

Exploring Expatriate Social Networks: Does Country-Risk Matter for Psychological Well-Being?

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Abstract

Despite its increasing relevance for international business, the effects of terrorism on international assignments have hardly been analyzed. Applying a social network perspective, this study investigates the impact of expatriate social network characteristics on psychological well-being in a terrorism-endangered environment. Drawing on data surveying 175 expatriates assigned to Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia, the study finds that large and diversified networks positively affect the psychological well-being. When including the influence of terrorism moderating these relationships, the results are amplified. Hence, country risk plays an important role for the social support that can be obtained from network actors and affects expatriates' psychological well-being. Discussing these findings, the study also differentiates between closeness with host country nationals and others, and presents several implications for managers.

Keywords: Expatriate Social Networks, Country Risk, Terrorism, Psychological Well-Being, Social Support

INTRODUCTION

Over the last years, the number of expatriate assignments has increased, with companies sending staff to a very diverse group of host countries (Brookfield Global Relocation Services, 2012). There are various reasons for sending expatriates to foreign subsidiaries such as subsidiary coordination and control motives, transfer of technologies or organizational practices, as well as advancing the expatriate's personality and career (Edström & Galbraith, 1977; Harzing, 2001; Stahl, Miller, & Tung, 2002). Such tasks become increasingly important for establishing business activities on a global scale which enable multinational companies to meet the global demand in today's competitive environment (Shin, Morgeson, & Campion, 2007). For the individual expatriate, relocating to a foreign country goes along with many changes in his or her life. One big challenge is seen in leaving the expatriate's familiar social network behind. This often is accompanied with the loss or at least limitation of social support, which is usually drawn from this network (Wang & Kanungo, 2004; Wang & Nayir, 2006). Moreover, expatriates have to deal with different cultural values, unexpected behavioral rules, and often with language barriers. Concerning this matter, Osman-Gani & Rockstuhl (2008) state that differences in language, cultural values, and expectations about appropriate behavior lead to job uncertainty and stress. However, in several regions other risks, like violent conflict and the threat of terrorism, which can be tremendous sources of stress for an expatriate, are widespread (Czinkota, Knight, Liesch, & Steen, 2010; Oetzel & Getz, 2011) with severe consequences for expatriates' psychological well-being. Recent research highlights that terrorist attacks cause post-traumatic stress, anxiety, feelings of insecurity, decreased self-efficacy, and a decrease in subjectively rated health (Peus, 2011). Just in the year 2011, more than 10,000 terrorist attacks took place, affecting nearly 45,000 victims in 70 countries and resulting in about 12,500 deaths. Over 75 percent of these attacks occurred in the Near East and South Asia, two regions that have been increasingly considered strategically important investment regions of multinational companies (London & Hart, 2004; Nakata & Sivakumar, 1997; National Counterterrorism Center, 2012).

Overall, despite impressive work on expatriate cultural adjustment and job performance in the last decades (Avril & Magnini, 2007; Black & Gregersen, 1990; Black & Mendenhall, 1991; Harrison,

Shaffer, & Bhaskar-Shrinivas, 2004; Takeuchi, 2010; Tung, 1998), the quest of assuring successful assignment seems yet to be solved. While failure rates normally are estimated to range between 25 and 40 percent, in developing countries this threshold is at about 70 percent (Chiu, Wu, Zhuang, & Hsu, 2009). In other words, two out of three expatriates either leave the assignment before having finished their tasks, or they stay while, due to psychological withdrawal, they perform poorly (Shaffer & Harrison, 1998). Such failure is quite costly for MNCs, in the worst case the entire investment abroad is in danger (Farh, Bartol, Shapiro, & Shin, 2010). One of the major reasons for failure is associated with poor adjustment (for a review, see: Bhaskar-Shrinivas, Harrison, Shaffer, & Luk, 2005), which is strongly related to the expatriates psychological well-being.

A promising instrument to achieve a good well-being and foster adjustment is a satisfying social network (Li & Rothstein, 2009; Wang & Kanungo, 2004; Wang & Nayir, 2006). However, despite Harrison et al.'s (2004) call for new investigations of expatriates' social environment, this topic is still under-researched. In a similar way, Osman-Gani & Rockstuhl (2008) highlight that scholars have been arguing for the need to pay more attention to the concrete interaction of expatriates, empirical investigations of expatriates' social networks have only recently been offered, while Li & Rothstein (2009) consider the impact of expatriate social networks as under-emphasized. At the same time, the relationship between expatriates and terrorism has only been scarcely analyzed and should be subject to further research (Czinkota et al., 2010). Hence, in order to address this lack of research this study is the first to analyze the composition and impact of expatriate social networks in countries suffering from the prevalence of terrorism. Even though terrorist attacks are not a phenomenon of developing countries, as 9/11, the Madrid train bombings in 2004, or the bomb attack during the 2013 Boston Marathon have tragically shown, there are certain countries with a higher penetration of terrorist incidents. The National Counterterrorism Center (2012) reports terrorist attacks worldwide, identifying Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, and India as the four most dangerous countries. Hence, in this article we focus on these terrorism-endangered countries. However, we excluded Iraq and therefore integrated a country with a low level of terrorism, Saudi Arabia, in order to discuss possible differences.

Our study aims at bridging this research gap and contributes to literature by 1) analyzing the structure of expatriate social networks in terrorism-endangered countries, 2) enhancing expatriate lit-

erature by investigating the influence of several network characteristics on the expatriate's psychological well-being, and 3) providing a more differentiated picture of social support with regard to network closeness. Furthermore, practical implications for managers are provided, which are intended to help expatriates sustaining their social network in terrorism-endangered countries.

