

Where the danger lies: Contextualising Demands and Resources for Expatriates in Hostile Environments

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ABSTRACT

With the international business environment becoming more turbulent, an increasing number of expatriates is assigned to environments characterised as hostile. While the literature on global mobility shows consensus that work outside employees' home countries poses challenges to both organisations and individuals, the resulting stress is seen to increase when the location is considered a hostile environment (HE). Increased stress is a phenomenon which is often associated with severe health outcomes such as burnout. Does this then mean that expatriates working in highly stressful environments are particularly at risk? This paper addresses this question by applying the Job-Demands and Resource (JD-R) perspective to expatriation in HEs and presents the qualitative findings gathered to identify context-specific demands and resources. Drawing on 42 in-depth interviews with expatriates assigned to HEs, the results reveal that work overload, work and non-work constraints, cultural novelty and work-life conflict might be potential predictors of burnout. In contrast perceived organisational support (POS), job satisfaction, internal career advancement, a support network and leisure coping strategies might be valuable resources to prevent this, ideally leading to increased work engagement. The paper contributes to the rather novel discussion on expatriate burnout and extends the occupational stress model by its application in a new context as well as the incorporation of personal demands and resources. Findings can be used to provide recommendations for appropriate global mobility policies and practices.

Keywords: expatriation, hostile environments, job demands, job resource, burnout