

Factors Contributing to the Success of Female Self-initiated Expatriate Service Workers in the United Arab Emirates

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Research into self-initiated expatriate (SIE) success is important when a nation's workforce is overwhelmingly comprised of expatriates. We examined the direct effect of perceived organizational support and adjustment on intent to stay and job engagement and the mediation effect of adjustment for lower-skilled, female SIEs in the UAE. Hypotheses were tested using correlation, multiple regression and bootstrapped mediation analysis. Perceived organizational support and work adjustment demonstrated a significant, positive, direct effect on intent to stay and engagement. Work adjustment partially mediated the effect of perceived organizational support on engagement and intent to stay. Results and implications are discussed.

Keywords: Expatriate Success, Expatriate Adjustment, Perceived Organizational Support, Engagement, Intent to Stay, United Arab Emirates

INTRODUCTION

The study of expatriation management and experiences has been an active field of research for many years. The vast majority of studies have focused on those known as the traditional expatriate (TE) – one who is sent abroad by the employing organization for a limited-duration international assignment (Aycan & Kanungo, 1997). An increasing strand of research over the past 20 years has focused on another type of expatriate – the self-initiating expatriate (SIE). The main differentiator between TEs and SIEs is based on the initiator of the foreign work assignment. For TEs, the initiator is the employing organization, while for SIEs, initiation is self-directed.

There is increasing evidence that SIE and TE experiences differ in significant ways (Andresen, Biemann, & Pattie, 2015) beyond who initiates the work assignment. For example, SIEs are more likely to work directly for a smaller, national or regional foreign organization than TEs, who are typically more employed by large, multinational enterprises (Froese & Peltokorpi, 2013; Suutari & Brewster, 2000). SIEs have typically worked in a greater number of different foreign locations than TEs and such tenure abroad is also typically longer for SIEs (Jokinen, Brewster, & Suutari, 2008; McNulty & Inkson, 2013; Peltokorpi & Froese, 2009). In addition, SIEs tend to include more females than TEs (Andresen, et al.,

2015), and are more likely than TEs to go abroad as a result of a lack of viable employment options in their home country (Suutari & Brewster, 2000).

Research into SIEs becomes increasingly important in regional contexts in which the overwhelming majority of a nation's workforce is comprised of expatriates, such as the Arab Gulf States in the Middle East. These countries lack a sufficient indigenous workforce and so therefore must import most of the needed labor requirements. For example, in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), expatriates are 84% of the total population (Burgess, Connell & Winterton, 2013), and constitute almost 99% of private sector employees (Al-Waqfi & Forstenlechner, 2014). Such figures would logically indicate that expatriates in the UAE, at least, are employed in a range of occupations and industries, would therefore require and hold varying levels of skills, abilities, and education. This diversity would indicate a greater complexity in human resource management practices for expatriate labor in such an environment (Bonache, Brewster, Suttari, & Cerdin, 2018). Jokinen et al. (2008) once remarked that SIEs are considered a hidden aspect to the labor market. While it can be argued that SIEs, as a category of expatriates, no longer are hidden, much of the published SIE research is based on participants whose demographics closely resemble those of studied TEs (Al Ariss, 2010; Haak-Saheem & Brewster, 2017). Research has focused almost exclusively on highly-skilled or professional knowledge workers, most often from Western nations (Clark, Corbin & Punnett, 2017). Unskilled workers from developing countries who expatriate for a specific task or role highlight a new use for the term "hidden" expatriates, given the distinct lack of research attention given to these workers (Haak-Saheem & Brewster, 2017). This paper focuses on this hidden expatriate population by studying lower skilled, female service worker SIEs in the UAE from underdeveloped home countries.

"Hidden" SIE workers, such as those studied in this paper, have been described as vulnerable workers (Burgess, et al., 2013; Connell & Burgess, 2013), particularly with regards to working conditions and mechanisms of organizational support. It is therefore important to examine the experiences and success of this group of SIEs through organizational as well as individual lenses. Indeed, having a better understanding of the employment relationship between expatriate workers and their sponsoring organizations is needed more generally (Takeuchi, 2010). We used this approach in examining known TE success factors with an unstudied SIE population. Specifically, we examined the direct effect of perceived organizational support on work, interaction, and cultural adjustment; the effect of the three facets of adjustment on two measures of SIE success, intent to stay and job engagement; and the effect of perceived organizational support on intent to stay and job engagement, mediated by work, interaction, and cultural adjustment.

The first section of this paper reviews what we know to date about the experiences and success of SIEs. Next, the paper discusses expatriates in the UAE context, highlighting the research conducted to date. The theoretical framework and concepts upon which the tested hypotheses are built are discussed. The research conducted is detailed, to include the sample, setting, method used, hypotheses, and data obtained. The results are presented, along with implications and recommendations for both researchers and HRM practitioners.

SELF-INITIATING EXPATRIATES

The study of SIEs began in earnest 20 years ago (Inkson, Arthur, Pringle, & Barry, 1997), and has in the main been exploratory in nature (see Selmer, Andresen & Cerdin, 2017; and Shaffer, Kraimer, Chen, & Bolino, 2012 for thorough reviews). In general, SIE studies have concentrated on the differentiators between SIEs and TEs (Suutari & Brewster, 2000; Jokinen et al., 2008; Peltokorpi & Froese, 2009), motivations to expatriate (Dorsch, Suutari, & Brewster, 2012; Froese, 2012; Richardson & McKenna, 2000, 2002; Selmer & Lauring, 2012, 2103; Vance & McNulty, 2014), the sociocultural adjustment experiences of SIEs (Froese, 2012; Isakovic & Whitman, 2013; Peltokorpi & Froese, 2009; Selmer & Lauring, 2011), career paths of SIEs (Biemann & Andresen 2010; Vance, McNulty, Paik, & D'Mello, 2016), and exploration of what motivates SIEs to stay in their positions in the foreign country (Bozionelos, 2009; Schoepp, 2011). Through these studies, a generalized picture of SIEs has begun to

