

# A review of work–life balance in the expatriation context

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – Work–life balance (WLB) is an important aspect of modern society, influencing personal well-being and business performance. Despite its importance in the business context, its analysis in the expatriation context is still scattered. Thus, this paper reviews the literature covering the analysis of 40 papers that focus on WLB and expatriation.

**Design/methodology/approach** – A systematic literature review (SLR) was deployed in both the WoS and Scopus databases until December 2024. About 40 articles were in-depth analyzed, and four themes emerged inductively. The Hoshin Kanri Matrix was used to showcase each of the main themes.

**Findings** – Four main themes emerged from this SLR: (1) Cultural adaptation; (2) Types of support; (3) WLB challenges and (4) Gender perception. Qualitative studies are predominantly used vis-à-vis quantitative studies.

**Originality/value** – This paper contributes to the literature by identifying four main strands that reveal potential paths for developing WLB in expatriation processes, both academically and in business contexts.

**Keywords** Work–life balance, Work–life conflict, Expatriation, Systematic literature review, SLR

**Paper type** Literature review

## 1. Introduction

The globalization process has fueled a surge in international workforce mobility, compelling organizations to deploy skilled professionals on international assignments across different cultural and geographical contexts (Ballesteros-Leiva *et al.*, 2018; Cerdin and Selmer, 2014; Scullion *et al.*, 2007; Shortland, 2021). While expatriation presents noteworthy opportunities for professional growth, skill development, and increased responsibility, enhancing future career prospects (Shortland, 2018), it also imposes heavy organizational and personal burdens. Among them, the challenge of acculturation and adaptation to unfamiliar cultural and business contexts disrupt expatriates' work-life balance (WLB), a critical aspect of their well-being and effectiveness (Harris, 2004; Shaffer *et al.*, 2001; Shortland, 2018).

The literature on work-family interface, expatriate adjustment, WLB, and work-life conflict (WLC) is extensive, addressing both employee (e.g. diminished stress levels, higher productivity, job satisfaction, and personal fulfillment) and employer perspectives (e.g. flexible work conditions, employee retention, reduced absenteeism, and greater productivity) (Fleetwood, 2007; Lewis *et al.*, 2007; Rashmi and Kataria, 2021). Achieving a balance between professional and personal lives has gained increasing public attention as employees and employers recognize its importance for the overall quality of life (Rashmi and Kataria, 2021).

This paper explores the intersection of expatriation and the work-nonwork interface, a growing area of scholarly interest. As such, key constructs such as WLB, WLC, and



work-life enrichment are often discussed. These terms, while related, reflect different processes. Work-life balance refers to the *perceived equilibrium* between work and nonwork roles, typically implying satisfactory functioning in both without excessive conflict. Work-life conflict arises when demands from work and nonwork domains are mutually incompatible, causing strain in either direction, from work to life (*work-to-family conflict*) or from life to work (*family-to-work conflict*). Work-life enrichment reflects the positive transfer of resources from one domain to another, wherein experiences or support in work enhance personal life and vice versa. The work-nonwork interface encompasses all these processes, conflict, balance, and enrichment, and represents the dynamic interactions between roles, expectations, and resources across domains (Geurts and Demerouti, 2003; Greenhaus and Allen, 2011; Sirgy and Lee, 2018).

For expatriates, these WLB considerations are often amplified and complicated by unique stressors. International assignments frequently generate challenges that lead to WLC, manifesting as strain between work demands and family responsibilities (Mäkelä *et al.*, 2017; Salamin, 2021). The lack of adequate organizational support can exacerbate these difficulties, leaving expatriates feeling isolated and overwhelmed (Fischlmayr and Kollinger, 2010). Managing family responsibilities consistently emerges as a significant hurdle for international assignments (Shaffer *et al.*, 2001, 2012; Takeuchi, 2010). The negative impact of WLC on expatriate adjustment underscores the intricate interplay of influences from various stakeholders, including family members, the employing organization, and host-country nationals (Takeuchi, 2010).

Despite growing attention to expatriate adjustment and career outcomes, the WLB and WLC dimensions of expatriation remain under-researched and theoretically fragmented. Takeuchi's (2010) adjustment framework, though influential, primarily emphasizes work adaptation and psychological adjustment, without fully integrating the broader work-life interface. Similarly, Shaffer *et al.* (2012) identify key international career paths (assigned expatriates (AEs), self-initiated expatriates (SIEs), and global travelers (short-term assignees, flexpatriates, and international business travelers)), but focus largely on career success rather than holistic well-being. Similarly, Mäkelä *et al.*'s (2022) recent exploration of WLB among different expatriate types (AEs, SIEs, and careerists) sheds light on work-to-nonwork and nonwork-to-work dynamics; their non-systematic review underscores the need for more rigorous and comprehensive investigations into organizational and environmental factors influencing WLB. Dang *et al.* (2022) systematically addressed the families' international assignment experience. Although they found five different themes (family's influence on expatriates; expatriation's influence on expatriate families; family and individual adjustment in the expatriation process; organizational practices concerning family issues in expatriation; and expatriate families' social interaction), their focus was on families and not on WLB or WLC.

Despite the importance of WLB, research specifically addressing the multifaceted challenges expatriates face in achieving this balance remains limited (Tahir, 2023). Furthermore, while the demographic landscape of expatriation is evolving with a growing proportion of female assignees (Mäkelä *et al.*, 2011), the potential gendered differences in WLB experiences and challenges warrant further scrutiny. Consequently, while expatriation provides opportunities for professional advancement, the concurrent and significant WLB challenges faced by both men and women necessitate more in-depth exploration and understanding (Shortland, 2018, 2021). The existing body of research on WLB and WLC within the expatriate context remains fragmented, hindering a holistic understanding of the issue.

To address these gaps, this systematic literature review (SLR) aims to answer the following central research question: "What are the main thematic groups when examining WLB in the context of expatriation?" By systematically synthesizing existing research, this study aims to provide a more cohesive and comprehensive picture of the factors influencing expatriate WLB and the manifestations of WLC.

The Conservation of Resources (COR) theory will be utilized to discuss the results, as it provides a psychological framework for understanding how individuals seek to acquire, maintain, and safeguard valuable resources in response to stress. Given that COR theory posits

stress arises from the threat or loss of resources, or the failure to gain them despite effort, it is particularly well-suited for addressing the complexities of WLB and the emergence of WLC among expatriates navigating demanding international assignments (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001). However, it will be complemented by the boundary/border theory (Ashforth *et al.*, 2000; Clark, 2000), which posits that individuals manage the interface between work and personal life through psychological, temporal, and physical boundaries, as both theories provide a robust conceptual foundation for understanding the interplay between expatriation and the work-nonwork interface.

Following this introduction, the article outlines the research method used, describes the sample of articles included in the SLR, presents the main findings, and concludes with a discussion of the results and final conclusions.

## 2. Research method

To conduct this research, we have adopted an SLR, which allowed us to minimize bias and have a more transparent and replicable process (Tranfield *et al.*, 2003). Following the steps suggested by Tranfield *et al.* (2003), we first planned the review, defining its objective and research question, as stated in the introduction. Stage II, aiming to identify studies that address expatriates and their views on WLB, is presented in Section 3.1. The final stage of the systematic review process is then reporting and announcing the results (Tranfield *et al.*, 2003).

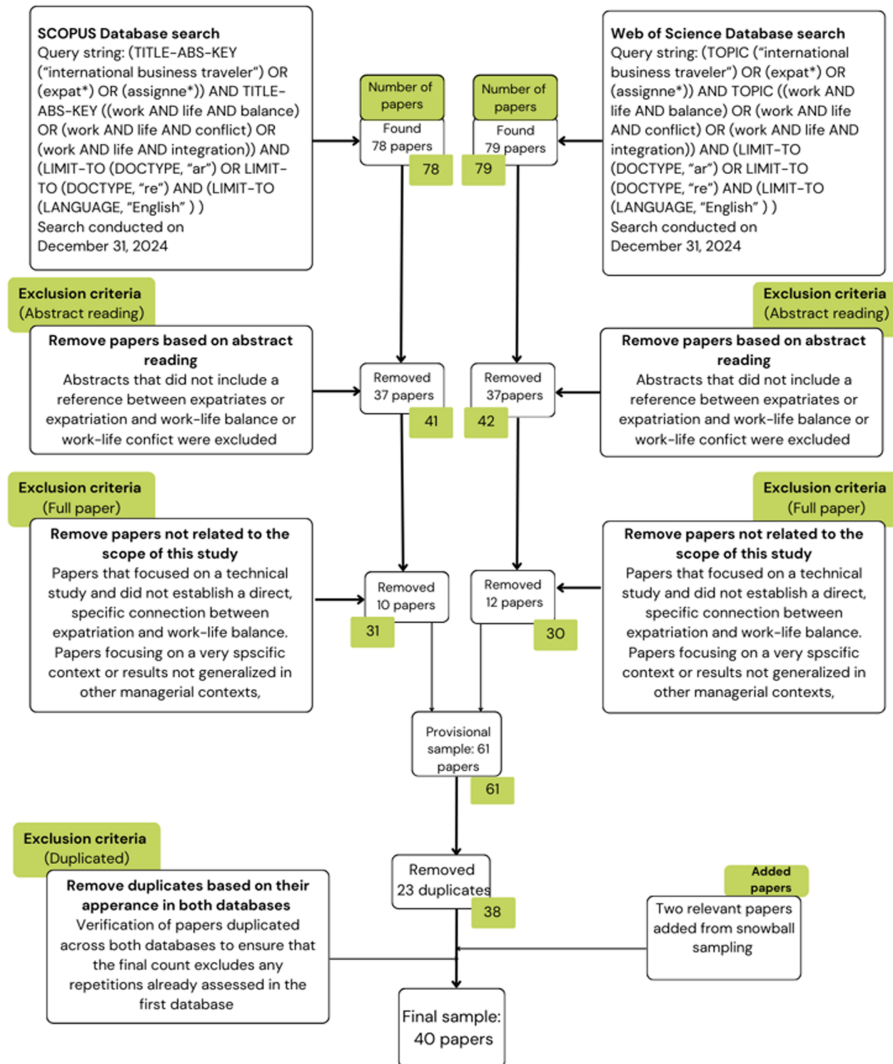
### 2.1 Identification and selection of relevant manuscripts

The second stage involves identifying relevant studies and evaluating their quality and fit to the present study (Tranfield *et al.*, 2003). To do this, searches were conducted in two databases: Scopus and Web of Science (WoS). The search criteria included titles, abstracts, and keywords, using the following query string: (“international business traveler\*” OR expat\* OR assignee\*) AND ((work AND life AND conflict) OR (work AND life AND integration) OR (work AND life AND balance)). The search was carried out covering all documents until December 2024, limited to articles and reviews, resulting in 78 manuscripts from Scopus and 79 manuscripts from the WoS.

All relevant data from the 157 articles were compiled into Excel spreadsheets. Subsequently, all authors reviewed the titles and abstracts of the articles to assess their relevance to the study. This step enabled the exclusion of articles that did not establish a direct connection between expatriation and WLB. Following a thorough abstract review and a full-text analysis, and consensus among the authors, a total of 61 papers were selected, comprising 31 from Scopus and 30 from the WoS. After this process, 23 duplicate articles were identified across the two databases, resulting in a final set of 38 relevant papers. However, two additional articles (Lazarova *et al.*, 2010; Reiche *et al.*, 2023) were included due to their thematic relevance to the study of WLB and WLC. As such, the final sample is composed of 40 articles.

To ensure the rigor of the selection process, in line with recommendations from prior studies (Xiao and Watson, 2019), each researcher independently conducted a full-text review of the 40 articles. Following the review, the researchers discussed the inclusion or exclusion of each manuscript, with unanimous agreement required for inclusion. This process yielded a final pool of 40 articles, as outlined in Figure 1.

These 40 selected articles serve as the foundation for identifying key themes within the literature, guiding the categorization of the different themes identified. Employing an inductive approach, as used by Jones *et al.* (2011), an interpretive lens was initially applied to analyze the content of all 40 manuscripts. This approach involved developing first-order codes (topics), second-order topics, and overarching aggregate themes (Gioia *et al.*, 2013). The coding process began with a thorough examination of the selected articles, where all researchers independently identify and generate first-order codes that closely reflect the original content of the articles under scrutiny. The following topics were, among others,



**Figure 1.** Identification and selection process in this SLR. Source: Authors' own work

considered as first-order topics: constant travel; long working hours; excessive workload; limited support from the organization; big cultural differences; impact of expatriation on the entire family; partners' different perspectives; and organizational perspectives or expectations about singles and childless families.

This first-order analysis focuses on identifying and documenting key terms and phrases used within the research articles without categorizing them initially. This resulted in a large number of codes, which were gradually refined by identifying similarities and differences among them. As patterns emerged, the first-order codes are grouped into broader categories, forming the second-order themes that represent more abstract concepts that synthesize the underlying patterns found. Among others, the following second-order topics emerged: work-related challenges; organizational support; cultural-related challenges; and work-related and family-related gender considerations.

Once a coherent set of second-order topics was established, the analysis advanced to the next stage, where these topics were aggregated into four main thematic areas that capture the essence of our study. The articles were subsequently organized according to the specific context at the intersection of WLB and expatriation and classified under the following thematic areas, shown in [Table 1](#), as follows: Cultural adaptation; Types of support; WLB Challenges; and Gender perceptions.

### 2.2 Characterization of the sample

[Table 1](#) presents the results organized by the main themes addressed in the selected papers. While a range of topics are covered, the findings highlight a significant emphasis on the challenges faced by expatriates and the gender differences observed during expatriation. [Table 1](#) indicates that the most prominent themes include the difficulties in achieving WLB within the expatriation context, the support mechanisms available to address these challenges, and gender-specific perspectives, particularly those of female expatriates. In contrast, the impact of cultural adaptation on WLB has received the least attention in the sampled literature.

[Table 2](#) presents a summary of the final set of articles included in the study. They are spread across 28 different journals, covering topics such as human resource management, gender, diversity, and global business. The *Journal of Global Mobility* and the *International Journal of Human Resource Management* stand out with six and five articles, respectively. *Global Business and Organizational Excellence*, *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, *European Management Review* and *Community, Work and Family* are present with two articles each. These six journals represent 46.3% of all manuscripts analyzed.

