and practitioners have identified family members, particularly spouses, as stakeholders for MNCs.

Passakonjaras (2019) states that an effective and well-developed global mobility policy should allow for spouse and family consideration throughout the international assignment and expatriation. Spouse adjustments are considered of high value for MNCs as the expatriates spend most of their time in the office and focus on tasks at hand, children will attend a school or day-care, but spouses will mainly spend their time at home, which

can lead to isolation and dissatisfaction. Thus, spouses must be considered as one of the main stakeholders for MNCs when considering global mobility practices.

In the salience stakeholder theory, the relationship between stakeholders is versatile and subject to changes. According to the theory, “power, urgency and legitimacy” are the three main areas for MNCs when identifying the stakeholder relationship. Understanding the stakeholder relationship for MNCs requires consideration of the presence or absence of all or some of the features mentioned above. Accordingly, expatriate family members are considered stakeholders for the MNCs when considering IAs and developing global mobility policies. Thus, the MNCs must understand and recognize the expatriate’s family’s impact on the IA’s overall turnover (Lämsä, Heikkinen, Smith, & Tornikoski, 2017, p. 6).

2.2.3 Organizational Practices for family adjustment

According to a study by Cole (2012), despite the known importance of the expatriate’s role in the success of the expatriation, many MNCs are facing difficulties in providing support to the trailing spouses and further research and support is required to address this challenge faced by MNCs and to enable providing adequate services to expatriate’s spouses. Based on a recent systematic literature review on expatriate families, family members, including spouses and children, strongly influence employees’ willingness to accept an international assignment opportunity (Dang, Rammal & Michailova, 2021).

To ensure a smoother expatriation process for families, organizations need to implement specific practices that support and consider the needs of the entire family unit. While research has shown that family support is necessary for successful expatriation, many organizations underestimate the importance of the family dimension and fail to provide adequate support. This lack of support can lead to expatriate failure (Shah, de Oliveira, Barker, Moeller, & Nguyen, 2022).

Additionally, reductions in support packages for expatriate families can cause reward dissatisfaction among expatriates and may impact their willingness to accept international assignments. To answer these issues, MNCs should consider implementing support programs and practices that include career development, mental well-being, education pursuits, social networking, and support cultural activities (Wilkinson & Singh, 2010). Although some theories have been applied in this context, there is still a need for more comprehensive theoretical frameworks that emphasize the crucial role of the family in the expatriation process and the role of MNCs in addressing the challenges associated with the relocation of expatriates' family members (Dang, Rammal & Michailova, 2021).

2.3 Work-life Balance and theoretical models for Expatriates

Researchers have studied how spouses' adjustment in the host country can influence expatriates' adjustment and vice versa (Chen & Shaffer, 2018). Below, three theoretical models of work-life balance models for expatriates are discussed.

2.3.1 Family Adjustment and Adoption model

According to Yu-ping and Shaffer (2018), based on the Family Adjustment and Adoption model (FAAR), three primary resources of demand expatriates and their spouses face stressors, which is related to moving abroad and to a new country, strains, which is related unsolved issues after moving abroad, and daily hassles, which is related to new traffic rules, new neighbourhood, and a new way of living the daily life. The studies have examined that if all these factors are addressed appropriately, expatriates and their families can adjust to the new living environment. Therefore, to increase the success and performance of expatriates, multinational companies need to consider coping strategies to facilitate the adjustment of expatriates' families.

In expatriates' families who accompany the employees on international assignments, spouses tend to experience more challenges and difficulties, and the three factors sug-

gested in the FAAR model are stressors, strains, and daily hassles. In addition, the researchers have highlighted that among the expatriates' families and during the international assignments period, spouses have the most challenging role, as they are more involved in the host country's culture than expatriates and children in the family. One of the main reasons for spouses to have higher involvement in the host country's culture is because the employees proceed with organizational tasks and duties from the home country to the host country, and children will continue in the school system. However, for expatriates' spouses, some most critical aspects of their life, such as careers, family, and friends, are left behind when relocating to the host country (Chen & Shaffer, 2018).

According to Chen and Shaffer (2018), when expatriates' spouses relocate to the host country and leave behind their careers and achievement, many can face strains as they feel unrecognized. As a result, the trailing spouse will face more challenges in the host country as they will have the least capabilities to address the cultural differences in the new living environment. In this regard, expatriates play an important part in adjusting to their spouses and vice versa. As a result, expatriates and their spouses become more independent, and the feelings and actions of one will have a higher impact on the other partner. The FAAR model suggests that the adjustment of one family member can facilitate the adjustment of the other family members in the host country.

2.3.2 Cross-over and spillover model

The spillover model in expatriates' management emphasises that one element, such as expatriates' family members, can directly impact another domain, such as expatriates' performance. The spillover model is a two-way model (work-family and family-work), meaning that expatriates' family situation can impact expatriates' work and vice versa. The spillover model has identified an exchange in moods, such as skills and behaviour. The model further recognizes the transfer of stress from one environment to another, indicating that work-family and family-work environments can directly impact each other.

In addition, the model explains that negative experiences from one environment negatively impact the expatriate in the second environment. Thus, the model suggests that the negative experience and home and at the family level can directly spillover to expatriates' work and negatively influence expatriates' performance levels (Bussin, Nienaber, & Trompetter, 2016).

In addition to the cross-cultural adjustment of expatriates in the work environment, the expatriates face challenges in cultural adjustment in non-work environments. The studies have identified that the cross-cultural adjustment of an expatriate's spouse-family positively impacted the overall cross-cultural adjustment of the expatriate and their performance level. These effects, where the attitudes and behaviours of one individual influence those of their spouse (and vice versa), are known as crossover effects (Takeuchi, Yun, & Tesluk, 2002).

According to a recent study, expatriates experience increased levels of stress due to several factors such as increased responsibility, new working environment and work culture, new team members and cross-cultural implications. At the same time, expatriates' family members also experience higher stress levels due to the loss of workplace in the home country, loss of support from family members and friends and adjustment to the new living environment and cross-cultural experiences. Thus, in this circumstance, the dependency between the expatriates and their family members increases in the new living environment, which subsequently increases the impact of spillover and cross-over in family-work and work-family environments (Reiche, Dimitrova, Westman, Chen, Wurtz, Lazarova, & Shaffer, 2021).

2.4 synthesis on literature review

The adjustment of spouses is an important factor in the success and performance of expatriates during international assignments. Studies show that between 16 to 40 percent of expatriate failure can be attributed to the maladjustment of spouses (Fish &

Wood., 1997). While attention is paid to the adjustment of expatriates, very little consideration is given to supporting the spouse in their adjustment. According to Passakonjaras (2019), MNCs' global mobility policies should allow for adjustment of the spouses and as poor practices in this area can lead to isolation, stress, and dissatisfaction of spouses. In addition, the expatriates' spouse well-being in connection to the cultural adjustment in the host country (Waibel et al., 2018).

