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Expatriates' subjective well-being in hostile environments

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ABSTRACT:

Traveling for business has increased significantly during last two decades. Due to this phenomenon of globalization, the utilization of expatriates has also increased worldwide. Expatriates have various kinds of work assignments around the globe, thereby potentially facing locations possessing certain risks and threats, more commonly referred as hostilities. In these hostile locations, the well-being aspect is in essence, as it brings out new dimensions and challenges the expatriate, and the organization must consider.

Expatriate well-being, management, selection, repatriation, and other human resource management functions have been studied in the past. The role of well-being, in particular expatriates' ability to the new host country, or the ability to cope with the new environment are well-studied topics in literature. However, research of expatriate's subjective well-being, in a hostile environment context remains rather limited.

This study aims to provide understanding to expatriate well-being. This is done by focusing on expatriates whose international assignment's location was in a hostile environment. Thereby, the study presents key findings of prior literature of expatriation, well-being, and hostile environments. From the literature review, a Job Demands-Resources model was implemented. According to the model, job demands increase risk of burnout and negative outcomes of occupational well-being. The job resources decrease risk of burnout, increase work engagement and lead to positive outcomes. In order to explore the phenomena of subjective well-being, semi-structured interviews with seven Finnish expatriates were conducted. The dimension of hostility varied amongst the participants, from infrastructure-related risks to man-made threats. This allowed the study to discuss the influence of hostile environment to well-being from a multifaceted viewpoint. The findings of the study disclose key job demands and resources the participants felt influenced their well-being. These demands are for example fear and threat of violence, and pressures faced. Main resources the participants described were social relationships, individual characteristics, and recreational activities.

The findings align with previous research of managing expatriates in hostile environments. In conclusion, the study enhances knowledge and understanding of how expatriates in hostile environments perceive their subjective well-being from job demands-resources point of view. The study topic from prior research is very limited. The basis created by the study allows for future research to increase knowledge, enhance well-being and human resource procedures, practices, and guidelines.

KEYWORDS: well-being, hostile environment, expatriate, job demands-resources model

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TIIVISTELMÄ:

Liikematkustaminen ja pidemmät ulkomaankomennukset ovat globalisaation myötä lisääntyneet merkittävästi viime vuosikymmenien saatossa. Ekspatriaateilla on erilaisia työtehtäviä ympäri maailmaa, jonka seurauksena erilaisten riskitekijöiden sekä uhkien kohtaaminen voi olla mahdollista. Uhkaavassa ympäristössä työskentely muodostaa ekspatriaattien hyvinvoinnille erityisiä haasteita, jotka niin ulkomaankomennusta tarjoavan organisaation sekä itse ekspatriaatin on keskeistä ottaa huomioon. Ekspatriaattien hyvinvointia, johtamista, valikointia, jaksamista, sopeutumista, kotiinpaluuta ja muita henkilöstöjohtamiseen liittyviä toimintoja on tutkittu aikaisemmin kiitettävissä määrin. Riskikohteissa työskentelevien ekspatriaattien subjektiiviseen hyvinvointiin liittyvä tutkimuskirjallisuus on kuitenkin vähäistä.

Tämä tutkielma pyrkii laajentamaan ymmärrystä ekspatriaattien hyvinvoinnista keskittymällä riskialueilla työskennelleisiin suomalaisiin ekspatriaatteihin laadullisesta, subjektiivisia kokemuksia analysoivasta näkökulmasta. Tutkielmassa esitetään aihealueen tutkimuskirjallisuuden keskeisimmät teoriat ja löydökset, joista merkittävämpänä teoreettisen viitekehyksen muodostava työn vaatimukset ja voimavarat -teoria. Teoriamallin mukaan työn vaatimukset lisäävät työuupumuksen sekä kielteisten lopputulemien riskiä työarjessa. Työn voimavarat puolestaan vähentävät työuupumuksen riskiä, lisäävät työn imua sekä johtavat myönteisiin lopputulemiin. Tutkielma on luonteeltaan laadullinen ja siinä analysoidaan seitsemän suomalaisen ekspatriaatin puolistrukturoituja haastatteluja. Tutkielman tekijän järjestämien haastattelujen pohjalta kerättyjä havaintoja analysoidaan ja verrataan aiempaan tutkimuskirjallisuuteen. Tulosten mukaan jokaisella haastateltavalla oli riskitekijöitä kohdemaassa, esimerkiksi infrastruktuuriin liittyvien riskien tai ihmisen muodostamien uhkien muodossa. Tämä edesauttoi ymmärtämään riskialueen vaikutusta hyvinvointiin monesta eri näkökulmasta. Tutkielman löydökset kertovat työn vaatimuksien ja voimavarojen vaikutuksista haastateltavien hyvinvointiin. Edellä mainittuja vaatimuksia olivat esimerkiksi väkivallan uhka, pelko, sekä työhön liittyvät paineet. Tärkeimpiä voimavaroja olivat haastateltavien mukaan puolestaan sosiaaliset suhteet, yksilön omat luonteenomaiset piirteet sekä vapaa-ajan aktiviteetit.

Tutkielman löydökset ovat linjassa aikaisemman tutkimuskirjallisuuden kanssa ekspatriaattien hyvinvoinnista riskialueilla. Johtopäätöksenä voidaan pitää tutkielman ekspatriaattien hyvinvointiin liittyvän tiedon lisäämistä, sekä ymmärrystä kuinka subjektiivinen hyvinvointi näkyy työn voimavarojen ja vaatimuksien näkökulmasta. Samankaltaisia tutkimuksia on vähän. Lähtökohtana tutkielmalla on auttaa tulevaa aihealueen tutkimusta tuottamalla uutta tietoa, jonka avulla hyvinvoinnin ja henkilöstöjohtamisen prosesseja on mahdollista kehittää pidemmälle. Tutkielman tulokset auttavat yhdessä muun tutkimuskirjallisuuden kanssa ymmärtämään ekspatriaatteihin kohdistuvien uhkien vaikutusta hyvinvointiin ja työssä jaksamiseen sekä pohtimaan toimia kielteisten vaikutusten minimoimiseksi.

AVAINSANAT: well-being, hostile environment, expatriate, job demands-resources model

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Abbreviations

JD-R: Job demands-resources model

1 Introduction

In this section, the background of the study is presented as well as key concepts defined. Additionally, the research gap is identified. Research question and objectives are outlined and justified. Lastly, structure of the study is presented by illustrating the order of chapters as well as the content.

1.1 Background of the study

Globalization and the growth of internationalizing organizations has contributed to the use of expatriates (Anderson, 2005, p. 567). According to Pucik et al. (2017, p. 172), global organizations operating in emerging markets face a shortage of qualified employees. Moreover, a growing number of expatriates is claimed to have resulted from active international trade, specifically in the European context (Brewster, 1993, p. 49). This need for talented employees has resulted in sending expatriates abroad. However, the safety of expatriates must be considered.

Some locations possess political, social, or man-made threats (Bader et al., 2015). These threats can be for example acts of violence, poor medical infrastructure, undrinkable and contaminated water, or food (Jones, 2000). Jahanshahi et al. (2019) describe Afghanistan as one of the most dangerous locations to work. According to Greppin et al. (2017), Afghanistan, Iraq, and Venezuela, amongst others, are ranked as having a high level of corruption. High corruption levels bring physical and financial threats to both locals and expatriates (Greppin et al., 2017). Jahanshahi et al. (2020) claim employees working in a physically hostile environment may have an impact on well-being, consequently influencing the employee's productivity.

Occupational well-being and non-work well-being are different types of well-being (Biswas et al., 2022). The individual's satisfaction with health, life and work are illustrated as well-being (Schulte & Vainio, 2010). Different measures and digital gadgets have been invented to measure, evaluate, and analyze the level of well-being. Job

demands and resources model proposes well-being at work consists of positive and negative outcomes; from the job demands and resources the individual perceives (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). Job demands may be showcased as too vast workload, pressures, or conflicts at work (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), whereas job resources are the social relationships, support, and feedback (Schaufeli, 2017, p. 121).

The implications of long-term exposure to hostilities bring new challenges in expatriates' lives. Additionally, stress and other negative outcomes may come forth. Jahanshahi et al. (2019) found job vitality is affected negatively by high levels of perceived danger in the environment. Dickmann & Watson (2017) implied organizational perspective to the assignment, such as the selection process for expatriates which should consider stress, and well-being of the individual. In addition, holidays and leaves are perceived as vital (Dickmann & Watson, 2017).

Previous research includes studies on the role of human resources in hostile environments (Bader et al., 2019), on international assignments in hostile environments (Pinto et al., 2017), and expatriates in hostile environments and the threats perceived are under-studied (Bader & Schuster, 2015; Pinto et al., 2017). Moreover, the well-being of expatriates has been studied, in particular the impact COVID-19 brought to expatriate's life (Tripathi & Singh, 2022). However, there is a limited number of studies combining the well-being aspect of expatriates in hostile environments. Faeth & Kittler (2020, p. 14) emphasized the importance of utilizing a job demands and resources model to study expatriates in hostile environments, in particular with a focus on well-being. Therefore, the need for a study thoroughly combining all three elements of expatriation, well-being and the dimension of a hostile environment is needed.

This study used one key model in evaluating the well-being of expatriates: the job demands and resources model. The job demands and resources model is further explained in chapter 2.4. Job demands and resources model acted as a guideline for the conduction of the study and steered the direction to the well-being dimension.

1.2 Aim, research question and objectives

This study aims to understand, map, and evaluate the well-being of expatriates in hostile environments. The objectives act vis-à-vis the research question, by guiding the study in interview question formulation as well as in data analysis. The objectives enhance the study by specificizing relevance to the job demands and resources point of view.

Expatriate well-being has been an increasingly studied topic in research, whereas the number of studies utilizing a qualitative method related to the topic is scarce. Therefore, this study presents a way expatriate well-being, in particular in a hostile context can be studied. Interviews are one way of conducting qualitative research, and since the benefits of interviews allow the study to understand the phenomena of individual well-being, it is the chosen research approach for this specific study. The aim of this study is to provide valuable insights to academic research about expatriate well-being by broadening understanding on how both expatriates and organizations can facilitate and adapt to a hostile environment more efficiently. The extended knowledge may also play a consequential role in minimizing stress, dangerous situations, and other negative effects during expatriate assignments.

The study has one research question:

What job demands and resources are considered as the most significant for expatriates' well-being in a hostile environment?

With the research question, research objectives are formulated into three separate:

1. What types of special demands does expatriate work include in hostile environments?
2. What resources were considered important?
3. How did these job demands and resources connect with expatriate work in hostile environments, in particular impact on well-being of these expatriates?

1.3   Key concepts

This study aims to provide a coherent overview of the definitions and topics related to the study, whilst simultaneously forming a clear analysis of the findings. The used definitions play a pivotal role in understanding the contents of the research. Below are the key concepts of this study.

Expatriate is an employee sent abroad to work for a certain period of time (Brewster & Scullion, 1997, p. 32). Assignments can be divided into short-term and long-term assignments based on their period of time spent in the host country (Viitala, 2021).

Job demands refers to for example pressures or overburdened work (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) which may lead to emotional exhaustion (Demerouti et al., 2001). Job demands create detrimental value to the employee, as emotional exhaustion of the employee decreases their productivity and increases absences (Schaufeli, 2017). Job demands that lead to burnout, which results in negative outcomes is referred to as health impairment process (Schaufeli, 2017).