emerge which is rapidly evolving into the standard definition of SIEs (see for example, Peltokorpi & Froese, 2009). The sample populations of SIEs which have been studied to date display the following characteristics: Males are only a slight majority, average in age between 35 to 45, are in the majority married, work in a professional/white-collar role, and have at least a bachelor's degree (Chen, Kirkman, Ki, & Farh, 2010; Dickmann, Doherty, Mills, & Brewster 2008; Kim & Slocum, 2008; Lee, 2005; Tharenou, 2008). Interestingly, while for TEs the percentages of females has historically been quite low (Caligiuri, Joshi, & Lazarova, 1999; Suutari & Brewster, 2000), scholars focusing on SIEs (Jokinen et al., 2008; Isakovic & Whitman, 2013; Selmer & Luring, 2011) have found a much higher percentage of females that self-initiated their expatriate experiences, from almost 30 percent to just over 50 percent. While these demographics differ from the generally reported characteristics of TEs, they still cannot be considered exhaustive in describing the demographics of SIEs.

There is still debate in the literature as to how limiting the defining characteristics of SIEs should be considered. For example, should non-professional workers, such as blue-collar workers, be included in the SIE definition? What about those who hail from developing or non-developed countries? Some scholars (Al Ariss, 2010; Baruch, Dickmann, Altman, & Bournois, 2010) have attempted to delineate between SIEs and migrants, while Andersen, Bergdolt, and Margenfeld (2013b) conducted a meta-analysis of studies in both expatriation and migration domains and determined that both SIEs and TEs fell under the same umbrella category of migrants (p. 31). These authors conclude that “[a] person is called expatriate if he moves to another geographical point crossing national borders and changes his dominant place of residence and executes dependent work in a foreign country” (p. 31). To differentiate expatriates from migrants, McNulty and Brewster (2017) have attempted to address the ongoing debate on how to differentiate expatriation from other international experiences:

Business expatriates are] legally working individuals who reside temporarily in a country of which they are not a citizen in order to accomplish a career-related goals, being relocated abroad either by an organization, by self-initiation or directly employed within the host-country (p. 46).

Furthermore, four boundary conditions must be met to be considered a business expatriate:

1. The business expatriate must be organizationally employed;
2. Regardless of the length of time in employment abroad, the intended stay is always considered temporary;
3. Business expatriates are non-citizens of the country in which they work; and
4. Employment eligibility and conditions of the business expatriate are legally compliant with regards to a foreigner allowed to work in the host country (pp. 43-45).

McNulty and Brewster (2017) also point out that the majority of business expatriates will be either TEs or SIEs. Andersen et al. (2013) state that the definitional split between TEs and SIEs is dependent on who formalizes the action to work abroad and who makes the legal employment decision to do so (i.e., the employee or the organization). This main differentiator between SIEs and TEs echoes earlier definitions as discussed by Jokinen et al. (2008) and Suutari and Brewster (2000). Therefore, if the only true differentiator between TEs and SIEs is the initiator of the move (and legal employment decision-maker), then the academy has far to go in truly understanding the SIE phenomenon, as to date the overwhelming majority of studies on SIEs have been on those from developed countries in Europe, Australia and New Zealand, and to a lesser extent, the US (Dorsch, et al., 2012). Moreover, it must be noted that extant research into SIE success is based on research participants whose demographics closely resemble those of studied TEs (Andresen et al., 2013a; Haak-Saheem & Brewster, 2017). This narrow understanding of the SIE experience fails to explain the experiences of other SIE population segments, such as those who are lower-skilled and/or originate from non-Western countries.

EXPATRIATES IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is one of the fastest growing countries in the Middle East. Overarching economic characteristics of the UAE include a "...dependence on petroleum products, young and fast paced growth of the local labor population, and high dependence on expatriates in the private sector" (Naithani & Jha, 2010, p. 98). With the population reaching an estimate of over nine million by the end of 2016, UAE nationals represent less than 20% of the population (UAE Federal Authority for Competitiveness and Statistics, 2019; De Bel-Air, 2018). This creates a situation in which there is a severe shortage of indigenous labor. In terms of the workforce, UAE nationals only represent about 4% of the total workforce, and over 73% of those hold senior official, manager, professional and technical positions (UAE National Bureau of Statistics, 2008, Table 2-6). The marginal representation of Emiratis in the private sector is even smaller – only 0.5% of private sector employees are Emirati. Workers who are termed to be service workers, shop and market sales workers are mostly from Asian and other Arab countries, with almost 85% of those from Asian countries (UAE National Bureau of Statistics, 2008, Table 2-6). Asian workers actually comprise the majority of the entire workforce (83%), in the main working in the service, craft and trade, elementary (labor) occupations, and plant and machine operators (UAE National Bureau of Statistics, 2008, Table 2-6). These statistics clearly indicate that the majority of expatriate workers in the UAE would not fall into the category of knowledge/professional/white-collar workers. Therefore, it cannot be assumed that knowledge gained from the examination of knowledge worker SIEs will describe the experiences of expatriate service workers, whether in the UAE or elsewhere.

To date there have been limited studies published regarding expatriates in the UAE. Those that have been published have followed a strikingly similar agenda: The exploration of the experiences of Western, white-collar SIEs in professional roles. For example, Forstenlechner (2010) studied behavioral reactions among British professionals to institutional injustice; Bashir (2012), Isakovic and Whitman (2013), and Schoepp (2011) focused on issues of Western faculty in higher educational institutions; Ali, Azim and Krishnan (1995), Ali, Krishnan and Azim (1997) and Elamin (2011) focused on Arab and Western expatriate managers; and Harrison and Michailova (2012) and Stalker and Mavin (2011) studied Western, female executives and managers. There is a decided lack of published studies focusing on SIEs in the UAE from developing or undeveloped countries, who are mainly those which Connell and Burgess (2013) consider as vulnerable workers who make up the lowest tier of the labor market in the UAE. To date, only one qualitative study (Haak-Saheem & Brewster, 2017) has provided an initial understanding of these "hidden" SIEs, and such understanding is restricted to descriptions of demographical characteristics, motivation to work in the UAE, general challenges faced as an expatriate in the UAE, and parameters of employment conditions and packages. Given that this category of SIEs make up 42.5% of the UAE workforce (Connell & Burgess, 2013, p. 4171), it is critical to understand the factors which will contribute to their success so that proper HRM practices may be designed and implemented to protect these vulnerable workers and their rights.