Family members' relocation, practicalities, and adjustment are among the challenges for global mobility managers who work with international assignments. In particular, spouse's career and adjustment are known to be biggest challenges faced by global mobility managers. (McNulty & Inkson, 2013). Furthermore, community and social challenges face by expatriates' spouse can result in identity crisis and distress. (Cole & Nesbeth, 2014).

To support spouses in their adjustment, separate training and integration programs designed to support spouses are necessary (Gupta et al., 2012). Companies can provide cultural and language training and pre-visits to the host country to reduce relocation stressors and strains. Spouses' adjustment and well-being are significant factors in their success during international assignments (Ramos et al., 2017). MNCs should consider implementing support programs and practices that include career development, mental well-being, education pursuits, social networking, and cultural activities (Wilkinson & Singh, 2010).

3 Methodology

After an in-depth literature review on the thesis topic, the author will illustrate the research design and approach in answering the research question in the chapter below. In addition, the chapter outlines the authors' choice of case selection, sampling and data collection methods, data analysis methods, and validity and reliability in research process.

3.1 Research strategy and method

The author's general plan or strategy for answering the research questions is the research design. The research design involves a clear objective on research questions, identifying the sources for data collection, the intended methods to analyse the data and explaining and justifying the author's choice of research method based on the nature of the research (Saunders et al., 2016). It is necessary to have an appropriate methodological choice to answer the research questions. In this regard, the author conducts inductive qualitative research as a single case study to answer the research questions.

The author's choice of research methodology lies behind the study's qualitative nature. Qualitative research is concerned with people's opinions and beliefs and how it is an understanding of people's perspectives and references as they experience it (Corbin and Strauss., 2008). The single case study is selected as the method because it allows the author to collect data from various resources (Maylor and Blackmon., 2005).

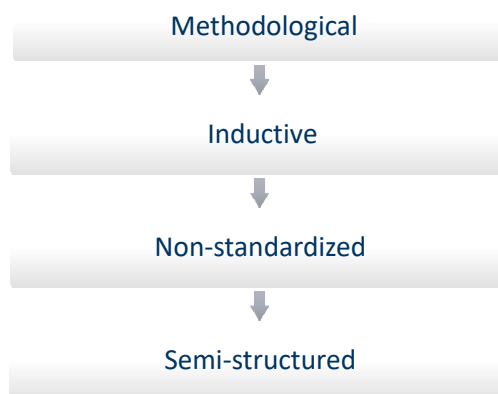


Figure 3. Methodological choice (Saunders et al. 2016, 167-390).

3.2 Case selection

According to the Finnish Immigration Service statistics, the number of applications for first-time residence permits in Finland was 47,447 in 2022. The number of applications in this period is higher than in previous years (2015 – 2021) based on the statistics (Finnish Immigration Service, 2023).

The table below demonstrates the rising trend of work-based immigration to Finland and shows that the number of first-time residence permits based on family ties has significantly grown during the past year. Out of 17,476 first-time residence permit applications based on family ties, 5,382 were submitted by spouses of third-country nationals. The number excludes the spouses of Finnish nationals and spouses of a person whom the Finnish Immigration Service granted international protection. Among the 5,383 first-time residence permit applications based on family ties of foreign nationals, 3,844 of the applicants were female, 1,537 applicants were male, and one applicant with unknown gender. The population can further be studied by age group. Three thousand two hundred twenty-six applicants were aged 18-34, 2,137 were aged between 35-64, and 19 were 65 years and older (Finnish Immigration Service, 2023).

Based on the below data from the Finnish immigration service and the increasing trend in family-based immigration to Finland, the author will study the challenges faced by family members and, in particular, spouses of the experts relocating to Finland. In addition, the author will study the current service offering by the private and public sectors to understand how currently companies and the public sector are responding to these challenges. The author will then additionally reflect on conceptual and managerial contributions for both the public and private sectors.

Year	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
work-based applications	6,321	6,962	7,891	9,447	12,537	10,737	13,775	19,947
family-ties applications	9,998	9,546	10,972	11,308	13,011	10,559	11,281	17,476
Total number of applications	23,329	24,290	25,145	26,997	32,259	25,803	31,991	47,447

Table 1 Number of first residence permit applications to Finland

3.3 Data collection

The author uses both primary and secondary data in this research. The primary data will be collected from interviews with expatriates' spouses from Finnish multinational companies actively involved in cross-border recruitment and global mobility to find out and understand the challenges that expatriates' spouses face in the Helsinki region. The secondary data is collected by reviewing and analysing the website of public sector organizations, companies' annual reports, published global mobility surveys and websites of international consulting companies, and global mobility policies of Finnish companies as the author intends to explore the current global mobility practices and service offering to gain a better understanding and knowledge on the topic.

The interviewees were chosen based on purposive sampling. Purposive sampling helps the author to choose the interviewees based on their judgment and arbitrarily that can serve the purpose of the research the best based on unique personal experience and help the author to collect the required data (J.K. Sachdeva, 2009. P.167).

The author has designed the thematic semi-structured interviews based on the nature of the thesis and the research questions. The author's reasoning behind these themes results from in-depth conversations and interviews with the expatriates' spouses. The themes are chosen based on the case study's interest and the author's research area. After transcribing the interviews, the findings are discussed in the following sub-chapters. In the below chapter, the author introduces each theme based on the interviews with the spouse and, under each of them, also provides evidence on current services offered by the public and private sectors.

The author conducted semi-structured interviews with ten trailing spouses. Below, the table provides an introduction and background on the same group. The table below provides information on the type of ongoing assignment policy of the expatriates (either assigned or self-initiated expatriates), expatriate nationality, duration of the stay in Finland at the time of the interview, spouse's gender, previous relocation experience, and whether family have any children.

Based on the purposive sampling, the author has interviewed ten spouses that have the below criteria in common:

- Currently living in Finland permanently and never lived in Finland before
- Relocated to Finland due to spouse's job and is not the spouse of a Finnish national

Number	Assignment	Nationality	Duration	Gender	Experience	Children
1	AE	South Africa	1 year	F	No	Yes
2	AE	Ireland	6 months	F	Yes	No
3	AE	Chile	2 years	M	No	Yes
4	SIE	Brazil	1 year	F	Yes	No
5	SIE	Ukraine	2 years	F	No	No

6	SIE	Australia	1 year	F	Yes	No
7	SIE	South Africa	5 years	F	Yes	Yes
8	SIE	India	6 months	F	No	Yes
9	SIE	China	4 years	M	No	Yes
10	SIE	Russia	2 years	M	Yes	Yes

Table 2 Introduction and background of interviewees.