A citation analysis was conducted to explore potential connections between the papers reviewed ([Fahimnia et al., 2015](#)). In [Table 2](#), the total global citation (TGC) score represents the number of times each paper has been cited in the SCOPUS database, while total local citations (TLCs) reflect how often a given article has been cited by others within our sample of 40 articles ([Fahimnia et al., 2015](#)). [Table 2](#) highlights a noticeable gap between TGCs and TLCs: it is clear that while four articles stand out with more than 100 TGCs, only three articles ([Fischlmayr and Kollinger, 2010](#); [Grant-Vallone and Ensher, 2001](#); [Shaffer et al., 2001](#)) emerge as central among the 40 analyzed. This disparity, evident in the limited TLC scores vis-à-vis the TGC scores, suggests that research in the WLB field is still far from reaching a mature stage.

**Table 1.** Thematic groups

WLB challenges	<a href="#">Alomari and AlAhmari (2023)</a> , <a href="#">Atay et al. (2024)</a> , <a href="#">Ballesteros-Leiva et al. (2017)</a> , <a href="#">Cho and Chew (2021)</a> , <a href="#">Dang et al. (2022)</a> , <a href="#">Fischlmayr and Kollinger (2010)</a> , <a href="#">Jais et al. (2015)</a> , <a href="#">Kumpikaite-Valiuniene et al. (2022)</a> , <a href="#">Lazarova et al. (2010)</a> , <a href="#">Lirio (2014, 2017)</a> , <a href="#">Mabkhot and Al-Ameryeen (2023)</a> , <a href="#">Mayerhofer et al. (2011)</a> , <a href="#">Mäkelä et al. (2015)</a> , <a href="#">Mäkelä et al. (2017)</a> , <a href="#">Mello and Tomei (2021)</a> , <a href="#">Pinto and Maia (2015)</a> , <a href="#">Saarenpää (2016)</a> , <a href="#">Shaffer et al. (2001)</a> , <a href="#">Schütter and Boerner (2013)</a> , <a href="#">Shortland and Cummins (2007)</a> , <a href="#">Tahir (2021)</a>
Cultural adaptation	<a href="#">Atay et al. (2024)</a> , <a href="#">Bader et al. (2018)</a> , <a href="#">Mabkhot and Al-Ameryeen (2023)</a> , <a href="#">Noman et al. (2023)</a> , <a href="#">Tahir (2023)</a>
Types of support	<a href="#">Alomari and AlAhmari (2023)</a> , <a href="#">Ballesteros-Leiva et al. (2017, 2018)</a> , <a href="#">Blanco and Golik (2023)</a> , <a href="#">Cho and Chew (2021)</a> , <a href="#">Dang et al. (2022)</a> , <a href="#">Fischlmayr and Kollinger (2010)</a> , <a href="#">Grant-Vallone and Ensher (2001)</a> , <a href="#">Kempen et al. (2015)</a> , <a href="#">Lämsä et al. (2017)</a> , <a href="#">Mabkhot and Al-Ameryeen (2023)</a> , <a href="#">Reiche et al. (2023)</a> , <a href="#">Schütter and Boerner (2013)</a> , <a href="#">Shortland and Cummins (2007)</a> , <a href="#">Takeuchi et al. (2008)</a>
Gender perception	<a href="#">Dang et al. (2022)</a> , <a href="#">Harris (2004)</a> , <a href="#">Kollinger-Santer and Fischlmayr (2013)</a> , <a href="#">Mäkelä et al. (2011)</a> , <a href="#">Mäkelä et al. (2017)</a> , <a href="#">Salamin (2021)</a> , <a href="#">Shah and Barker (2022)</a> , <a href="#">Shortland (2018, 2021)</a> , <a href="#">Sulphey and Faisal (2020)</a>

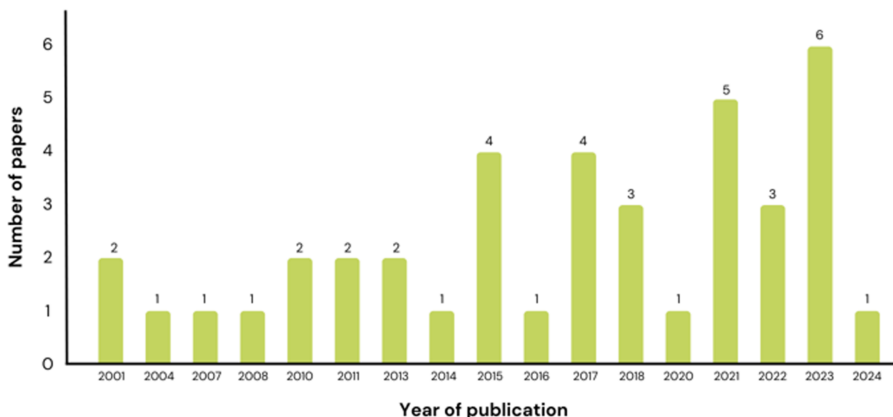
**Source(s):** Authors' own work

**Table 2.** Final pool of publications included in this SLR

Article No	Authors	Journal	TGCs	TLCs
1	Shaffer <i>et al.</i> (2001)	<i>J of Management</i>	254	11
2	Lazarova <i>et al.</i> (2010)	<i>Academy of Management Review</i>	246	5
3	Takeuchi <i>et al.</i> (2008)	<i>Organization Science</i>	110	0
4	Grant-Vallone and Ensher (2001)	<i>Int J of Intercultural Relations</i>	105	11
5	Fischlmayr and Kollinger (2010)	<i>Int J of Human Resource Management</i>	88	12
6	Harris (2004)	<i>J of Management Development</i>	68	9
7	Schütter and Boerner (2013)	<i>J of Global Mobility</i>	50	7
8	Mello and Tomei (2021)	<i>Global Business and Organizational Excellence</i>	46	1
9	Mäkelä <i>et al.</i> (2015)	<i>Human Resource Management</i>	42	4
10	Mäkelä <i>et al.</i> (2011)	<i>Gender in Management: An Int J</i>	39	6
11	Bader <i>et al.</i> (2018)	<i>European Management Review</i>	37	2
12	Shortland and Cummins (2007)	<i>Global Business and Organizational Excellence</i>	32	8
13	Kempen <i>et al.</i> (2015)	<i>Int J of Human Resource Management</i>	28	6
14	Lämsä <i>et al.</i> (2017)	<i>Int J of Human Resource Management</i>	32	1
15	Ballesteros-Leiva <i>et al.</i> (2017)	<i>Personnel Review</i>	30	1
16	Mayerhofer <i>et al.</i> (2011)	<i>Equality, Diversity and Inclusion</i>	26	1
17	Shortland (2018)	<i>Gender in Management: An Int J</i>	27	2
18	Kollinger-Santer and Fischlmayr (2013)	<i>Zeitschrift für Personalforschung</i>	25	1
19	Dang <i>et al.</i> (2022)	<i>Human Resource Management Review</i>	19	0
20	Mäkelä <i>et al.</i> (2017)	<i>J of Global Mobility</i>	19	2
21	Lirio (2014)	<i>J of Global Mobility</i>	18	0
22	Ballesteros-Leiva <i>et al.</i> (2018)	<i>European Management Review</i>	18	1
23	Lirio (2017)	<i>Community, Work and Family</i>	15	1
24	Jais <i>et al.</i> (2015)	<i>Higher Education Research and Development</i>	13	0
25	Saarenpää (2016)	<i>Community, Work and Family</i>	12	0
26	Reiche <i>et al.</i> (2023)	<i>Human Relations</i>	9	0
27	Shortland (2021)	<i>Int J of Human Resource Management</i>	7	0
28	Cho and Chew (2021)	<i>Current Psychology</i>	6	2
29	Shah and Barker (2022)	<i>Int J of Human Resource Management</i>	6	0
30	Salamin (2021)	<i>J of Global Mobility</i>	4	0
31	Tahir (2021)	<i>Int J of Management Practice</i>	4	0
32	Pinto and Maia (2015)	<i>Academia Revista Latinoamericana de Administración</i>	3	1
33	Kumpikaite-Valiuniene <i>et al.</i> (2022)	<i>J of Global Mobility</i>	2	0
34	Sulphey and Faisal (2020)	<i>Pertanika J of Social Sciences and Humanities</i>	2	0
35	Atay <i>et al.</i> (2024)	<i>J of Global Mobility</i>	1	0
36	Noman <i>et al.</i> (2023)	<i>Frontiers in Psychology</i>	1	0
37	Alomari and AlAhmari (2023)	<i>Review of Economics and Finance</i>	0	0
38	Blanco and Golik (2023)	<i>Int J of Emerging Markets</i>	0	0
39	Mabkhot and Al-Ameryeen (2023)	<i>Croatian International Relations Review</i>	0	0
40	Tahir (2023)	<i>Cross Cultural and Strategic Management</i>	0	0

**Source(s):** Authors' own work

Shortland, Mäkelä and Suutari were the most prolific authors in the field, with three articles each. As shown in Table 2, WLB in the context of expatriation has been a topic of interest for over 2 decades. However, it has gained increased attention only recently, as depicted in Figure 2.



**Figure 2.** Number of articles per year of publication. Source: Authors' own work

The Hoshin Kanri matrix is a widely used strategic planning tool that helps coordinate operations and establish relationships between objectives and actions, which represent the outcomes being analyzed (Patrício *et al.*, 2018; Silveira *et al.*, 2018). Although it has been traditionally employed to align organizational goals, prioritize objectives, drive continuous improvements, and promote cross-functional collaboration (Silveira *et al.*, 2018), in this paper, this matrix was adapted to display the relationships between the main topics under analysis in each theme.

The X-matrix consists of four sections that can be customized to meet the user's needs. It interrelates the main components of the matrix, enabling a comprehensive assessment of the topics covered in each theme while highlighting key characteristics across its building blocks (Patrício *et al.*, 2018). This structure not only provides transparency and reliability but also facilitates cross-comparisons of various studies in a consistent and organized manner.

For each theme displayed in Table 1, an Hoshin Kanri matrix was created, displaying the primary topics analyzed, arranged according to the article number provided in Table 2. Each matrix, shown in Tables 3–6, also incorporates the key topics discussed, as well as the methods of data collection and analysis, complementing the overview of the main themes examined. While Table 3 displays the results of the thematic areas of cultural adaptation and types of support, Tables 4 and 5 display the main findings of the thematic area of main challenges. Finally, Table 6 displays the results of the gender/female perception thematic area.

It is important to note that the information disclosed in the X matrices represents the topics covered in the articles. Regarding types of support, Table 3 covers two principal topics (organizational support and social and family support) and the respective subtopics. Regarding cultural adaptation, Table 3 only presents the principal topic, cultural adaptation, which coincides with the main theme covered.

The thematic group regarding WLB challenges presented four main topics: work-related, culture-related, family-related and organizational-related topics, each of them covering several subtopics. As a result of the huge number of subtopics, it was decided to present two X matrices, Tables 4 and 5, each covering two principal topics. Finally, Table 6 presents the thematic topics regarding gender perception, covering four main topics: work, partner, culture/environment and children considerations.

The X matrices presented sought to provide as much information as possible regarding authors, data collection and analysis methods, type of expatriation, topics, main subtopics and main theories utilized. For the type of expatriation, three categories were used: one including self-initiated expatriates, one including traditional (short or long-term) assignments and the