EXPATRIATE SUCCESS

Predictors of TE Success

The literature identifies several predictors of TE success, including individual factors such as self-efficacy, previous overseas experience (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005) and personality dimensions (Harari, Reaves, Beane, Laginess, & Viswesvaran, 2018); non-work factors such as culture novelty and spouse adjustment (Hechanova, Beehr, & Christiansen, 2003); and organizational factors such as perceived organizational support (Cao, et al., 2010). Throughout the range of expatriate studies, expatriate adjustment has been considered as *the* construct to use to measure expatriate success (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005). We have chosen to focus on an organizational factor less studied: perceived organizational support, as well as adjustment, both in its normal predictive role as well as in a lesser-used mediation role.

Perceived Organizational Support

With regards to antecedent factors that predict expatriate success, most studies have focused on individual factors of the expatriates themselves, while a smaller subset has examined organizational support factors (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005; Kraimer, Bolino, & Mead, 2016). This state of affairs is surprising, given the robust amount of research into the role organizational support factors play in employee success in domestic settings (Kurtessis, Eisenberger, Ford, Buffardi, Stewart, & Adis, 2017; Riggle, Edmondson, & Hansen, 2009). It would logically follow that expatriate employees may need even greater organizational support in a work and living environment that would be marked by greater uncertainty and unfamiliarity. Unfortunately, the limited evidence demonstrating the effects of organizational support on expatriate effectiveness has provided mixed results. This current state may indicate that a direct, causal relationship between organizational support and expatriate success should be revisited, and other potential sequential variables also be included (Kawai & Strange, 2014).

Furthermore, while some progress, albeit with uncertain outcomes, has been made on researching the impact of organizational support on TEs, far less has been examined in the SIE context (Cao, et al. 2014). Certainly, a great deal is known about the impact of organizational support in the domestic employment context; perceived organizational support is positively related to many outcomes, including organizational commitment, performance, and job satisfaction (Rhoades et al. 2002; Rhoades & Eisenberger 2002; Allen, Shore, & Griffeth 2003). This positive outcome is developed through repeated exchanges between the organization and the employee. As proposed by social exchange theory, if such exchanges lead to feelings of being treated well, reciprocating treatment will be favorable as well (Gouldner, 1960). Based on such theoretical support, Cao et al. (2014) proposed that perceived organizational support would associate positively to SIE intent to stay in the host country. Their study results confirmed this hypothesis; however, the SIE sample mostly resembled those of earlier studies: well-educated, highly-skilled, and a sizeable proportion from Western countries (the majority were from China, which was attributed to the first author's, who is Chinese, use of personal networks). Therefore, more research is needed to understand the importance of perceived organizational support to the low-skilled, single-track SIE experience, who may very well have greater socio-emotional needs and will be more dependent on the employing organization when compared to the more highly-skilled SIEs normally included in published research.

Adjustment

Expatriate adjustment has long been considered as *the* construct to use to measure expatriate success (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005). However, viewing adjustment as an outcome, or proxy for success, limits a full understanding of the role it plays in the expatriate experience. Adjustment has long been viewed from the perspective of stress theory, whereby as adjustment increases to the work, interaction, and cultural milieu, levels of uncertainty decrease, thus leading to a decrease in stress and an increase in effectiveness (Bhaskar-Shrinivas, et al., 2005). If adjustment leads to a reduction in stress and therefore an increase in effectiveness, logically it would have mediation power for relationships between other antecedents and expatriate success. In that vein, scholars have slotted adjustment into mediation roles and found support for the same. For example, Chen, et al. (2010) found that adjustment mediated the relationship between cross-cultural motivation and job performance. Harari et al. (2018) conducted a meta-analysis and found adjustment to mediate the relationship between the five factors of personality and the outcomes of job performance and turnover intentions. For MNC expatriates working in Malaysia, and again conforming to standard demographic descriptors, adjustment mediated the effect of POS on expatriate performance (Malek, Budhwar, & Reiche, 2015). There is mounting evidence that adjustment should be considered not just as an outcome itself but also as a means to an end (Takeuchi, 2010). Therefore, in this study, adjustment will be examined in a mediating role between perceived organizational support and the two measures of expatriate success: intent to stay with the organization, and job engagement.

Traditional Measures of Success

Financial and performance outcomes of traditional expatriate failure can be severe (Copeland & Griggs, 1985; Shaffer & Harrison, 1998; Tung, 1981). As a result, a great deal of research into the TE experience has focused on researching antecedent factors which lead to greater rates of expatriate success. There has been some variation in choice of constructs used to represent expatriate success. Aycan and Kanungo (1997) summarized it well by stating “there seems to be general agreement on the fact that ‘overseas success’ is evidence if expatriates (1) remain in the assignment until the end of the term, (2) adjust to living conditions in the new culture, and (3) perform well on the job” (p. 251). It is not uncommon to find studies defining TE expatriate success as turnover intent (e.g. Caligiuri, 1997; Salgado & Bastida, 2017), job performance (e.g., Kraimer & Wayne, 2004; Lazarova & Thomas, 2012; Shaffer, Harrison, Gregersen, Black, & Ferzandi, 2006), and organizational commitment (e.g. Guzzo, Noonan, Elron, 1994; Liu & Ipe, 2010).