The remainder of this study is organized as follows: First, we give a brief overview regarding the literature on (expatriate) social networks and develop a set of hypotheses in order to test our research model. In the next section we then present the research design and sample, before we test our hypotheses against data gathered from 175 expatriates in four different countries (Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia) using linear regression modeling. The paper concludes with a discussion of the results, also outlining theoretical and managerial implications.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this study, we employ a social network perspective in order to analyze the psychological well-being of expatriates in terrorism-endangered countries. According to the social network perspective, expatriates can obtain valuable resources from their social network that enhance their psychological well-being during the foreign assignment. Caligiuri & Lazarova (2002) regard social interaction with host, home, and third-country nationals as an invaluable resource in order to receive information about culturally acceptable norms and to reduce uncertainty associated with work and non-work situations. Social support is considered one of these valuable resources which House (1981) categorizes into four broad types – emotional support, instrumental support, informational support, and appraisal support. Emotional support captures the provision of empathy, love, trust, and caring, while instrumental support refers to the tangible aid that directly assists a person in a specific situation. Informational support contains advice, suggestions, and information that a person can use to address specific problems. Finally, appraisal support covers constructive feedback and affirmation (Glanz, Rimer, & Viswanath, 2008). These different types of social support that people receive through interactions with actors of their social network have a strong positive impact on the individuals' psychological well-being (Wang, 2002). According to Albrecht & Adelman (1987) emotional support can be considered a platform where expatriates can articulate their uncertainty and problems that helps them to develop a

more objective perspective on these issues. In addition, emotional support helps expatriates to resolve troubling issues that they face while being abroad. Informational support in turn enables expatriates to modify negative internalized attributions that ignore the local context and thus reduces uncertainty and stress. Instrumental support helps expatriates by assisting them with personal resources such as time, money, and labor that promote feelings of social integration and thus increase the psychological well-being of expatriates. Finally, appraisal support informs expatriates about appropriate and inappropriate behavior and increases their skills to adapt to the local conditions in a more efficient and faster way.

A social network refers to the web of social relationships that surrounds individuals and is broadly defined as a finite set or sets of actors that are connected by one or more specific types of relational ties (Hall & Wellmann, 1985; Wasserman & Faust, 1994). In the social network literature, the term “actor” refers to all individuals, who are in our context the expatriates surveyed, his or her peer expatriates, local colleagues, local friends, as well as colleagues and friends who stayed in the home country, and relatives and family members. In the following, we will refer to all actors who are citizens of the respective host country as host country nationals (HCNs), to all other people as non-HCNs. The term “relational ties” describes a linkage between a pair of such actors. From an egocentric view, a social network is formed by a focal actor (i.e. the expatriate) and a set of different people who have relational ties to the focal actor (Bruning, Sonpar, & Wang, 2012). The patterns of ties in the expatriate social network can be described by network structural characteristics including network size, closeness, interaction frequency, and network diversity (Burt & Minor, 1983; Campbell, Marsden, & Hurlbert, 1986; Haines & Hurlbert, 1992; House, Kahn, McLeod, & Williams, 1985; Marsden & Campbell, 1984; Wang & Nayir, 2006). Network size refers to the number of actors the expatriate reports in his/her social network during the foreign assignment. These actors consist of peer expatriates, host country nationals inside or outside of the workplace, family members and other relatives, and friends. Network diversity accounts for the heterogeneity of the expatriate social network, i.e., to what extent the network is composed of both HCNs and non-HCNs (HCN diversity) and to what extent the network is composed of both female and male actors (gender diversity). Network closeness indicates the intensity of relational ties (Marsden & Campbell, 1984), which means how intimate the expatriate is with the actors in his/her social network. Finally, frequency reveals how often an expatri-

ate contacts the actors of his/her social network (Wang, 2002). As argued above, expatriates obtain valuable resources such as emotional, instrumental, informational, and appraisal support from their social network that possibly enhance their psychological well-being during the foreign assignment. In the social network literature, it is argued that the network characteristics determine how much support a person can obtain and thus also affects the psychological well-being. Figure 1 illustrates the explained rationale and shows the theoretical framework of this study. In the following, based on social network theory we develop hypotheses that connect the network characteristics with psychological well-being and investigate how country risk in the form of terrorist threat might influence the direct relationship between network characteristics and psychological well-being.

Insert Figure 1 about here

HYPOTHESES

Network size refers to the total number of different actors in the expatriate social network. In the network literature it is argued that larger social networks provide more social support (Nan Lin, Woelfel, & Light, 1985) that enables expatriates to reduce uncertainty and stress which occur during the foreign assignment and thus is considered an important predictor for psychological well-being. According to this literature, expatriates will aim at enhancing their social network by establishing relational ties with HCNs and by maintaining already established relational ties with non-HCNs in order to deal with uncertainty and stress. For example, on-site the expatriate can establish contact with peer expatriates in the local subsidiary or with local employees to seek help with work-related problems, to cope with the new and unfamiliar working environment, and to obtain useful information about the local context. Moreover, the expatriate can keep in touch with friends, colleagues, and relatives in his/her home country. Advanced communication technology such as email, phone or video calls enable expatriates to communicate concerns and feelings fast and in a convenient way. Several studies support the assumption that expatriates with a large number of network partners can better obtain the different kinds of social support and will feel more certainty and less ambiguity about the foreign assignment (Furukawa, 1997; Kashima & Loh, 2006; Wang & Kanungo, 2004; Wang & Nayir, 2006). The basic

rationale behind this argument is that expatriates with a larger social network have a greater possibility to receive emotional, informational, instrumental, and appraisal support through relational ties with the people in their social network than expatriates with smaller social networks. This rationale is based on the assumption that each relational tie with a network partner has a certain value for an expatriate and that the relational tie helps the expatriate to reduce uncertainty and stress, and thus increase his or her psychological well-being. Obviously, a larger network means a higher number of relational ties. Summing up the individual value of all ties should result in a higher total value of the network ties, hence being in favor of psychological well-being. Based on these considerations, we conclude:

Hypothesis 1: Expatriates with a larger social network will have a higher psychological well-being.