Job resources refers to the positive influence on the employee, such as support and feedback from others (Schaufeli, 2017). These positive matters lead to work engagement and decreases the risk of burnout (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). Work engagement creates positive outcomes and is referred to as the motivational process (Schaufeli, 2017).

Subjective well-being consists of life satisfaction, positive and negative affects (Diener et al., 1985). It indicates how life experiences are perceived (Dutra & Carlotto, 2023). The evaluation of positive experiences and happiness is part of subjective well-being (Diener & Tov, 2012).

Hostile environment is an environment where a dimension of hostility is present. An environment can be hostile from various perspectives. Expatriates may for instance face a hostile manager, a hostile culture or a hostile physical environment. Environmental

dimensions can be, but are not limited to, health-related risks, infrastructure-related risks, man-made threats or natural catastrophes (Jones, 2000). Cultural or managerial hostilities are not focused on this study, since the aim is to understand how a hostile environment impacts the well-being of expatriates.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

The study begins with an introduction, in which the background of the topic is explained, the research gap is evaluated as well as key concepts provided. Moreover, the research question and objectives are represented. Subsequently a comprehensive literature review is presented, where key concepts are explained and justified. The aim of the literature review is to gain understanding of prior research. Finally, a theoretical framework is formed to the study as an outcome of literature review. The fourth section, methodology, outlines philosophical considerations as well as justifies the chosen research method. The section encases information about data collection and analysis. Finally, section four concludes with ethical considerations as well as discusses the validity and reliability of the study. From here, findings are presented in order of relevance to the topic. The sixth section provides discussion of the findings, managerial implications, limitations of the study and lastly, suggestions for future research. Finally, references and appendices are provided.

2 Literature review

This chapter consists of literature review of relevant concepts related to the study. Key elements of the study are outlined individually, and lastly incorporated as one theme to fully gain understanding of previous research. Firstly, the definition of expatriation is presented, followed by the different dimensions' expatriation is affected by. These aspects, such as global responsiveness are then further showcased to understand the concept in-depth. Secondly, well-being from multiple definitions is explained. The theoretical framework, the job demands and resources model is outlined and justified. Thereafter, the aspect of hostilities and hostile environments are introduced. Motivators to undergo an international assignment in hostile environments are discussed in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of the study topic. Lastly the literature review summarizes the most essential findings from previous literature.

2.1 Expatriation

In the below chapter, the definition of expatriate is explained as well as the expatriation cycle. The introduction of these key concepts is important for understanding the study's ideology. Thereby, also expatriate failure is discussed.

2.1.1 Expatriate

Expatriate is a person working in a foreign country (Brewster & Scullion, 1997, p. 32). Employees are sent either for short-term or long-term international assignments. Short-term assignments typically last from 3 to 12 months, and long-term assignments around one to five years (Viitala, 2021, p. 202).

An organization can either send their employee to the international business assignment, or the person themselves can fully self-initiate the assignment. Company-backed expatriates' international assignment is supported by the company. Self-initiated expatriates undergo the international assignment without any company support or sponsorship.

Priority for self-initiated expatriates are the location and host reputation motives. On the contrary, for company-backed expatriates the priority is more focused on company specific skills, and overall career impact. (Doherty et al., 2011)

According to Pucik et al. (2017, p. 83), international assignments are categorized into demand-driven and learning-driven. A demand-driven, also known as developmental international assignment comprises knowledge transfer, coordination as well as communication (Stahl et al., 2009, p. 92). On the contrary, learning-driven, or a functional international assignment is focused on developing a certain goal or a competency as well as career development (Stahl et al., 2009, p. 93).

2.1.2 Expatriation cycle

An expatriation process consists of selection, pre-departure training, expatriation, and repatriation (Viitala, 2021, p. 203; Harzing & Christensen, 2004, p. 620). In order to identify suitable candidates for an international assignment, organizations should focus on evaluating various tests, such as stress tests, professional evaluations declaring the candidate's interpersonal, and cross-cultural competencies (Mendenhall et al., 1987, p. 338). Shivarudrappa et al. (2009) advise expatriate selection should consist of language, culture, and practical training. Strong technical skills, diplomacy, adaptability, being emotionally intelligent and having intercultural competencies are good characteristics of an expatriate (Bussin, 2015). According to Tung's (1982, p. 70) research, rigorous selection process resulted in better performance and less failure in the context of U.S. and European organizations. On the contrary, the inability to select the right candidate, might turn into a "selection mistake", which then can result in premature return (Harzing & Christensen, 2004; Shivarudrappa et al., 2009, p. 155).

A versatile, cross-cultural training before the assignment decreases the expatriate's and their family's stress, uncertainty, and possible culture shock (Sims & Schraeder, 2004; Strubler et al., 2011, p. 106). Additionally, it is used in order to minimize the risk of expatriate failure (Reiche, 2022, p. 238). Successful cross-cultural training depends on

hierarchical support on both financial and political level (Mendenhall et al., 1987). Adjusting to the new country, culture, work, and networks takes time and resources.

According to Solomon (1994), many expatriates encounter a "honeymoon phase", where the new, different host country generates excitement and happiness. Sims & Schraeder (2004, p. 75) propose that once the phase has passed, reality sets in and the culture shock emerges. Cross-cultural training significantly influences adjustment and performance efficiency (Harrison, 1994). Furthermore, linguistic fluency plays a pivotal role in adjusting to the host country (Strubler et al., 2011, p. 106).

According to McNulty & Brewster (2020), the expatriation phase for organizations is the performance management. This is due to expatriation assignments' costly nature, thereby the need to manage and evaluate their job performance is critical (McNulty & Brewster, 2020, p. 64). Essentially compensation package influences expatriate motivation (McNulty & Brewster, 2020, p. 65). Expatriates accept international assignments for several reasons, namely personal development (Stahl et al., 2002) and interest in internationalization. Moreover, expatriates also view and evaluate economic factors, such as taxation, cost-of-living and assignment allowance reward (Suutari, 2003, p. 188). Psychosocial attributes the expatriate possesses influences successfulness of the assignment (Jones, 2000).

Study by Stahl et al. (2002) found that especially for German expatriates, career orientation motivated them to accept the international assignment. Furthermore, career advancement as well as both personal and professional development were affirmative factors (Stahl et al., 2002, p. 226). On the other hand, Vijayakumar & Cunningham (2016) found that Indian expatriates who had financial motives outlined less positive cultural adjustment, whereas expatriates who initiated the international assignment based on exploratory motives reported better (positive) cultural adjustment. As mentioned by Suutari (2003, p. 188), knowledge-transfer, co-ordination, and integration of worldwide

operations along with transfer or organizational practices are fundamental reasons why organizations send employees on international assignments.

Further, job performance of expatriates is based on performance criteria, in which the standards and criteria are presented (McNulty & Brewster, 2020). McNulty & Brewster (2020) also define it is important to assess risks that may lead to job failure, which can be done in the job performance phase.

Preparation, physical relocation, transition, and re-adjustment is the process of repatriation (Shivarudrappa et al., 2009, p. 159). Mello et al. (2023, p. 12) claim expatriates may face challenges in repatriation, especially after high-density assignment. Additionally, Harvey (1982) identified a dilemma of expatriate repatriation. According to the study, lack of motivation and clear career plans, intriguing jobs outside of the organization and adjustment difficulties all impact whether or not the employee leaves the organization.

To support the findings of Harvey (1982), Valk et al. (2015) define Dutch expatriates' intentions to find alternative jobs outside the organization if their expectations during repatriation are not met. Secondly, the number of employees wanting to take an international assignment decreases if current and past expatriates have had unsatisfied experiences (Harvey, 1982, p. 54). Harvey (1982, p. 56) also identified the longer the international assignment takes, the more repatriation problems are estimated to occur. Organizations may tackle repatriation dilemmas by assigning a mentor, who ensures appropriate measures are taken once the employee returns and advocates on the expatriate's future plans regarding promotions (Shivarudrappa et al., 2009, p. 160).

2.1.3   Expatriate failure

Premature return from the international assignment is considered as expatriate failure (Harzing & Christensen, 2004; Harzing, 1995; Shivarudrappa et al., 2009). Additionally, low performance at the host country or challenges in adjusting to the host country are also considered as expatriate failures (Harzing & Christensen, 2004; Harzing, 1995).

According to Shivarudrappa et al. (2009) multinational corporations lose significant amounts of money and resources from expatriate failure. Expats face multiple challenges during their international assignment, to illustrate homesickness and isolation, cost of living, different society and norms (Mendenhall et al., 1987, p. 331). Wang & Varma (2019) claim the greater cultural distance within the home and host country, the more challenging the expatriate's assignment will be.

As per Harzing & Christensen (2004), expatriate failure from an organizational point of view is not always vis-à-vis the expatriate's perspective. Meaning the expatriate might have positive notes on the international assignment, whereas the organization only sees failure due to premature return. It is important that both the organization and the employee hold the same expectations of duration of the international assignment, salary and working hours (Harzing & Christensen, 2004, p. 622).

Bovens (2021) illustrated three ways people deal with failure and frustration. Firstly, to make the impression of extinguishing desires. Secondly, by shifting beliefs. Thirdly, by associating the event, product or matter is not for them. The author illustrated these three coping mechanisms by telling a story of The Fox. In the story, The Fox finds tempting grapes in the woods, but is unable to reach these. Thereby, The Fox copes with the failure of not being able to eat the grapes by 1) declaring they do not like grapes, 2) associating the grapes as being too ripe, and not tasting well, and 3) stating the grapes are for others, by changing the frame. (Bovens, 2021). By understanding the context from expatriate point of view, one could say the assignment was unsuccessful due to different values of host-country employees, stating the assignment was set to failure, or by stating the assignment would have required a different skills and competencies than what they might possess.

2.2 Hostile environments

Expatriates face different types of threats depending on the environment. Expatriate health and types of threats must be evaluated, especially if the environment is hostile.

Four key aspects of hostilities are infrastructure-related, health risks, natural catastrophes (Jones, 2000) and man-made threats (Posthuma et al., 2019). All aspects are discussed below in detail to provide a comprehensive understanding of the context expatriates are working in. Jones (2000) identified factors influencing expatriate well-being. To illustrate, quality of air, infrastructure and health related issues were presented, and are further demonstrated below. Additionally, aspects on how both the home and host-organization body support the expatriate are discussed.

2.2.1 Aspects of hostilities

Infrastructure related risks, in particular poor or absence of proper infrastructure impacts well-being and overall comfort. The quality and level of road infrastructure correlates with decreased injuries and fatalities (Noland, 2003). According to Jones (2000), the greatest risk amongst all health-related threats is the risk of accidents, in particular traffic accidents. Poor road infrastructure alongside increased vehicular movements increases the risk of roadside accidents (Osayomi & Areola, 2015). Jones (2000) proposes the organization can support the expatriate by assigning a personal driver and encouraging the use of seatbelts.

Another infrastructure related threat is poor medical infrastructure. Additionally, the insufficient number of doctors and nurses, ambulances, and medic helicopters as well as hospitals with sufficient amounts of medicines are all risks faced, especially in developing countries (Jones, 2000). Measures requiring regular monitoring might be postponed due to minimal infrastructure. In addition to the above-mentioned health threats, expatriates may face occupational health risks such as decreased dental health caused by lack of daily dental routines due to the demanding nature of the assignment (Jones, 2000, p. 576).