**Table 3.** Characterization of the themes *Cultural adaptation* and *Types of support*

<b>Types of support</b>															
<b>Organizational support</b>															
22	22	37		37	22	(Flexible) working hours		37	37	22					
		37		37		Job-sharing		37	37						
		39		39		Customized training programs									39
13		13		13		Customized training programs				13					
5	4	5	4	5	4	Cross-cultural support systems		4			5				
7		7		7		Cross-cultural support systems									7
	39	39		39		Cross-cultural support systems									39
28		28		28		Cultural training					28				
	39	39		39		Mentorship									39
5		5		5		Tailored support					5				
14	12		12	14	12	Tailored support								14	12
13		13		13		Tailored support				13					
	4		4		4	Health care		4							
3		3		3		Off-the-job organizational support				3					7
3		3		3		Supportive work environment				3					7
7		7		7		Supportive work environment									7
13	4	13	4	13	4	Supportive work environment		4		13					
15	15	37		37	15	Supportive work environment		37	37	15				15	
28		28		28		Supportive work environment					28				
14	19		19	14	19	Family considered a key stakeholder								14	19
14		14		14		HRM policies addressing family well-being								14	
<b>Social and Family Support</b>															
38		38		38		Family/marital commitment									38
5		5		5		Family support essential resource for adjustment				5					
13		13		13		Family support essential resource for adjustment				13					
19		19		19		Family support essential resource for adjustment									19
13		13		13		Life-domain enrichment as social/family support				13					
26		26		26		Expatriate self-efficacy moderating family support				26					
7	4	7	4	7	4	Spouse, family members and friends		4			5				7
5		5		5		Spouse, family members and friends					5				
26		26		26		Spouse, family members and friends				26					
22	22			22		Spouse, family members and friends				22					
<b>Cultural Adaptation</b>															
36	36			36		Successful cultural adaptation enhances WLB									36
	39			39		Successful cultural adaptation enhances WLB									39
40		40		40		Successful cultural adaptation enhances WLB					40				
11	11			11		Adaptation style					11				
40		40		40		Adaptation style					40				
11	11			11		Pressure to adjust					11				
40		40		40		Pressure to adjust					40				
11	11			11		Willingness to adjust					11				
40		40		40		Willingness to adjust					40				
11	11			11		Cultural differences hinder WLB					11				
35		35		35		Cultural differences hinder WLB								35	
40		40		40		Cultural differences hinder WLB					40				
<b>Cultural Adaptation and Types of Support</b>															
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <div style="width: 30%;"> <p>Type of Expatriation / Data Collection &amp; Analysis Methods</p> </div> <div style="width: 30%; text-align: center;"> <p>Main articles on Cultural Adaptation and Types of Support</p> </div> <div style="width: 30%;"> <p>Main Theories Utilized</p> </div> </div>															
<b>Theories</b>															
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <div style="width: 30%;"> <p>Buffering Model</p> <p>Spillover theory</p> <p>Compensation theory</p> <p>Conservation of Resources</p> <p>Role Theory</p> <p>Social Exchange Theory</p> <p>Grounded Theory</p> <p>Boundary Theory</p> <p>Work-Life/Family Inter face</p> <p>Person-Environment Fit</p> <p>Stakeholder Salience</p> <p>No theories mentioned</p> </div> </div>															
<b>Cultural Adaptation</b>															
11	11			11		Clash of cultures? German expatriates' work-life boundary adjustment in South Korea					Bader et al. (2018)				11
35		35		35		Multi-dimensional adjustment of Eurasian self-initiated expatriates in Korea					Atay et al. (2024)				35
36	36			36		Adjustment of self-initiated and organizational expatriates: The moderating role of family support					Noman et al. (2023)				36
	39			39		Bridging cultures, building Careers: The role of diverse work					Mabkhot and Al-Amerveen (2019)				39
40		40		40		Struggling or juggling: work-life balance challenges of Western self-initiated expatriates					Tahir (2023)				40
<b>Types of Support</b>															
	3			3		Role of domain-specific facets of perceived organizational support during expatriation					Takeuchi et al. (2008)				3
	4			4		An examination of work and personal life conflict, organizational support, and work-life balance among expatriates					Grant-Vallone and Ensher (2004)				4
5		5		5		Work-life balance - a neglected issue among Austrian female expatriates					Fischlmayr and Kollinger (2010)				5
7		7		7		Illuminating the work-family interface on international assignments : An exploratory study					Schütter and Boerner (2013)				7
	12			12		Work-life balance: Expatriates reflect the international dimension					Shortland and Cummins (2007)				12
13		13		13		Beyond conflict: the role of life-domain enrichment for expatriates					Kempen et al. (2015)				13
14		14		14		The expatriate's family as a stakeholder of the firm: A responsibility viewpoint					Lämsä et al. (2017)				14
15	15			15		The relationship between life-domain interactions and the well-being of international expatriates					Ballesteros-Leiva et al. (2017)				15
	19			19		Expatriates' families: A systematic literature review and research agenda					Dang et al. (2022)				19
22	22			22		Social support and life-domain interactions among assigned and self-initiated expatriates					Ballesteros-Leiva et al. (2018)				22
26		26		26		Expatriate work role engagement and the work-family interface: A conditional model					Reiche et al. (2023)				26
28		28		28		Work-life balance among self-initiated expatriates in Singapore: Definitions, dimensions, and antecedents					Cho and Chew (2021)				28
	37			37		Work-Life Balance and Job Satisfaction in the Era of Saudi Arabia's New Labor Market					Alomari and AlAhmari (2023)				37
38		38		38		Family influence on career decisions: Perceptions of Latin American CEOs					Blanco and Golik (2023)				38
	39			39		Bridging cultures, building Careers: The role of diverse work					Mabkhot and Al-Amerveen (2019)				39

Source(s): Authors' own work







despite boundary challenges; and the flexible style reflects an open attitude toward adjustment without becoming overwhelmed. [Tahir \(2023\)](#) aligns with the boundary adjustment subdimension by illustrating how women SIEs adopt different styles to manage work-life boundaries in the UAE. Some adopt a localized approach, adjusting their norms and behaviors to fit host country cultural expectations, thereby enhancing WLB satisfaction ([Tahir, 2023](#)). Others maintain a more ethnocentric or flexible boundary styles, depending on cultural adaptation levels and personal preferences. These patterns reflect how expatriates perceive and navigate cultural and social pressures in boundary management, influencing their overall WLB and life outcomes ([Tahir, 2023](#)). The findings underscore that adopting a localized or flexible approach may be essential for effective cross-cultural boundary management in expatriation contexts ([Bader et al., 2018](#); [Tahir, 2023](#)).

Cross-cultural training is valuable for expatriate cross-cultural adaptation, significantly reducing challenges. Organizations or expatriates themselves can provide this training. It can include pre-departure training on etiquette, clothing, traditions, and language. Informal training, such as online resources, can also build knowledge and skills. Expatriates report that cross-cultural training is essential for seamless transition and adjustment to living abroad ([Noman et al., 2023](#)).

The cultural context also plays a role in how expatriates experience work-life conflict, with gender potentially influencing these experiences ([Mäkelä et al., 2017](#)). Some expatriates make considerable efforts to align their work-life boundaries with the new environment; however, this effort is unnecessary when their boundaries align with local norms ([Tahir, 2023](#)). Expatriates in the United Arab Emirates who face significant pressure to adapt but are unwilling to do so report lower levels of satisfaction with their WLB ([Tahir, 2023](#)). Conversely, those willing and able to adopt a lifestyle consistent with that of the United Arab Emirates experience higher satisfaction with their established WLB ([Tahir, 2023](#)). Furthermore, work-life balance satisfaction among expatriates may vary by both perceived pressure and willingness to adapt. Expatriates who face strong pressure to adapt but are unwilling to do so report the lowest levels of work-life balance satisfaction ([Bader et al., 2018](#)). In contrast, those willing and able to align their boundaries with the host culture experience the highest satisfaction ([Bader et al., 2018](#)). Those under less pressure or who adapt with more flexibility report moderate levels of satisfaction ([Bader et al., 2018](#)).

Successful cultural adaptation is crucial for enhancing WLB. [Mabkhot and Al-Ameryeen \(2023\)](#) found that participants widely recognized the effectiveness of cultural adaptation techniques in fostering ease and stability within diverse work environments. The seamless integration of professional and personal responsibilities is closely linked to an individual's ability to adjust to different cultural settings, facilitating a balanced approach to managing work-life demands. Adapting to local norms and practices is key in mitigating work overload, improving time management, and reducing stress levels. Moreover, effective cultural adaptation strategies enhance cross-cultural competence, enabling employees to meet professional demands while sustaining personal well-being ([Mabkhot and Al-Ameryeen, 2023](#)). The openness and perceived friendliness of the host culture may significantly influence expatriates' social and daily life adaptation. Welcoming local populations can help mitigate feelings of isolation and facilitate smoother integration ([Noman et al., 2023](#)). Moreover, female SIEs who adapt effectively to the cultural context of the UAE often report improved work-life balance. This process entails aligning with local norms, particularly concerning boundaries between work and personal life ([Tahir, 2023](#)). SIEs with extended tenure in the host country typically achieve better cultural fit, enabling them to adopt localized boundary management strategies, such as integrating work and personal domains or adjusting expectations in line with local practices ([Tahir, 2023](#)).

Cultural differences pose distinct challenges in expatriate work environments. For instance, Korean workplace culture, rooted in Confucian values like hierarchical respect, group harmony, and informal social networks, profoundly shapes expatriate experiences ([Atay et al., 2024](#)). Expatriates in Korean companies often struggle to adapt to seniority-oriented cultures, which

may hinder the expression of alternative viewpoints and complicate adjustment to hierarchical structures (Atay *et al.*, 2024). Building positive relationships with supervisors and colleagues can be particularly difficult, as personal connections are important alongside professional interactions. The hierarchical nature of such workplaces further intensifies these challenges (Atay *et al.*, 2024). Informal networks play a crucial role in both social and professional integration, yet are difficult for SIEs to access due to cultural differences and indirect communication styles (Atay *et al.*, 2024). Participation in after-hours gatherings, such as dinners or karaoke, is commonly expected and operates as an informal norm to maintain team cohesion (Atay *et al.*, 2024). These events, typically scheduled during evenings or weekends, are critical for fostering trust and acceptance but often encroach upon personal and family time (Atay *et al.*, 2024). Refusing to attend may be perceived as detrimental to team unity or even as a sign of disloyalty, especially within a culture that values group alignment and long working hours (Atay *et al.*, 2024). Consequently, Western expatriates may face considerable difficulty balancing professional and family responsibilities while navigating Korea's collectivist and relationship-centric corporate culture (Atay *et al.*, 2024).

WLB outcomes among expatriates also vary depending on the cultural background of their supervisors. German expatriates in South Korea report differing levels of WLB based on whether their supervisors are Korean or foreign, with the former often exhibiting a more detached approach to work (Bader *et al.*, 2018). Additionally, the alignment of cultural values and attitudes with supervisors is a key determinant of expatriates' satisfaction. For instance, Western SIE women with Western supervisors experience lower levels of pressure compared to those working under Asian supervisors (Tahir, 2023).

The challenges of cultural adaptation highlight its critical role in maintaining a favorable WLB. Ineffective adaptation jeopardizes expatriates' well-being and negatively impacts their workplace productivity.

### 3.2 Support

**3.2.1 Organizational support.** Starting a new role abroad can be challenging, and having a supportive network often determines success. Organizational support significantly enhances various aspects of international assignments, particularly in improving WLB (Mabkhot and Al-Ameryeen, 2023) and in assisting employees with the adjustment to new environments, especially when social networks and extended family support are absent (Grant-Vallone and Ensher, 2001). This support can include tangible resources like language classes, relocation assistance, and intangible support focused on health, well-being, and WLB (Grant-Vallone and Ensher, 2001). The critical role of organizational support, particularly during the early stages of expatriate assignments is also important (Schütter and Boerner, 2013). Based on a qualitative study, organizational support was instrumental in managing administrative tasks, such as navigating tax regulations in the host country. The absence of such support was perceived as a significant source of stress and resentment, in which the lack of organizational support exacerbated their stress.

While financial incentives, such as home-based compensation packages, are appreciated, they often act as compensation for unmet career expectations rather than being primary motivators (Shortland, 2018). Cultural preparation before embracing international assignments, including language training, is also vital; it reduces stress and improves the social integration of expatriates (Fischlmayr and Kollinger, 2010). By offering WLB support, organizations can access a wider talent pool and retain top talent (Mäkelä *et al.*, 2011).

Practices like flexible working hours and work-from-home options support employees and enhance retention, satisfaction, performance, productivity, and loyalty (AlAhmari and AlAhmari, 2023). The health and well-being of expatriates are significantly influenced by the level of support perceived. Those who feel supported by their organizations report lower levels of depression, anxiety, and work-personal life conflict (Grant-Vallone and Ensher, 2001). Grant-Vallone and Ensher (2001) also confirmed that organizational support would

significantly predict employee well-being. Furthermore, lacking organizational support is a key challenge for SIEs in achieving WLB, particularly in cultural training and relocation assistance (Cho and Chew, 2021). Encouraging international managerial employees to engage in personal activities such as sports, leisure, and other interests can enhance overall well-being (Ballesteros-Leiva *et al.*, 2017). Employers can play a pivotal role by implementing policies that promote a healthy WLB, thereby supporting employees' efforts to maintain personal well-being.

The role of supervisors is critical in influencing expatriates' adaptation and attitudes toward WLB. A supportive supervisor who understands personal boundaries and respects WLB can significantly reduce stress and overall satisfaction (Bader *et al.*, 2018). Supervisors who guide expatriates professionally and exemplify positive behavior foster a more flexible approach to WLB (Cho and Chew, 2021). Thus, supervisors significantly influence how expatriates manage the boundaries between their work and personal lives. Establishing positive relationships with supervisors and colleagues is also influenced by cultural dynamics. This emphasizes the importance of personal connections in addition to work-related interactions. Schütter and Boerner (2013) also support the importance of supervisors, particularly when providing emotional support, which was the most important, and seemed to be important throughout the whole assignment, and not only during the early stage of the expatriation.

Research indicates a gap between the presence of WLB programs and employees' awareness of them. For instance, Mayerhofer *et al.* (2011) found that only half of the surveyed organizations had WLB programs (focusing on healthcare matters, work arrangements, and care), and the majority of expatriates were unaware of their existence. Similarly, Shortland and Cummins (2007) reported that only 21% of expatriates knew about their organization's WLB policies, with nearly half being unaware of such programs. This gap underscores the need for comprehensive support systems tailored to the unique challenges faced by expatriates.

Beyond individual adjustment, expatriates often relocate with families, requiring organizational support for dual-career couples and childcare. Lämsä *et al.* (2017) and Dang *et al.* (2022) emphasize the expatriate's family as a crucial stakeholder in international assignments. The family's importance grows when management recognizes their power, legitimacy, and urgency, influencing expatriation decisions (Dang *et al.*, 2022; Lämsä *et al.*, 2017). While organizational engagement with the family is usually moderate due to consistent power and legitimacy, it intensifies during relocation and repatriation, when urgency increases the family's significance (Lämsä *et al.*, 2017). Furthermore, family engagement is particularly vital in assignments with significant cultural or institutional differences, where complex adaptation amplifies the urgency of family-related concerns (Lämsä *et al.*, 2017).

Addressing these needs could involve assistance with documentation, employment support, counseling for spouses, and financial aid (Fischlmayr and Kollinger, 2010). While previous research has highlighted the negative effects of extended periods away from home, such as marital strain, a more nuanced understanding is needed that also considers the positive aspects of WLB experiences, including "enrichment"—the beneficial interplay between work and private life (Mäkelä *et al.*, 2011). Enrichment significantly predicts job satisfaction, turnover intentions, and fulfilling role-related expectations, particularly for expatriates whose roles and cultural contexts greatly influence their adjustment (Kempen *et al.*, 2015).

Lämsä *et al.* (2017) advocate for a holistic HRM approach to family well-being, supporting the expatriate's professional adjustment and the health, safety, and social integration of accompanying family. They suggest that socially responsible HRM practices, developed through dialogue with expatriate families, can improve support effectiveness and family functioning during international assignments. Literature also highlights customized support programs as crucial for expatriate adjustment and work-life balance. Moreover, perceived organizational support fosters social reciprocity; greater support, such as logistical aid, increases the expatriate's willingness to reciprocate through higher engagement and performance to achieve organizational goals (Takeuchi *et al.*, 2008).