Closeness refers to the intensity of relational ties between the expatriate and his/her social network. The variable is one of the components of tie strength which is considered in the social network literature (Granovetter, 1973) and captures the mutual trust and attraction between the expatriate and his/her social network. Closeness indicates how connected the expatriate feels with the network partner and suggests a more authentic relationship (Bruning et al., 2012). Moreover, closeness reveals whether the network partners are willing to provide assistance to the expatriate when he/she is dealing with stress and uncertainty (e.g. Amato, 1990; Walker, Wasserman, & Wellman, 1994) which in turn enhances the expatriate's psychological well-being. However, along these lines, the network literature shows mixed lines of argumentation. On the one hand, it is argued that especially close or strong ties provide individuals with emotional and appraisal support which increases the psychological well-being. Concerning this matter, Shen & Kram (2011) highlight that emotional and appraisal support is more likely to be offered when the relationship evolved into friendship (i.e. close ties). With regard to instrumental and informational support, previous studies argued that network partners are more likely to share information and advice with the expatriate in the case of close ties (Mäkelä & Suutari, 2009; Reiche, Harzing, & Kraimer, 2009). On the other hand, it is argued that arm-length ties, i.e. low closeness, are sometimes more beneficial in providing informational and instrumental support (Granovetter, 1973; N.

Lin, 1982) as such actors usually have more access to outside information and other valuable resources that cannot be obtained in a closer network.

In the case of foreign assignments, we assume that the first stream of argumentation prevails. Close ties will improve the psychological well-being of expatriates as in a foreign environment with a lot of uncertainty and stress (Avril & Magnini, 2007; Harrison et al., 2004), authentic, trustful relationships are of the essence. Close network ties and relationships based on mutual trust can be qualified to overcome problems abroad by drawing emotional and appraisal support from the network and overall contribute to a higher psychological well-being. Based on these considerations, we conclude:

Hypothesis 2: Expatriates with close ties to actors in their social network will have a higher psychological well-being.

Frequency indicates the number of times that the expatriate corresponds with actors in his/her social network in a given time frame (e.g. one month). It is reasonable to assume that the more frequent the contact, the more social support the expatriate will obtain as the support exchange occurs more often. In the literature, it is argued that contact frequency with network partners will have a positive impact on the expatriate's psychological well-being. Bruning et al. (2012) argue that an increased frequency of contact should provide expatriates with more information (Granovetter, 1973; Liu & Shaffer, 2005), which consequently should positively affect the psychological well-being. Wang & Kanungo (2004) empirically support this relationship in their study about expatriates in China. Based on these considerations, we conclude:

Hypothesis 3: Expatriates with more frequent contact to actors in their social network will have a higher psychological well-being.

HCN diversity indicates whether the expatriate's social network consists of both host country nationals (HCNs) and network actors of other nationalities, while **gender diversity** indicates to what extent the network is composed of both female and male actors. In the network literature it is argued that different actors might provide expatriates with different forms of support. In line with the argumentation above, network partners might provide emotional, instrumental, informational and appraisal sup-

port. The expatriate literature considers HCNs important actors, as they provide expatriates with instrumental and informational support such as varied information about cultural norms and values (Fee & Gray, 2011). Non-HCNs, who are usually not located in the host country, are valuable sources of emotional and appraisal support. In the literature, it is argued that emotional and appraisal support is facilitated by using the same language and having similar customs and cultural norms (Li & Rothstein, 2009). As a result, expatriates can obtain a higher amount of social support when they possess a diversified social network containing male and female actors as well as more diversity in terms of HCNs and non-HCNs. Based on these considerations, we assume:

Hypothesis 4: Expatriates with a more diverse social network in terms of HCNs and non-HCNs will have a higher psychological well-being.

Hypothesis 5: Expatriates with a more gender-diverse social network will have a higher psychological well-being.

Prevalence of terrorism and the social network

While the aforementioned hypotheses deal with social networks in general, in the following section we focus on the very specific context of terrorism. Expatriation is a stressful event for any expatriate in any country (Harrison et al., 2004). However, if a country is in the grasp of terrorism, there are additional drivers of stress, such as family/spouse conflicts or impeded living conditions, that negatively influence the expatriate (Bader & Berg, 2013). Moreover, Reade (2009) points out that a higher sensitivity to terrorism leads to negative work attitudes and Peus (2011) stresses the argument that terrorist attacks have important negative individual-level consequences such as a feeling of insecurity and a decrease in subjectively rated health. Since terrorism can lead to an elevated stress level and negative work attitudes, the expatriate's performance may suffer as well. All these factors are very unsatisfying for the individual and are supposed to cause a high level of frustration. Eventually, it is reasonable to assume that this also contributes to a negative psychological well-being. Hence, we conclude:

Hypothesis 6: A high terrorism level in a country negatively affects expatriates' psychological well-being.

Moreover, besides this direct effect on psychological well-being, terrorism also has several effects on the composition of and interaction within the individual expatriate's social network. For instance, in times of crisis, such as after a recent terrorist attack, employees especially value emotional assistance and guidance (Alexander, 2004). While such emotional assistance can originate from their employer, the role of the personal social networks is of at least equal importance. Depending on the host country's terrorism index we expect that the relationships hypothesized above will look different. In particular, we argue that a higher risk of terrorism moderates the impact of an expatriate's social network characteristics on his or her psychological well-being.

Interaction with network size. While the direct effect between the size of one's network and psychological well-being is argued to be positive, in a terrorism-endangered environment this effect is expected to be even stronger. James (2011) argues in a study on terrorism prevention and response that it is beneficial for organizations to have a larger network because they can draw on a larger pool of information and resources. This should also apply on individual level. When terrorism is prevalent, it is important for an expatriate to gather as much information as possible on acute threats and perhaps emotional support from other people affected. Since every contact person within the network has a network on his or her own, the indirect information flow, for instance regarding a terrorist attack, between the focal expatriate and the respective network actors increases with network size, as more indirect ties can be accessed. Hence, especially for informational support, a large network is important, as the number of actors increases the chance to receive new information (Granovetter, 1973). In terms of terrorist activity this can be essential to base decisions like leaving the country or staying on a broader, more solid basis.