Health related risks include many elements present in an expatriate's life. The quality of water, food hygiene, transmissible diseases, sexual health, and the quality of air all affect the expatriate's health (Jones, 2000). The type of work and environment affects what

type of hazards or risks expatriates encounter. For example, exposure to radiation of laboratory physicians correlates with a higher number of cancers compared to employees not working in laboratories (Orme et al., 2015). On the other hand, the occupational health hazards of street cleaners consist mainly of traffic accidents, respiratory disorders, and increased contamination with pollution (Van Kampen et al., 2020). Commonly, health-related risks are dependent on the infrastructure, such as how well the healthcare and education institutes are designed and implemented (Fee et al., 2019, p. 1711).

Natural catastrophes, such as tsunamis, hurricanes, droughts, earthquakes, flooding, and wildfires are risk factors for expatriate well-being. Pre-departure training of expatriates should evaluate the possible natural catastrophe risks, for example if the host-country locates on top of tectonic plates. For example, earthquakes happen when tectonic plates edges suddenly have too much friction (Haila, 2005). In addition to the prevention possibilities, Fee et al. (2019) describe the role infrastructure plays in preventing and being able to continue "business as usual" after a natural catastrophe has occurred. Tesselaar et al., (2020) state the frequency of natural catastrophes will increase in the future.

Man-made threats consist mainly of human influenced acts. These are for example, terrorism (Reed et al., 2023; Bader et al., 2015). Posthuma et al. (2019) described terrorism, kidnapping, street crimes and diseases as one of many risks expatriates may face. Bader et al. (2019, p. 2809) claim in particular after the terrorist attack on the 11th of September in 2001 in the United States resulted in governments and societies perceiving terrorism as a relevant topic. After the September 11th terrorist attack, stress was present in Americans across the nation (Schuster et al., 2001). Hence, it is important to acknowledge the influence terrorist attacks can have on people outside the act, even in different country or region. The study of terrorism consists of multiple sub-categories. To name a few, counter-terrorism studies focus on the prevention of terrorism, whereas psychology of terrorists focuses on the terrorists' way of thinking (Reuveny et al., 2010).

On the other hand, some studies focus on terrorism by applying religious perspective, or the human right perspective (Reuveny et al., 2010).

2.2.2 Coping mechanisms to hostile situations

Breckenridge & Maguen (2006) argue that people find different coping mechanisms to hideous acts, for example by turning to religion or finding comfort from friends and family. Clergy is the first point of contact for many people facing a trauma, as mentioned by Everly (2003). Studies regarding military personnel working in foreign countries have been studied more vastly, as illustrated by Fisher et al. (2015). The authors studied how female military expatriates experienced their work and what coping mechanisms they developed. The study found acculturative stressors impacting the expatriate's ability to adapt and conclude the international assignment. Firstly, the extreme conditions of working in a war zone was established as significant, as trauma and risk of death was present. Secondly, they found gender a stressor impacting their experience. Thereby, the sample group developed and adapted coping mechanisms in order to better sustain themselves. Support from both co-workers, family as well as friends was emphasized as very significant, in addition to recreational activities and individual-level resources. By establishing a routine of working out, socializing, mindfulness or controlling one's emotions, the sample group was able to disassociate themselves from the dangerous settings. (Fisher et al., 2015)

People find different ways to cope with challenging matters. Wishful thinking, willful forgetting and willful misremembering are three ways an expatriate can shift their belief. Wishful thinking is about wishing something, or someone would happen or do, such as finding a missing person or wishing a family member would clean the house. Willful forgetting and willful misremembering are used to cope with difficult times, such as traumas, unhappy periods in life or abuse. Additionally, willfully shifting a frame of the situation, such as belittling the past experience or stating something could have gone in a worse way than it happened. Lastly, willfully shifting tastes is by encouraging one to try new matters or products and adapting to new norms. (Bovens, 2021)

2.3 Organizational support in hostile environments

Suder et al. (2019) claim certain human resource interventions along with knowledge-transfer from expatriates allow for rare and unique knowledge exploitation in future hostile environments. To elaborate, human resource support is specifically needed in situations where lack of security is present, moreover both personal danger and limited freedom were identified as challenging elements (Suder et al., 2019, p. 1806).

Expatriate management in hostile environments impacts how successful the assignment is. Therefore, the well-being of expatriates should be managed properly. Organizations face different challenges when sending expatriates to hostile environments (Bader et al., 2019, p. 2811). The influence and impact of hostile environments and in particular, terrorism has on human resource management and business, has increased over the years, although still in its early stages (Bader et al., 2019). Finding suitable employees to work and get along in a hostile environment, providing adequate security and safety training as well as developing policies for emergencies increases the workload for the human resource department (Bader et al., 2019, p. 2811). A study by Mäkelä & Kinnunen (2018) indicates the importance of adequate workload and pressure of international business travelers, particularly if employees operate in hostile environments. The safety and well-being of employees is paramount for organizations, in particular when international assignments are conducted in high-risk countries (Faeth & Kittler, 2020).

Bader et al. (2019) introduce a situation - response - outcome framework, which is divided into micro-, meso- and macro-levels. On the macro-level national governments play a crucial role in both preventing a terrorist attack, and possibly providing sufficient support after one. Public safety consisting for example of laws, legislations as well as other regulations are all different ways to influence on a macro level. The focal point of the meso level is on multinational corporation's ways to manage employees in hostile environments, specifically looking into the human resource strategies, policies, and practices. On the meso-level security and emergency training are essential for a successful

expatriation. In contrast, the micro level focuses on acute- and post-crisis analysis. Micro level HR activities include teaching coping mechanisms and networking skills. By these, the outcome promises better psychological well-being and work motivation. (Bader et al., 2019)

Bader (2015) emphasizes the importance of organizational support, specifically for expatriates in high-risk countries. On a similar note to this study, Reade & Lee (2012) studied effects ethnopolitical conflicts have on employee commitment to the organization. The study found that organizational support is crucial, especially when hostility in the area is present. The higher the conflicts, the lower the commitment to the organization and vice-versa (Reade & Lee, 2012, p. 96). Additionally, the study found that perceived organizational support can reduce the significant negative influence conflicts have on organizational commitment (Reade & Lee, 2012, p. 97). Therefore, an important aspect of managing employees in foreign context, in particular in hostile environments is the perceived organizational support.

2.4 Well-being

2.4.1 Concept of well-being

Diener et al. (2009) argue well-being is formed by three elements: psychological well-being, both positive and negative emotions and the relationship within these and thirdly, positive thinking (Diener et al., 2009). Psychological well-being is about the negative and positive feelings in everyday life (Warr, 1978, p. 111). Scholars use a six-dimensional theoretical model to evaluate psychological well-being, which includes: autonomy, environmental mastery, positive relations with others, self-acceptance, purpose in life and personal growth (Ryff & Keyes, 1995, p. 719).

2.4.2 Occupational and subjective well-being

Work provides important structure to people's lives, offers meaningful purpose (Bakker & de Vries, 2021), as well as allows people to create social ties. Concurrently, people

spend years of their lives at work. Thus, it is important to consider occupational well-being as vital. Occupational well-being varies greatly even amongst same-organization employees due to different personalities, goals, and motivation (Mäkikangas et al., 2013). Workplaces can make a difference on how the individual perceives occupational well-being, for instance, Google has a sports complex, whereas Meta offers free food and transportation (Day, 2014). Additionally, these types of incentives and benefits are very appealing on social media, and companies generally appreciate the free content young employees post about the company.

A healthy workplace, according to Day (2014) consists of a physical environment, health promotion programs and a psychosocial environment. The physical environment demonstrates how well hazards are eliminated (Day, 2014). Health promotion programs focus on outlining how employees can improve their health by certain lifestyle choices (Day, 2014). Lastly, the psychosocial environment consists of six risk factors to the employee's well-being, namely demanding workload or schedules, stress, insecurity, unmeaningful work or poor relationships with other employees (Day, 2014, p. 7).

Biswas et al. (2022) state expatriates' well-being is declining, which may result in low performance. The authors conclude well-being dividing into general well-being and work well-being (Biswas et al., 2022). General well-being concerns matters related to the person's overall well-being, not to those that directly apply to work (Biswas et al., 2022). On the other hand, occupational well-being is about the employee's ability to work and the experiences at work (Grant et al., 2007). To emphasize the importance, Schulte & Vainio (2010), claim the definition of well-being is also a reflection of the person's satisfaction with work, life, and health. Well-being is also argued to be an element of managing and maintaining an effective workforce (Schulte & Vainio, 2010, p. 422). Therefore, workforce well-being consists of health, socioeconomic status, occupational hazards, and multiple different factors, such as environmental, workplace as well as host and demographic (Schulte & Vainio, 2010, p. 423).

Life satisfaction, positive and negative affects form subjective well-being (Dutra & Carlotto, 2023; Diener et al., 1985; Andrews & Withey, 1976). Subjective well-being defines how people perceive and feel about their life experiences (Dutra & Carlotto, 2023). Dutra & Carlotto (2023) argue a person satisfied with their life, experiencing numerous positive and a few negative experiences is the figurative picture of high subjective well-being. Diener & Tov (2012, p. 3) describe subjective well-being as happiness and the evaluation of positive experiences. Interestingly, studies show people who feel positive emotions likely also earn better pay and are helpful toward others, the so-called organizational citizens (Diener & Tov, 2012). In the opinions of Kahneman & Deaton (2010), high income does not equal happiness, but allows one to buy life satisfaction. To support the statement, also Gere & Schimmack (2017) outlined higher income as one contributor to higher life satisfaction. Thereby, people with low income are more associated with both low life satisfaction and emotional well-being (Kahneman & Deaton, 2010).

2.5 Job Demands-Resources model

The Job Demands-Resources model (JD-R) was established in 2001 by four scholars, and it proposes working characteristics can be fitted into two categories: job demands and job resources (Demerouti et al., 2001), which consist of organizational, physical, or psychosocial aspects (Demerouti et al., 2001, p. 501; Xanthopoulou et al., 2007, p. 768; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

Job demands and resources are present in each and every job, regardless of the occupation. Job demands are the harmful, negatively impacting characteristics an employee face. To illustrate, job demands are classified as high workload or pressure (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), or for example physical or emotional demands (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). In contrast, job resources decrease job demands, increase personal growth and act as a function in attaining business objectives (Xanthopoulou et al., 2007, p. 768). Job resources are the positively impacting features, such as support from others and adequate performance feedback (Schaufeli, 2017, p. 121).

The JD-R model allows to view well-being from two perspectives: the demands and resources. From these, well-being link can be established by understanding the specific demands and resources expatriates possess in hostile environments. These job demands and resources impacting well-being are discussed subsequently.

2.5.1 Demands

In Schaufeli & Bakker (2004), Jones & Fletcher (1996, p. 34) describe job demands as "things that have to be done". Schaudeli & Bakker (2004) elaborate each job has demands, matters that need to be done, however the difference is in the effort required from the employee. This effort can be cognitive or emotional (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004, p. 296). Unfavorable physical environment, overload of work and scheduling pressures are job demands that are linked in particular with emotional exhaustion (Demerouti et al., 2001). Additionally, Schaufeli & Bakker (2004) define job demands as time pressure, personal conflicts or physical demands.

According to Bakker & de Vries (2021), the imbalance between sufficient job resources and high demands at work may lead to burnout. Bakker & Demerouti (2007) claim features of the job influence employee well-being. Therefore, it is crucial for organizations to assess the psychosocial characteristics which behave as either job demands or job resources. Schaufeli (2017) emphasizes employees who experience a burnout are strongly connected with increased sickness absences, poor performance and productivity at work. To summarize the JD-R model, by reducing job demands whilst simultaneously increasing job resources employee burnout may be prevented, and additionally work engagement improved (Schaufeli, 2017, p. 122). Importantly, even though the job demands wouldn't be negative, these can turn into stress factors and lead to negative outcomes (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

2.5.2   Resources

Job resources are those work aspects that decrease job demands and increase personal and work objectives (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Job resources can be for example performance feedback, social support, job control, being able to participate in decision-making processes and supervisor coaching (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004, p. 296). On the contrary to job demands, sufficient job resources at work lead to work engagement. Job resources act importantly in externally initiating a motivational process, thereby also helping to attain goals set at the workplace (Schaufeli, 2017).