Mabkhot and Al-Ameryeen (2023) suggest developing tailored training programs, cross-cultural support systems, and mentorship services to assist expatriates in global environments. Organizations can also consider flexible work arrangements, mindfulness programs, and strategies for managing work-life boundaries. Hosting events for employees and their families can further promote socialization and adjustment (Cho and Chew, 2021). Moreover, cultivating a result-oriented, family-friendly organizational culture that respects employees' personal lives may enhance WLB (Cho and Chew, 2021).

Expatriates' perspectives on WLB and support differ. Mayerhofer *et al.* (2011) identify four expatriate types: Type A prioritizes WLB with strong organizational support and high performance; Type B experiences imbalance due to limited support, needing recognition of long hours and flexibility; Type C accepts imbalance, managing it independently with flexible work; and Type D shows little interest in WLB support. This suggests work-life imbalance can be a career-driven choice, demanding tailored support and ongoing dialogue between organizations and employees.

Family and organizational support are crucial for reducing expatriates' life-domain conflicts. While family and friend support eases personal-to-work conflicts, organizational support is key in alleviating work-to-family conflicts (Ballesteros-Leiva *et al.*, 2018; Kempen *et al.*, 2015). Coworker support is also vital, as it provides emotional support and fosters social networks outside work (Schütter and Boerner, 2013). Coworker social support enhances emotional well-being and builds social connections, leading to mutual enrichment in work-to-life and life-to-work domains (Kempen *et al.*, 2015).

Reducing the perception of work-life interference among Self-Initiated Expatriates (SIEs) is especially important, as this impacts life satisfaction more than personal life affecting work (Ballesteros-Leiva *et al.*, 2017). Organizational support remains essential in addressing well-being challenges among international business travelers, helping alleviate stress and reducing the likelihood of premature assignment termination (Grant-Vallone and Ensher, 2001; Schütter and Boerner, 2013; Shaffer *et al.*, 2001).

*3.2.2 Social and family support.* Life-domain enrichment refers to the positive effects that experiences in one domain (e.g. work) have on the quality of life and performance in the other domain (e.g. private life), and vice versa (Kempen *et al.*, 2015). Kempen *et al.* (2015) found that enrichment correlates positively with job satisfaction and accomplishing role-related expectations, and negatively with turnover intentions. This means when expatriates perceive that their work positively enhances their private life or their private life positively supports their work, they tend to be more satisfied with their job, feel more capable of fulfilling their roles, and have lower intentions to quit their assignments (Kempen *et al.*, 2015).

According to Reiche *et al.* (2023), the extent to which an expatriate's partner adjusts to their family role during expatriation significantly affects the expatriate's own family role adjustment. However, this effect depends on the expatriate's general self-efficacy (i.e. their belief in their ability to handle the demands of expatriation). For those with low self-efficacy, there is a strong positive crossover as they rely more on their partner's adjustment to feel stable in their own family role. In contrast, expatriates with high self-efficacy adjust well regardless of their partner's experience, suggesting they possess greater internal resources to cope independently.

Furthermore, expatriates who are well-adjusted in their family role tend to be more mentally engaged during family activities. This psychological adjustment enhances their motivation and focus within the family domain (Reiche *et al.*, 2023).

Social support is crucial for female expatriates and single, childless workers. Fischlmayr and Kollinger (2010) highlight that single female expatriates often face loneliness and isolation, struggling to form social bonds without a direct support network. The involvement and support of spouses and children are critical in assisting female expatriates throughout the expatriation process (Fischlmayr and Kollinger, 2010). In particular, spousal support, both emotional and psychological, helps alleviate stress and contributes significantly to the expatriate's career success during international assignments (Fischlmayr and Kollinger, 2010).

Furthermore, family factors significantly influence expatriation decisions for Latin American CEOs (Blanco and Golik, 2023). The spouse's input is fundamental in accepting or rejecting an assignment. Spousal support, encompassing emotional, instrumental (managing daily life, household duties, aligning routines), and career-related assistance, plays a key role in adaptation (Blanco and Golik, 2023). Emotional support includes listening, instrumental support involves active involvement in family responsibilities, and career support includes helping with career opportunities and decisions (Blanco and Golik, 2023).

Atay *et al.* (2024) also note support from governments and municipalities through language programs, business aid, and cultural integration for children, easing host country adaptation. Understanding the host culture is vital for business success. Building workplace and social networks is crucial but time-consuming, and frequent network meetings can worsen work-life balance (Atay *et al.*, 2024).

While organizational and family support reduce expatriate conflicts, organizational support, particularly administrative and financial aid for adjusting, is critical for assignment success (Ballesteros-Leiva *et al.*, 2018). Unlike studies showing negative family impacts (Shortland and Cummins, 2007), their participants viewed work positively for career and personal growth, with male travelers prioritizing work over family. However, Schütter and Boerner (2013) found that almost all participants viewed family support as crucial throughout assignments, and its absence was a stressor.

### 3.3 Challenges

International assignments present various challenges for expatriates, significantly impacting their WLB. The nature of expatriation varies, with scenarios involving either the expatriate alone or the relocation of the entire family, resulting in distinct adjustment difficulties.

**3.3.1 Organization-related challenges.** Numerous studies have reported limited organizational support for expatriates in managing WLB (Ballesteros-Leiva *et al.*, 2017; Cho and Chew, 2021; Dang *et al.*, 2022; Fischlmayr and Kollinger, 2010; Jais *et al.*, 2015; Schütter and Boerner, 2013; Shortland and Cummins, 2007). For instance, flexpatriate assignments are often managed informally by operational units without formal HR processes tailored to their unique needs (Tahir, 2021), resulting in unresolved challenges. Thus, organizations might need to rethink and redesign HR policies to better support flexpatriates' lifestyle and work demands, thereby enhancing assignment success and retention (Tahir, 2021). Despite the recognized importance of organizational support, many companies still fail to meet the specific needs of expatriates, particularly those on short-term international assignments (Jais *et al.*, 2015; Tahir, 2021). This gap between stated commitments and actual support underscores the necessity of comprehensive systems that respond to the unique challenges faced by expatriates.

Conventional WLB programs offered by organizations are often ill-suited to the needs of flexpatriates (Mayerhofer *et al.*, 2011). Initiatives such as flexible hours or onsite fitness facilities are typically designed for employees with stable, location-bound routines and fail to align with the highly mobile, unpredictable nature of flexpatriate work. For instance, fixed-time fitness sessions are often incompatible with frequent travel, reducing participation and diminishing program effectiveness. As a result, standard WLB measures frequently fall short in addressing the temporal (e.g. irregular hours) and spatial (e.g. constant mobility) demands inherent in flexpatriate roles. Organizations must therefore adopt more adaptable, context-sensitive support mechanisms tailored to the distinctive mobility patterns and challenges of this workforce segment (Mayerhofer *et al.*, 2011).

Shaffer *et al.* (2001) found that a lack of perceived organizational support increases expatriates' intentions to leave their international assignments prematurely. Organizational support provides essential resources for managing job demands and mitigates psychological withdrawal (Shaffer *et al.*, 2001).

The literature also reveals a marked absence of institutional support for academics engaged in short-term international teaching assignments (Jais *et al.*, 2015). Expatriate academics

frequently report inadequate support from their universities, not only regarding logistical arrangements but also in relation to emotional well-being and WLB (Jais *et al.*, 2015). This perceived lack of responsiveness to both personal and professional needs contributes to elevated stress and dissatisfaction, undermining overall balance and well-being. The consequences may extend beyond the individual, adversely affecting teaching performance and productivity. Furthermore, organizational support often remains narrowly focused on administrative tasks such as travel, neglecting critical dimensions such as family support, emotional care, and broader work-life integration. This limited, task-oriented approach fosters feelings of being undervalued and unsupported among academic expatriates (Jais *et al.*, 2015).

Effective communication is essential in organizations, particularly when managing expatriates on international assignments. Clear communication helps mitigate challenges in such contexts. Shortland and Cummins (2007) note that organizational difficulties often stem from inadequate communication regarding available support systems and WLB policies. A recurring issue is expatriates' lack of awareness of existing organizational practices designed to support their WLB. Studies indicate that many expatriates perceive their organizations as lacking such policies or failing to implement them effectively.

Organizational challenges are particularly pronounced for female expatriates, who often struggle to gain acceptance in managerial roles abroad. Their authority is frequently questioned, especially in countries with persistent gender biases, leading to heightened stress (Fischlmayr and Kollinger, 2010). Additionally, expatriates frequently report a lack of organizational commitment and inadequate communication. Unmet expectations regarding assignments often result from incomplete information about job roles and responsibilities (Fischlmayr and Kollinger, 2010). Another major challenge stemming from ineffective communication is repatriation, with many expatriates citing a lack of structured planning for their return (Fischlmayr and Kollinger, 2010). Expatriates often experience significant anxiety and stress when communication and planning regarding their repatriation are insufficient (Fischlmayr and Kollinger, 2010). Uncertainty about their professional and personal situation upon return can undermine focus and engagement during the international assignment. Many report difficulties securing appropriate roles post-assignment, highlighting a lack of structured support for career development and re-entry planning (Fischlmayr and Kollinger, 2010). Without a clear repatriation strategy or realistic career prospects, feelings of insecurity and frustration may emerge, negatively impacting motivation and emotional well-being. To mitigate these challenges, organizations should ensure transparent communication and implement targeted career support to facilitate smoother transitions, reduce stress, and improve assignment outcomes (Fischlmayr and Kollinger, 2010).

A critical challenge in expatriation is the failure to recognize expatriates' diverse needs across different life stages. Although tailored support is essential, organizations frequently overlook this requirement (Fischlmayr and Kollinger, 2010). Inadequate support often leads to feelings of being overwhelmed, disrupting both professional and personal equilibrium. Schütter and Boerner (2013) emphasize that the absence of instrumental and informational support heightens stress and dissatisfaction. Problem-solving assistance and guidance on administrative procedures are particularly vital during the initial stages of an assignment, yet their absence is commonly reported as a major concern.

A systematic review on expatriate families reveals that, although the adjustment of spouses and children is widely recognized as vital to assignment success, organizations often disregard the individual needs of family members during recruitment and support processes (Dang *et al.*, 2022). Expatriation significantly affects families, contributing to stress, work-family conflict, and adjustment challenges. However, families are seldom treated as internal stakeholders, resulting in insufficient organizational support for family-related issues (Dang *et al.*, 2022). Most organizations retain an expatriate-centric approach, offering limited consideration for the well-being of accompanying family members.

Disparities in support between SIEs and AEs further hinder WLB. SIEs often receive lower salaries, reduced logistical support, and fewer family-oriented resources, making it more difficult for them to achieve sustainable WLB (Ballesteros-Leiva *et al.*, 2017).

Lack of support in training, leave policies, and relocation logistics represents a major barrier to WLB, particularly during the early stages of expatriation (Cho and Chew, 2021). Additionally, host-country organizational cultures may compound these challenges. In competitive, hierarchical workplaces that reward long hours, expatriates often feel pressured to conform to local norms, even when these contradict formal WLB policies (Cho and Chew, 2021).

SIEs in Korea may face further challenges regarding talent management and promotion (Atay *et al.*, 2024). Employers, concerned about the potential for foreigners to leave the country unexpectedly, often perceive them as high-risk candidates for advancement. Moreover, promotions are influenced not only by performance but also by informal networks and perceived loyalty, areas where expatriates, lacking deep-rooted connections, are typically disadvantaged. Language barriers and cultural adaptation further hinder progression (Atay *et al.*, 2024). Organizational culture and informal work practices also pose difficulties. Employees are often expected to participate in after-hours team activities, which can encroach on personal and family time. For expatriates, particularly those from Western cultures with clearer work-life boundaries, this expectation can be stressful. Rooted in Confucian values of group harmony and loyalty, such participation is often viewed as essential for career success in Korean firms (Atay *et al.*, 2024).

**3.3.2 Family-related challenges.** The failure of expatriates or their families to adjust is a key factor in the unsuccessful completion of international assignments (Cho and Chew, 2021). Addressing family-related challenges requires distinguishing between *spillover* and *crossover* effects. Spillover refers to intra-individual processes where experiences in one life domain influence another (Lazarova *et al.*, 2010). For example, successful cultural adjustment can enhance work and family role adaptation within the same individual. In contrast, crossover involves inter-individual effects, where one partner's emotional state or adjustment influences the other's experience. An expatriate's positive adaptation may ease their partner's adjustment, while negative emotions can transfer across the relationship, potentially leading to mutual maladjustment (Lazarova *et al.*, 2010).

Expatriation often triggers significant identity and role shifts for accompanying family members, especially spouses or partners, including career disruptions, altered social networks, and redefined familial roles. These shifts can be sources of stress or personal growth, deeply affecting partners' engagement in the expatriate experience (Lazarova *et al.*, 2010). When both expatriates and partners adjust well across cultural, work, and family domains, they gain psychological stability and emotional well-being. This enables greater allocation of mental and physical resources, such as energy and attention, to their respective roles, fostering higher engagement and enhanced performance in both work and family contexts (Lazarova *et al.*, 2010). However, adjustment alone does not ensure high performance. While it provides a foundation, it is engagement that mediates the relationship between adjustment and outcomes. Adjustment cultivates psychological states such as meaning, safety, and availability, key precursors to engagement, which, in turn, translate into improved functioning at work and home (Lazarova *et al.*, 2010). Supporting these conditions for expatriates and their families is therefore essential to their overall success and well-being.

Both forms of work-family conflict, work interference with family and family interference with work, are found to be predictors of expatriates' intentions to withdraw from international assignments (Shaffer *et al.*, 2001). Moreover, high affective organizational commitment amplifies the positive relationship between work interference with family conflict and withdrawal intentions, meaning that highly committed expatriates may experience stronger withdrawal urges when work disrupts family life (Shaffer *et al.*, 2001). Similarly, strong family/marital commitment intensifies the effect of family interference with work conflict on the desire to leave the assignment, as conflicting family demands may push expats toward

withdrawal to restore the work-family balance (Shaffer *et al.*, 2001). Thus, commitment can exacerbate the negative impact of domain-specific conflicts, rather than shielding against them (Shaffer *et al.*, 2001).