The interviews will be held in semi-structured form. Thus, the author can have the main theme but allows additional questions and discussion in the area of interest.

The author works as a global mobility advisor in an international consulting company, and in this regard, the author was invited to attend a networking event hosted by an MCN in the Helsinki capital region. More than 100 expatriates' spouses attended the event. The event was aimed to provide networking opportunities for expert spouses, and there were several workshops and speeches by the public and private sectors during the event.

The author met some of the interviewees during the same event and, through networking opportunities, provided a background of the research to the spouses. The author then invited ten spouses based on purposive sampling and semi-structured interviews through phone calls or Microsoft Teams meetings.

Once the patterns were recognized, the author reviews the in-house global mobility practices in use by MNCs to determine how these companies and organizations address or aim to address challenges face by expatriate spouses.

3.4 Data analysis

According to Lancaster (2005), data analysis has four key roles: Distillation, Classification, Identification, and Communication. Conducting research can leave the researchers with a large amount of data. It is essential to distil the data in an easier way to understand data and use it in different contexts.

In addition, data analysis helps the author to classify the data and omit the unnecessary data that do not serve the research purpose. The classification process of the data can help the author to distribute the data in different categories and, therefore, to identify patterns in the data. Finally, it is important to analyse the research data so that it can be communicated (Lancaster., 2005).

The data analysis in this research starts with analysing the interview results from expatriates' spouses to discover the challenges they face in the Helsinki capital region. The results will be classified and categorized into groups to determine the most significant issues most respondents mentioned.

The author uses the Applied Thematic Analysis method with an inductive approach to analysis the qualitative data collected from interviews. Thematic analysis is often considered a generic approach to analysing qualitative data. The thematic analysis approach can help the researcher find parallel patterns in qualitative data, such as interviews. The main goal of the thematic analysis is to search for themes within the research. Thus, to facilitate the data analysis process, the author divides the interview questions into different themes based on the results of the interviews. The author can use thematic analysis, as it offers a systematic yet flexible approach (Saunders et al. 2016, 283).

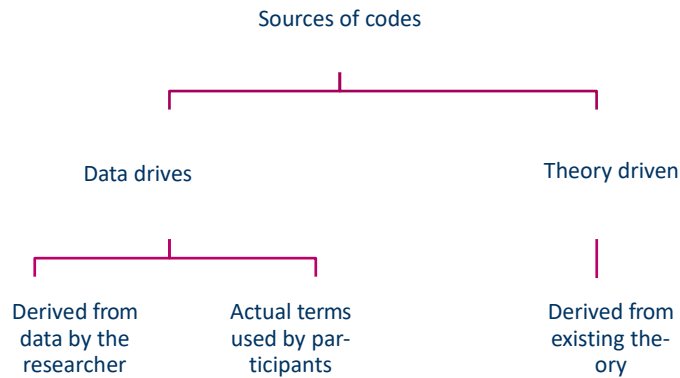


Figure 4. Sources and types of codes in Thematic analysis (Saunders et al. 2016, p.283)

3.5 Validity and reliability

Saunders (2016) emphasizes the importance of considering access and ethics in research projects, regardless of the type of data used for data collection being primary or secondary data. There are three different level of access: physical, continuing, and cognitive (Saunders et al 2016, 222). While researchers can access secondary data through the internet, some web sources require registration and may provide limited public access. Requesting access to an organization's data requires building trust between parties and demonstrating how the research questions align with the company's operations and can be beneficial to the organization.

The author has accessed e-articles and online books through online library of University of Vaasa and University of Helsinki's library. To gain access to global mobility policies employed by MNCs in Helsinki capital region and to conduct interviews, the author had several meetings with the managers at MNCs and discussed the objective of the research project and the methods of data collection.

Ethical considerations must prioritize avoiding harm to participants, respecting their culture, protecting the confidentiality of organizational and personal information, and avoiding any misleading information. The interviewees in this thesis project are familiar with the topic and objective of the research and all the ethical aspects are followed.

To uphold the reliability and validity of the thesis, the author has followed the requirement in scientific research. In the literature review (chapter 2), the author has a wide view over the subject being researched. The data sources in the theoretical part of the research are collected through comprehensive reading of scientific articles and various books on the subject.

4 Findings

In the below chapter, the author provides the finding based on the interviews with expatriate spouses. In addition, the author provides the finding resulted from review and analysis of global mobilities employed by MNCs in Helsinki capital region, and the current service offering my public sector.

4.1 Case analysis

Based on the interviews with expatriates' spouses, five themes are identified. Below, each theme is discussed in detail with direct clauses from the interviews highlighting most of the challenges faced by expatriates' spouses who participated in the interviews.

4.1.1 Invisible spouses

Based on the interview with the spouses, one of the main topics mentioned by several interviewees was that they feel neglected. From receiving a job offer from a company abroad, the hiring process, and practicalities related to the relocation and even post-arrival matters in the host country, many interviewees felt they had no part in their life and only followed their spouse.

According to spouse number 9, "It is, of course, understandable that my husband was the one who is getting a job abroad, but it all seemed very frustrating. From the beginning, my husband already met with the new company, got to know the people he would be working with and made some connections. Even though he shared everything with me, and we were both excited about the move, I always felt like I was shadowing my husband".

Eight out of 10 interviewees mentioned that relocating to Finland was a common decision with their spouses. At the same time, the interviewees mentioned that after deciding to relocate abroad, they start feeling behind as the spouse with the job offer receives all the communication and information.

According to spouse number 3, "We received help from my wife's company when relocating to Finland. Words cannot explain how helpful this was. From the beginning, we received all information related to the paperwork needed in Chile, we had a short-stay apartment booked for us when we arrived in Helsinki, and they helped us with all the registrations. This would have been much more difficult without the help of the relocation company. I wish she were more involved in the communication so I could better understand all the practicalities. We received all the information we needed, but the information was always to be communicated to me from my wife, and I felt like a second-class citizen".

Relocating to a new country and navigating the bureaucracy and paperwork involved in relocation to a new country can be a complicated and stressful process. While the expatriates receive information on the related practicalities and how to prepare for the requirements for visa and work permits, the information many follow from the company's global human resources team or the relocation service provider directly to the employee, and often, the spouse are not involved in the process.

Based on the interview with spouse number 3, while the services from the relocation service provider helped navigate through the bureaucracy and paperwork when applying for residence permits to Finland, information was always communicated to the spouse who had received a job opportunity in Finland, and he always had to ask his spouse for updates or receive further information regarding the next steps.

In addition, spouse number 3 mentioned, *“Several services from the relocation agency were only provided for my wife who had a job in Finland. For example, the help with opening a bank account in Finland”*.