Interaction with closeness. Similar to the network size, in a terrorism-endangered country, being relatively close to one's network partners should be of even greater importance than in a less-endangered environment. Intense relational ties express trust and familiarity which can function as an area of mental retreat and relief. Terrorist events are sudden and highly destructive (James, 2011b). However, most expatriates are not directly affected by terrorist attacks, they rather suffer from indirect effects (Bader & Berg, 2013). In order to deal with arising negative emotions and fear, seeking areas of mental retreat and emotional support is a natural reaction. Potential actors who could provide such

support can be found within the expatriate's social network. A stronger network tie, based on mutual trust, should not only be qualified to deliver such emotional support. In times of crisis its importance should be higher as well.

Interaction with frequency. Terrorist activity is a non-linear, unpredictable process that can hardly be predicted. In some months attacks occur on a daily basis, while in others there is almost no activity (National Counterterrorism Center, 2012). More frequent contact with network actors can help to better evaluate the current threat and terrorist activity. This informational support again helps to receive a clearer picture of the situation in the host country. In addition, more regular social exchange should help to build trust and contribute to better adjustment.

Interaction with gender and HCN diversity. As actors in the host country should have a better assessment of dangers and the situation in general, if the terrorism index is high this assessment should be of even bigger value. Also, having a more diverse network in terms of gender seems to be more beneficial, when the terrorism index is high, since it is likely to assess the risk situation more balanced, both from a male and a female view.

Overall, we conclude:

Hypothesis 7: Structural network characteristics are moderated by the terrorism index; a higher terrorism index increases the impact of network size, closeness, frequency, gender diversity, and HCN diversity on psychological well-being.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Sample

In order to test our hypotheses, we collected data using a sample of German-speaking expatriates with current foreign assignments in Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia. As there is no directory providing an overview and contact data of expatriates currently on foreign assignment, we had to hand-pick contact details. Therefore, we identified potential expatriates by collecting names and researching email addresses based on information provided by the expatriates in online platforms. We then emailed all respondents a token-based link to our online questionnaire, attaching a personalized letter of invitation, briefly describing the purpose of the study and asking them to participate. Of 2088

emails sent out, with two reminders two and four weeks later, we received 175 usable data sets, which equals a response rate of 8.4 percent. As we addressed senior-level employees who are often not willing to participate in academic surveys, this response rate compares favorably to other mail surveys targeting at executive respondents (Bader & Berg, 2013; Baruch, 1999; Cycyota & Harrison, 2006)

Of the 175 expatriates in our sample, 17 are assigned to Afghanistan, 91 to India, 13 to Pakistan, and 54 are currently located in Saudi Arabia. Tests for non-response bias and comparing early versus late responses did not reveal any problems with our data (Armstrong & Overton, 1977). Thus, we do not expect non-response bias to be a problem and used the data without further correction.

To reduce potential common method bias, we followed several recommendations of Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff (2003) and (Chang, van Witteloostuijn, & Eden, 2010). Ex-ante, we ensured all respondents complete anonymity and separated survey questions measuring independent and dependent constructs. In addition, our survey was pre-tested and all items that could be misinterpreted were re-written to be more precise and avoid misunderstandings. Ex-post, we applied an exploratory factor analysis and examined the unrotated factor solutions in order to test for a potential common method bias in our survey approach by means of the commonly used Harman's single factor test (Podsakoff et al., 2003). However, neither a single factor nor a general factor accounting for the majority of the covariance emerged. Thus, common method bias is not regarded as a problem.

Measures

Network characteristics

In order to assess the expatriates' network characteristics we applied Burt's (1992, 1997) name generator method, which has already been utilized in previous research on expatriates' networks (Bruning et al., 2012; Kashima & Loh, 2006; Wang & Nayir, 2006). In our questionnaire, we asked the respondents to name people who had supported them in the previous six-month period (respondents should name at least 3 and a maximum of 12 people). Moreover, we asked the respondents to answer several questions regarding individual characteristics which were necessary for evaluating the expatriates' networks. We calculated the network size by summing up the number of people reported by each respondent. Closeness was measured on a 5-point Likert scale by asking the expatriates to indicate how close they are to each person in their network. Moreover, the respondent had to answer

on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = less than monthly – 5 = daily) how often they were in contact with each person over the last six months in order to measure frequency. For both variables, we summed up the scores for each person in the expatriate's network and calculated the arithmetic average.

For measuring the variable HCN diversity we applied the operationalization of Wang & Nayir (2006) who defined it as the extent to which an expatriate's network consists of people originating from the assigned country and from all other countries. The variable is calculated by multiplying the respective percentage of HCNs and all other people in the network. For instance, if an expatriate who has been assigned to Afghanistan has a total network of ten people from which four originate from Afghanistan and the other 6 people come from other countries, we would obtain a score of .24 ($.6 \times .4$). In order to calculate the gender diversity score, the percentage of males and females were multiplied.

Terrorism Index

In order to measure the terrorism threat of a country, we used the Global Terrorism Index (GTI) of 2011. This indicator, which measures the impact of terrorism in 158 countries, is based on data from the Global Terrorism Database and is published by the Institute for Economics and Peace. This index combines four indicators - the total number of terrorist incidents, the number of fatalities, the number of injuries and the approximate level of property damage - to account for each country's yearly terrorism score (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2012).

Psychological Well-being

In order to obtain our dependent variable psychological well-being we adopted the 18-item scale developed by (Ryff & Keyes, 1995) which has already been adopted in the context of foreign assignments by Li & Rothstein (2009) and Wang & Nayir (2006). As the value for Cronbach's Alpha (0.80) met the recommended threshold value (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1978), we created a composite factor by calculating the arithmetical average of all 18 items.