Flexibility and rapid adaptability are critical for expatriates, particularly flexpatriates, and their families (Tahir, 2021). The sudden travel demands of expatriate work often necessitate immediate reorganization of personal and family responsibilities, frequently shifting these obligations to spouses or other family members. Such unpredictability strains family life, requiring a highly adaptable support system within the family unit. In situations where the family does not accompany the expatriate, the spouse may need to assume additional responsibilities, especially in childcare, often relying on support from the extended family (Tahir, 2021). This burden of adjustment places significant stress on young families, leading to feelings of guilt and anxiety for the expatriate (Jais *et al.*, 2015). Family separation associated with expatriation imposes both emotional and practical strains, including increased responsibilities for partners at home and disruptions to family routines and roles (Jais *et al.*, 2015). Mayerhofer *et al.* (2011) found that while overall perceptions of flexpatriation were positive, some participants acknowledged the challenges of maintaining personal relationships and a balanced social life. Nevertheless, most considered these drawbacks acceptable trade-offs, reflecting broader acceptance of the flexpatriate model. This outlook is often shaped by career-driven goals and the intrinsic benefits of global mobility. Many flexpatriates expressed general satisfaction with roles involving frequent international travel, citing professional and personal advantages such as career progression, expanded networks, and personal growth.

Atay *et al.* (2024) report that self-initiated expatriates in Korea face notable challenges with their children's integration, complicating overall family adjustment. Concerns often stem from discrimination and language barriers in public schools, where an emphasis on homogeneity and exclusive social circles can marginalize foreign children. Consequently, many expatriates opt for international schools, which offer culturally and linguistically accommodating environments. However, this choice limits their children's interaction with local peers and exposure to Korean culture. Such challenges in children's social inclusion may increase parental stress and hinder expatriates' emotional adjustment and sense of belonging (Atay *et al.*, 2024).

An expatriate's relationship status and partner's career orientation significantly affect work-life balance (WLB). Research suggests dual-career couples are more prone to high work-life conflict than those with only one career-focused partner (Mäkelä *et al.*, 2017). Extensive travel significantly impacts international business travelers, increasing time away from family and home, affecting the entire family (Mäkelä *et al.*, 2015). Travel is a major source of work-family imbalance, often causing guilt or uncertainty for travelers and even leading to spousal quarrels (Saarenpää, 2016). Travel fatigue can also cause irritability in the traveler, negatively impacting their partner and contributing to disagreements (Saarenpää, 2016). Work-family boundary management among international business travelers (IBTs) and their spouses is dynamic and shifts throughout the business travel cycle (Saarenpää, 2016). When IBTs are at home, boundaries between work and family are more integrated, though still shaped by individual preferences. Despite their physical presence, work frequently intrudes into family time, requiring ongoing negotiation. During trips, by contrast, physical and temporal distance promotes clearer segmentation between work and family for the traveler. However, this segmentation transfers responsibility to spouses, who often integrate work and family roles to manage the household alone (Saarenpää, 2016). In dual-career couples, spouses frequently adjust their work schedules, reducing hours or working evenings, to accommodate increased family duties, particularly when children are involved. The presence of dependent children intensifies this integration, whereas childless spouses report more flexibility in maintaining work focus. Many spouses liken this period to "single parenthood," requiring external support and substantial personal adaptation (Saarenpää, 2016).

Transitions – traveler departures and returns – are particularly disruptive (Saarenpää, 2016). Each departure demands reorganization of routines, while returns may temporarily unsettle established patterns and cause role confusion. The unpredictability and duration of trips further destabilize family life, as limited control over scheduling impedes effective work-family balance and contributes to emotional strain. Travelers often experience guilt over prolonged absences, while spouses shoulder increased logistical burdens (Saarenpää, 2016).

Global managers navigating international travel frequently encounter blurred work-family boundaries. To manage these challenges, they adopt various boundary strategies to maintain balance in a demanding, mobile context (Lirio, 2017). Temporal tactics include maintaining a standard Monday-to-Friday schedule while accommodating time zone differences, often by scheduling meetings during overlapping “primetime” hours and protecting family time when possible. Communicative tactics involve setting clear expectations with colleagues and family regarding availability and acceptable interruptions, helping reduce role conflict. Behavioral and physical strategies include using designated workspaces, establishing transition routines between roles, and managing technology use to support domain separation (Lirio, 2017).

Many global managers also benefit from flexible organizational cultures that support autonomy and adaptable work arrangements. Mobile and telepresence technologies enable them to stay professionally connected while attending to family obligations. Rather than causing conflict, technology is often viewed as an essential tool for maintaining work continuity across time zones without significantly increasing work-life tension (Lirio, 2017).

Managers with seniority or strong performance records often enjoy greater discretion in shaping their roles. This may include reducing travel frequency or modifying schedules to better integrate work and family responsibilities, enhancing their capacity to maintain balance amid global work demands (Lirio, 2017).

Additionally, female expatriates often face greater difficulties balancing personal and professional life. For example, expatriated women reported that the added responsibilities of managing the home and children, coupled with limited flexibility and leisure time, significantly contribute to the challenges of maintaining WLB abroad (Fischlmayr and Kollinger, 2010).

Schütter and Boerner (2013) identified family-work conflict as an energy depletion driver when attempting to address domestic issues, negatively impacting their professional responsibilities. The absence of family support during expatriation was further identified as a considerable source of stress, intensifying the difficulties faced by expatriates during their assignments.

Expatriation challenges expatriates and their partners, influenced by crossover and spillover effects between family and work roles, with self-efficacy as a key moderator (Reiche et al., 2023). High self-efficacy fosters positive spillover, while low self-efficacy can cause emotional strain. Self-efficacy can compensate for partner support but might also decrease sensitivity to the partner’s emotions. Considering the instability of family adjustment during relocation, organizations should support family engagement and customize training based on individual self-efficacy to improve expatriate success (Reiche et al., 2023).

Lirio (2014) presents a nuanced perspective on international business travel in global careers, particularly among Generation X managers. While frequent travel often disrupts family life, causes physical strain, and challenges consistent presence at home and work, it can be effectively managed through *travel discretion*, managers’ control over the timing, necessity, and mode of travel, which is vital for maintaining work-life balance. Travel discretion involves both advance planning and flexibility in execution. The ability to schedule trips ahead enables coordination with family, reduction of scheduling conflicts, and better alignment with domestic responsibilities. Flexibility during travel, such as postponing trips or opting for virtual meetings, allows managers to address unforeseen family needs and reduce fatigue (Lirio, 2014).

Technological tools like telepresence, videoconferencing, and collaboration platforms have become essential in reducing the need for physical travel and promoting work-life

integration. While managers find these tools effective substitutes in many situations, they recognize that certain tasks, such as building client trust or managing complex negotiations, still require face-to-face interaction. The ability to distinguish when physical presence is essential versus when virtual alternatives suffice further strengthens travel discretion and balance (Lirio, 2014).

Managers also manage personal obligations by rescheduling or delegating travel. Delegating to junior staff not only reduces personal burden but also supports talent development, making it a mutually advantageous strategy (Lirio, 2014). In sum, a combination of planning, flexibility, technological substitution, and strategic delegation enables global managers to meet travel demands while safeguarding personal and family well-being (Lirio, 2014).

**3.3.3 Work-related challenges.** Work-related factors significantly jeopardize expatriates' WLB. Lack of structured schedules and fair workload distribution increases stress, hindering management of personal and family responsibilities. Expatriates often face constant availability expectations, leading to excessive workloads across host and home countries (Tahir, 2021; Jais *et al.*, 2015). Hierarchical and competitive organizational cultures further obstruct WLB through long hours and frequent travel (Cho and Chew, 2021). Extended international travel significantly contributes to WLC, particularly for those with partners, disrupting routines and impacting work-personal life boundaries (Mäkelä *et al.*, 2015; Saarenpää, 2016).

Long working hours have emerged as a prominent work-related challenge to expatriates' WLB (Atay *et al.*, 2024; Cho and Chew, 2021; Jais *et al.*, 2015; Lirio, 2014; Mayerhofer *et al.*, 2011; Shortland and Cummins, 2007). Many expatriates report greater work strain during international assignments compared to domestic roles, with a significant number, particularly women, feeling overwhelmed. Notably, women reported these feelings more frequently than men, despite working slightly fewer hours (Shortland and Cummins, 2007). Intensive work demands frequently encroach upon family life, with late hours, weekend work, extensive travel, and social obligations cited as key contributors (Shortland and Cummins, 2007). Primary wage earners, responsible for their households' financial well-being, reported higher levels of WLB conflict and stress, likely due to heightened sensitivity to the effects of work pressure on family life.

Many expatriates perceive their WLB to be poorer than that of local colleagues in host countries (Shortland and Cummins, 2007). This perception is often linked to assignment-related pressures, such as the need to justify costs and meet expectations for return on investment. Long hours, frequent travel, and work-related commitments that intrude on personal time intensify work-life conflict. Expatriates frequently work evenings and weekends and undertake business trips averaging 5.6 days, often occurring at least once per month (Shortland and Cummins, 2007). These trips are rarely accompanied by family and are frequently scheduled over weekends or outside regular hours, typically without compensatory time off. The resulting prolonged family separation contributes to stress and dissatisfaction, which in some cases leads to early termination of international assignments (Shortland and Cummins, 2007).

While cultural understanding and workplace networks are crucial for business effectiveness, adapting to these networks requires time and effort. Frequent meetings can conflict with family responsibilities, worsening WLB (Atay *et al.*, 2024). Furthermore, the balance between efforts invested and rewards received significantly influences WLC and work-life enrichment (Mäkelä *et al.*, 2015). An imbalance leads to greater WLC and less enrichment.

Expatriates in academia encounter specific challenges, particularly in dedicating extra hours to class preparation before departure and during teaching assignments (Jais *et al.*, 2015). These efforts often go unrecognized by their institutions (Jais *et al.*, 2015).

The COVID-19 pandemic presented new WLB challenges for expatriates (Mello and Tomei, 2021), demanding adaptation to new work arrangements. Quarantine led to reported work-family conflicts despite reduced workloads from travel suspension, indicating deep-seated WLB issues (Kumpikaite-Valiuniene *et al.*, 2022). Interestingly, some found

satisfaction in manageable business travel, suggesting its absence does not automatically improve well-being (Kumpikaite-Valiuniene *et al.*, 2022). Nevertheless, some expatriates recognized their families' positive impact on WLB, enriching work-family integration (Mello and Tomei, 2021). This period highlighted the importance of flexibility and resilience. Post-quarantine, a shift towards integrated roles and fewer international assignments due to technology was anticipated (Mello and Tomei, 2021). To improve expatriate WLB and organizational effectiveness, Mello and Tomei (2021) suggest understanding family demands' impact on productivity, promoting healthy remote work, facilitating virtual skill-building, fostering cultural alignment, acknowledging self-directed work effects, strengthening global team unity, and prioritizing employee well-being by reassessing corporate values.

Mayerhofer *et al.* (2011) found that most expatriates perceived international travel as advantageous for career progression, professional networking, exposure, and personal enjoyment. In the case of flexpatriates, work-related challenges appear to be the predominant source of stress, outweighing concerns related to family or health. These individuals primarily experience difficulties associated with the nature of their work, including administrative burdens linked to travel arrangements, long and irregular working hours, and unproductive "dead" travel time (Mayerhofer *et al.*, 2011). This limited emphasis on caregiving responsibilities or health issues reflects a distinctly "work-first" orientation among flexpatriates, whereby professional demands are prioritized over personal or health-related needs. Such a perspective may be influenced by the demographic profile of the study sample, which included relatively few parents and female participants (Mayerhofer *et al.*, 2011). The findings suggest that support interventions for flexpatriates should focus on minimizing work-related inefficiencies and stressors rather than primarily addressing care or health-related concerns (Mayerhofer *et al.*, 2011). This is further supported by Schütter and Boerner (2013), who noted the perception of expatriation as a career booster and skill development opportunity. However, frequent, long travel eventually caused fatigue due to limited personal time, though career benefits were highly valued. Pinto and Maia (2015) also found some individuals use international assignments for self-fulfillment and positive self-regard, with work-oriented individuals not viewing work interfering with personal life as problematic, even finding work enriching. Conversely, less work-oriented individuals find these missions challenging for WLB and struggle with boundaries (Pinto and Maia, 2015). Higher-level individuals often had administrative support, fostering empowerment and flexibility. Some expatriates took pride in efficient task management despite the added time. While workload and travel disrupted WLB, participants, unlike in earlier studies (Mayerhofer *et al.*, 2011), did not express a desire to leave their jobs.

In the context of expatriate work, work-family conflict was primarily perceived as time-based, with some individuals expressing guilt over not dedicating enough time to their families due to work obligations (Schütter and Boerner, 2013). However, some expatriates report no significant reduction in family time, feeling they successfully managed to separate work from family life. Work-family enrichment was also a notable theme, as lessons learned at work positively influenced their family lives. Examples included becoming more attentive to communication nuances or learning to approach situations with patience and acceptance of what is beyond their control. Additionally, expatriation often fostered greater family cohesion, as members were compelled to rely more on one another while navigating new challenges (Schütter and Boerner, 2013). Fourteen interviewees viewed this increased focus on family as a positive experience, with six specifically highlighting more opportunities for family travel and activities during their assignment.

Travel demands in global careers, particularly for Global Generation X professionals, are notably exhausting due to the extensive time spent abroad and the broader scope of responsibilities required in comparison to domestic roles (Lirio, 2014). To manage these demands, they seek to minimize the duration of travel, emphasizing efficiency during trips to quickly return to their family routines, despite the physical and mental fatigue involved. Key factors contributing to satisfactory WLB in global careers include discretion over travel and

the strategic use of technology. Effective management of international travel hinges on two primary components of travel discretion: planning feasibility, which allows professionals to schedule trips in advance and coordinate with their families, and enactment flexibility, which provides the option to accept, defer, or delegate travel according to work or family needs. When combined with technology that reduces the necessity for travel, these strategies enable professionals to better manage the competing demands of work and home life (Lirio, 2014).