4.1.2 **White-collar to blue-collar**

The idea of moving abroad for an extended period or permanent relocation is a difficult decision to make. Relocation to a new country can significantly impact expatriates' and their spouse life in both home and host countries. One of the main difficulties mentioned by the expatriates' spouses during the interview was when it came to their careers. Several interviewees stated they had a dilemma when choosing their career when considering relocating to Finland. For many expatriate spouses, the prospect of giving up their job and putting their careers on hold can be difficult.

During the interviews, spouse number 10 mentioned, *“I was working as a supply chain manager in Russia. I had an above-average salary, and I enjoyed my work. After moving to Finland, it has been very difficult for me to find a suitable job here when I compare my situation with when I was back in Russia. I have a university degree and many years of work experience, and I still cannot find a suitable job for myself. After moving to Finland, I was unemployed for almost one year, which was very difficult for me both personally and financially. After about one year, I finally found a job at a warehouse. I am happy to make some money, but right now, my job is to move boxes around in the warehouse, but in the end, relocation to Finland was a good choice for our children's future”*.

For expatriates' spouses, the decision to put their careers on hold can also lead to feelings of frustration and a sense of loss of identity. Many expatriates' spouses have spent years building their careers, developing their skills, and establishing professional networks. Giving up all of this can significantly impact their self-esteem and confidence. Moreover, the lack of a career can also impact the family's financial situation. The expatriate spouse may feel financially dependent on their partner.

According to spouse number 5, *“After moving to Finland, I felt like my life was on standby, and I was waiting for it to start again, but I did not know where to start. I was working as a part-time teacher back in Ukraine. After moving to Finland, it was difficult for me to navigate the job market. I registered as a jobseeker with the TE office in Finland and started learning the Finnish language. They also had some services helping Finland a job in Finland, but it was still very confusing for me. It has been two years now, and I am still unemployed. My husband's salary is enough for both of us living in Finland, but I still would like to have my own job as well”*.

During the interviews, several spouses mentioned that they face difficulties finding suitable career opportunities for themselves in Finland. In addition, the spouses who had a career before relocating to Finland mentioned that they could not find a position in the Helsinki area like the job they previously had in their home country. Furthermore, interviewees mentioned that they feel their professional career path is on hold after relocation to Finland and lack a sense of achievement, accomplishment, identity crisis, and financial dependency on the working spouse. Based on the interviews, several spouses have attended the TE office's integration program. However, while benefiting from the Finnish language courses and career advice provided by the TE office, the spouses mentioned that they still face difficulties finding a position corresponding to their qualifications and work experience compared to their career opportunities back in their home country.

According to spouse number 2, *“I received guidance from the relocation service provider on service offered by the TE office and how to register as a job seeker. At first, I thought this would be interesting and a good opportunity to learn a new language. However, after visiting the TE office and discussing with one of their consultants, I was in doubt if the service provided by the TE office and registering as a job seeker was the best option for me. My husband's assignment is only for two years in Finland and registering as a job seeker and starting the integration program is more like a full-time commitment to life in Finland, which I am not sure would fit my situation perfectly. I am planning to travel*

often between Finland and Ireland, so I would not be able to commit to the Finnish language course every day of the week. I will still spend much time in Finland, so I would like to learn the basics of the language and have activities during the week; thus, I am considering looking for some short time volunteer work”.

Career opportunity was identified as one main challenge faced by the expatriates’ spouses relocating to Helsinki metropolitan area. Based on the interviews, many spouses face difficulties related to not knowing the job market in Finland, lack of professional connection and network, language barrier, and uncertainty regarding the duration of a spouse’s job in Finland. In addition, during the interviews, it was mentioned that the spouses feel their higher education qualifications and work experience from their home country are not fairly evaluated when searching for career opportunities in Finland.

During the interviews, the spouse described the challenges faced regarding the job opportunities in Finland as frustrating and impacting their overall mental health. According to spouse number 2, *“It is not really pleasing to be in this situation. It feels like I do not know what I want to do with my life during these two years my husband works in Finland. It was difficult for me to plan and follow my life. This adds to my stress and gives me uncertainty in life”.*

4.1.3 Language barrier

The language barrier is one of the main themes identified during the interviews with the expatriates’ spouses. Language barriers can significantly challenge expatriate spouses when relocating to a new country. If the spouses do not speak the host country's language, they may struggle to communicate with locals, access essential services, and integrate into the community.

According to spouse number 1, *“I love Finland. Everybody speaks English, which is great and helps me to find my way around easily. But moving to a new country is much more difficult and different than visiting a country as a tourist for one week. Your needs change*

from ordering a burger in a restaurant to filing your taxes. You can find basic information in English on different government websites, but not everything is explained in English, making it difficult to find the practical information I seek”.

During the interviews, the spouses articulated the fact that in Helsinki's capital region, many people speak fluent English, a lot of the services by both public and private sectors are offered in English and in general, it is manageable for daily life and tasks only speaking in English when living in Helsinki capital region. However, when it comes to more practical living practices, expatriates' spouses face challenges with language barriers.

According to spouse number 4, *“Google translate in my best friend! In Brazil and now in Finland, I grocery shopped and made food at home. The supermarkets in Finland are so different from the ones back in Brazil. When I go grocery shopping, I always have Google Translate open. The products only have descriptions in Finnish and Swedish, and since the packaging is very different, it is difficult for me to understand what I am buying. This is really important as my husband has a soy allergy, so I need to be very careful with all the products I buy and not risk my husband's health. Likely I have my best friend Google Translate with me all the time”.*

The interviewees mentioned that the language barrier impacts almost all aspects of their daily life when living in Finland, even though English is commonly used in many places such as governmental offices, supermarkets, gyms, and public transport. However, there are some areas where the lack of knowledge of the Finnish language has a more significant impact on spouses.

According to spouse number 7, *“One day, my daughter came home from school, and suddenly she was speaking in Finnish, a language neither I nor my husband speak or understand. Kids learn the language fast, making it more difficult for us to keep up as adults. My kid has many Finnish friends, and something when my daughter's friends come to our place for a sleepover, it feels like they have their own secret language they*

are speaking. Most importantly, as my kid attends a Finnish school, all her books and homework assignments are also in Finnish. When she questions me and asks me to help her with her assignments, I feel I am not very helpful as I do not understand the language. I have participated in the Finnish language course offered by the TE office, but I am still not very good with the language to help my daughter with her school assignments. Sometimes I feel sad about this because I could help my daughter much better if we were in Brazil. For some reason, I blame it on myself and my language skills for not being able to help my child with most basic things”.

In addition to the difficulties related to everyday living in the Helsinki capital region caused by my language barrier, interviewees also mentioned other challenges raised by the same issue when it comes to other activities and areas, such as finding a job, participating the activities related to social and political matters, social networking, hobbies and even joining the church.