However, far more substantial research exists which focuses on the antecedent and in-country factors influencing TE adjustment (Bhaskar-Shrinivas, Harrison, Shaffer, & Luk, 2005; Takeuchi, 2010), as this construct has been positioned as the key factor influencing expatriate success (Stoermer, Haslberger, Froese, & Kraeh, 2018). An unfortunate result of the greater focus on adjustment has resulted in a narrowing view of adjustment as “an end to itself, not as a means to an end” (Takeuchi, 2010, p. 1043). Such a perspective ignores the role adjustment can play as a predictor to other indicators of success (Harari et al., 2018) or as a mediator between those antecedent factors and expatriate success (Chen, Kirkman, Kim, Farh, & Tangirala, 2010; Claus, Lungu, & Bhattacharjee, 2011; Haslberger, Brewster, & Hippler, 2013; Kawai & Strange, 2014; Malek, Budhwar & Reiche, 2015; Salgado & Bastida, 2017).

Measuring SIE Success

In contrast to the robust collection of empirical evidence on TE success, less is known regarding SIE success. An obvious contributing factor to this imbalance is that SIEs have been studied for far less time than TEs. However, another issue is in how the differentiation between TEs and SIEs is articulated; if the key determinant between these two categories is in who initiates the foreign employment, then the subsequent expatriate experience and effectiveness milieus would show increasing divergence (Cao, Hirschi, & Deller, 2014). For example, defining expatriate success as only completing an international assignment is not useful when studying SIEs, as failure does not necessarily mean that the expatriate departs from the job, but can instead reflect low job performance, presenteeism, low morale, and other negative effects (Lee, 2005). Furthermore, researchers have mainly focused on the individual perspective of the SIE (Cao, et al., 2014) rather than the organizational perspective. While this focus may be natural in the early stages of exploring the identity and experiences of this category of expatriates, it by no means can singularly provide a complete understanding of SIE success.

From an organizational perspective, it is more practical to gauge SIE success through the SIEs desire to stay in place and positively contribute to the organization’s goals. This perspective is better captured through an examination of intent to stay and job engagement, as there is considerable evidence that high levels of engagement are linked to high levels of performance in domestic firms (Christian, Garza & Slaughter, 2011; Truss, Shantz, Soane, Alfes, & Delbridge, 2013). Furthermore, individual job performance has been directly linked to overall organizational performance Mollick (2012). Therefore, this study used the constructs of intent to stay and job engagement as representative measures of SIE success.

Intent to Stay

As traditional expatriates are usually sent on a fixed-term foreign assignment by the organizational headquarters, TE studies conceptualize tenure as completing an assignment with specific time boundaries. In contrast, SIEs decide how long they intend to stay or repatriate from the foreign country. It can be assumed that the more typically-studied SIE, the educated, highly-skilled Western SIE, will have greater opportunities and choices that will influence whether to stay or leave (Cao et al., 2014). However, low-skilled, single-track SIEs are far less likely to have many options other than the binary choice of stay or

leave. For example, in the UAE, there are legislative restrictions in place that prevent the low-skilled workforce from easily changing jobs while remaining in the UAE. Part of this restriction is that residency visas are connected to the employment contract, whereby the employing firm “sponsors” (i.e. is fiscally and legally responsible for) the expatriate employees. As a result, there are more limited options of career movement for low-skilled SIEs in the UAE. Intent to stay, then, becomes a logical measure of SIE success, particularly for those at the lower skill levels. While some scholars (Cao et al., 2014) have measured the intent to stay among SIEs with regards to the host country, we find it more appropriate to measure the intent to stay with regards to the employing organization for low-skilled, single-track SIEs.

Job Engagement

The first mention of the construct of engagement in the academic literature is the grounded theory work of Kahn in 1990. Kahn first explored engagement from the psychological conditions of *meaningfulness, safety, and availability*. He defined engagement from a personal (not organizational) perspective stating, engagement is “...the harnessing of organization members’ selves to their work roles (p. 694). He posited that “...people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances” (p.694). While Kahn conducted two qualitative studies to begin to explore this construct, his model was not empirically tested until the work of May, Gilson, and Harter (2004). These authors found that all three factors of meaningfulness, safety, and availability were significantly related to engagement; thus, Kahn’s model was supported. Specifically, meaningfulness had the strongest relationship to employee outcomes related to engagement.

Some researchers have questioned whether engagement was simply another form of organizational commitment or perhaps job satisfaction. Authors such as Saks (2006) have argued that employee engagement is a discrete variable from others such as organizational commitment and job satisfaction. The basis for this argument is that engagement goes beyond an employee’s attitude toward their organization or their job. Engagement focuses on the individual’s attentiveness to their work and immersion in their performance of job roles. Shuck and Wollard (2010) built on this idea by offering a more sophisticated definition for employee engagement: “an individual employee’s cognitive, emotional, and behavioral state directed toward desired organizational outcomes” (p.105). It is important to note that there is still ongoing debate as to how to precisely define engagement as well as the nature of engagement, and indeed much is still not known. For example, little is known about engagement as a *state* versus engagement as a *trait* (Shuck, Osam, Zigarmi, & Nimon, 2017). Therefore, we have chosen to operationalize engagement as based on the traditional view as captured by Shuck and Wollard’s definition.

There is strong support in the literature for the positive impact of engagement in both organizational (Saks & Gruman, 2011) and individual (Xanthopoulou, Baker, Heuven, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2008) performance. Halbesleben (2010) found engagement related to performance and other variables such as commitment and turnover intentions. Leiter and Bakker (2010) have argued that engagement can be linked to individual job performance. Barbera, Macey, Martin, and Schneider (2009) found that firms with engaged employees were more profitable, had greater return on assets (ROA) and improved shareholder value. Outside of the academic literature, several well-respected research organizations have conducted significant studies related to engagement. Gallup, in their ongoing research in engagement (Sorensen, 2012) has found relationships between engagement, profitability, business growth, and even customer loyalty. Therefore, evidence suggests that engagement can be a factor indicating employee success. However, very little is known about the engagement of expatriate workers.