Lirio (2017) further examines how global managers navigate work-life complexities through nuanced boundary management strategies, identifying four main tactics: temporal (allocating time across zones), communicative (setting expectations to manage interruptions), behavioral (using routines), and physical (spatial separation like home or hotel work). These managers fluidly blend segmentation and integration based on context, rather than strictly adhering to one. Technology is a double-edged sword, potentially blurring boundaries but largely essential for connectivity, prompting managers to establish personal usage guidelines. Organizational flexibility, including remote work support and adaptive scheduling, is vital, fostering trust and enabling sustained well-being and performance in international roles (Lirio, 2017).

Lazarova *et al.* (2010) defend that as demands and resources evolve over the course of an assignment, there are cumulative effects that need to be addressed. It also questions whether engagement in one role (work or family) enhances or depletes engagement in the other, suggesting this depends on individual differences such as role salience and personality. Gender is another complicating factor, with female expatriates potentially facing unique challenges, such as limited organizational support or greater family responsibilities. Lastly, Lazarova *et al.* (2010) underscore the difficulty of empirically testing such a multifaceted model, especially with mobile populations, and call for more longitudinal and partner-inclusive research. These insights carry significant implications for organizational practices, urging companies to offer stronger support to expatriates and their families and to consider both adjustment and engagement in assignment planning and success metrics.

Reiche *et al.* (2023) also found that self-efficacy moderates the spillover between family and work domains. When self-efficacy is high, engagement in family life positively influences engagement at work. Conversely, low self-efficacy leads to negative spillover, where family involvement drains energy and reduces work engagement (Reiche *et al.*, 2023). Overall, general self-efficacy determines when and how partner adjustment affects expatriate adjustment and whether this extends to the work domain. High self-efficacy enables expatriates to maintain work engagement despite family challenges, while low self-efficacy increases reliance on partner adjustment and vulnerability to negative spillover. Ultimately, the interaction between the adjustment levels of both expatriates and their partners influences engagement in both family and work roles, though benefits across domains depend on personal resources such as self-efficacy (Reiche *et al.*, 2023).

*3.3.4 Health and well-being-related challenges.* Previous research has consistently shown that conflicts between work and personal life domains negatively impact expatriates' subjective well-being (life satisfaction) and psychological well-being (self-acceptance, growth) (Harris, 2004; Grant-Vallone and Ensher, 2001).

Significant health concerns are linked to flexpatriate assignments, especially regarding healthy lifestyles (Tahir, 2021). Irregular schedules disrupt routines, leading to unhealthy habits like excessive coffee and frequent business meals, causing unbalanced diets and hindering regular eating and exercise. Tahir (2021) notes specific risks: erratic meals, disrupted sleep from time zone changes, and inactivity during travel, which can increase cardiovascular and musculoskeletal problems. Kumpikaite-Valiuniene *et al.* (2022) found that even with reduced travel during COVID-19, international business travelers reported increased health concerns and psychological distress. This suggests that health risks in flexpatriate roles are not solely due to physical routines but are also intensified by the broader work context, especially during crises, further complicating work-life balance (Kumpikaite-Valiuniene *et al.*, 2022).

Similarly, [Mabkhot and Al-Ameryeen \(2023\)](#) emphasize that well-being and satisfaction with WLB are crucial for expatriates to manage job demands effectively. Physical health and wellness play a key role in stress management, preventing professional responsibilities from overwhelming personal life. Prioritizing well-being not only enhances WLB but also provides mental relief, helping to establish boundaries that safeguard personal time amidst professional obligations ([Mabkhot and Al-Ameryeen, 2023](#)).

Research indicates that expatriates experience work-to-life enrichment as positively influencing their subjective well-being. This aligns with broader findings that such enrichment increases job satisfaction ([Kempen et al., 2015](#)). Additionally, findings highlight that life-domain conflicts, which lead to resource loss, have a more substantial effect on expatriates' well-being than resource gains resulting from enrichment. This supports the psychological emphasis on resource loss's greater impact than resource gain ([Ballesteros-Leiva et al., 2017](#)).

The intrusion of work into personal life has further implications for expatriates' mental health. Lower levels of perceived WLB correlate with higher incidences of depression, anxiety, and health concerns ([Grant-Vallone and Ensher, 2001](#)). The nature of flexpatriation, characterized by frequent international travel, introduces unique challenges by inducing high anxiety levels that can be overwhelming for some individuals, while stimulating for others ([Tahir, 2021](#)). [Shortland and Cummins \(2007\)](#) also point to stress and emotional imbalance, partly stemming from long working hours and the lack of personal and family time, as contributing factors to physical and mental illnesses. The separation from family and friends leads to feelings of loneliness and isolation among expatriates, primarily due to a lack of social contact and limited time resulting from extended working hours ([Fischlmayr and Kollinger, 2010](#)). Similarly, concern over childcare is identified as a major stress factor, directly influencing WLB.

### 3.4 Gender/female perception

Historically, the majority of expatriates have been male, but the proportion of female expatriates is steadily increasing. This shift is driven by factors such as higher education levels among women and a shrinking pool of male candidates available for expatriate positions ([Mäkelä et al., 2011](#)). Career development and financial rewards are key motivators for those considering international assignments, including female workers. Expatriation provides opportunities for professional growth, skill development, and increased responsibility, which can enhance long-term career prospects ([Shortland, 2018](#)).

Changes in societal expectations and globalization have contributed to a shift in women's priorities, who now aim to balance both career and family responsibilities. Rather than prioritizing one domain at the expense of the other, contemporary approaches increasingly focus on achieving success in both spheres. Economic incentives, along with the availability of international assignments, provide opportunities for career advancement while maintaining family commitments ([Shortland, 2018](#)). Research on Indian women in the IT sector highlights the role of expatriation in challenging traditional gender expectations, which often position women as dependent on their parents or, after marriage, on their husbands and in-laws. International assignments are perceived as a means of asserting professional identities and navigating entrenched societal norms, offering women greater independence and autonomy in their personal and professional lives ([Shah and Barker, 2022](#)).

To promote greater gender diversity in expatriation, organizations should design long-term assignments that allow sufficient time for career development and family adjustment. Rotational and commuter assignments should also be optimized to provide better outcomes in both professional and personal life. Organizations must recognize women's effectiveness in expatriate roles and avoid losing valuable talent by reducing long-term assignments in favor of flexible options that accommodate the desired WLB ([Shortland, 2021](#)).

Research has shown that long-term assignments are the most popular among female expatriates, as they provide stability for families and foster social integration. These assignments

allow for establishing a home environment conducive to professional success and personal well-being (Shortland, 2021). In contrast, while somewhat favored, short-term, accompanied assignments offer limited career benefits and often disrupt family life, particularly when undertaken solo. Rotational assignments, though predictable in terms of home life, are perceived as providing limited career advancement opportunities. Commuter assignments, while sometimes necessary, contribute little to career development and negatively impact WLB, often requiring sacrifices in both career and family spheres.

International business travel is stressful and negatively impacts WLB, regardless of gender (Kollinger-Santer and Fischlmayr, 2013). Still, women often experience more intense stress due to multiple demands and time constraints (Kollinger-Santer and Fischlmayr, 2013). They usually have primary responsibility for private life, childcare, and household organization, while men tend to have a more passive family role and report less stress (Kollinger-Santer and Fischlmayr, 2013). Family responsibilities and the availability of family support are consistently highlighted as critical elements shaping women's willingness to expatriate (Dang et al., 2022). Female expatriates often encounter unique stressors related to managing family obligations alongside the challenges of adjusting to a new cultural and professional environment (Dang et al., 2022).

Female expatriates experience greater work-life conflict than their male counterparts, with these challenges exacerbated in dual-career couples where both partners pursue professional growth. The persistence of traditional gender roles, which place a disproportionate share of domestic responsibilities on women, contributes to this imbalance and heightens the tension between professional and personal life domains (Mäkelä et al., 2017).

Female expatriates face greater work-life conflict than their male counterparts, especially in dual-career couples pursuing professional growth. Persistent traditional gender roles, placing more domestic duties on women, contribute to this imbalance (Mäkelä et al., 2017). Single individuals or those in single-career relationships generally manage WLB more easily, while dual-career couples, particularly with professional commitment and travel, experience greater tension (Kollinger-Santer and Fischlmayr, 2013). Within these couples, traditional roles persist, with women handling most household and family duties even with work and travel. At the same time, men acknowledge less time with children/friends but do not see domestic tasks as burdens (Kollinger-Santer and Fischlmayr, 2013). Young children, especially under ten, significantly increase stress for women managing childcare and routines during travel. At the same time, men rarely report these responsibilities, and older children are generally not seen as stressors (Kollinger-Santer and Fischlmayr, 2013).

Further evidence suggests that female expatriates report lower levels of WLB compared to their counterparts residing in India. This disparity is primarily attributed to the absence of support from extended families, a resource commonly available to women in their home environments. Notably, demographic factors such as marital status, spouse's employment, age, and years of experience have been found to exert no significant influence on WLB among female expatriates (Sulphay and Faisal, 2020).

Comparative analysis reveals that Indian women repatriates in the IT sector report better WLB during international assignments than in their home country. The structured work culture prevalent in host locations, particularly in Western countries, emphasizes regular work hours and employee well-being. This environment allows individuals to prioritize self-care and pursue personal interests, contrasting with the demanding and unstructured nature of work in Indian IT firms (Shah and Barker, 2022).

Salamin (2021) found that single and childless female expatriates are often subject to workplace assumptions suggesting they have fewer personal obligations than colleagues with families. This perception increases expectations for extended availability, including working overtime, on weekends, or undertaking frequent travel. Consequently, their personal time is undervalued, contributing to heightened work-life conflict. Salamin (2021) further argues that organizational norms often reflect a hierarchy of personal commitments, prioritizing family-related responsibilities over social engagements. As a result, single and childless women

frequently encounter unrealistic work demands. The study underscores the need for organizational awareness and equitable recognition of employees' personal lives. Acknowledging the diverse forms of personal commitments and offering flexible working conditions could alleviate work-life conflict for single expatriates and foster a more inclusive workplace environment (Salamin, 2021).

According to Harris (2004), work-family conflict and adjustment research lacks relevance for women on international assignments due to outdated methods, a domestic focus, and static perspectives. Much of the existing literature is US-centric, relies on old data, and overlooks mobility and cultural diversity factors. Based on a model integrating gender, work, family, and adjustment, focusing on female expatriates, Harris (2004) suggests that gender-based work-family conflict is heightened in these contexts, where relocating families can blur the boundaries between work and home life. This disruption of traditional family roles adds to the stress of female expatriates, who must also navigate new work pressures and cultural adjustments. Gender role theory identifies three key areas, work, partner, and family considerations, that influence the experiences of female expatriates in cultures with traditional values. Societal expectations and organizational biases often challenge workplace integration, particularly in environments where traditional gender roles prevail (Harris, 2004). Cultural and societal norms in host countries can further contribute to feelings of exclusion and conflicts between personal and professional responsibilities. Balancing practical needs with career demands remains a persistent challenge, highlighting the complex interplay between cultural expectations and professional aspirations.

Lastly, it is worth noting a recognized gender bias in existing research on family influences women's decisions to accept international assignments, with much of the literature disproportionately focusing on female expatriates while overlooking their male counterparts (Dang *et al.*, 2022).

#### 4. Discussion

The impact of adaptation on expatriates' WLB is multifaceted and shaped by personal, cultural, and organizational factors. Various adaptation styles influence WLB differently, indicating that no single approach is universally effective (Bader *et al.*, 2018). Professional and personal lives are balancing during international assignments, as they are closely linked to expats' effective international adaptation (Mabkhot and Al-Ameryeen, 2023). Integrating local cultural norms and practices facilitates a more harmonious balance between work and personal responsibilities, reducing stress and fostering a sense of stability. Alignment between an expatriate's personal work-life boundaries and the expectations of the host culture is crucial for achieving WLB (Tahir, 2023). When personal norms align with host country practices, expatriates tend to experience lower stress levels and higher overall satisfaction. Support mechanisms, including language training, cultural orientation programs, and social integration initiatives, play a significant role in enhancing WLB by fostering a sense of stability in diverse environments (Mabkhot and Al-Ameryeen, 2023). Cultural adaptation contributes to improved work performance and enhances personal well-being through the development of cross-cultural competencies. Pre-departure training and ongoing support initiatives are essential in helping expatriates adjust to the work-life norms of the host country, ensuring a smoother transition and greater overall well-being (Fischlmayr and Kollinger, 2010).

Expatriation activities involve work-, family-, culture-, and organizational-related activities that influence WLB. Similarly, those activities demand individual-, family-, and organizational-based support, which are closely aligned with the principles of COR theory as individuals strive to acquire, maintain, and protect resources that are valuable for their well-being (Hobfoll, 1989). Expatriates face significant challenges in preserving their personal and professional resources when adapting to new cultural and organizational environments.

The literature predominantly emphasizes organizational support in facilitating cultural adaptation, framing the organization as the key driver of successful outcomes (Mabkhot and

[Al-Ameryeen, 2023](#)). While organizational assistance is vital, this perspective underestimates the expatriates' own agency in managing adaptation. Expatriates bring personal resilience and strategies that are equally important in shaping WLB outcomes. Therefore, organizations must balance structured support mechanisms with efforts to empower expatriates to manage their adaptation autonomously. Encouraging self-management could enhance the effectiveness of organizational initiatives and support a more adaptive workforce.

#### 4.1 Cultural adaptation

Cultural challenges in certain regions, such as Asia, underscore the need for culturally sensitive support strategies ([Atay et al., 2024](#)). Despite the various available supports, organizational support remains foundational for successful expatriate adjustment and integration ([Ballesteros-Leiva et al., 2018](#)).

Cultural adaptation can significantly reduce the stress and anxiety of navigating a new culture. It also facilitates the development of meaningful social connections with locals. By understanding and adapting to local norms, customs, and expectations, expatriates can avoid cultural misunderstandings, reduce social friction, and increase social support. Effective cultural adaptation enhances communication and collaboration with colleagues and supervisors, which supports expatriates in building stronger working relationships and improving their overall work experience. These aspects reinforce the resource-gain perspective of the COR theory by increasing social support, reducing stress and anxiety, and improving communication and collaboration.