Vigor towards the job attributes is a key element in work engagement, as it brings resilience and energy. In addition, increase in autonomy, relatedness and job competencies promote a positive feeling at work. This is from either achieving business goals or satisfaction of basic human needs. (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014, pp. 46-47). Commitment, superior performance and engaged, motivated employees are a result of plentiful job resources and work engagement. Thereupon, low commitment, poor performance and mental exhaustion stem from immoderate job demands. (Schaufeli, 2017, p. 121)

The JD-R model proposes sufficient job resources can alleviate the negative outcomes of job demands, in particular on exhaustion (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014, p. 45). Since first introduced, the JD-R model has been revised and improved in order to better harmonize with job demands and resources. In 2004, Schaufeli & Bakker proposed an updated version of the model, which initiated a positive-psychological point of view (see Figure 1) (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014, p. 46). The model presumes two processes: a motivational process and a health impairment process (Schaufeli, 2017, p. 122).
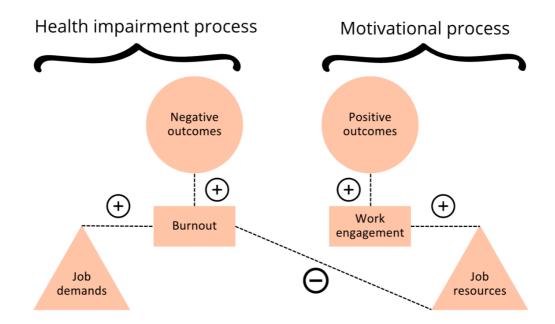
Figure 1. The Job Demands-Resources Model (Schaufeli, 2017, p. 122).

Schaufeli (2017) illustrated the JD-R model as above, with the intention of job demands increasing burnout, which increases negative outcomes. Contrary, job resources increase work engagement, which then consequently increases positive outcomes. Further, job resources decrease burnout. The negative outcomes process is called the health impairment process, whereas the positive outcome process is the motivational process. (Schaufeli, 2017).

2.5.3   Job stress and burnout

External factors that disturb the cognitive-emotional-environmental system are generally referred to as stress (McGrath, 1976, p. 1352). Stress is reduced by adopting and developing coping strategies (Nurmi, 2011, p. 123). Stress is caused by stressors (Lazarus & Folkman, 1980), and stressors are unmanageable demands (Nurmi, 2011, p. 124). Key stressors are commonly major cataclysmic events that are considered stressful. Both positive and negative events can cause stress. Subsequently, not all stressful events are caused by major events, thus Lazarus & Folkman (1980) indicate the "daily hassles" are the second key stressors in one's life. These daily hassles are small matters which irritate and disturb an individual's life, for example too much responsibility, loneliness,

arguments, or sickness. Additionally, people experience both acute and chronic stressors if not daily, then often. A stream of stressful events, such as divorce or losing a job as well as irregular chronic stressors such as conflicts with friends are all different types and dimensions of stress. (Lazarus & Folkman, 1980)

The feeling of being exhausted from the emotional demands the job requires is emotional exhaustion (Demerouti et al., 2001). Bakker et al. (2014, p. 390) claim that Freudenberger in the 1970s introduced the term burnout as they noticed voluntary employees were demonstrating gradual loss of motivation at work. In line with Freudenberger, also Maslach & Jackson (1981) studied and observed burnout from human-services workers perspective and established the definition of burnout even more.

According to Maslach & Jackson (1981), burnout consists of three aspects which form the burnout syndrome: emotional exhaustion, cynicism and negative evaluation of work and themselves. Firstly, emotional exhaustion means the person's emotional resources have been consumed. Secondly, cynicism is considered as an important spectrum of the burnout syndrome, as the person develops negative attitudes and feelings, in particular towards customers and clients. Thirdly, negative evaluation of themselves and dissatisfaction with the quality of their work. (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Freudenberger (1974, p. 160) asserts burnout commonly happens after one year of working for an organization.

As per Freudenberger (1974, p. 160), burnout's physical signs are feeling of exhaustion, recurrent gastrointestinal disruptions and headaches, insomnia, and shortness of breath. Behavioral signs include temperamental attitudes such as irritation, frustration, and anger. Furthermore, the individual has challenges regulating their emotions, might easily cry, yell, scream and feel exhausted. (Freudenberger, 1974, p. 160). Burnout creates detrimental influence on job satisfaction and promotes unwanted organizational behavior, such as absenteeism (Bakker et al., 2004, p. 83). Additionally, burnout influences job performance (Bakker et al., 2004, p. 83).

Personal attributes, such as being emotionally intelligent or having a proactive person-ality allows the person to better identify work fatigue before de trop job stress or burn-out (Bakker & de Vries, 2021). Freudenberger (1974, p. 161) claims some people are more prone to burnout than others. An individual, who senses they have a need to give - an unrealistic and excessive need. Secondly, an individual working too much and having too much pressure at work. Lastly, an individual who is too bored at their work due to ossified routines. (Freudenberger, 1974, pp. 161-162) In conclusion, an employee who experiences too much mental exhaustion is experiencing burnout (Schaufeli, 2017).

2.5.4 Work engagement

Work engagement is the positive antipode of burnout and exhaustion (Schaufeli & Bak-ker, 2004, p. 294). Work engagement promote to extra-role performance at work (Bakker et al., 2004, p. 95). As per Bakker et al. (2014, p. 389) and by Schaufeli & Taris (2014, p. 46) work engagement is illustrated by three positive dimensions of well-being: vigor, dedication, and absorption. A person filled with vigor is resilient and filled with energy even in adversities. Dedication is about pride, inspiration, and having a meaningful yet challenging work. Absorption focuses on a deep state of concentration, even on not ac-knowledging the passing of time whilst working. (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014, p. 46; Hakanen, 2011, p. 39)

Hakanen (2011) proposes work engagement in the Finnish context is higher in males than females. Interestingly, having children at home, preferably under school-aged, is linked with better work engagement (Hakanen, 2011, p. 40). Work engagement illus-trates occupational well-being at its best, thus increasing and improving work engage-ment brings quality and success to working life (Hakanen, 2011, p. 41).

2.6 Expatriate well-being in hostile environments

In particular, research focusing on the expatriation in high-stress environments, in which the environment is stressful due to continuous or unexpected natural crises is limited

(Koveshnikov et al., 2022). In the opinions of Fee et al. (2019), research on the organizational point of view of how expatriates in hostile locations tackle physical and psychological safety issues is also limited.

On the contrary, the well-being of expatriates has been studied previously, namely the impact COVID-19 had on international travel. Tripathi & Singh (2022) studied COVID-19 and the influence similar natural crises have on expatriate psychological well-being and stress. The authors conclude social networks and resilience are beneficial to diminish stress factors. In addition to the influence of COVID-19, well-being and hostile environments have been studied. Relating to the study topic, Shirom et al. (2008) studied the effects of employees exposing to terror and the way these employees would self-rate their health. The study found a decrease in self-rated health, and a significant difference amongst male and female reports of depression, which is the most powerful linkage of self-rated health (Shirom et al., 2008, p. 267).

According to Shrira et al. (2011, p. 273), a hostile world scenario is formed by threats to one's mental or physical integrity, and if these threats are activated the hostile world scenario allows the individual to be cautious and alert. These characteristics of alertness and cautiousness are important to remain safe, however if the hostile world scenario is continuous, the sense of survivorship is in place (Shrira et al., 2011, p. 273). Even though a hostile world may influence the individual's well-being, subjective well-being and meaning of life are two attributes that often allow people to generally live a happy life (Shrira et al., 2911, pp. 273-274). By working in hostile environments, fear may be experienced. The perceived organizational support, confidence, self-assurance skills as well as resilience decrease fear (Bao et al., 2024). Fear is a job demand, which may influence the work engagement negatively (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014).

2.7 Theoretical framework

The literature review section divided the study's concepts into three key elements: expatriation, well-being and hostilities. These elements were followed by previous

research similar to the study, which justifies the need for the study, and additionally demonstrates how both positive and negative outcomes influence well-being and performance. The theoretical framework section provides insights to the used theories and models, which demonstrates how and why these were the chosen frameworks.

Expatriation is the process of an employee working abroad (Brewster & Scullion, 1997). Expatriate can be either as a company-backed, or self-initiated assignment (Doherty et al., 2011). High-density work influencing the employee's learning (Mello et al., 2023). Mello et al. (2023) describe expatriate work is generally described as more complex and demanding when compared to domestic work.

A hostile environment can be affected by infrastructure-related risks, health risks, natural catastrophes (Jones, 2000) or for example, man-made threats (Posthuma et al., 2019). If an expatriate is on a company-backed assignment, the support received from the organization impacts the expatriate's well-being. In a man-made hostile environment, where the risk of violence or terrorism is present, it is crucial to evaluate the coping mechanisms the expatriates have or would need. To illustrate, finding comfort from close friends (Breckenridge & Maguen, 2006) or turning to clergy can be helpful (Everly, 2003).

Extreme institutional voids and high security risks are threats present in hostile environments (Suder et al., 2019). The organizational actions provide a basis for the international assignment, as they can support and train the expatriate well in before, during and after the assignment. The well-being of expatriates is influenced by the hostilities, therefore in addition to organizational actions, the expatriate selection phase should aim to find individuals who are suitable for the job. In the opinions of Felix et al. (2023), seeking for positive outcomes of one's occupation leads to better work performance, better sense of well-being at work as well as wanting to work in extreme environments. This is crucial for this study, as it brings out the meaning and importance of everyone's own perceptions.

To summarize the theoretical background for the study, the job demands and resources model is used. Job demands and resources are proved to impact both negatively and positively on the expatriate experience in hostile environments. The JD-R model consists of job demands and resources, which either result in positive or negative outcomes (Schaufeli, 2017). Job resources allows the expatriate to feel vigor and positive outcomes (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014, pp. 46-47) from the job is crucial also from a literature review point of view. According to Felix et al. (2023), better performance, well-being, and the want to work in a hostile environment are related to seeking positive matters and outcomes. Past literature strengthens the chosen JD-R model. Additionally, the chosen model highlights the already discussed prior literature similarities, but also aims to identify research gaps in terms of expatriate well-being in said hostile contexts. Positive outcomes that result in vigor and work engagement include positive mind, better performance, and quality to the work (Hakanen, 2011). The hostile environment aspect is brought to the study by the participant's past experiences in hostile environments.

3   Methodology

In this section, the methodological approach chosen for the study is presented. Firstly, the philosophical considerations are discussed. Hereafter, the qualitative research approach of the study is presented. Lastly, the research process from data collection to analysis is described along with reliability and validity considerations.