A search of expatriate studies revealed no publications that examined engagement levels of TEs. However, two recent empirical studies (Lauring & Selmer, 2015; Selmer & Lauring 2016) included measures of engagement to examine the subsequent effects on work outcomes. For example, Selmer and Lauring (2016) found moderate levels of significant association between engagement and the three factors of adjustment among expatriate academics in China. Lauring and Selmer (2015) focused on the impact of engagement on the expatriate academic work outcomes of work adjustment, time to proficiency, job satisfaction, and work performance. Although not all hypotheses were supported, firm support for the

impact of engagement on work adjustment was evident. These preliminary findings regarding engagement among SIEs are encouraging and therefore warrant further examination.

HYPOTHESES

Based on our review of the literature, we proposed the following hypotheses to be tested in this study:

Hypothesis 1: Perceived organizational support is positively associated with job engagement.

Hypothesis 2: Work adjustment is positively associated with job engagement.

Hypothesis 3: Interaction adjustment is positively associated with job engagement.

Hypothesis 4: Cultural adjustment is positively associated with job engagement.

Hypothesis 5: Work adjustment mediates the relationship between perceived organizational support and job engagement.

Hypothesis 6: Interaction adjustment mediates the relationship between perceived organizational support and job engagement.

Hypothesis 7: Cultural adjustment mediates the relationship between perceived organizational support and job engagement.

Hypothesis 8: Perceived organizational support is positively associated with intent to stay.

Hypothesis 9: Work adjustment is positively associated with intent to stay.

Hypothesis 10: Interaction adjustment is positively associated with intent to stay.

Hypothesis 11: Cultural adjustment is positively associated with intent to stay.

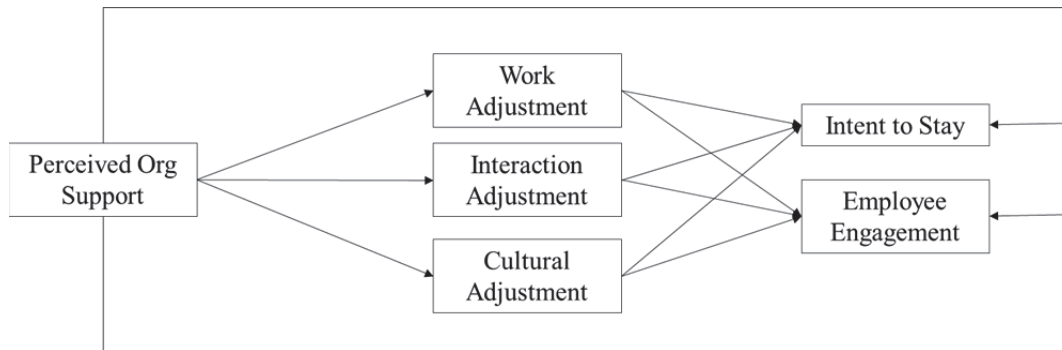
Hypothesis 12: Work adjustment mediates the relationship between perceived organizational support and intent to stay.

Hypothesis 13: Interaction adjustment mediates the relationship between perceived organizational support and intent to stay.

Hypothesis 14: Cultural adjustment mediates the relationship between perceived organizational support and intent to stay.

Figure 1 provides a visual representation of the relationships we tested in this study.

FIGURE 1
CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF PROPOSED RELATIONSHIPS



METHODS

Measures Used

We quantitatively surveyed the SIE employees of one private organization in the health and beauty industry in the United Arab Emirates with a survey instrument based upon the previously tested scales created by Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, and Sowa (1986), Rich, Lepine, and Crawford (2010), and Black, Mendenhall, and Oddou (1991). These scales measured the constructs of perceived organizational support, job engagement, work adjustment, interaction adjustment, and cultural adjustment. We created and used a single item to measure intent to stay with the organization: “I rarely think about the possibility of returning to my home country before the end of my employment contract”. We also asked personal and job-related demographic questions such as age, marital status, children, education level, nationality, language fluency, previous overseas jobs, and tenure at the current organization to gain a better understanding of this subset of SIEs. All scale items have been individually tested for reliability in previously published research and found to show acceptable levels of reliability (Black & Gregersen, 1991; Christian, et al. 2011; Selmer & Luring, 2009; Shaffer, Harrison, & Gilley, 1999; Takeuchi, Yun, & Russell, 2002; Van Vianen, De Pater, Kristof-Brown, & Johnson, 2004; Wayne, Shore, & Liden, 1997). Acceptable levels of reliability were also found in this study, with Cronbach alpha values of .91 for perceived organizational support, .88 for employee engagement, .90 for work adjustment, .91 for interaction adjustment, and .90 for cultural adjustment.

TABLE 1
FACTOR ANALYSIS OF ADJUSTMENT SCALES

Item	Cultural	Work	Interaction
Living Conditions in General	.73		
Housing Conditions	.74		
Food	.72		
Shopping	.74		
Cost of Living	.77		
Entertainment	.71		
Health Care Facilities	.61		
Socializing			.88
Day to Day Interaction			.87
Interaction Outside of Work			.86
Job Responsibilities		.90	
Performance Standards		.87	
Supervisory Responsibilities		.79	

TABLE 2
FACTOR ANALYSIS OF PERCEIVED ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT SCALE

Item	Financial	Career	Emotive
Takes care of me financially	.82		
Financial incentives are good	.81		
Received generous support	.76		
Takes interest in my career		.77	
Considers my goals		.87	
Keeps me informed re career opportunities		.80	
Cares about career development		.88	
Help is available when I have a problem			.86
Tries to make job interesting			.86
Values my contribution			.84
Really cares about my well-being			.74
Cares about my general satisfaction			.78
Takes pride in my accomplishments			.68

TABLE 3
FACTOR ANALYSIS OF JOB ENGAGEMENT SCALE

Item	Physical Engagement	Emotional/ Cognitive Engagement
I work with intensity on my job	.63	
I exert my full effort to my job	.82	
I devote a lot of energy to my job	.85	
I try my hardest to perform well on my job	.80	
I strive as hard as I can to complete my job	.73	
I exert a lot of energy on my job	.78	
I am enthusiastic in my job	.66	.50
I feel energetic at my job		.63
I am proud of my job		.72
I feel positive about my job		.83
I am excited about my job		.82
At work, my mind is focused on my job		.80
At work, I pay a lot of attention to my job		.75
At work, I focus a great deal of attention on my job		.75
At work, I am absorbed by my job		.73
At work, I concentrate on my job		.78
At work, I devote a lot of attention to my job		.72