According to spouse number 6, *“We used to go to the church every Sunday back in Australia. So, it was very important for me to join the church right after moving to Finland as I wanted to keep the tradition alive. But unfortunately, things are not as easy as you might think when you do not speak the local language”.*

Based on the interviews with the spouse, while the language barrier remains to cause challenges for the expatriate’s spouse in everyday life in the Helsinki capital region, the spouse was happy that English is well-spoken in Finland and is easy to manage life only in English while living in Finland. According to spouse number 2, 6, 7, 9 and 10, who have experience from previous relocation to other countries before relocation to Finland, the language barriers in Finland are not as big as their previous destination countries as many people speak English in Helsinki capital region.

4.1.4 Community and social networks

Another topic that the expatriates' spouses highlighted was making new friends and building a social network during the interviews. When moving to a new country, in addition to challenges related to going through the required paperwork and learning about a new culture and language, finding a community and social network is a new challenge faced by expatriates' spouses.

According to spouse number 8, *“When we relocated to Helsinki, I was very excited. I had never been to Finland and was so happy to settle in our new home. Once we arrived in Finland, we had temporary accommodation booked for us, and during this time, we received help to look for a permanent apartment. It was all very exciting and new. We visited different neighbourhoods and apartments, and the best part was shopping for new furniture. I love shopping for furniture and decorating our home. We also received help with finding schools for our children, and everything went very well. When the school season started, the children went to school, and my husband went to work. Suddenly it was me and just me. I did not have a job, no family, friends, or even any hobbies”*.

In the relocation process to a new country, in addition to leaving their career path behind, expatriates' spouses also leave their family and friends behind, following their spouse to a new country for their job. During the interviews with the spouses, many stressed that leaving their family and friends behind was one of the most difficult decisions they had to make.

According to spouse number 1, *“In South Africa, the concept of family is very different. Families are very close, and we meet all the time. We eat together, travel together, the children play with their cousins, and have many family gatherings. After relocating to Finland, we do not have any family or friends here, and sometimes I feel lonely. My husband goes to the office, socializes with his co-workers, and kids find friends in school. For a little while, I visited a life coach, which was helpful. But I still miss having my own network, which sometimes stresses me”*.

Moving to a new country can be a stressful experience, and expatriate spouses may find themselves dealing with a range of emotions, from excitement to anxiety. The pressure of adjusting to a new culture, language, and way of life can impact mental health and well-being. Based on the interviews, some services are provided by city officials and companies targeted at spouses, which helps build a social network in Helsinki's capital region.

According to spouse number 1, "My husband's company organized a networking event for spouses' of their international employees that I really enjoyed. Several guest speakers provided information on finding a job in Finland and other activities during the event. But what I enjoyed the most was the social aspect of it. It was really nice to meet the other spouse who has relocated to the Helsinki region and going through similar emotions and ideas as you. I discussed the schooling system in Finland with several spouses and how different it is from our countries. Overall, it was a great event; I felt I belonged there and even kept in touch with some of the spouses".

According to spouse number 5, "I joined the spouse program offered by International House Helsinki. This is a program for spouses of international employees in Finland. The program lasts two years, and you receive information on different topics. They also organize workshops, seminars, and different social gatherings. It is a good place to meet new people and make friends. I wish I had known about this program earlier when I moved to Finland or even before moving to Finland. One of the things that I really enjoy about this program is that after you have completed the program, you can still participate in some of the activities as an alumnus and help the other spouse who has recently joined the program. This was a great opportunity to learn more about living in Finland and make new friends".

4.1.5 Cultural differences and adjustment

Cultural differences and the cultural adjustment process can significantly challenge expatriate spouses when moving to a new country. Expatriate spouses may be in a completely different cultural environment with unfamiliar customs, traditions, and social norms. Adjusting to new ways of greeting, dining, communicating, and socializing can be overwhelming and require a period of adaptation.

According to spouse number 4, "When we first moved to Finland in February last year, I think my body was in shock! It was 30+ degrees in Brazil and -20 degrees in Finland. We were mentally prepared for the cold weather, but perhaps not physically. We had our warmest clothes, but those were not good enough for the Finnish winter. I remember getting very sick the first days after our arrival, making me feel homesick. I wanted to make soup but was lost in the grocery store and did not know the local markets. I remember buying a few vegetables to make soup, but I could not pay for my shopping at the cashier because I did not know I needed to put them on a scale to get a price tag! Luckily, Finnish people are very helpful. Later, when we met the relocation agent to help us with the local registrations, we had to spend the whole afternoon visiting different local offices, and it was a very cold day. The relocation agent gave us some tips about shopping in Finland, which was helpful again. I remember my spouse agreeing that we needed a new winter jacket and boots before anything else, like finding a new apartment!"

When relocating to a new country, in addition to learning about a new culture and language, expatriate spouses face challenges with everyday tasks, including shopping for clothes and furniture.

According to spouse number 7, "Before relocating to Finland, we had to sell all our furniture back home. It was not a very nice experience as we had collected those pieces over the years, and not only do you have an emotional attachment to your home, but also financially, it impacts your life. We had to sell our furniture to recycling centres in South Africa for a much lower price than we originally purchased them. After moving to Finland

and finding a new apartment, we again had to invest a lot of money in furnishing our apartment. We were new in Finland, so we bought most of our furniture brand new, at high prices and from the most popular furniture retailers like IKEA. Later on, we settled in and learned more about ways of living in Espoo; we learnt that furniture outlets in the Helsinki area could help you save money but the products in sale. We also learned about the secondhand shopping culture in Finland. In South Africa, we really do not have a culture of buying secondhand clothing or furniture. It is taboo and connected to lower-income families. But in Finland, it works very differently, and secondhand shopping has nothing to do with your social status. It is even seen as a positive thing”.

In addition, expatriate spouses may encounter different perspectives on family, gender roles, religion, education, etc. These differences sometimes challenge their beliefs and require an open-minded approach to understanding and accepting cultural diversity.

According to spouse number 9, *“Before relocating to Finland, we were concerned about the school system as we knew the school semester start dates are different in Finland compared to China. It was important for us that our child could continue the school without any pause and not be left behind. We received some very useful information on the Finnish education system and different school types from the relocation agency helping us. As we intend to stay in Finland longer, we decided on a local Finnish school rather than an international one. This was a better option to compare the costs between different school options. But we also wanted our kid to learn the Finnish language and integrate better into society growing up! But some information that we did not receive and had to learn ourselves was about the after-school programs. Here in Finland, kids have afternoon classes and go through their homework. So, there is not much to do when they return home. But later we learnt about the afternoon programs offered by the school as an extra-curriculum. This would be useful information to know when planning school matters for the kids. In addition, something new for us was how family and friends circle work differently here in Finland regarding the school system. In Finland, many activities*

include group work and family members' involvement, but in China, there are not many activities after the official school hours".