3.1   Philosophical considerations

The aim of the thesis is to understand the subjective well-being of expatriates who have had long-term international assignment in a hostile environment. As previously described, hostilities are perceived and experienced individually. Hence, it is crucial the research process is adequate to thoroughly provide insight to the research question. Scientific studies aim to clarify questions related to problems, help to disassociate from traditional thinking habits as well as increase consideration to solutions (Hirsjärvi et al., 2009). The philosophical considerations impact the whole research and provide direction on how to proceed from the research question to the findings (Hirsjärvi et al., 2009). According to Alasuutari (2011, p. 82), the research method must be established in order to analyze perceptions and observations amongst the sample group. The method focuses on those practices and preparations of which one can form perceptions. Additionally, guidelines and rules for the study must be established beforehand. Without these, there is a risk of solely leaning on the researcher's own prejudices through empirical evidence. The method is not appropriate if it does not allow findings to prove surprises. (Alasuutari, 2011, p. 82)

Methodology indicates the standards of how some instruments or methods are being used to achieve an objective. It illustrates how and what type of concepts have been used to illustrate a reality and to conclude scientific information. Methodology is often discussed further into ontology and epistemology. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2009, p. 13) Ontology proposes questions about the nature of reality (Hirsjärvi et al., 2009, p. 130). To further demonstrate, ontology focuses on questions related to what is real or what can

be seen as evidence or proof (Hirsjärvi et al., 2009, p. 130). Epistemology handles the origin of knowledge and the nature of making up science, and it answers questions such as what the relationship between the study topic and the researcher is (Hirsjärvi et al., 2009, p. 130).

In research, there are three different ways to reason the data: deductive, inductive, and abductive. Deduction is generally utilized in quantitative data analysis (Easterby-Smith, 2021, p. 267). According to Easterby-Smith (2021, p. 267), deduction is about forming a reasoning from general to specific. Second approach, inductive, identifies and compares phenomena to provide general assumptions. Thirdly, abductive reasoning is about finding and connecting an observation to a particular theory, affluence of utilizing a plausible interpretation (Easterby-Smith, 2021, p. 267). In the present study, this abductive reasoning is applied.

Each individual perceives and interprets their reality through their own experiences; therefore the participants of this research made sense of their experiences and shared these experiences differently. In essence, the author also interprets the obtained information through their reality, which most likely, influenced the outcomes of the study.

3.2 Qualitative research approach

Quantitative methodology was traditionally used in research, since it provided a way to observe and measure matters (Antwi & Hamza, 2015). Qualitative research aims to explain and understand experiences of the research participants, and therefore helps to clarify what is important for the participants (Silverman, 2020). The basis of qualitative research is to evaluate and demonstrate real life, in which the reality is manifold (Hirsjärvi et al., 2009, p. 130). Research methods have been debated for a long time, and the so-called "paradigm war" is used to symbolize the intense debate of whether quantitative or qualitative research methods should be used (Bryman, 2008, p. 14). Quantitative research proposes an objective lens to what the phenomena is, and qualitative rather proposes a subjective lens, as of what the people perceive as true or important

(Silverman, 2020, p. 3). Generally international business research has been focusing on quantitative research methods (Doz, 2011).

According to Bryman (2008, p. 13), quantitative research is considered as positivist and objective, whereas qualitative research is interpretivist and constructionist. In science, qualitative research can be seen as a method in solving problems and simplifying perceptions (Alasuutari, 2011, p. 32-33). Simplifying perceptions and observations from the sample group allows the study to focus on what is essential (Alasuutari, 2011, p. 51). Solving dilemmas and problems refers to "understandable explaining" phenomena, as well as referring to similar studies and theoretical frameworks (Alasuutari, 2011, p. 51). This research method is not focusing on the median answer, rather discovering a relationship within the sample group from finding common leads, therefore generating findings from these (Alasuutari, 2011, pp. 41-43). According to Puusa & Juuti (2020) a qualitative study is beneficial by providing a versatile and highly detailed point of view, which allows the reader to understand the overview of the topic as well as in-detail. Qualitative study generally utilizes a survey, secondary data, interviews, or perceptions (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2009). In the present study, qualitative research approach was chosen and is subsequently justified.

3.2.1   Semi-structured interviews

Qualitative interviews can be categorized into three: unstructured, semi-structured and structured (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 314). In this study using semi-structured interviews was selected as the interview method. Semi-structured interviews refer to an interview method in which modifying the course of an ongoing interview is possible (Zhu & Zhang, 2022). It allows both parties of the interview to specify, ask for more detailed information and questions, fix misunderstandings, clarify wordings or the origin of the question, if the situation so requires (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2009). Additionally, the model allows the researcher to specify in more detail the interviewee's personal perspectives and attitudes towards the topic (Eskola, 1998). As a social encounter, interviews offer a great variety of interviewee's actions, experiences and thoughts (Seale et al., 2004, p.

16). Alasuutari (2011, p. 117) argues one-on-one interviews can be considered as therapeutic, as the interview questions can be related to the interviewee's personal life.

As the study is an exploratory study, interviews suited the design well. An explanatory study also allows to evaluate casualties within variables, considers the interviewee's attitudes, opinions and focuses on understanding the underlying reasons why certain actions were made (Saunders et al., 2023, p. 450). Additionally, semi-structured interviews allowed to determine insightfully interviewee's thoughts, attitudes, and everyday life experiences. Interviews are suitable as it supplies direct linguistic interaction with the interviewee, therefore most beneficially offering flexibility (Hirsjärvi et al., 2009, p. 204).

3.3 Data collection

To understand the influence a hostile environment has on well-being of expatriates, certain criteria were set to choose the sample group. The respondents had to have a minimum of one year experience in working in a hostile environment. During the data collection phase, focally important aspect was the hostile environment: the author tried to find suitable interviewee's by choosing individuals from different backgrounds in terms of occupation, and location of the international assignment. This allowed the study to focus on expatriate experiences from a multifaceted point of view, rather than focusing on well-being of certain group. To guard the respondent's privacy, all have been assigned a code, which will be used in presenting the findings.

The sample group consisted of seven individuals, whose backgrounds, years spent abroad and the era of first assignment varies. This allowed the study to gain comprehensive details of how individuals from different age categories, occupations and years spent abroad experience well-being in hostile contexts. Different dimensions of hostilities were experienced, mostly due to the occupation and years spent abroad. Gender was not evaluated in this study, however representation from male and female's are present. Below interviewee's backgrounds illustrated (see table 1).

Code	Occupation	Location	Year(s) abroad, start of assignment
A	doctor	Zambia	over 6 years, in the 80s
B	peacekeeper	Lebanon	1 year, in the 10s
C	officer of the Finnish Defence Forces	Kosovo, Bosnia, Afghanistan	over 5 years, in the 00s
D	reverend	Pakistan	over 6 years, in the 90s
E	peacekeeper	Lebanon, Bosnia	4 years in total, in the 90s
F	journalist	Countries in the Middle East	over 20 years, in the 90s
G	public relations officer/peacekeeper	Israel	1 year, in the 90s

Table 1. Sample characteristics

Interviewees were searched in social media platforms, namely LinkedIn and Facebook. Also, other social media channels were utilized. Suitable volunteers fulfilling the previously mentioned criteria were invited to Microsoft Teams, Zoom or phone call meetings, based on their preference. Although preliminary information about the sample was narrow, the selection process aimed to choose as versatile a sample as possible. By selecting different ages, from various occupations and both female and male respondents, the study gained more insight and a better understanding for the research question and objectives.

All the interviewees were contacted by email, or in the social media platform directly. Preliminary information the respondents received was the research topic, the estimated time needed to conduct interviews and insights on how participating in the interview would be a contribution to science. Interviewees were asked to share their experiences and thoughts regarding well-being in hostile environments. Each interviewee could propose a suitable date and time, and ask questions before, during and after the interview.

All interviews were held in Finnish, as it was the mother tongue of respondents and the author. Welch & Piekkari (2006, pp. 427-433) claim the chosen language for the interviews impacts rapport and data accuracy and authenticity. Length of the interviews varied from 20 minutes to 1 hour and 15 minutes. Interviews were held between March 2024 and April 2024, and all participants gave their permission to be audio-recorded. The audio recordings were eventually deleted after the study was finished. All the participants received a GDPR-form. This form stated how the study is conducted, how data is collected and stored, why this study is being conducted, as well as the positive outcomes of attending the study. Disclosing information about voluntarily attending the interview, understanding the study and the opportunity to withdraw from the study without any reason. According to Tuomi & Sarajärvi (2009), this is an efficient way to improve the study's ethical considerations. Moreover, either during the interview or beforehand, information about the interviewee's occupation and time spent in a hostile environment was collected. This data was collected in case data analysis would require comparing and analyzing the responses received.

Seale et al. (2004, p. 16) propose that it is important to analyze whether certain topics or narratives produced by the interviewer influenced the outcome of the interview. The aim was to produce interview questions in a neutral way, which would not lead or direct to certain answers. The order of interview questions was deliberate, as the aim was to find out how respondents would first define the level of their well-being, being followed by positive aspects and how one could keep up the positive well-being and lastly inquiring information about negative aspects of the assignment and well-being. This order was specifically assigned so that respondents could first think of their overall well-being, followed by a question that focuses on the positive, good outcomes. It was thought respondents could easier discuss their experiences if they would first be seen as positive people, rather than first having to share negative aspects and information.

3.3.1 Analysis of the data

The job demands-resources model is used in analyzing the findings, where similarities and differences are identified. Furthermore, interview questions are formed by trying to seek answers to the JD-R model, however without asking direct questions of resources or job demands. This way the study's participants do not receive leading questions and can fully initiate the direction and focus the interviews have. Scenarios in which the JD-R model is hypothesized to make an impact is the analysis of findings. The JD-R model guides the analysis by having a theoretical basis where findings can be compared. The job demands and resources model ensures the study has a clear direction, where both positive and negative outcomes are studied.

In terms of analyzing the data, an interpretative phenomenological analysis was conducted. Briefly, the analysis consists of reading the transcripts of the interviews, generating basic themes of each interview, creating a list of themes, making the themes connect to other themes, creating sub-themes and lastly once all interviews have been through the process, creating a final list of superordinate and sub-themes (Silverman, 2020). As the interviews were recorded, a Microsoft Word -transcribing tool was used in transcribing the recorded audio. A transcribed version of each participant was conducted within the next two days of the interview. This was done due to the reason that the content of the interviews were fresh in mind. From the transcribed version, spelling mistakes and commonly used filler words in spoken language were modified. 165 pages of data was gathered from the transcribed documents.

Hence, reduction of each document was made. The reduction of each Microsoft Word -document was made by highlighting interesting, different, similar or otherwise important data the author considered as relevant for the study. After this, all highlighted sections were copy-pasted on top of each document, and from there to a separate document dedicated to the most fundamental findings. Themes were then established, firstly focusing on the positive and negative outcomes, and from these main themes a

list of sub-themes was gathered. These themes allowed to form a comprehensive understanding of the study, which are presented in chapter 5, "Findings".

3.4 Ethical considerations

General ethics are related to wrong and right, good and bad. In research, many ethical considerations must be applied, and ethically good study demands the use of good scientific practices during the study. These practices include honesty, meticulousness and being precise whilst doing the study, recording, presenting and evaluating the research material. Additionally, the study must be planned, implemented and reported in-detail and in line with scientific requirements. (Hirsjärvi et al., 2009, pp. 23-24)

Interview data and recordings were kept in University of Vaasa's network disc secured by two-factor authorization. All interviewee's received a GDPR-form, to which they had to sign and date, to confirm that all respondents are aware of how their data will be used. The relationship between the interviewer and interviewee is important to analyze (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 200). The interviewees did not read the study, nor the findings before publication of the thesis. The Mengele-case denotes studies where the standards regarding the protection of research participants is questionable (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2009, p. 131). This is brought up as the ethics of the study is important, both for the author and for the respondents. The standards regarding protection of the participants include all the already mentioned elements. To illustrate, the author must inform respondents of the study goals, methods, voluntarily, the possibility to withdraw from the study, the right to know how their data is collected and analyzed (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2009).