All scale items were analyzed using a principal component factor analysis procedure with a varimax rotation of factors. As Table 1 shows, three factors which correlate with the items used in each scale of adjustment emerged with Eigen values greater than one. These three factors explained 74.11% of the variance. Items in Factor 1 which loaded strongly (above .50) correlate with the items on the cultural adjustment scale. Items in Factor 2 which loaded strongly correlate with the items on the work adjustment scale. Items in Factor 3 which loaded strongly correlate with the items on the interaction adjustment scale. Table 2 shows items which loaded strongly (above .50) and correlated with three measured facets of perceived organizational support, explaining 66.28% of the variance. Table 3 shows items which loaded strongly (above .50) and correlated with two facets of employee engagement, explaining 59.77% of the variance. The original Rich, et al. (2010) scale found three factors: physical engagement, emotional engagement, and cognitive engagement. However, in our study, items originally designated as emotional engagement and cognitive engagement loaded as one combined factor.

Upon confirming the reliability and validity of the scale items, descriptive statistics were generated on the sample participants. Subsequently, the 14 hypotheses were tested using correlation, multiple regression and mediation analysis supported by bootstrapping.

Participant Sample

An invitation to participate in this research study was sent to 647 SIEs employed by one private organization in the health and beauty industry in the United Arab Emirates. Out of the total employee population for this organization, 321 eligible participants completed the survey, for a response rate of 49.61%. The overall description of this SIE sample is markedly different from the normal SIE demographics reported in most empirical studies. These health and beauty service worker SIEs are unsurprisingly almost entirely female (two respondents were male and were subsequently removed from the study). Furthermore, the SIEs surveyed in this study are a much younger age group overall than other SIE studies (Chen, et al., 2010; Dorsch, et al., 2012). These workers indicated almost equal distribution in the age groupings of 20-30 and 31-40. As a result, a lower percentage of these SIEs are married (56.3%), and in a quite striking difference from more highly-skilled SIEs, the majority of these SIE spouses do not reside in the UAE (68.7%).

Other demographic differences are very evident; whereas the majority of other reported SIE groups held passport nationalities from developed, Western countries such as the UK, the US, and Australia, the sample of these SIEs were almost universally from developing or non-developed nations in Asia, Middle East, and North Africa (e.g., top five nationalities reported: 86.4% Filipino, 4.1% Nepalese, 4.1% Indian, 1.9% Indonesian, .9% Jordanian). The largest segment of these employees reported only a high school degree (32.4%), with similar numbers reported for having attended some college (29.8%) and holding a bachelor's degree (27.8%). These lower educational levels are contrasted against the majority of SIE populations reported to hold bachelor's and graduate degrees (Chen, et al., 2010; Kim & Slocum, 2008; Selmer & Luring, 2016).

RESULTS

We tested hypotheses 1-4 and 8-11 through multiple regression analysis. Correlation analysis was first conducted to establish statistically significant relationships among the variables (see Table 4 for descriptive statistics and correlation analysis for all tested variables). We subsequently used mediation analysis, with bootstrapping (10,000 samples) to test hypotheses 5-7 and 12-14. The results are reported below.

TABLE 4
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS AND CORRELATIONS

Variable	Mean	s.d.	1	2	3	4	5
1. Intent to Stay	4.32	1.09					
2. Job Engagement	4.42	0.61	.41**				
3. Perceived Organizational Support	3.59	0.77	.21**	.37**			
4. Cultural Adjustment	4.23	1.25	.16**	.20**	.42**		
5. Interaction Adjustment	3.71	1.58	.02	.09	.27**	.52**	
6. Work Adjustment	4.92	1.35	.27**	.43**	.43**	.60**	.41**

** p < .01 level Two-tailed test.

Regression Analysis

Multiple regression analyses were conducted for both the dependent variables of job engagement and intent to stay. Perceived organizational support and the three facets of adjustment (work, interaction, cultural) were used as predictor variables. Simultaneous regression was the mode chosen for predictor variable entry. In addition, to minimize any possible loss of predictive power of the models, pairwise deletion was used to ensure the sample size remained as large as possible.

Multiple regression analysis was used to test if the predictor variables perceived organizational support and the three facets of adjustment (work, interaction, cultural) significantly predicted job engagement. The results of the regression analysis indicated two predictors explained 22.1% of the variance ($R^2=.22$, $F(4,282)=20.01$, $p<.001$). It was found that perceived organizational support significantly predicted job engagement ($\beta = .21$, $p<.001$), as did work adjustment ($\beta = .42$, $p<.001$). Therefore, hypotheses 1 and 2 were supported, whereas hypotheses 3 and 4 were not supported.

Multiple regression analysis was used to test if the predictor variables perceived organizational support and the three facets of adjustment (work, interaction, cultural) significantly predicted intent to stay. The results of the regression indicated three predictors explained 10.9% of the variance ($R^2=.11$, $F(4,276)=8.46$, $p<.06$). It was found that perceived organizational support significantly predicted intent to stay ($\beta = .14$, $p<.001$), as did work adjustment ($\beta = .25$, $p=.001$), and interaction adjustment ($\beta = .14$, $p<.05$). Therefore, hypotheses 8, 9, and 11 were supported, whereas hypothesis 10 was not supported.