According to spouse number 10, *"There are some matters that you focus on when relocating to a new country, but there are also some that you really miss! When we relocated to Finland, my spouse received health and medical coverage from the company. After my local registration in Finland, I understood I would be covered under the Finnish healthcare system. Only then did I realise how different the Finish health care system is, compared to the services we receive in Russia. In Finland, visiting a doctor is defiantly cheaper, but it is crazy to know how much time you have to wait until getting a doctor's appointment. Finland also has a private health centre closer to what we have in Russia, but the costs are extremely higher".*

4.2 Synthesis

Based on the interview with spouses, the author recognized similar patterns in challenges faced by the spouse of expatriates in the Helsinki capital region. The patterns were divided into five different themes, as provided above. The sub-chapter summarises the main findings based on interviews analysis and provides insights related to current service offerings provided by expatriates' employers in city officials addressing the challenges faced by the expatriates' spouses.

4.2.1 Services provided by companies

To understand the current services offered by MNCs in the Helsinki capital region, the author has analysed the global mobility policies of 3 different MNCs to identify the practices employed and developed in the area of expatriate management targeted at addressing the challenges faced by the spouses and family members of the expatriates relocating with the employees to Helsinki capital region.

Global mobility policies are developed by MNCs to generally outline guidelines and procedures for managing the relocation of their mobile employees. These policies ensure consistency, fairness, and legal and regulatory requirements compliance. Among policies related to eligibility, compensation and benefit, compliance and legal consideration, performance management and repatriation, global mobility policies are designed considering different assignment types and duration. In addition, global mobility policies consider family support provided to employees accompanying family members.

Based on the analysis of global mobility policies applied by MNCs, the author has identified similar services provided by companies related to the relocation of expatriate's family members and summarized as below:

- Assistance related to immigration practicalities
- Sponsorship of immigration-related costs
- Flight tickets for travel from home country to destination country
- Return tickets to home country
- Relocation lump sum payment between 4000 EUR to 1000 EUR
- Sponsorship of household removals and travel bags
- Covering fees related to medical examination at home and destination country
- Medical insurance
- Covering additional costs raised by a relocation between 1000 EUR to 5000 EUR
- Fees related to the language course
- Tuition fee for children's education

Global mobility policies for MNCs are developed based on each company's needs and assignees' population. All three MNCs in this research have developed different global mobility policies based on their needs and the best practices that suit their employees. Each MNC has several global mobility policies which can further facilitate the assignment type. For example, separate global mobility policies are designed for AEs and SIEs.

Furthermore, in addition to including family support practices in global mobility policies, all three different MNCs studied in this research provide relocation support to their mobile employees and their accompanying family members. Relocation support is often

provided through an external service provider. The 3 MNCs studied in this research provided spousal support as part of their relocation benefit through a third-party consulting firm.

The relocation support provided is included with the relocation lump sum as a taxable benefit to employees. The support provided can include all different areas of the relocation process, such as assistance with pre-visit, guidelines on required immigration process and paperwork, assistance with work and residence permit, assistance with post-arrival registration in Finland (registration with Finnish Digital and Population Data Service agency, applying for a tax card, registration under Finnish social security, and opening a bank account in Finland).

In addition, the relocation service providers can offer services related to everyday living in Finland, cross-cultural training, assistance with booking temporary accommodation services, assistance with long-term apartment search, lease negotiation and arrangement, connection and information on utilities, assistance with the search for a school and day-care service, and spousal support.

Based on the analysis of services provided by Finnish and international relocation service providers in the Helsinki metropolitan region, the third-party relocation service providers assist expatriates' spouses in several areas, including:

- Integration and adjustment
- Labour market advisory
- Studying in Finland (higher education and open university)
- Language courses
- Free time activities and hobbies

In addition, relocation service providers in the Helsinki region organize annual or bi-annual networking and social events for spouses as part of their service offerings. The events are targeted at expatriates' spouses to provide a unique networking opportunity,

finding employment opportunities, advice on the labour market and job search, storytelling and introduction to services offered public sector and cities.

Based on the interview with the expatriates' spouses, all ten interviewees received assistance from a relocation service provider appointed at the time of their relocation by their spouse's employer in Finland. Furthermore, all spouses who participated in the interviews stated that the assistance they received from the relocation service provider was helpful and made the relocation process easier.

4.2.2 Services provided by city officials and the public sector

In addition to services offered by MNCs and with the help of a third-party relocation service provider, there are several services designed by city officials, and governmental parties target expatriates in the Helsinki capital region. Several integration programs in Finland aim to help expatriates' spouses find support for socially and professionally settling in. The services help international spouses in Helsinki, Espoo, or Vantaa looking for support to rebuild their social and professional network and learn more about day-to-day life in Finland. Integration aims to help expatriates feel equal in their new living environment, feeling that they belong to their surrounding society and have the know-how and the opportunity to manage their daily lives.

Based on the interview analysis with spouses, 6 out of 10 spouses have attended the integration program offered by the TE office. Based on the TE office online website analysis, the program is to support your integration process in Finland. It involves determining suitable Finnish or Swedish language studies based on existing language skills and abilities and identifying relevant employment services that best align with your circumstances. The plan may include enrolling in reading and writing courses in your native language or participating in additional education regarding Finnish society.

The integration plan is initiated by either the TE Office or the local municipality no later than two weeks following the initial assessment conducted for newcomers in Finland.

During the program, the individual is connected with an expert from the municipality or TE Office to develop the integration plan. The initial plan covers one year and is subject to revision as agreed upon. The integration plan can extend up to a maximum of three years.

In addition to the integration program offered by the TE office and local municipalities, the city of Helsinki offers a “spouse program” for spouses recently relocated to the Helsinki capital region. Based on the analysis of the online website of the spouse program, the program is designed to help and support expatriates’ spouses and partners who have lived in Helsinki, Espoo, or Vantaa and the Helsinki capital region for less than two years. The spouse program mainly targets newcomers in the Helsinki capital region (who have lived in Finland for less than two years). However, others are also welcomed to join the program if they find it beneficial.

The program helps expatriates’ spouses with the following:

- Making new friends
- Providing a supportive community
- Information on entering the local job market
- Professional networking opportunity
- Knowledge transfer
- Learning more about living in Finland

In addition, the spouse program organizes several events to integrate the international spouse better in the Helsinki region. The events focus on networking opportunities, information on employment opportunities, CV workshops, workshops related to work-life culture in Finland, well-being, and free time activities. After the program onboarding has ended, the spouse program still allows spouses to network utilizing different platforms such as the “Spouse Program LinkedIn group”, networking events, and pitching opportunities. Furthermore, the program allows the spouse to stay active and in touch with the other spouses as a spouse program ambassador, where spouses who have completed one year of the program can contribute to the spouse community and support new spouses.