Control Variables

Finally, we controlled for a number of additional factors. These variables have been utilized in previous studies on expatriates (Li & Rothstein, 2009; Puck, Kittler, & Wright, 2008; Shaffer & Harrison, 1998; Takeuchi, Yun, & Tesluk, 2002) as they depict personal characteristics and may also influence the expatriate's psychological well-being. Therefore, the respondents were asked to provide

demographic data, such as gender, marital status, and age, as well as other important factors that might impact an expatriate's well-being, such as previous foreign assignments and satisfaction with compensation package. For instance, expatriates with a higher previous experience should have an easier time to adjust abroad and thus also have a higher psychological well-being. We used single-item questions to obtain the required data. To be more precise, we asked the respondents to indicate how many months in total they worked abroad before this assignment in order to measure previous foreign assignments. For assessing the satisfaction of the compensation package, the respondents were asked on a 5-point Likert scale how satisfied they are with their whole compensation package.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, Cronbach's Alphas, and the correlation coefficients of all variables. The descriptive results show that the average age of the expatriates in our sample is 38.5 years with an average international working experience of 4.4 years. 69 percent of the expatriates are male and 48 percent are married. Moreover, the results indicate that compensation satisfaction, network size, closeness, HCN diversity, as well as all support variables are correlated with our dependent variable.

Insert Table 1 about here

We analyzed whether expatriates form different social networks depending on the country of their foreign assignment. Therefore, we employed a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). The network characteristics, network size, closeness, frequency, HCN diversity, and gender diversity were used as dependent variables while the assignment country was integrated as independent variable.

The mean value comparisons of different social network characteristics reveal some interesting findings. First, we can observe that the network size of expatriates assigned to Afghanistan (mean = 7.18) is significantly bigger than the size in other countries. The results also indicate that HCN diversity is larger in India (mean = .16) than in other countries and that gender diversity is significantly lower in Saudi Arabia (mean = .09) than that in other countries. Finally, the results suggest that expa-

triate form similar social networks with regard to closeness and frequency in Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia as the ANOVA does not reveal any significant differences.

Insert Table 2 about here

In order to gain further insight, we conducted a regression analysis and tested the developed hypotheses. To check for the possibility of multicollinearity problems we subsequently conducted collinearity diagnosis. The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values were below 2, substantially lower than the recommended threshold of 10. Thus, we concluded that there was no serious multicollinearity effect.

The results of the regression models are presented in Table 3. The Base Model (control variables only) explains only a small share of the variance in psychological well-being ($R^2 = .004$, $p > .10$). The results show that gender, marital status, age, and previous foreign assignments do not affect the expatriates' psychological well-being in a statistically significant way. Merely the satisfaction with the overall compensation package has a significant positive effect on the psychological well-being ($\beta = .154$, $p < .05$). Thus, the explanatory power of the control variables is very limited as less than 1 percent of the variance can be explained. In Model 1, we integrated the network characteristics, the independent variables of our research model. The included network characteristics make a significant contribution over and above the base model ($R^2 = 0.073$, $p < .05$). The results indicate that network size ($\beta = .183$, $p < .05$) and HCN diversity ($\beta = .165$, $p < .05$) have a positive and significant effect, while closeness ($\beta = -.194$, $p < .05$) shows a significantly negative impact on the psychological well-being of expatriates. Model 2 adds our hypothesized interaction terms - a country's terrorism index - between network characteristics and psychological well-being. The integration of the interaction term contributes once again to the explanation of the variance in a significant way ($R^2 = 0.114$, $p < .05$). The results of Model 2 reveal a negative and highly significant beta value for the interaction effect of closeness and terrorism index ($\beta = -.207$, $p < .05$) and a positive and highly significant beta value for the interaction effect of network size and terrorism threat ($\beta = .163$, $p < .05$).

Insert Table 3 about here

DISCUSSION

This study investigates the interrelationships among social network characteristics and psychological well-being in the context of terrorism-endangered countries. The findings of our analysis indicate that specific network characteristics positively affect the expatriates' psychological well-being while other characteristics have no or even negative effects. The findings highlight that network size and HCN diversity have, as predicted, a positive and significant effect on the expatriates' psychological well-being. Consequently, Hypotheses 1 and 4 can be supported by our results which provide evidence that expatriates with a large and in terms of HCNs diverse social network possess a higher psychological well-being. Moreover, the findings confirm that the social support that expatriates obtain through a larger social network has a stronger effect on the psychological well-being in countries with a high terrorism index value and thus terrorism threat than in countries with a low terrorism threat.

In Hypothesis 3 we suggested that expatriates who frequently interact with actors of their social network will possess a higher well-being as they will receive instrumental, informational, emotional, and appraisal support more often. However, only a marginal and non-significant effect between contact frequency and psychological well-being was found. This indicates that expatriates who frequently contact actors from their social network and expatriates who sporadically communicate with their social network obtain just as much social support and thus feel comfortable in almost the same manner. Therefore, the data do not support Hypothesis 3. The reasons why expatriates that occasionally contact actors in their social network obtain the same amount of social support as expatriates that frequently communicate with their network actors and thus possess a similar psychological well-being might be twofold. On the one hand, it might be the case that problematic matters affecting psychological well-being only occur occasionally and that expatriates depend on receiving emotional support at rare intervals. This means that in order to realize a high psychological well-being it is sufficient when an expatriate discusses important matters from time to time and that in the majority of frequent contacts with network actors, issues of no importance for the psychological well-being are addressed. For

instance, the indirect effects of terrorist attacks, i.e. fear, a higher stress level, and feelings of uncertainty, do not necessarily change over time. After a recent terrorist attack, one might feel frightened and need a lot of emotional support. However, as there seems to be no actual solution except leaving the country, the range of advice one can obtain from the network is limited. Once one has expressed his or her feelings and received the other actor(s) opinion, additional contact on the same matter only has limited marginal value. Network partners could only repeat the advice, without providing additional emotional support of higher value. Hence, once having exchanged standpoints and received a specific type of support, it does not make sense to ask for the same type of support again the next day. On the other hand, it is also plausible that network actors might only be willing to provide social support occasionally. While this might be different for emotional support by very close network actors, such as family members, normal members of the network might get tired of repeating the same arguments over and over (Shen & Kram, 2011). Everyone having to deal with his or her own problems can contribute to explain, why certain actors within the network will stop providing support for others after a certain amount of “contact approaches” is exceeded.

Regarding Hypothesis 5, our findings do not support our assumption that expatriates with a more gender-diversified social network have a higher psychological well-being. It appears that both male and female actors are supportive in a similar way. Perhaps, the change of gender roles in society contributes to this finding. For instance, nowadays we have an increasing number of female expatriates in responsible positions. Traditional gender roles fade in the background and both women and men focus on the core issue of doing their job.