Boundary theory emphasizes the proactive role of the individual in managing these interfaces, highlighting that it is not just about passively receiving organizational support but actively shaping one's boundaries. Conversely, when cultural misadaptation occurs, WLB is jeopardized as it leads to a sense of resource loss. Difficulty in adapting to a new culture can result in heightened stress, anxiety, and feelings of isolation and loneliness, thereby depleting psychological resources and negatively impacting overall well-being. Failure to adapt to local norms and build meaningful social connections can exacerbate social isolation, depriving individuals of crucial social support and contributing to feelings of loneliness and depression. When individuals feel overwhelmed by cultural differences and cannot navigate the new environment effectively, they may experience a loss of control and autonomy, undermining their sense of self-efficacy and well-being. Cultural misunderstandings and communication breakdowns can lead to frustration, conflict, and deteriorating working relationships, depleting valuable social and professional resources. Similarly, based on boundary theory, expatriation inherently disrupts established WLB boundaries as moving and adapting to another country with different work norms. The need to build a new social life contributes to re-establishing new boundaries. Similarly, COR theory helps interpret these effects: cultural adaptation can either conserve resources (when successful) or deplete them (when challenging).

Cultural adaptation significantly influences expatriates' satisfaction with WLB. However, the literature focuses on organizational support, often overlooking expatriates' strategies. Cultural adaptation should not be viewed solely as a managerial responsibility but as a personal journey that varies between individuals. Many studies fail to capture the subjective nuances of this process, leading to generalized recommendations that may not address individual needs.

#### 4.2 Support and WLB

Organizational support is critical in facilitating expatriates' adjustment to new cultures and work environments, significantly influencing their WLB ([Grant-Vallone and Ensher, 2001](#); [Mabkhot and Al-Ameryeen, 2023](#); [Tahir, 2021](#)). This support includes both tangible resources, such as language training and relocation assistance, and intangible elements like health and well-being services, which are essential for expatriates' adaptation ([Fischlmayr and Kollinger, 2010](#); [Grant-Vallone and Ensher, 2001](#); [Mabkhot and Al-Ameryeen, 2023](#)). Effective

organizational support can prevent stress-related issues and enhance expatriates' well-being (Grant-Vallone and Ensher, 2001).

COR theory posits that individuals strive to acquire, conserve, and protect resources (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001). When individuals perceive a threat to their resources or experience a loss, they experience stress and may engage in behaviors to regain or protect their resources. Consequently, individual-related support from family and friends serves as a crucial resource buffer, mitigating stress and enhancing WLB (Ballesteros-Leiva *et al.*, 2018). Support from coworkers and roommates provides emotional and social resources, fostering social networks, while engagement with religious communities further enhances overall well-being (Kempen *et al.*, 2015; Salamin, 2021). Language training and cultural preparation also improve individuals' ability to navigate the host country and build social connections, thereby increasing their personal resources (Mabkhot and Al-Ameryeen, 2023). Similarly, nurturing personal interests and hobbies, particularly when encouraged by organizations, provides a sense of fulfillment and contributes to overall well-being (Shah and Barker, 2022).

Organizational support helps expatriates establish and maintain healthy boundaries, as, for example, relocation assistance can help create a separate and stable home environment in the new country, reinforcing the work-home boundary. Similarly, providing language and cultural training equips expatriates to better manage the boundary between their culture and the host culture, reducing boundary ambiguity and potential conflict. On the other hand, the lack of support can erode important boundaries, blurring the lines between appropriate and inappropriate behavior and causing social boundary issues.

The resource loss perspective is particularly relevant when a lack of social support, especially for female expatriates, leads to loneliness and social isolation, threatening their social resources and increasing stress. Strong social ties from home and within the host country provide crucial emotional and practical support, especially for women, enhancing their WLB (Salamin, 2021; Sulphrey and Faisal, 2020). Furthermore, a lack of flexibility and autonomy in work arrangements can result in a perceived loss of control over an individual's time and energy, negatively impacting WLB.

Another challenge arises when expatriates are accompanied by family members who face adaptation difficulties (Fischlmayr and Kollinger, 2010). Although some organizations support expatriates, they often overlook the needs of accompanying spouses or families. This lack of comprehensive support can hinder the overall success of the expatriate's mission, especially when the family's well-being is affected (Jais *et al.*, 2015; Tahir, 2021).

From the resource-gain perspective, organizations can foster family-related support by providing assistance for dual-career couples, such as employment opportunities for spouses, which enhances family resources and reduces stress. Facilitating access to quality childcare allows parents to focus on their careers while maintaining a healthy WLB (Fischlmayr and Kollinger, 2010). Conversely, from the resource loss perspective, extended periods of separation from family and friends can strain relationships and threaten family resources. Similarly, access to suitable childcare in the host country can significantly impact WLB for parents and should be adequately addressed.

Regarding work-related support, several resource-gain aspects are noteworthy. Relocation assistance, language training, and financial incentives provide valuable tangible resources. In addition, flexible work arrangements, work-from-home options, and supportive supervisors offer intangible resources, such as autonomy and control, which help reduce work-related stress (Cho and Chew, 2021; Fischlmayr and Kollinger, 2010). Supportive supervisors who understand personal boundaries and respect WLB provide emotional and instrumental support, further enhancing overall well-being.

The resource loss perspective within COR theory suggests that inadequate organizational support for administrative tasks, a lack of cultural training, and insufficient relocation assistance can lead to stress, frustration, and a sense of being unsupported (Grant-Vallone and Ensher, 2001; Mabkhot and Al-Ameryeen, 2023). Regarding specific work-related aspects,

long working hours, excessive travel demands, and inflexible work arrangements can result in work-life conflict and the depletion of personal resources.

From a resource-gain perspective, organizations implementing comprehensive WLB programs, such as flexible work arrangements, mindfulness initiatives, and family-friendly policies, provide valuable resources that enhance employee well-being. However, a discrepancy between organizational claims of WLB support and the actual support provided can lead to frustration and a sense of betrayal, ultimately threatening trust and employee well-being, in line with the resource loss perspective of COR theory (Mayerhofer *et al.*, 2011; Shortland and Cummins, 2007).

Organizational support is a crucial resource that helps expatriates manage stress and maintain WLB. Tangible resources such as language training and relocation assistance correspond to the resource acquisition component of COR Theory, where expatriates are equipped with tools that reduce the risk of resource depletion. Intangible support mechanisms, including well-being services and cultural adaptation programs, contribute to the protection of psychological resources by mitigating stress and fostering a sense of stability (Grant-Vallone and Ensher, 2001).

The role of expatriates' personal agency in managing their adaptation is aligned with COR theory's notion of proactive resource investment. When expatriates engage in cultural learning and self-management strategies, they actively invest in personal resources, which can lead to resource-gain cycles and enhanced WLB outcomes. Conversely, insufficient organizational support or misalignment between expatriates' expectations and provided resources can lead to resource loss cycles, exacerbating stress and work-life conflict (Tahir, 2023). Furthermore, the discussion on expatriates' family dynamics underscores the concept of resource interdependence within COR theory. The well-being of accompanying family members can significantly impact an expatriate's resource pool, either contributing to resource gain through emotional and social support or leading to loss when adaptation challenges arise (Fischlmayr and Kollinger, 2010). Providing comprehensive support to expatriates and their families is thus essential to promote successful assignments.

Organizational and individual support are crucial for equipping expatriates with the tools to effectively manage the boundaries between their work life, personal life, and the host culture. Difficulties in cultural adaptation and WLB often stem from challenges in establishing and maintaining healthy boundaries in a new and demanding environment. Boundary theory also provides a valuable lens to analyze how these boundary dynamics influence the resource conservation and loss processes described by COR theory, as physical and temporal boundaries are often difficult to maintain in expatriation due to blurred organizational expectations and cultural differences. Moreover, as organizational, family, and social resources play a pivotal role in strengthening these boundaries relocation assistance and language training strengthen physical and temporal boundaries by stabilizing daily routines and facilitating integration (Fischlmayr and Kollinger, 2010; Cho and Chew, 2021).

#### 4.3 Challenges and WLB

COR theory is well-suited for addressing WLB challenges encountered during expatriation. The resource loss perspective is especially relevant when examining individual-related challenges, particularly in the following circumstances (Cho and Chew, 2021; Fischlmayr and Kollinger, 2010; Jais *et al.*, 2015; Tahir, 2021): (1) when expatriates are inadequately prepared to adjust to new environments, cultural norms, and unforeseen circumstances, resulting in stress and a perceived loss of personal control; (2) when expatriates experience frequent travel, irregular schedules, and disruptions to their daily routines, which can lead to physical and mental health issues; (3) when expatriates face a lack of social support and limited social connections due to cultural differences, language barriers, and extended working hours; (4) when the demands of work and family life, potentially exacerbated by travel and cultural differences, result in role overload; (5) when female expatriates encounter gender biases and

challenges in balancing career and family responsibilities; and (6) when expatriates experience a perceived loss of autonomy due to the expectation of increased flexibility in the absence of family obligations.

The resource loss perspective also applies to family-related challenges, particularly in two key areas: marital strain and family disruption, and childcare challenges. The former often arises due to extended periods of separation, unpredictable travel schedules, and the increased burden of family responsibilities on spouses. Difficulties in finding suitable childcare and the impact of childcare responsibilities on both parents' careers are examples of the latter (Mäkelä *et al.*, 2017).

Three primary work-related challenges (Grant-Vallone and Ensher, 2001; Mabkhot and Al-Ameryeen, 2023; Shortland and Cummins, 2007) include organizational support, excessive workload, and travel demands. Inadequate communication, limited assistance with administrative tasks, insufficient relocation support, and a lack of awareness regarding WLB policies contribute to the depletion of organizational resources that expatriates rely on to fulfill their assignments successfully. Similarly, the absence of clear expectations, inadequate training, and limited career development opportunities can result in uncertainty and a loss of career-related resources. Long working hours, constant availability, and unrealistic expectations may contribute to burnout and work-life conflict. Moreover, frequent and unpredictable travel can disrupt routines, strain personal relationships, and significantly reduce individual and family time.

Inadequate communication regarding WLB policies, support systems, and organizational expectations can erode employees' trust and confidence in their employer. The limited support provided to SIEs compared to AEs can create a perception of inequity and a loss of perceived fairness (Ballesteros-Leiva *et al.*, 2017). Furthermore, rigid work schedules, inflexible travel policies, and a lack of support for diverse family structures may result in losing autonomy and control (Alomari and AlAhmari, 2023). COR theory effectively highlights the organizational challenges that demand developing a supportive work environment, emphasizing the importance of promoting flexible and adaptable work arrangements.

Expatriates face several boundary-related and resource-depleting challenges, including, e.g. psychological boundary erosion due to cultural dissonance and lack of social support; temporal boundary strain from excessive travel and irregular working hours; and physical boundary collapse in remote working or shared living arrangements with limited privacy.

Boundary theory highlights that expatriates who actively set boundaries (e.g. time for family, disengaging from work after hours) are investing personal resources to protect other resources and enhance WLB. As such, successful cultural adaptation often involves negotiating boundaries with colleagues, supervisors, and the local community. Boundary theory provides a framework to understand these negotiation processes and their impact on resource gain or loss.

Organizations must create tailored support programs that align with expatriates' evolving resource needs, fostering resilience and enhancing overall well-being. If work-life balance is to be achieved to meet demands in both work and personal life, personal-, work-, family-, and organizational-related activities need to be analyzed to minimize work-life conflict.

These boundary-related challenges lead to role overload, stress, and WLC, classic symptoms of resource loss (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001). As such, if effective organizational support acts as a crucial resource that expatriates can leverage to achieve work-life balance and mitigate stress future studies need to address how expatriates balance resource acquisition, maintenance, and protection in their quest for cultural adaptation and professional performance in international assignments.

#### 4.4 Gender/female perception

Gendered experiences of boundary management further illustrate the role of COR and Boundary Theory. Female expatriates often face heightened challenges in balancing work and

personal roles, particularly in cultures with rigid gender norms. They may experience weaker physical and psychological boundaries due to disproportionate domestic responsibilities and limited organizational support.

Adopting an individual-based perspective, challenging traditional norms may enhance WLB among expatriates, which is in line with the COR theory's resource gain perspective. By embracing international assignments, women can challenge conventional gender roles and attain greater autonomy and independence in their personal and professional lives. Successfully navigating the challenges associated with international assignments, such as cultural adaptation and balancing work and family demands, can significantly enhance women's self-efficacy and confidence. Moreover, international assignments offer valuable career development opportunities, including gaining international experience, acquiring new skills, and expanding professional networks.

Organizations that support gender diversity, offer flexible work arrangements, and provide adequate support for female expatriates can create a resource-rich environment that enhances WLB. Providing clear career paths, mentorship programs, and opportunities for professional development can empower female expatriates, increasing their sense of accomplishment and self-worth. Similarly, strong family support, including that provided by spouses, partners, and extended family members, can offer crucial emotional and practical assistance, enabling women to manage work-life demands better and conserve their resources. From the perspective of COR theory, the organization- and family-based perspectives serve as essential resource bases for supporting WLB in expatriation processes. From the boundary theory perspective, those support activities help women build stronger boundaries, gain autonomy, and protect their resources, contributing to enhanced WLB.

Conversely, from the resource loss perspective, disproportionate domestic responsibilities placed on women can lead to increased stress, fatigue, and a lack of time for personal and professional development. The absence of family support, particularly for women who relocate without their families, can contribute to heightened stress, loneliness, and a sense of isolation. Additionally, gender biases and discriminatory practices within organizations can hinder women's career advancement opportunities, create a hostile work environment, and erode their sense of self-worth and confidence. These individual-, family-, and organization-based challenges exemplify the resource loss perspective, based on COR theory, when WLB activities are absent.

By acknowledging the female expatriates' unique challenges and opportunities and implementing targeted strategies to address these issues, organizations can foster a more equitable and supportive environment for all employees. From the boundary management perspective, this approach promotes inclusive and supportive workplaces and mitigates significant resource depletion, thereby enhancing overall WLB and organizational effectiveness.