5 Discussion and Conclusion

In the below chapter, the author reviews the results of the research and provides insights to answer the third research question “How could companies (either internally or with a help relocation partner company) address expatriate family issues by developing different services to facilitate the integration and adjustment of expatriates’ spouses in the Helsinki region?”.

The author provides a discussion based on the literature review and research findings in chapter 4, which helped the author to answer research question 1, “What are the challenges that expatriates’ spouse face in the Helsinki region?” by interviewing ten expatriate’s spouses and research question 2 “How do companies / public sector currently respond to expatriate family issues through a set of specific expatriate-oriented practices?” by analysing the global mobility policies of 3 different MNCs in Helsinki capital region, analysing the service offered by third-party relocation service providers and services offered by city officials and public sector.

McNulty and Inkson (2013, p.60) stated that global mobility managers who handle internal assignments face significant challenges related to family members' relocation, practicalities, and adjustment. These challenges are among the most prominent concerns for such managers. Key topics of concern include the adjustment and satisfaction of expatriate families and the career development of expatriate spouses in the host country.

In this regard and based on the analysis of the global mobility policies employed by MNCs in the Helsinki capital region, while the policies allow for some practices related to family members, the policies are not directly aimed at expatriates’ spouses. For instance, the MNCs cover flight tickets for family members, which is included in the expatriate compensation and benefit scheme. However, the policies lack focused targeted sections and

guidelines for managing expatriates' spouses. It can be argued that some of the compensation in the global mobility policies may indirectly target and facilitate the relocation process for expatriates' spouses.

The maladjustment of family members directly impacts the assignments' return on investment (ROI). It is widely acknowledged that the adjustment and well-being of expatriates' spouses play a crucial role in the success of international assignments (Ramos et al., 2017). Thus, it is crucial for MNCs to truly understand the challenges faced by expatriates' spouses as, based on the analysis of interviews, the spouses feel anxiety and isolation, which further can result in stress for expatriates and impact the expatriates' performance level following the FAAR, cross-over and spill-over family adjustment model.

Organizations must adopt targeted practices that support and cater to the needs of the entire family unit to facilitate a more seamless expatriation process for families. Despite evidence demonstrating the necessity of family support for successful expatriation, many organizations tend to undervalue the significance of the family dimension and overlook the provision of adequate support. This lack of support can result in expatriate failure (Shah et al., 2022).

A recent systematic literature review focusing on expatriate families indicates that family members significantly influence employees' decision to accept international assignment opportunities (Dang et al., 2021). Family members are considered a primary factor influencing employees' decisions to decline international assignments and are also recognized as one of the key factors leading to premature repatriation. Recognizing the substantial impact of family members on international assignments, researchers and practitioners have identified expatriates' spouses as important stakeholders for MNCs (Goede & Holtbrügge, 2021). In this regard, MNCs must apply early consideration of family needs. Based on the interview analysis, many spouses already feel distressed and isolated before the relocation starts. According to the interview results, spouses feel invis-

ble and out of the process. They feel all the information related to the destination country, arrival dates, and all practicalities related to the relocation process is only communicated to the spouse who has received a job opportunity in Finland. They are spouses to follow their spouses blindly.

Wang and Varma (2019) found that expatriates encounter significant adjustment challenges when they are assigned to destination countries with cultures distant from their home country culture. Based on the interview analysis, while some of the cultural differences may have a more unpleasant impact on expatriates' spouses' adjustment, such as learning new ways of searching for a job in Finland, the cultural difference can also positively impact the expatriates' spouse relocation experience by for example learning about the difference in second-hand shopping in Finland which is considered a taboo in some other cultures.

To cope with the new living environment in the host country and to facilitate the adjustment of expatriates' spouses, scholars have suggested that there is a need for a separate training and integration program designed to support the spouses (Gupta et al., 2012). Based on the analysis of global mobility policies practised by MNCs, services provided by third-party relocation service providers, and service offerings by the public sector and minimalities, several cultural integration programs aim to help and support expatriates' spouses. These cultural trainings aim to facilitate spouses' adjustment process and provide them with social and professional networking opportunities.

5.1 Conceptual implications

According to Cole and Nesbeth (2014), identity crises and challenges related to finding career opportunities are the main reasons for expatriates' spouse maladjustment. In addition, it is a difficult choice for many expatriates' spouses to leave their careers behind when relocating (Chen & Shaffer, 2018). According to Wilkinson and Singh (2010), adding career development programs for expatriates' spouses should be a top priority for MNCs when considering expatriate management policies.

Based on the analysis of interviews, the expatriates' spouse mentioned their concerns about leaving their career path in the past and the challenges they faced in Helsinki metropolitan area when looking for a new job. Some expatriates' spouses, lucky to find employment opportunities, mentioned that they were unsatisfied with their job in Finland as it does not match their qualifications and work experience.

However, based on the findings presented in Chapter 4, some spouses are not concerned about finding career opportunities in the Helsinki capital area. This is rather evident based on the findings from interviews with spouses who are in Finland for a limited and shorter time; thus, while career opportunities remain of the biggest challenges faced by expatriate spouses, factors such as duration of the assignment in Finland, whether the assignee is AE or SIE, and the home country of the expatriate's spouse.

In addition to challenges related to career exploration in the literature review and findings, challenges related to the language barrier are another topic thoroughly explored and discussed in this research. According to Wang and Varma (2019), the host country's language and previous experience from international relocation can directly impact the relocation experience and adjustment of expatriates' spouses. Based on the research findings, the spouses in the Helsinki capital region experience some challenges to the language barrier. While the spouse faces challenges related to filling their taxes, finding the suitable ingredient in the supermarket, and understanding the homework of their children, the spouse is generally satisfied with the fact that everyone speaks English in the Helsinki capital region, and it is easy to take care of everyday life tasks.

5.2 Managerial and policy implications

Based on the literature review and the research finding, the author aims to answer the research question number 3, How could companies (either internally or with help relocation partner company) address expatriate family issues by developing different services to facilitate the integration and adjustment of expatriates' spouses in the Helsinki region? in the below chapter.

Based on the research findings, 5 themes were identified which present the biggest challenges face by the expatriates' spouses in Helsinki capital region. The author aims to provide recommendations on form managerial and policy implications for the MNCs and public sector to better address these challenges. The below will provide recommendations based on each theme analysed in the research findings in exception to the language barrier. Based on the research findings, expatriates' spouse can manage well only using English language. In addition, based on the findings on analysis of MNC's global mobility policies and services offered by public sector, Finnish language learning courses are provided by both public and private sector.