With respect to Hypothesis 2, the results reveal a significant and negative effect of closeness on psychological well-being. This unexpected finding contradicts the hypothesized direct relationship between these two variables and indicates that expatriates who have a close relationship with actors in their social network feel less comfortable during the foreign assignment. This finding is counterintuitive as it is mainly argued that strong ties allow expatriates to obtain a higher amount of social support from their social interactions with network actors. However, in the literature on social support mixed arguments in connection with closeness are discussed. Lybeck (2002) and Furukawa (1997) revealed a

positive relationship between closeness and psychological well-being, while Wang & Nayir (2006) and Wang & Kanungo (2004) found a negative relationship between these variables. Wang & Kanungo (2004, p. 787) conclude that “for expatriates, while emotional support from close ties is helpful, the informational and instrumental support from less close ties might be vital in reducing stress and uncertainty caused by the unfamiliarity of the local environment.” In other words, the authors argue that weak ties with network partners are more beneficial for expatriates as they have a better access to outside information and other valuable resources. We would go a step further and argue that close ties might not be positive for the expatriates’ well-being in every situation, as strain and stress of network partners might be transmitted to the expatriate as well and thus negatively influence his/her psychological well-being. In line with this argument, the results show that a country’s terrorism threat amplifies the negative relationship between closeness and psychological well-being. In other words, in countries with a higher terrorism index expatriates feel significantly less comfortable when they have close relations to their network actors. Concerning this matter Waldman et al., (2011) state: “The victims of terrorism include not only the people who experience the attack directly, but also their families, friends, and colleagues.” This finding confirms our argumentation as it indicates that expatriates do not only obtain positive emotional and appraisal support from close ties with network actors, but that they might also get anxious about the local conditions as network actors might raise fears. Their close network partners might be scared and anxious and thus transfer these feelings to the expatriate who then again starts to think about the danger. Hence, instead of receiving social support that helps to overcome these problems, interaction with close network actors might cause the opposite. It seems to be intuitive that the closer the ties to these network actors are the stronger the effects will be on the expatriate’s psychological well-being.

In order to deepen our understanding with regard to the revealed negative relationship between closeness and psychological well-being we executed further analysis. In the discussion, we suggested that close ties to network actors might have a negative effect on the expatriate’s psychological well-being as strain and stress of network actors are transmitted to the expatriate. This argumentation mainly refers to emotional and appraisal support but not to instrumental and informational support.

These dimensions of social support should still be positively related to psychological well-being. As our analysis does not enable us to open the black-box between network characteristics and psychological well-being, and thus hinders us to determine the social support dimensions which lead to the negative and significant effect, we try to provide a profound argumentation to clear the picture.

We argued above that instrumental and informational support is supplied by HCNs, while emotional and appraisal support is mainly provided by non-HCNs as they speak the same language and have similar customs and values (Li & Rothstein, 2009). Thus, in order to provide evidence that emotional and appraisal support dimensions cause the negative effect of closeness on psychological well-being we replace the original closeness variable with two variables which distinguish between closeness to HCNs and closeness to non-HCN network actors and conducted the same hierarchical regression analysis.

Insert Table 4 about here

The results of our modified regression analysis reveal that the negative effect between closeness and psychological well-being is mainly caused by close ties with non-HCNs. Model 3 shows a significant negative relationship between close ties with non-HCNs and psychological well-being ($\beta = -.183, p < .05$) while the effect of close ties with HCNs is insignificant ($\beta = -.072, p > .10$). In Model 4, we find that the negative effect between close ties with non-HCNs and psychological well-being is negatively moderated by a country's terrorism index ($\beta = -.206, p < .05$). This means that expatriates maintaining close ties with non-HCNs have a lower psychological well-being in countries with a high prevalence of terrorism. This finding partly supports our assumption that emotional and appraisal support might have a negative effect on psychological well-being in specific situations. Hence, the results confirm that the negative effect is caused by close ties with non-HCNs. This might explain that expatriates are exposed to stress due to the anxiety of non-HCNs and thus have a lower psychological well-being while ties with HCNs function in a different way. With regard to the other network characteristics, we find only marginal different values.

CONTRIBUTIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND LIMITATIONS

Our study contributes to the expatriate literature in several ways. First, we shift the focus on terrorism-endangered countries and thus our research goes beyond countries that have been subject to extensive prior analysis. In this paper we employed a social network perspective in order to answer the question whether expatriates can benefit from their interactions with network partners in terrorism-endangered countries in terms of increasing their psychological well-being. While previously published studies already revealed that specific network characteristics have a positive impact on expatriates' psychological well-being during foreign assignments, this study transfers the logic to terrorism-endangered countries, as they are characterized by several additional challenges. Transferring the social network perspective to this context is especially important as multinational companies increase their business activities in these countries and have to make sure that expatriates feel comfortable and do not suffer from impediments in their well-being. Expatriates who have been assigned to terrorism-endangered countries do not only have to culturally adapt to unfamiliar cultural conditions but have to face other risks, such as violent conflict and the threat of becoming victim of a terrorist attack. Such risks can be tremendous sources of stress. Hence, it is questionable whether expatriates can benefit from their social network in a similar way as they do in less-endangered areas.

Consequently, this study contributes to the expatriate literature as it applies recent research findings to an increasingly important context by testing the basic rationale of the social network perspective in terrorism-endangered countries. Second, and in line with previous research findings, this study shows that expatriates with a large and diversified social network have a higher psychological well-being in terrorism-endangered countries as well. The finding that large and diversified networks are particularly important in terrorism-endangered countries has several practical implications. Organizations should encourage and actively assist expatriates to establish and maintain social networks, both before and after starting their assignment abroad. Prior to departure, organizations can get the expatriates in touch with local employees and provide information about useful events (such as regular meetings), potential support groups (expatriate groups), and available activities in the host country (Johnson, Kristof-Brown, Van Vianen, De Pater, & Klein, 2003). During the foreign assignment, organizations might organize formal and informal meetings with other expatriates and local employees

which facilitate socializing and help to build friendships. In case the expatriate is accompanied by his or her family, it is important to include their kinship in these events from the very beginning. Finally, the organization might support regular return voyages that help expatriates to maintain their social network in their home country and stay in touch with previous colleagues and friends at home. Additional vacation and a travel budget might help to realize this endeavor.