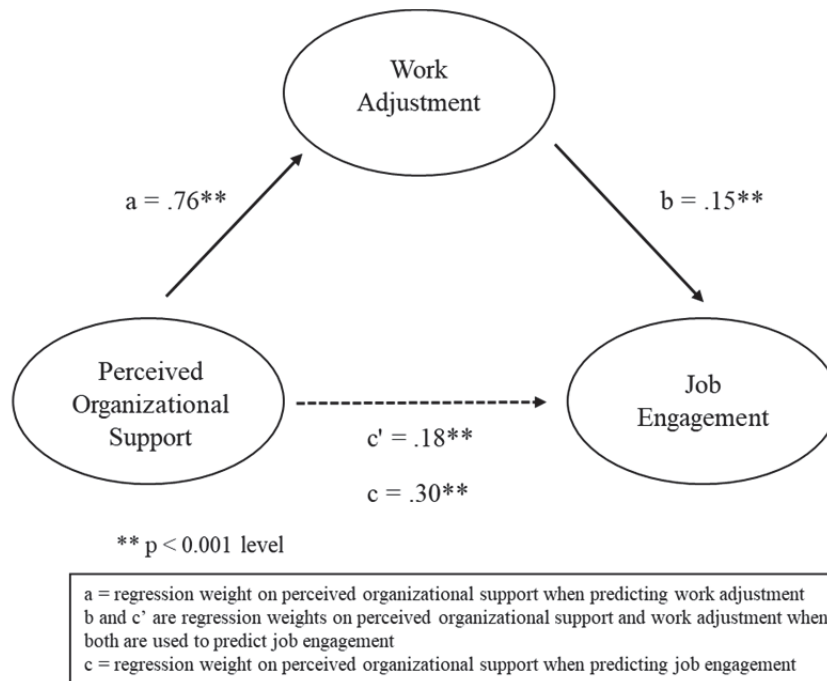
Mediation Analysis

The relationship between perceived organizational support and job engagement was partially mediated by work adjustment. As Figure 2 illustrates, the standardized regression coefficient between perceived organizational support and work adjustment was statistically significant, as was the standardized regression coefficient between work adjustment and job engagement. The standardized indirect effect was $(.76)(.15) = 0.11$. We tested the significance of this indirect effect using bootstrapping procedures. Unstandardized indirect effects were computed for each of 10,000 bootstrapped samples. The bootstrapped unstandardized indirect effect was .11, and the 95% confidence interval ranged from .56 to .97. Thus, the indirect effect was statistically significant. The mediator work adjustment could account for roughly one-third of the total effect, $P_M = .37$. Therefore, hypothesis 5 is partially supported.

The relationship between perceived organizational support and job engagement was not mediated by interaction adjustment. The standardized regression coefficient between perceived organizational support and interaction adjustment was statistically significant; however, the standardized regression coefficient between interaction adjustment and job engagement was not significant. Using the absolute value of both direct coefficients, the standardized indirect effect was $(.56)(.00) = 0.00$. Therefore, hypothesis 6 was not supported.

The relationship between perceived organizational support and job engagement was not mediated by cultural adjustment. The standardized regression coefficient between perceived organizational support and cultural adjustment was statistically significant; however, the standardized regression coefficient between cultural adjustment and job engagement was not significant. Using the absolute value of both direct coefficients, the standardized indirect effect was $(.68)(.03) = 0.02$. We tested the significance of this indirect effect using bootstrapping procedures. Unstandardized indirect effects were computed for each of 10,000 bootstrapped samples. The bootstrapped unstandardized indirect effect was .02, and the 95% confidence interval ranged from -.02 to .09. Thus, the bootstrapped indirect effect was not statistically significant. Therefore, hypothesis 7 was not supported.

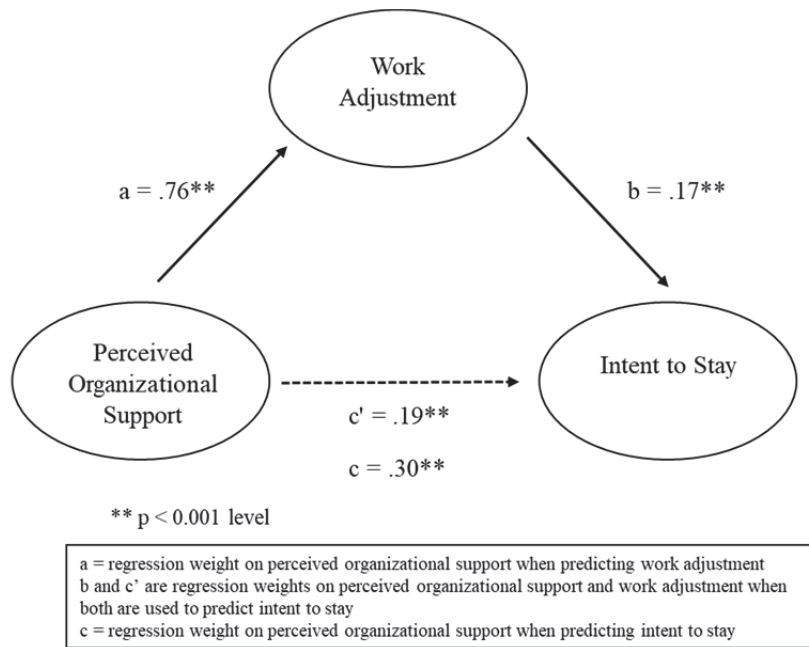
FIGURE 2
MEDIATION STRENGTH OF WORK ADJUSTMENT ON RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
PERCEIVED ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT AND JOB ENGAGEMENT



The relationship between perceived organizational support and intent to stay was partially mediated by work adjustment. As Figure 3 illustrates, the standardized regression coefficient between perceived organizational support and work adjustment was statistically significant, as was the standardized regression coefficient between work adjustment and job engagement. The standardized indirect effect was $(.76)(.17) = 0.13$. We tested the significance of this indirect effect using bootstrapping procedures. Unstandardized indirect effects were computed for each of 10,000 bootstrapped samples. The bootstrapped unstandardized indirect effect was .13, and the 95% confidence interval ranged from 2.53 to 3.83. Thus, the indirect effect was statistically significant. The mediator work adjustment could account for almost half of the total effect, $P_M = .43$. Therefore, hypothesis 12 is partially supported.