The literature often disproportionately focuses on female expatriates, potentially overlooking the needs of male expatriates (Salamin, 2021). While research has extensively documented how female expatriates benefit from strong social support networks, the support needs of male expatriates receive less attention. This gender-specific focus raises questions about the comprehensiveness of expatriate support systems. Male expatriates may face similar or different challenges related to social integration, which has not been as thoroughly explored or addressed.

From the boundary management perspective, social, organizational, and family support actions act as a crucial boundary protecting an expatriate's resources. Gendered expectations, both from the expatriate's home and host cultures, significantly shape the pressures and challenges of managing boundaries between work, family, and social life. Organizational and familial support systems play a crucial role in helping expatriates establish and maintain healthy boundaries, influencing their resource availability and WLB. The lack of support or gender bias can lead to the erosion of crucial boundaries, resulting in stress and resource depletion, as COR theory describes.

## 5. Future research agenda

### 5.1 Gender/female perception

While organizations are recognized as pivotal in supporting expatriates, significant gaps remain. These include how organizational support mechanisms (e.g. mentorship programs, flexible work policies) vary in effectiveness for male versus female expatriates, the extent of gender bias in such programs, and how gender intersects with factors like race, age, or nationality to influence access to resources.

In family dynamics, further research could explore how diverse family structures (e.g. single parents, dual-career couples) shape the WLB experiences of male and female expatriates. Similarly, comparative studies on the WLB of male and female expatriates who relocate without families could illuminate family-related gender disparities.

From a cultural perspective, examining female expatriates' experiences in male-dominated cultures compared to more gender-equal societies would provide valuable insights. Understanding how expatriates navigate conflicting gender norms between their home and host cultures could enhance cross-cultural adaptation strategies. Based on the results, some research proposals and their justification are proposed in [Table 7](#).

### 5.2 Cultural adaptation

Cultural adaptation significantly shapes expatriates' integration into host countries. Since the role of individual effort in adaptation remains underexplored, future research could identify effective personal coping mechanisms for reducing stress and anxiety. The perceived cultural gap between home and host countries warrants attention, as it likely affects adaptation efforts and WLB.

The experiences of accompanying family members are critical yet underexamined. Future studies should assess the cultural adaptation challenges faced by spouses and children

**Table 7.** Research proposals on gender/female issues

Research proposal	Justification
To investigate female expatriates throughout their international assignments to understand how WLC evolves, considering factors like career progression, family changes, and adaptation to the host culture	This longitudinal study could study the evolution of WLC for female expatriates throughout their assignments, complementing previous studies ( <a href="#">Blanco and Golik, 2023</a> ; <a href="#">Lirio, 2017</a> ; <a href="#">Salamín, 2021</a> ; <a href="#">Shortland, 2018</a> ; <a href="#">Sulphéy and Faisal, 2020</a> )
To investigate how inclusive leaders (or male colleagues) can contribute to a more supportive work environment that fosters better WLB for female expatriates	This could clarify specific behaviors and initiatives that make a positive difference, complementing previous studies ( <a href="#">Atay et al., 2024</a> ; <a href="#">Cho and Chew, 2021</a> ; <a href="#">Schütter and Boerner, 2013</a> ; <a href="#">Tahir, 2023</a> )
To conduct a comparative study examining the WLB and career progression trajectories of female expatriates in traditional long-term accompanied assignments versus those short-term, flexible arrangements (e.g. rotational, commuter)	This comparative study could clarify how career outcomes for female expats differ according to assignment types, complementing previous studies ( <a href="#">Lämsä et al., 2017</a> ; <a href="#">Pinto and Maia, 2015</a> ; <a href="#">Shah and Barker, 2022</a> ; <a href="#">Shortland, 2021</a> ; <a href="#">Sulphéy and Faisal, 2020</a> )
To explore the reasons behind female expatriates' preferences for different assignment types, considering their circumstances, career goals, and WLB priorities	This could clarify the factors influencing female expatriates' preferences for different assignment types, complementing previous studies ( <a href="#">Shortland, 2021</a> ; <a href="#">Schütter and Boerner, 2013</a> ; <a href="#">Sulphéy and Faisal, 2020</a> )
To compare the experiences of WLC and the availability and effectiveness of support systems for female expatriates working in host countries with more traditional versus more egalitarian gender norms	This could address the influence of support systems for female expats in countries with varying gender norms, complementing previous studies ( <a href="#">Mäkelä et al., 2017</a> ; <a href="#">Shah and Barker, 2022</a> )

**Source(s):** Authors' own work

and how these experiences influence expatriates' adaptation and WLB. Moreover, examining the adverse effects of family misadaptation on expatriates' adjustment and well-being would address a notable research gap. Based on those aspects, some research proposals and their justification are proposed in [Table 8](#).

### 5.3 Support and WLB

While family dynamics significantly influence expatriates' WLB, accompanying family members are often overlooked in research. As expatriates usually experience resource gain and loss cycles, context-specific research could analyze whether longer assignments lead to resource accumulation through deeper adaptation or to resource depletion due to fatigue and prolonged family separations. Based on the results, some research proposals and their justification are proposed in [Table 9](#).

### 5.4 Challenges and WLB

The challenges arising from inadequate preparation highlight the importance of pre-departure training tailored to address expatriates' cultural adaptation and resilience. Investigating interventions that foster expatriates' autonomy and control during adaptation would provide a complementary perspective.

Frequent travel and irregular schedules, common among expatriates, warrant further research into their psychological and physical effects on health and WLB. Based on the results, some research proposals and their justification are proposed in [Table 10](#).

Finally, it would be advisable to conduct longitudinal studies, exploring differences in perceptions, for both SIEs and AEs returning to the home countries, to explore if there are changes in the perception of pre- and post-international missions. Similarly, quantitative studies to validate and generalize qualitative findings are advisable.

**Table 8.** Research proposals on cultural aspects

Research proposal	Justification
To conduct a longitudinal study tracking expatriates from pre-departure through their assignments to examine how their adaptation styles evolve and the coping mechanisms for reducing stress and anxiety	This could provide insights into the dynamic nature of adaptation and its long-term impact on well-being, complementing previous studies ( <a href="#">Bader et al., 2018</a> ; <a href="#">Jais et al., 2015</a> ; <a href="#">Takeuchi et al., 2008</a> )
To explore the underlying motivations, experiences, and contextual factors that lead expatriates to adopt specific adaptation styles (ethnocentric, disconnected, localized, flexible), contextualizing the perceived cultural gap between home and host countries	This could explain how these styles influence work-life boundaries. Addressing the cultural gap between home and host countries would also help to understand the coping mechanisms of adaptation, complementing previous studies ( <a href="#">Bader et al., 2018</a> ; <a href="#">Mayerhofer et al., 2011</a> )
To compare the specific WLB challenges faced by frequent international business travelers versus long-term expatriates, considering the different nature of their cultural immersion, differing cultural contexts and work demands. This could include expats and accompanying family members	This could clarify the differences between the two types of expats and how their working environments differ. A gender-based, expat-spouse analysis would be of added value, complementing previous studies ( <a href="#">Atay et al., 2024</a> ; <a href="#">Bader et al., 2018</a> ; <a href="#">Blanco and Golik, 2023</a> )
To examine how organizational support systems (e.g. mentorship programs, employee resource groups, family support) interact with cross-cultural training (e.g. pre- and post-departure) to influence expatriate adaptation and WLB outcomes	This could clarify how the role of organizational support systems supports expatriates' WLB, complementing previous studies ( <a href="#">Noman et al., 2023</a> ; <a href="#">Mabkhot and Al-Ameryeen, 2023</a> ; <a href="#">Salamin, 2021</a> ; <a href="#">Schütter and Boerner, 2013</a> ; <a href="#">Tahir, 2023</a> )
<b>Source(s):</b> Authors' own work	

**Table 9.** Research proposals on support aspects

Research proposal	Justification
To investigate the effectiveness of different types of organizational support (e.g. relocation assistance, language training, well-being programs, flexible work arrangements), considering factors like assignment duration (short-term vs. long-term), family status (single vs. accompanied; expat vs. spouse), and career stage	This could complement previous studies (Blanco and Golik, 2023; Dang <i>et al.</i> , 2022; Jais <i>et al.</i> , 2015; Lämsä <i>et al.</i> , 2017; Lirio, 2017; Mäkelä <i>et al.</i> , 2015; Salamin, 2021; Shortland, 2018; Tahir, 2021), providing insights that help organizations develop more targeted and impactful support packages to improve expats and accompanying family members' WLB
To explore how employment opportunities for spouses affect expatriates' resource acquisition and career satisfaction, the psychological and relational consequences of prolonged family separations, and how expatriates utilize flexible work arrangements to maintain work-life boundaries	
To conduct a cross-cultural study examining how spousal support influences expatriate WLC and adaptation, considering potential cultural variations in spousal roles and expectations	This could clarify the role of spousal support in mitigating WLC across different cultural contexts, complementing previous studies (Blanco and Golik, 2023; Kempen <i>et al.</i> , 2015; Mabkhot and Al-Ameryeen, 2023; Sulphey and Faisal, 2020)
To investigate the types of social and organizational support most effectively combating loneliness and isolation and enhancing the WLB of single female expatriates	This could complement previous studies (Kempen <i>et al.</i> , 2015; Mabkhot and Al-Ameryeen, 2023) on the role of support in mitigating loneliness and isolation
To investigate the reasons behind the low awareness and utilization of existing organizational WLB programs among expatriates	This could complement other studies (Cho and Chew, 2021; Lirio, 2014; Mabkhot and Al-Ameryeen, 2023; Schütter and Boerner, 2013), cultural factors, and perceived stigma associated with seeking support
To investigate the relationship between supervisor WLB role modelling and expatriate WLB outcomes	This could clarify whether supervisors' WLB practices influence expatriates' WLB satisfaction, complementing previous research (Bader <i>et al.</i> , 2018; Cho and Chew, 2021; Schütter and Boerner, 2013)
To conduct a comparative study examining the distinct support needs and WLB experiences of SIEs versus those on traditional company-sponsored assignments	This could clarify the difference between support needs and WLB outcomes of SIEs <i>vis-à-vis</i> assigned expatriates, complementing previous research (Ballesteros-Leiva <i>et al.</i> , 2017, 2018; Tahir, 2021)
<b>Source(s):</b> Authors' own work	

## 6. Conclusions and limitations

The rapid growth of multinational companies has increased demand for executives willing to work abroad. Companies often prefer sending expatriates due to their loyalty, familiarity with company goals, and adherence to management style, despite the higher costs associated with expatriation. While expatriation offers certain advantages, it also presents significant challenges.

This paper reveals the complexities of expatriates' WLB, significantly influenced by cultural adaptation and organizational support. Adapting to local norms is crucial for managing stress and achieving WLB satisfaction. However, it highlights a gap between the reliance on organizational support and the autonomy of expatriates in managing their adaptation. Although organizational support is essential, empowering expatriates to navigate cultural challenges independently may be equally important.

While organizational support is crucial, it must be balanced with efforts to empower expatriates in managing their adaptation. A dual-focused approach that integrates both organizational assistance and personal agency would ensure support systems are comprehensive and tailored to meet diverse expatriate needs, enhancing the success of international assignments.

**Table 10.** Research proposals on challenges

Research proposal	Justification
To conduct longitudinal or retrospective studies to identify specific combinations of challenges that are most likely to lead to premature assignment termination or expatriate dissatisfaction	This could provide insights into critical paths leading to expatriate assignment failure due to unmanaged challenges, complementing previous studies (Bader <i>et al.</i> , 2018; Dang <i>et al.</i> , 2022; Jais <i>et al.</i> , 2015; Takeuchi <i>et al.</i> , 2008)
To conduct research focused on the unique organizational and cultural challenges female expatriates face in assuming managerial roles and develop strategies to mitigate gender bias and promote their effective integration	This could help in understanding previous work (Mäkelä <i>et al.</i> , 2015, 2017) and addressing the specific challenges faced by female expatriates in gaining managerial acceptance and navigating gender bias
To investigate the hurdles SIEs face due to limited organizational support and develop recommendations for how organizations or other entities can better support their WLB	This could clarify the distinct challenges and support needs of SIEs in achieving WLB (Ballesteros-Leiva <i>et al.</i> , 2017; Reiche <i>et al.</i> , 2023; Saarenpää, 2016)
To conduct research comparing how expatriates from various home countries experience and cope with organizational, family, work-related, and health-related challenges in different host cultural contexts	This could address cross-cultural comparisons on how expatriates perceive and cope with different WLB challenges, complementing previous work (Salamin, 2021; Tahir, 2021)
To investigate family-related challenges, such as marital strain and childcare issues, family adaptation dynamics and their impact on expatriates' WLB and job performance	This could complement previous work (Dang <i>et al.</i> , 2022; Mäkelä <i>et al.</i> , 2015, 2017) addressing how work and organizational aspects interfere in family dynamics
<b>Source(s):</b> Authors' own work	

Current research on gender and WLB among expatriates predominantly emphasizes social and family support for female expatriates, often neglecting the distinct needs of male expatriates. While organizations are recognized as pivotal in supporting expatriates, significant gaps remain. These include how organizational support mechanisms (e.g. mentorship programs, flexible work policies) vary in effectiveness for male versus female expatriates, the extent of gender bias in such programs, and how gender intersects with factors like race, age, or nationality to influence access to resources.

The integration of Boundary Theory and COR theory reveals that WLB in expatriation is not just a matter of support quantity but also of boundary quality and resource alignment. Stronger boundaries (psychological, physical, temporal) help protect critical resources. At the same time, weak or blurred boundaries leave expatriates vulnerable to resource depletion and WLC.

One of the main limitations of this research is its focused search on expatriation. As such, research with a broader focus in international assignments covering specific types of international assignments (e.g. short-term assignments, flexpatriates, international business travelers, self-initiated expats and repatriation) would be of added value to enrich the wealth of wisdom of those assignments. Another limitation is that the search focused on work-life perspectives. As such, covering other topics, such as work-family or well-being, could broaden the understanding of this research stream.

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