Third, our research advances the argumentation of previous work with regard to closeness. In previous studies it is argued that in the case of foreign assignments weak ties might be more beneficial than strong ties as expatriates can access new information that close network partners do not possess. However, by distinguishing between closeness to HCNs and closeness to non-HCNs, we are able to provide a more fine-grit picture of this relationship. Our study indicates that expatriates maintaining close ties with non-HCNs feel worse in terrorism-endangered countries. In this study, we argue that the negative effect on expatriates' psychological well-being is caused by a transmitted anxiety of network partners through a "contagion effect." Concerning this matter, (Adelmann, 1988) states that key members in a social network can deeply affect the well-being of other members and negative information can become salient and generate tremendous anxiety. In the case of terrorism-endangered countries this effect might be even worse. Non-HCNs mainly receive their information from mass media which present the conditions of countries quite undifferentiated. Thus, it might easily be the case that an expatriate feels secure and comfortable in a specific location, however, receives negative feedback from his/her network partners as they treat the condition of a country in an undifferentiated way and, via the network tie, might transport their emotions to the focal expatriate.

This finding also implies some practical implications for organizations as it shows that expatriates' well-being is negatively affected by non-HCNs. Thus, it might be reasonable to provide background information about the conditions of the location which can be distributed among the network partners. Finally, instead of including a broad variety of host countries, surveying an expatriate population from all over the world, we had a clear focus of assignment destinations. On the one hand, we analyzed the three most terrorism-endangered countries in the world. On the other hand, we set our focus exclusively on expatriates from the major German speaking countries, i.e. Austria, Germany, and Switzerland. Doing so contributes to literature by avoiding potential bias due to cultural differ-

ences between the expatriates. For instance, an expatriate growing up in Latin America might have a different perception of terrorism and violent conflict than a person being socialized in Canada or Denmark. Hence, we can assume that cross-cultural issues, such as language barriers or differences in Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions, are very similar for all respondents. This is also true for geographic distance, as the three home countries border each other and are relatively small in their size. Hence our results clearly focus on the topic analyzed, being free from any bias resulting from a too heterogeneous sample group.

As with every study, ours has some limitations as well, which have to be borne in mind when interpreting the results. First, by querying data at a fixed point in time rather than conducting a longitudinal analysis, our results may be biased. However, as the social network of people usually does not change too much in a short amount of time, this should not be a serious problem. Still, it only pictures a snapshot and future studies might overcome this issue by surveying expatriates over a period several months. Second, despite our immense effort to identify potential respondents and motivate them to participate, our sub-samples per country are too small to calculate reliable dyadic differences between each country-pair. Third, due to reasons of anonymity, we could not control for industry. While having included such item in the pre-study, we got feedback that such information could be used to identify the individual respondent. Fourth, using Burt's (1992) name generator method, we only assessed ego-networks. Especially in terms of closeness this could be a shortcoming, as the respondent him- or herself might over- or underestimate the tie strength from the network actor's perception. However, as our focus of analysis is the support, one draws from the network, highlighting the individual perception, our procedure is justified. In addition, it would not have been possible to receive this piece of information from each network actor in each network.

There are various avenues for future research. In order to get deeper insights on the process of establishing a social network in a new host country, future studies could survey respondents during their entire assignment. Using a longitudinal research design could look at different stages of adjustment and monitor changes in psychological well-being over time. This would also enable to detect changes in expatriates' contact behavior with HCNs and non-HCNs. It is reasonable to assume that ties with HCNs need some time to evolve and will arise with a longer stay in the host country. In addi-

tion, it also appears beneficial to not only differentiate between HCNs and non-HCNs, but also to analyze, whether the respective network actors are also in the host-country or if they stay in the home country or reside in a third country. Doing so would allow analyzing the effect of face-to-face interaction compared to cultivating social contacts using (electronic) long-distance communication.

Another promising step, despite the acknowledged practical difficulties, would be to extend the analysis beyond ego-networks by including other network actors in the survey. This would help to get a clearer picture of the network characteristics in terms of closeness. Moreover, it would be possible to investigate the actual exchange of social support compared to looking at the receipt of social support from the expatriate's perspective as a one-way street. Finally, future research could extend our model by looking at more output-oriented dependent variable. For instance, including the actual expatriate performance would be useful to see, whether the social support is actually effective. Employers need to know, if their efforts in supporting the expatriate are fruitful and what they can do in order to make sure that the social support drawn from their staffs' networks also transforms into good performance.

Figure 1:

Theoretical rationale between social network characteristics and psychological well-being