The relationship between perceived organizational support and intent to stay was not mediated by interaction adjustment. The standardized regression coefficient between perceived organizational support and interaction adjustment was statistically significant; however, the standardized regression coefficient between interaction adjustment and intent to stay was not significant. Using the absolute value of both direct coefficients, the standardized indirect effect was $(.58)(.03) = 0.02$. We tested the significance of this indirect effect using bootstrapping procedures. Unstandardized indirect effects were computed for each of 10,000 bootstrapped samples. The bootstrapped unstandardized indirect effect was .02, and the 95% confidence interval ranged from -.05 to .10. Thus, the bootstrapped indirect effect was not statistically significant. Therefore, hypothesis 13 was not supported.

FIGURE 3
MEDIATION STRENGTH OF WORK ADJUSTMENT ON RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
PERCEIVED ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT AND INTENT TO STAY



The relationship between perceived organizational support and intent to stay was not mediated by cultural adjustment. The standardized regression coefficient between perceived organizational support and cultural adjustment was statistically significant; however, the standardized regression coefficient between cultural adjustment and intent to stay was not significant. Using the absolute value of both direct coefficients, the standardized indirect effect was $(.68)(.07) = 0.05$. We tested the significance of this indirect effect using bootstrapping procedures. Unstandardized indirect effects were computed for each of 10,000 bootstrapped samples. The bootstrapped unstandardized indirect effect was .05, and the 95% confidence interval ranged from -.19 to .03. Thus, the bootstrapped indirect effect was not statistically significant. Therefore, hypothesis 14 was not supported.

DISCUSSION

In this study, we examined the role that perceived organizational support plays in SIE success, and the extent to which the impact of perceived organizational support on job engagement and intent to stay is mediated by expatriate adjustment. Although our findings did not support all of our proposed hypotheses, we found that perceived organizational support and work adjustment both directly relate to job engagement and intent to stay; we also found that cultural adjustment directly relates only to intent to stay. However, only work adjustment mediates the positive relationship between perceived organizational support and both job engagement and intent to stay. We next discuss the theoretical and managerial implications of our study's findings.

Theoretical Implications

Our study makes three theoretical contributions. First, the study extends the existing literature on SIE success by exploring job engagement of SIEs. To date, our study is only the third published that explores the construct of engagement for expatriates. Although Lazarova, Westman, and Shaffer (2010) propose that engagement can play an important role in the successful performance in both work and family arenas

of expatriates, there is still very little extant empirical evidence that can further our understanding of this construct.

Second, we demonstrate that for SIEs, perceived organizational support contributes directly to SIE success, as measured by job engagement and intent to stay. Our results add to the growing body of knowledge of SIE success as based in an organizational perspective. In addition, the facet of work adjustment both directly contributes to SIE success, and plays a substantial mediating role in the relationship between perceived organizational support and the dependent variables of engagement and intent to stay. An interesting result in our study is that hypotheses regarding the roles of interaction and cultural adjustment, particularly as mediators between perceived organizational support and the two tested measures of SIE success, were not supported. This result could stem from the way we operationalized the adjustment construct into the three distinct facets of adjustment. Other scholars have used adjustment as a mediator that did not break out the individual facets (e.g., Malek, et al., 2015; Salgado & Bastida, 2017). Further investigation is needed into how to operationalize expatriate adjustment as a mediator of predictor-success relationships. Nevertheless, our findings further support calls (Takeuchi, 2010) to examine adjustment in roles other than as the proxy for expatriate success, such as a mediator between predictive factors and expatriate success.

Third, we report on an unstudied segment of SIEs that has been described as “hidden” from SIE discourse (Haak-Saheem & Brewster, 2017): lower skilled, female service worker SIEs in the UAE from underdeveloped home countries. Our study provides the first collection of demographic detail of such hidden SIEs, as well as sheds some light on the expatriate experiences of the same. From the preliminary findings in our study, it is evident that there are large segments of SIEs who remain understudied, and for whom it is not clear as to whether HRM practices designed to serve and manage high-skilled, well-educated Western SIEs are appropriate.

Managerial Implications

Our findings provide practical significance through addressing specific contextual conditions in which SIE success can be supported by organizations. For example, the positive relationship between perceived organizational support and both engagement and intent to stay provides impetus for creating support initiatives and programs for SIE employees both during onboarding and through employee tenure. Such initiatives could contribute to higher retention of desired employees. Additionally, the significant role played by work adjustment in SIE success would warrant dedicated organizational resources designed to increase SIE work adjustment. These insights could help organizations that directly hire SIE labor better understand the provisions and care required to attract and retain the employees best suited to that organization.

Limitations & Future Research

The findings in our study are important as they do provide a first look at the expatriation experiences of low-skilled, single-track SIEs, a hitherto unstudied SIE subpopulation. However, it is unclear as to whether the results of this study are applicable only to female SIEs in the subgroup in the UAE, or whether such results will generalize to other low-skilled UAE SIEs, or indeed to the wider Arab Gulf region or beyond. In addition, the participant sample in this study worked for only one organization. We therefore cannot be certain if similar levels of perceived organizational support would be found in other organizations for this subgroup of SIEs. Ideally, the hypotheses tested in this study would be replicated with other groups of low-skilled SIEs both in the UAE and in other geographical locations so that a greater understanding regarding their expatriate experiences may be gained. Qualitative, longitudinal work with these “hidden” SIEs would add much richness and depth to that understanding.

CONCLUSION

Our study set out to provide some initial knowledge regarding the expatriation experiences of a hitherto unstudied subgroup of SIEs. We focused on their success, as measured by engagement levels and intent to stay with their organization. Through a quantitative research design, we obtained results that both supported previous findings regarding the more often-studied SIE subgroup of highly-skilled, knowledge worker SIEs from Western home countries, as well as provided insight into low-skilled, single-track, female SIEs in the United Arab Emirates. Despite inherent limitations in this study, our findings do lay a foundation upon which further empirical exploration of this subgroup of SIEs should be built as well as subsequent practical applications for organizations that hire such SIEs may be based.

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