3.5 Validity and reliability

The reliability and validity are largely impacted by the design of the study: the questions, structure and pilot testing (Saunders et al., 2023, p. 520). Reliability refers to replication and how well the study can be repeated whilst also resulting in continuous findings.

Validity refers to the accuracy of the analysis of findings, and the suitability of the used instruments. (Saunders et al., 2007, pp. 149-150)

Two pilot interviews were conducted beforehand the actual interviews. From these, the instruments were improved to better facilitate the research question and objectives. Interview questions, the GDPR-form and research objectives were improved to efficiently align with the research question. This allowed the study to gain more insight on how the interview questions align with research question, whether or not sufficient data can be gathered from the said questions, and how openly respondents could talk about their experiences. Minor changes were made to the formulation and order of the questions. Additionally, the experience on how to successfully conduct the interviews evolved during the interviews. Therefore, especially the validity aspect of the study can be justified, as the study is more focused on the research question.

One limitation to reliability creates the translations of participant's quotes from Finnish to English. As the interviews were held in Finnish, it was on the author's responsibility to translate the comments to a different language. The linguistic differences between Finnish and English forced to change the word order and structure of the quotes in order to keep the same meaning of the sentences. The quotes are translated as realistic as possible whilst keeping the initial tone and meaning.

In the opinions of Tuomi & Sarajärvi (2009), a basis for reliable qualitative study is having adequate time to conduct the study. For this thesis, a time period of ten months was used to plan, design and conduct the study, therefore in particular for the author, sufficient time was allocated. Close friends and family read the study and feedback from both friends, family and in particular the thesis supervisor was certainly beneficial. In addition to time, the study's reliability may be impacted by the way the study is analyzed and how data is reported (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2009). The analysis of the data was conducted in a way that highlights certain themes, thereby produced thematically. The credibility is

affected by how well the participants of the study are presented, as well as an assessment of the veracity of the sample group (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2009).

Reliability's parallel version is dependability (Saunders et al., 2023, p. 218). Dependability of the study is affected by an external person making sure the research process is appropriate, that the author is abreast of external factors that may impact the dependability. These can be for example own prejudices and bias. In terms of dependability, one key element is to focus on contingency aspects that may impact the study. Confirmability outlines that the findings align with previous research, various techniques have been used to confirm the suitability of research methods and findings are presented with such detail the reader is able to follow the author's reasoning, additionally able to evaluate it. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2009, pp. 138-139). Similar studies can easily be reproduced, as essential information on how the data was collected, contacted, and informed of the study are provided.

4 Findings

In this section, findings from the interviews are presented and analyzed. Based on the interviews, three main themes were identified. These themes are closely related to the research questions, either possessing a negative or positive aspect to the framework used, the job demands and resources model. The research question focuses on job demands and resources considered significant for the expatriate's well-being, thereby the elements of well-being, job demands, and job resources are analyzed from the interviews. The chosen interview questions shed light to the research questions, as explained thoroughly below.

4.1 Expatriate well-being in hostile environments

These are for example health risks experienced by participant A, infrastructure-related risks experienced by respondent F and man-made threats faced by respondent D. All the respondents were affected by a hostile location, but additionally some participants faced a threat related to their well-being. Participant A described health risks as having continuous risk of diseases, namely malaria. Infrastructure-related risks were present in participant F's environment, as they described the poor infrastructure during crises. It was described as:

> *"Pretty much in crisis areas the difficulties are caused precisely by the crisis. And the crisis changes the infrastructure where you are.*

Participant D described the man-made threats as feeling a decrease in their sense of safety. Additionally, the participant told a friend was kidnapped, which influenced their well-being and how they perceived the country. The participant described it as follows:

> *"It was somehow like how would I say, the end of enjoyment of culture. That it opened my eyes to the fact that this is a really dangerous country."*

In contrast, respondent D mentioned the host country's hostility affecting how much outside life one could have. The differences of each respondent's living arrangements and area that they lived in bring differences to the well-being experiences. Respondent D described it as being exhausted to the various social ties one had to develop, and to the continuous changes in living arrangements. On the contrary to participant D's experience of sensing a decrease in basic security, participant A defined well-being as being better in the hostile environment than in their home country. This was further demonstrated as:

"Actually, my mental well-being in developing countries was a lot better than what it has been in Finland, because I have always felt bad whilst in Finland. I somehow have a feeling that maybe I'm just that kind of adventurer who loves to go on adventures. And that's when I get into so many different situations that are much bigger than those small problems back home in Finland."

Majority of the respondents described their well-being in the hostile environment as good. Well-being is a concept each individual defines themselves. Participants responded in two ways: showcasing their positive or negative experiences. Two participants pondered their well-being depending on their level of maturity related to their age during the assignment. The set routines and discipline peacekeepers mentioned was determined as beneficial for the well-being aspect. Participant C discussed the impact of age and life experiences as one factor influencing well-being and their sense of safety:

"Certain life experience, the surface of youth on certain things had already faded away... So I tried better to enhance that everything was more or less safe."

Participant F felt exhausted by the continuous risk of witnessing violence. Especially in interviewee D's situation, being sent to a high-risk country and not having a consistent work community, local people or friends play a role in how stressful and demanding life can be perceived as. If both living and working arrangements are changing during the international assignment, it may be challenging to create a base, in which one can

enhance social ties to, for example, local people. The participant's work community was small, and also changed as the participant changed their location. The participant described it as:

> "I noticed that during the six years I got exhausted to the fact that all my closest friends were changing all the time... and you always had to start from the beginning with the new person. So you couldn't just share all the emotions and thoughts at first"

4.2 Job demands impacting expatriate well-being

During the interview, a question dedicated to job demands allowed the participants to describe their experiences. Also, as the saying goes, memories grow sweeter with time, could be said to be true in the case of these seven interviews. Job demands were asked from two angles: the first seeking about the state of their mental well-being during the assignment, followed by a discussion focusing on positive notes from the assignment.

4.2.1 Restricted lifestyle

Restrictions on freedom were considered as key job demands. Participant D described the inability to move during dark hours, due to the fact of increased man-made threats, such as kidnappings. It was described as "very restricted moving". Participant C shared the experiences with participant D:

> "In Afghanistan, we weren't outside the perimeter of the compound on our freetime, but only during work"

4.2.2 Safety concerns

Moreover, job demands of participant D also included being in danger whilst at home. The respondent told an example of experienced danger while living in a gated community in the country of assignment. Once the respondent's neighbor decided to move,

staying in the same gated community did not feel safe anymore. The respondent empha-sized continuing to live in that gated community would have been too dangerous even though it was specifically enclosed by stonewalls and had guards.

Respondent G described their sense of safety was decreasing when they had to drive in the host country. They described it as being fearful that an accident would occur in Syria. This was because the governmental level officers might not be trusted, and the respond-ent could end up in a conflict situation. Also, participants A, D and F outlined the distrust in governmental officers or the possibility of corruption. Participant D described it as:

> *"As a basis in Finland you can trust the authorities, you trust the police and so on. And there when you know that the police can beat you and anything can happen."*

4.2.3   Pressures

What also impacted well-being negatively are the risks and pressures experienced by either internal or external sources. To illustrate, these can happen before, during or af-ter the assignment. Respondent G signified even though they received sufficient support from their friends, they felt the need to not tell anyone about applying to the job.

"I didn't tell anyone that I had applied [for the job] until I was chosen"

Also participant A described that being the only doctor amongst the region made them feel as if they were the responsible of many lives. Therefore, having the need to be avail-able almost 24 hours of the day and working through challenging times as well. Moreo-ver, participant A did not deem having to work around the clock as a job demand, rather as it being challenging at times.

4.3 Job resources impacting expatriate well-being

4.3.1 Social support

Expatriate assignments are generally conducted in two ways: sending only the expatriate on the assignment or sending the expatriate's family as well. All participants were doing their assignments by themselves, without any family members joining the international assignment. Respondents stressed the importance of networks, communities, and the different social ties. Therefore, the different networks were arguably perceived as significant. Each interviewee highlighted either the importance of work communities, local communities, or the presence of friends in the hostile environment. Social networks provide a sense of safety and act as resources in handling the aspect of hostilities. Being able to discuss everyday life matters, share experiences and trust others plays a pivotal role in an expatriate's life.

Observation made by interviewee F, with over 20 years of experience in working abroad, provided an elucidating example of the importance of work colleagues. These colleagues were often other Nordic people, to which one could impose the similar cultures affecting how easily one can familiarize themselves with the group. Additionally, those whose occupation was related to crisis management felt the community at work was important. Interviewee E described this as follows:

> "The community that there was. It was a small post, therefore we didn't have a lot of people. The community was very close and it helped to cope"

In the opinion of respondent G, by working in a very organized military organization the level of friendships is on a different level than in civil life. Moreover, in many military assignments, the base compound is where individuals work, eat, hangout and sleep, therefore nearly every hour is spent either together, or in the immediate vicinity of the colleagues. This was described as:

"Even by force, the friendships go on a different level than in civil life."

The nature of peacekeepers' pre-departure training allows them to meet fellow peers and form new social ties with the future colleagues already in the home country. Hitherto, the work community existed before entering the foreign environment. Especially the relationships that have already formed are important, as they may act as a safety network. With these safe people, it may be easier to open up about challenging matters. Other important aspect related to communities were personal chemistries, as described by interviewee B:

> *"Always in a military context it works so that individuals are put together and you sort of just need to get along with them. In principle some of ours personal chemistries didn't meet at all, but getting along was still necessary since we were working together so intensively."*

This provided insight to the importance of working with both like-minded as well as dissenting people. Certainly the people chosen or willing to go and work in a hostile environment have somewhat similar characteristics, nevertheless not everyone can be one's closest friend.

Moreover, interviewees A and D felt the importance was on other social networks, for instance local people or other people from Western countries. This could be explained by the minimal or non-existent presence of Finnish people, or by the exceptional nature of both respondent's work community. Interviewee A described the importance of local people:

> *"Locals, so to be frank I noticed very quickly that the only ones that defend you in hostile situations are the possible friends and acquaintances with whom you have good relations"*

Interviewee D's experiences were opposing to A's experiences:

"Usually life was simpler if you were surrounded by other Westerns with whom you could share those experiences."

Based on the interviews of personnel working in crisis management, each expatriate worked primarily in one military base. In certain military compounds, personnel could not spend their free time outside of the base perimeter resulting in more free time spent with fellow peacekeepers. Respondents outlined that in the case where moving was restricted, importance was on inside social activities, which were refreshing and crucial for well-being. Working out, or doing traditional Finnish matters, such as going to the sauna were mentioned as ways to disassociate with the restricted reality.

The benefits of support were perceived differently amongst the respondents. Out of seven interviews, three mentioned the absence of mobile phones affecting their possibilities to stay in contact with people outside the organization or work community. The presence of mobile phones has eased staying connected, especially for expatriates allocated to hostile environments during the last decade. However, these three interviewees did not indicate the lack of mobile phones would have made the assignment unbearable. Letters were used to share life updates and receive updates of home country situations. Some of the examples provided by the participants are as follows: hearing that someone has tried to deposit a counterfeit check to a bank, sharing information about current health, or illustrating how life in the host country is going. Depending on the person, sending letters may require time and patience, but on the contrary, receiving letters from back home can be exciting and empowering. Interviewee A concluded receiving letters was lovely, but slow. On the other hand, interviewee E felt as support from outside of the organization was on each person's own responsibility:

"Some seeked for the support by writing back to Finland, and therefore they got a lot of letters from Finland"

Four respondents mentioned the difficulty in keeping contact with family. Some openly said the reason was purely due to not wanting to create any source of concern, or that family ties were not so close. Mobile phones and the abundance of networks all around the world influences how fast and surely information can be transferred. One respondent's occupation required reporting; therefore, electricity networks were crucial in sending the story in. The interviewee mentioned in some conflict cases, electricity was taken down to show power and dominance.