Based on the research findings, many expatriates' spouse feel that they are neglected or do not receive visibility and information through the relocation process to Helsinki capital region. To address this challenge, the MNCs should try to consider the family needs in early stages of the talent recruitment and attraction. In this way, the expatriates' spouse will also learn about the MNCs, and build a connection to Finland before their relocation.

If possible, after the recruitment process is over and a job offer or assignment letter is prepared, MNCs can already involve the spouse by organizing a call for both the expatriate and the spouse. During the call, the MNCs should aim to inform the spouses regarding the support provided for them according the MNC's global mobility policy. For example, if the global mobility policy allows for cultural and language training or any other polices that the expatriates' spouse can benefit from should be highlighted at the stages and before relocation to the destination country.

In addition, whether MNCs provide relocation support to the expatriates internally or with help of third-party relocation service provider, if possible, it would be beneficial to involve expatriates' spouse in all communication related to the relocation processes. Based on the research findings, expatriates' spouses may feel invisible, and they will be receiving all the information, including the information that concerns them directly is

always communicated to them second-hand. Furthermore, if an online meeting related to immigration process and relocation service offering is scheduled, MNCs should aim to have the spouses involved in the same, so information is directly communicated to the spouses and they feel more involved within the process.

Difficulties related to finding a suitable career opportunity in Helsinki capital region was another theme discussed in the research findings. Similar to early communication and involvement of the spouse in the relocation process, the author recommends MNCs to reach out to the expatriates' spouses with questions related to future career plan in Helsinki capital region. The information related to the labour market, websites for search for vacant positions, information on job fairs and other useful information that can help the expatriates' spouse should be communicated in early stages of the relocation process to allow for the spouse to better plan their career path in Helsinki capital region.

In addition to MNCs, the public sector can provide information related to Finnish labour market at very early stages of the relocation process and even as early as when expatriates' and their family members visit the Finnish mission in their home country to apply for their residence permit applications to Finland.

To address the challenges faced by expatriates' spouse related to community and networking in Helsinki capital region, based on the research findings the service offered by city of Helsinki and city of Espoo such as "Spouse Program" provide expatriates' spouse with excellent social networking opportunities. In addition, the program provides spouse with career coaching which is another challenge faced by expatriates' spouse. However, based on the research findings many expatriates' spouse are not familiar with the program or they only get to know the program after relocating to Finland. Early communication of services similar to the "Spouse Program" and other services provided by the city officials can be beneficial to expatriates' spouse before their relocation.

Through early communication and introduction to these services, expatriates' spouse can already build a social network at very early stages of the relocation process. Furthermore, access to a supportive community of spouse can facilitate search for information related other practicalities and challenges raised from the relocation.

Similarly, the services can help the spouse with cultural adjustment in Helsinki capital region. The MNCs can further aim to address the challenges to cultural adjustments by organizing online sessions hosted by expatriates' spouse who already have experience living in Helsinki capital region. For example, based on the research findings, schooling system in Finland can be very different compared to other countries. Sharing experience through storytelling shared by other expatriates' spouse can be potential way to introduce the newcomers to the way matters are handled in Helsinki capital region and provide success stories and mistakes to avoid.

Overall, MNCs should consider family members relocation needs at the very stages of talent attraction. Whether internally or with assistance from third-party relocation service provider, early involvement of spouses in the relocation process and early and clear communication of information related to the current service offering can further contribute to smoother relocation process and adjustment for expatriates' spouse.

5.3 Limitations and future research

Several limitations are applied to this research to help the author find a realistic research approach and increase the validity of the findings. The study's limitations are mainly related to the sample group of expatriates' spouses selected for the interviews and the location of the MNCs.

Firstly, the study only covers MNCs located in the Helsinki capital area. The author studies the global mobility policies of 3 MNCs in the Helsinki capital area. Certain factors differentiate the living and social circumstances in the Helsinki capital region from other places in Finland. For instance, the higher living expenses, international communities, international schools, level of English language

spoken and other factors. In this regard, the author only studies and analyses the services provided by third-party service providers and city officials within the Helsinki capital region.

According to the Finnish Immigration Service, there is an increasing number of first-time residence permit applications based on family ties to Finland; it would be beneficial to implement research related to the challenges faced by expatriates' spouses outside of the Helsinki capital region and how MNCs, relocation service providers, public sector and city officials are addressing these challenges. In addition, based on the research findings, expatriates' spouses only face language barrier challenges in the Helsinki capital area only in specific situations, for example, when filing taxes and looking for specific information. Future research related to language barrier challenges faced by expatriates' spouses outside of the Helsinki capital region can further contribute to service development and planning for spousal support programs in the rest of Finland.

In addition to the location of MNCs, the author has applied limitations to the research by purposive sampling. The expatriate spouses interviewed for this research all have the below criteria, which further limits the study.

- 1 All spouses speak English
- 2 All spouses had a foreign partner
- 3 All spouses had relocated to the Helsinki capital region due to their partner's job

All interviews were in English, and all spouses could fluently communicate in English to answer the research questions. Nevertheless, the language barrier was one the main challenges faced by spouses even though all spouses stated that they could manage day-to-day life in the Helsinki capital region only speaking English. Thus, this research is limited to the challenges faced by expatriates' spouses who can speak English. Further research regarding challenges faced by expatriates' spouses who do not speak English can benefit MNCs and the public sector when considering the service offering for expatriate spouses. Lack of language skills can further impact the services available to expatriate spouses and building a social network.

In addition, all spouses interviewed for this research had a foreign partner who relocated to the Helsinki capital region for a job opportunity. These criteria in the research add further limitations to the cultural adjustment of the spouses and expatriates themselves. Future research on challenges faced by expatriates' spouses related to cultural adjustment and building social networks comparing the nationality of the spouse (being host country national or third-country national) can develop a better understanding of challenges faced by expatriates' spouse and further add to the literature and provide MNCs and public sector with evidence on integration programs aimed at expatriates' spouses.

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Online resources

[Paikalliset TE-palvelut - TE-palvelut](#)

[Spouse-program - Helping spouses to settle in Finland's capital region \(spouseprogram.fi\)](#)

[Services for spouses | City of Espoo](#)

Appendices

Appendix 1. Interview Questions

- 1 How long have you been living in Finland?
- 2 What is your nationality and your spouse's nationality? Do you also have any children?
- 3 Have you been accompanying your spouse previously on assignments/relocation?
- 4 Can you describe some of the issues you faced when relocating to Finland? (Before arrival)?
- 5 Did you receive enough information before your relocation to Finland? (Different aspects)?
- 6 Could you describe some of the main challenges you face after relocating to Finland? (Different aspects)?
- 7 Did you think you received enough information before and after your arrival?
- 8 Anything that could make your relocation experience better? What information?