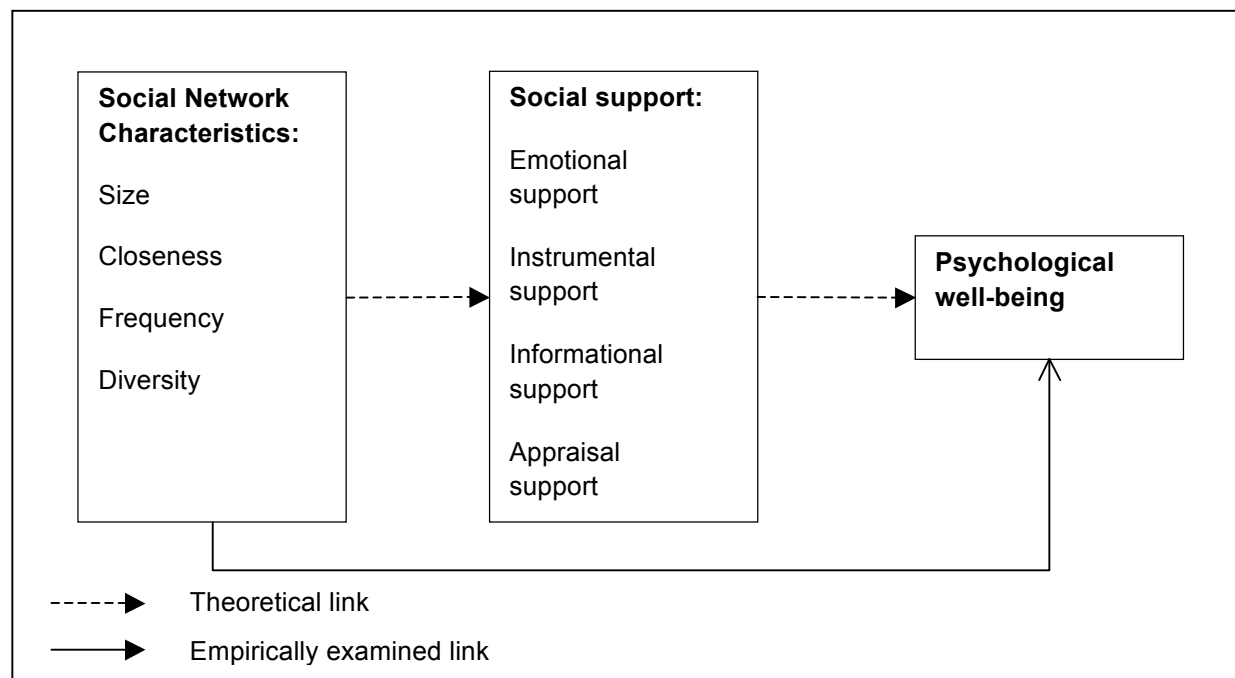


Table 1

Descriptive Statistics, reliability coefficients and correlations

	N	Mean	Std. dev.	α	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.
Control variables																
1. Gender ^a	173	.31	.46		1											
2. Marriage ^b	164	.48	.50		-.189*	1										
3. Age	174	38.50	9.90		-.206**	.444**	1									
4. Compensation satisfaction	166	3.59	1.08		-.153	.026	.060	1								
5. Previous foreign assignments	168	52.61	63.89		-.142	.201*	.529**	-.097	1							
Independent variables																
6. Network size	175	5.23	2.43		.179*	-.199*	-.197**	-.008	-.060	1						
7. Closeness	175	2.26	.47		-.205**	.164*	.236**	-.088	-.022	.002	1					
8. Frequency	174	1.86	.58		.007	.134	.135	.070	.047	.101	.353**	1				
9. Gender diversity	175	.14	.10		.353**	-.135	-.256**	-.114	-.096	.196**	-.222**	-.011	1			
10. HCN diversity	175	.11	.10		-.019	.075	.069	-.213**	.155*	.170*	.109	-.066	.087	1		
Moderator variables																
14. Terrorism Index	160	6.59	2.61		.313**	-.142	-.255**	-.123	-.179*	.185*	.000	.042	.315**	.293**	1	
Dependent variables																
15. Psychological well-being	160	4.77	.40	.792	-.049	.050	.035	.155*	.075	.177*	-.142	-.016	.050	.175*	.083	1

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$;^aMen=0, Women=1;^bMarried=1, all other marital status=0;

Table 2

Comparison of network characteristics of expatriates in Afghanistan, India, Pakistan and Saudi-Arabia

Variables	Afghanistan (n=17)		India (n=91)		Pakistan (n=13)		Saudi Arabia (n=54)		F-value
	mean	s.d.	mean	s.d.	mean	s.d.	mean	s.d.	
Network size	7.18	3.30	5.24	2.23	5.23	2.83	4.59	2.02	5.26**
Closeness	2.16	.48	2.31	.46	2.08	.38	2.25	.47	1.30
Frequency	1.94	.58	1.84	.58	1.95	.50	1.82	.62	.29
HCN Diversity	.07	.10	.16	.09	.07	.10	.06	.10	13.53**
Gender Diversity	.16	.08	.16	.09	.15	.10	.09	.10	6.51**

*p<.05, **p<.01

Table 3

Regression results between expatriates' network characteristics and psychological well-being

	Base model	Model 1	Model 2
Control variables			
Gender	-.005	-.072	-.139 [†]
Marriage	.012	.044	.057
Age	.043	.099	.125
Compensation satisfaction	.154*	.153*	.160*
Previous foreign assignments	.066	.016	.030
Independent variables			
Network size		.183*	.145 [†]
Closeness		-.194*	-.223*
Frequency		.006	.000
Gender diversity		.030	.061
HCN diversity		.165*	.189*
Moderator variables			
Terrorism Index			.094
Interaction terms			
Terrorism x Network size			.163*
Terrorism x Closeness			-.207*
Terrorism x Frequency			.045
Terrorism x Gender diversity			.009
Terrorism x HCN diversity			-.012
Adjusted R ²	.004	.073*	.114**
Incremental R ²		.093**	.069*
Model F value	1.154	2.367	2.400
Incremental F value		3.505	2.271

Table 4

Regression results between expatriates' network characteristics and psychological well-being with differentiated closeness variable

	Base model	Model 3	Model 4
Control variables			
Gender	-.005	-.075	-.141 [†]
Marriage	.012	.038	.059
Age	.043	.099	.104
Compensation satisfaction	.154*	.169*	.181*
Previous foreign assignments	.066	.027	.042
Independent variables			
Network size		.185*	.128
Closeness to people in home country		-.183*	-.137 [†]
Closeness to people in host country		-.072	-.009
Frequency		.006	-.027
Gender diversity		.045	.065
HCN diversity		.158*	.177
Moderator variables			
Terrorism Index			.085
Interaction terms			
Terrorism x Network size			.167*
Terrorism x Closeness to people in home country			-.206*
Terrorism x Closeness to people in host country			-.111
Terrorism x Frequency			.056
Terrorism x Gender diversity			.011
Terrorism x HCN diversity			-.042
Adjusted R ²	.004	.076*	0.121**
Incremental R ²		.093**	-
Model F value	1.145	2.299*	2.329*
Incremental F value		3.187*	2.192*

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