Support amongst peers was mentioned by three interviewees', namely D, E and F. The support was described as having good listeners by your side, being able to talk about almost anything, and having the thought that everyone helps each other. In the opinion of interviewee E, these types of relationships are challenging to form in everyday life in home country. These aspects and way of thinking increases the sense of safety, the sense of being in this together and having someone to trust. These are especially critical when working or living in a hostile environment, as the nature of the environment is uncertain.

In participant F's opinion, colleagues and friends increased the level of safety and resources experienced. The network of people one works with can together be involved in hostile situations, therefore the importance of debriefing must be acknowledged. Participant F described this as those with whom one works with understands most likely what a colleague is going through.

Moreover, a hostile environment may have an impact on the person's mental health even years after. An interview with a peacekeeper illustrated how some people have not received sufficient resources, or have not been able to seek help. This can be seen as bad well-being, especially shown in particular social media groups, or for example leaving the assignment earlier than agreed to. The need to be cautious of safety and protocol issues created mental burden, as described by respondent G. Moreover, respondent G signified gender influenced the way they were treated, therefore creating stress.

Participant C showcased the extreme situation which is caused by the hostile environment's attributes. In these cases, an escort is used to bring the individual back to their home country, and to deliver the needed help.

> *"Some are being escorted while coming back home, since it is not possible to be completely sure if the person is safe for themselves or to the surrounding people anymore. They might have experienced such (difficult) situations…"*

4.3.2 Organizational support

The sending organization, or in interviewee F's case, the organization whom they worked for acted in various ways. This also translates to how and different types of support and coping mechanisms participants had to evolve and adapt. All respondents' experiences are presented below.

For interviewee B's experience, the organizational support was adequate: sufficient training, instruments used were up-to-date and the opportunity to utilize doctors or other personnel in case needed. For the sample group, de-briefing was organized very differently. Having an assignment in the same country, but during a different time scheme, interviewee E described their debriefing experience as

> *"The day we left, we put our regular clothes on to the airplane and no one ever asked anything."*

Despite also working in crisis management, participant G did not have a similar experience. According to G, they were offered an opportunity to participate in a voluntary post-assignment meeting. From Respondent G's expatriation, the de-briefing and post-assignment checks have evolved, as described by the respondent. Nowadays, it is mandatory to participate in a post-assignment training.

Participant A described their trust in the sending organization as very low. The participant described organizational support as having sufficient pre-departure training. However, a sudden shift in having the sense an organization is supporting happened as the respondent described in the beginning having had the feeling that one could always call home country and share their dilemmas, however receiving internal information that these calls often end up being part of coffee table discussions. Therefore, the trust in the home country organization decreased. In addition, trust to own supervisors was described as not always wanting to express all weaknesses. This was followed by a discussion related to the fairness and equality supervisors might not possess, and the ability to utilize someone's weaknesses in a negative way. The participant described it as:

> "I remember in the beginning that I believed I could always call to the Finnish organization and tell them about these problems. Then later a person told me that listen, they are the biggest coffee table conversations, having gossips and laughing at other people problems."

Working as a freelance journalist in the Middle Eastern region, interviewee F described the organizational support as different to what others may have had, since they did not have a company-backed assignment. Per se, the work required reporting to home country, Finland, but support was described as minimal. The lack of organizational support was especially shown in the need for crisis therapy sessions, but due to the nature of a freelancer employee, they could not receive any support.

Well-being was also mentioned as being positive by receiving sufficient training. In particular for respondent G, the vocational field being in the military, was illustrated as having plenty of routines and a punctual lifestyle. The respondent added also that the community and close ties with people brings both benefits and detrimental value to the experience.

"Being successful in one's work" was mentioned by participant C as the main matter that allowed to continue the work in a hostile environment, and which helped to push over

challenging times. They added the following to a question related to what matters helped to overcome the hostile environment and helped to cope better:

> *"The community is the one and the same, which really supports a lot. It basically starts in the beginning from the first training sessions… The same people are with you from start to finish"*

The interview questions did not directly process work-life balance, however it was indirectly asked in questions that handled support from family. For participant F, it was crucial to illustrate the importance of having life other than work in the host country. They said being "married to work" was pleasant until it became a burden, and forced the respondent to move back to home country. Participant F described it as:

> *"It a had really big effect on that [well-being]. That in the end it caused that I couldn't take it anymore, so I came back. I moved back to Finland"*

In addition, one important aspect is to view the spousal or family support expatriates receive. Although it was not the main focus in this study, it was briefly discussed by some participants. Respondent G mentioned they received adequate support from their significant other, although being in separation took its toll.

Participant G described how good it was to have holidays in home and host country. In particular, home country vacations were good as the emphasis was on work-life balance, therefore allowing to meet friends, family and other acquaintances. Also other participants mentioned vacations as important, namely participants B and D.

Participant G:

> *"It was empowering when Finnair came to pick you up for a couple weeks"*

Moreover, a hostile environment may have an impact on the person's mental health even years after. An interview with a peacekeeper illustrated how some people have

not received sufficient help, or have not been able to seek help. This can be seen as bad well-being, especially shown in particular social media groups, or for example leaving the assignment earlier than agreed to. The need to be cautious of safety and protocol issues created mental burden, as described by respondent G. Moreover, respondent G signified gender influenced the way they were treated, therefore creating stress.

Participant C showcased the extreme situation which is caused by the hostile environment's attributes. In these cases, an escort is used to bring the individual back to their home country, and to deliver the needed help.

> *"Some are being escorted while coming back home, since it is not possible to be completely sure if the person is safe for themselves or to the surrounding people anymore. They might have experienced such (difficult) situations…"*

4.3.3   Individual characteristics

Individual's own values and importance they place on their occupation or job was mentioned by two participants. Respondent C demonstrated that the meaningfulness of one's work influences coping and the ability to work in a hostile environment. For participant C, it was related to doing something for the good of society.

> *"Everything is more or less for the good of society"*

Respondent B described the drive to help and the feeling of being able to really make an impact. In addition, participant B described the benefit gender brings, as the drive to help and protect others takes place.

> *"For sure that you are helping others, it makes a huge impact when you can really help… so that you can almost like protect others, is also something that plays a really big role. Even though it wasn't something that could have been identified during the assignment"*

Each respondent described their well-being and work engagement differently, as one could assume. Three participants mentioned having an adventurous mind, therefore

seeking somewhat abnormal experiences, such as working in the middle of a jungle, where the closest supermarket was 300 kilometers away. This characteristic can help in alleviating experienced culture shock, nonetheless providing a positive and adaptive mindset. Participant E described the motives to undergo an international assignment as follows:

> *"Personally I feel like it was only an adventure for me, I wasn't there for the money but the adventure"*

Being satisfied and receiving respect from others was described as important. Although interviewee A's location was quite unique from other respondents, mostly centralizing to the Middle Eastern region, the respondent commented that having a "culture ear" helps with adapting to the new environment. This skill was defined as being able to understand what happens in a certain culture, by watching, listening, following, and thereby understanding how people behave. Additionally, demanding respect, by means that wouldn't be considered as polite in one's home country, may be useful in other environments. An example presented by interviewee A:

> *"I once had a situation where a local family was yelling next to me. I was totally exhausted and just thought that since I work for [name of organization], must I be polite and humane and else. And then I broke. And I yelled like a small animal, so I was absolutely full of rage, and suddenly noticed that all the people that yelled to me looked at me with deep respect. Everyone was quiet for some time, thanked me and left."*

Additionally, interviewee A told a story how well they were adapted to the environment. The interviewee described the situation as having fun amongst the locals and seeing a mirror, where they were surprised by seeing a white male amongst all the dark-skinned locals. For some time, the respondent wondered who the white man is, but then realized it was the interviewee itself. The respondent described it as follows:

"So you know I had a certain type of sense of empathy for the environment. I totally forgot that the people see me as a white male. And I felt as if I was part of the gang"

Two respondents mentioned the importance of their job. Participants B and C considered either their work as important, or being able to successfully do the work as important. Participant B described their experience as being able to see the meaning of the assignment, in particular after the assignment has passed. Participant C described it as:

"Being satisfied with your own work, for sure"

Interviewees all coped with the different, hostile environment in their own ways. Interviewee F outlined the importance of knowing the host country's culture, such as famous pop-singers or athletes. With this cultural information, they could get away from uncomfortable situations with, for example, the local army. This information was utilized in a way that created a bond within the interviewee and the uncomfortable situation, creating a sense of similarity, the so-called "halo effect". Bonding with local people was a coping mechanism interviewee A mentioned, demonstrating the importance of local people being the ones that could help you in threatening situations. Four respondents signified the value work community brings to coping with the hostility, in particular F mentioned the importance of de-briefing with work colleagues.

Respondents had their own proverbs and mindsets that were used to cope with the hostilities, such as "*better safe than sorry*", "*never went anywhere boldly or recklessly*", and "*when you leave you know the safety risks*". One participant said that to this day, they lock their apartment's safety lock once home alone and check all exits in large audience events. These proverbs and mindsets may help to alleviate the stress and mental exhaustion that is caused by hostility.

4.3.4 Safety support

Organizational view on safety and mandatory safety or health checks have evolved during past years. Guidelines, processes, and practices are being developed to ensure the safety of employees, and it may happen on an organizational level or on a governmental level. In addition, the level of infrastructure and importance the government has on overall security influences expatriate experience. From the 80s, when interviewee E began on an international assignment, the guidelines have changed, as mentioned by E:

"Previously it was mandatory to meet a psychologist. Nowadays it isn't [mandatory], but it is possible."

However, from other interviews with military personnel, it became certain that current post-assignment training is enhanced and focuses on the well-being of personnel.

In addition, working as a group, team or with local people was mentioned as an important aspect of safety. Having someone by one's side is crucial. Participant F expressed that to this day, they have a colleague working in a hostile environment and they keep close contact with each other. This is part of a safety protocol, in which a person who understands the context is aware of the whereabouts of a colleague or a friend, and where they should be headed towards. Participant F described this was the case for themselves also: they needed to notify someone where they were going, for how long and when they should be back. This is to confirm the safety of the expatriate.

The sense of safety can also be created by external factors. All respondents had some sort of external safety factor, such as a designated driver, armed or unarmed guards, or protective walls around the accommodation premises. However, as mentioned by respondent A, the guards could still cause harm and not protect you, but more importantly it was crucial to create common respect and good social ties. Participant A described the situation as:

"And those were dangerous situations of their own, because the bored soldiers drank quite a lot... You usually had to use all the ways of diplomacy to maintain good ties with them, but I didn't have much problems with that because I took care of them, so they also respected me as a doctor."

4.3.5   Recreational activities

Three out of seven interviewees mentioned recreational activities as pivotal. Respondent G showcased how being able to exit the compound and have a somewhat normal life was good for the well-being. In addition, respondent D described recreational activities as very important. For respondent D, these activities were for instance vacations and holidays in the host country. Respondent E described the close community and the importance of working out and talking with colleagues. Time spent with friends was seen as refreshing, as illustrated by interviewee D:

"It was to myself, quite refreshing time to do something nice together during the evening"

5 Discussion

The aim of the study was to understand what job demands and resources in particular the participants felt as most significant to their well-being during the international assignment. Essentially, the goal of this chapter is to answer to the research question and provide insights to the research objectives. The research question was:

"What job demands and resources are considered as the most significant for expatriates' well-being in a hostile environment?"

The research objectives provided the study a clear focus, since these allowed to observe the interviews, analysis phase and discussion from a multifaceted point of view. The three objectives were:

1. What types of special demands does expatriate work include in hostile environments?
2. What resources were considered important?
3. How did these job demands and resources connect with expatriate work in hostile environments, in particular impact on well-being of these expatriates?

5.1 Summary of the findings

The findings are summarized into a table (see Table 2). The table concludes each respondent's key job demands and resources. Some respondents did not highlight any job demands, thereby in their box a "N/A" text is present. Further, the summary explains the table and describes each participant's well-being from the job demands-resources perspective.

Code	Job demands	Job resources
A	Multiple health related risks, such as malaria. Risk of violence impacted well-being and work.	Local community played a pivotal role. Collecting experiences and being adventurous, having a "culture ear" and developing a certain type of sense of empathy to the environment. Felt the organizational support was not reliable and fair.
B	N/A	Meaningfulness of the assignment, being able to protect and help others.
C	Restricted freedom	Being successful in their work providing meaningfulness to the job. Doing the work for the good of the society. Work colleagues were important.
D	High risk of violence and kidnappings, restricted freedom during evenings and nights. Exhaustion to the continuous fear	Support from friends was crucial and recreational activities were important: especially holidays with friends in the host country
E	N/A	Adventurous characteristic and the sense of belonging to a work community.
F	Infrastructure not working during crisis, exhaustion to the job and to witnessing continuous violence.	Peer support was significant, as well as debriefing after traumatic events. Learned certain coping mechanisms which helped to cope in challenging situations. Lack of organizational support.
G	Having to drive alone and the fear of accidents whilst driving. Pressures amongst colleagues, having to fulfill certain standards	Community and the social relationships with colleagues. Being able to have holidays in the host country as well as in the home country were empowering.

Table 2. Summary of key findings

In this study, the job demands-resources model was utilized and thereby findings are categorized either into job demands or job resources. In terms of job demands, key findings include the limited and restricted lifestyle, for example strict dress codes, or the restricted freedom. These affect well-being, as already identified by Faeth & Kittler (2020). Other job demands were related to the hostility aspect itself. Additionally, infrastructure-related issues were brought up. The absence of proper roads or medical infrastructure creates a hostile environment. Moreover, two respondents said their sense of safety decreased exponentially during the assignment. Corruption and frustrating legislation were mentioned by three interviewees. The remaining four respondents, however, were living in military compounds; therefore, these participants might have not experienced corruption due to not living with the local communities.

Key findings related to job resources was to establish the importance of social relationships, networks, and support. These were mentioned by all respondents, however with versatile ways. Similarly, Wang & Kanungo (2020) emphasized the importance of networks and the direct effect these have on psychological well-being. One respondent discussed the beneficial impact local communities can bring to one's life. The benefits include sense of belonging, sense of safety as well as other benefits from a community. Majority of interviewees said work colleagues were amongst the closest people in the foreign environment, whilst the one that did not specify work colleagues said that friends played an important role in receiving positive well-being and attaining resources to cope. Social relationships and ties were also mentioned in many other occasions during the interviews, as respondents felt they provided the core well-being.

5.1.1   Subjective well-being in the hostile environment

Overall well-being amongst the interviewees was described as good, and all respondents could find positive aspects of their international assignment. However, the hostile environment, in particular the threat of violence and fear was identified as a key stressor to subjective well-being. As per Shrira et al. (2011), the greater the hostile world scenario, the more influence can be perceived from subjective well-being as well as meaning in

life. Meaning in life was not central point in this study, however few participants mentioned the meaningfulness of their job, thereby deeming it as a job resource.

Participant A described their well-being in the hostile environment as good, even better than in home country. Participants D and F however, described their exhaustion to the continuous risks and fear, thereby moving back to the home country. Participants B, C, E and G, all who worked as a crisis management personnel did not specify the influence the hostile environment directly had on their well-being. This could possibly be by the strong organizational support and presence during the international assignment, whereas for participants A, D and F the organizational presence in the host country was minimal, if none.

5.1.2 The impact of job demands to subjective well-being

Respondents outlined pressures having had an impact on mental well-being, in particular to the negative well-being. As Mäkelä & Kinnunen (2018) disclosed, the significance of not having too much workload and pressures is especially for expatriates in hostile environments. External pressure sources were commonly other colleagues, or local communities. This was described as having the need to fulfil certain standards and expectations, which created stress. On the contrary to Mäkelä & Kinnunen's (2018) claim, participant A described their workload as having the need to work around the clock. However, the participant was not deeming it as a job demand, rather the work was taken as a privilege. The dissatisfaction with one's work was taken seriously, as mentioned by one interviewee. In addition, pressures related to the occupation were mentioned by two interviewees.

5.1.3 The impact of job resources to subjective well-being

Everyone adapts and copes with matters differently. However, in particular friends, family and colleagues' support are crucial (Fisher et al., 2015). In consonance with previous study, this study's respondents considered social relationships rather important. The social networks each had gathered varied from local people to work colleagues or other

foreign people. Bader et al. (2015) claim the higher the perceived terrorism in the location, the greater benefit may be seen from networks. Especially for participant D, working in a high-risk country of terrorism and violence, greater benefit from networks and social ties could have been beneficial, as the participant themselves also mentioned.

Bader & Schuster (2015) and Faeth & Kittler (2020) emphasize the significance of achieving adequate support from social networks, essentially in hostile environments. As described by some participants, the influence and impact co-workers had was significant to the well-being and overall satisfaction aspect of the assignment. In agreement with Altman & Taylor's (1973) social penetration theory, respondents outlined the intimate relationships and how fast these relationships grew to the intimate level. One factor that could explain the somewhat rapid development of these relationships could be the limited amount of other social networks and support, such as family.

Recreational activities and resources possessed individually also impact the way one can cope with the assignment (Fisher et al., 2015). Recreational activities were mentioned by all the interviewees, in one way or another. To illustrate, trips to local cities, going to a sauna, working out or hanging with friends were demonstrated as important. The absence or minimal number of recreational activities, as illustrated by respondent F was said to lead to the "end of marriage with work", where the respondent had to leave the assignment and return home. Additionally, participant D said these activities allow oneself to disassociate from reality.

5.2   Managerial implications

The managerial implications are further discussed in this section. The study aimed to identify key job resources and job demands that would influence an expatriate's well-being, particularly to those whose work is in hostile environments. Therefore, findings

provide various resources and demands that impacts to the following experiences of seven expatriates.

For individuals, those planning or soon to be undertaking an international assignment in a hostile environment, most importantly it would be crucial to identify their key job resources and demands. With this, appropriate training, mentoring, and coaching could already be implemented by the organization before the international assignment. Additionally, it is encouraged expatriates would seek for help and social support if needed. It would be beneficial if individuals could discuss of challenging matters before they escalate too much. Thereby, it would be also encouraged to have hobbies or activities outside of their organization or job. This way, the social support amongst locals could also benefit the expatriate.

From organization point of view, it would be important to evaluate the possible risks the expatriate may face in the hostile environment. By discussing with locals or with people whom have lived in the specific country, or traveling there themselves the risk analysis would be of better use. In addition, identifying the individual characteristics the expatriate possesses, and making sure they are suitable for the given job is needed. This way expatriate failure may be tackled. As per from the interviews, it is encouraged organizations act as supporting and offer crisis help, if needed. By offering support, such as calling or emailing to the expatriate may be seen as not useful, but what came across from the respondents was the need to have someone to listen and understand the challenges, rather than finding rapid solutions.

Certainly, activities outside of work life are one key finding regarding job resources, as it was demonstrated by all participants. These activities do not necessarily have to be costly, as illustrated by participants as well. Recreational activities, for example hanging out with friends or taking care of an animal are useful, as they allow the expatriate to disassociate themselves from the otherwise hostile environment. On top of recreational activities, in particular the social impact and side of international assignments was

mentioned by all respondents. The influence of social ties and relationships cannot be understated. Participants emphasized the sense of community and how it allowed them to discuss and listen to others. Previous research regarding social relationships and the significance of these to expatriates (Bader & Schuster, 2015; Faeth & Kittler, 2020), in particular expatriates in hostile environments also sheds light to this finding. The significance of this paper is towards the topic, as minimal similar studies exist.

5.3   Limitations of the study

This study is not without its limitations, essentially due to it being a master's thesis. Therefore, it is also the first larger scientific contribution the author has done, although with a pursuit of excellence. Worth noting is also the mother tongue of the author not being English, therefore interpretations of prior literature, analysis and overall language essentially is not grammatically perfect.

Limits related to the methods are also recognizable. The sample size is small if one would try to generalize the findings. It would be important in terms of validity and reliability to produce a study with similar theory background and with larger sample size. Additionally, the sample group being of Finnish nationalities most likely has had some influence on the findings. In addition, the standards of living in Finland may have had an influence on the outcomes as, these standards may create a baseline on what one might expect from abroad. Main limitation with regards to respondents was the translations of the quotes. This may have had an influence on the meaning of the sentence, although the author aimed at keeping the core meaning and tone during the translations. If the translations would have been made by a professional, this limitation would be minimal. Due to the restricted time and financial resources, this was not seen as possible.

5.4   Suggestions for future research

In terms of future research, a motivational theory point of view could bring new findings to the study, by focusing more on the mental and psychological side of expatriates in hostile environments. A study which compares managers, and subordinates could also bring new aspects to the topic, as then the impact to well-being could be different.

Whilst keeping in mind the limitations of the study, a sample group that would be versatile would be beneficial. A study of Finnish expatriates from quantitative angle could be useful as the literature lacks this in the Finnish and Nordic point of view. The studies could utilize a qualitative research approach, as it would provide more in-depth insights to the study topic better. With the additional studies, the expatriate cycle altogether could be enhanced: from the selection to the repatriation. Thereby, the international assignment in the hostile environment could be more successful.

Also, the topic could be viewed from the perspectives of all-female, all-male, or alternatively from a gender minority perspective. Lastly, focusing on a certain occupation or nationality could be useful, as it would bring knowledge to the specific field. As this study utilized only Finnish personnel, a mixed nationality, such as interviewing Finnish-Pakistani individuals who have had an international assignment in a hostile environment could possibly bring different findings on the topic.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Interview questions

1. Could you briefly talk me through the hostile environments you have worked at?

    a. Could you tell me about the location and what made it hostile

2. When were you working in the location?

    b. how many months/years

Subsequently, I will ask questions related to your international assignment, and wish that you would be as detailed as possible to try and remember how living and working felt during the assignment.

3. How would you describe your mental well-being during the assignment?

4. What type of matters brought positive counterweight to your job or otherwise helped in coping?

5. What matters caused stress or other mental burden?

6. Coming back to coping related, did you feel you received sufficient support so that you could be successful

    c. from your organization: what type of, was it sufficient?

    d. from your closest supervisor: what type of, was it sufficient?

    e. from your colleagues: what type of, was it sufficient?

    f. from people outside of the organization (friends, family): what type of, was it sufficient?

7. What matters could have helped you in terms of feeling better and coping better in the environment?

8. Do you have anything to add, or something else you would like to discuss?