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Expatriate performance in terrorism-endangered countries: The role of family and organizational support

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A B S T R A C T

Expatriates are not only sent to industrialized countries with stable environmental conditions, but also to countries that bear high political, social, and even terrorist risk. Despite its practical relevance, the role of expatriates’ families on assignments in terrorism-endangered countries has not been addressed yet. Integrating expatriate literature and family systems theory we investigate the family-related performance antecedents of 121 expatriate managers assigned to a terrorism-endangered country. We find evidence that safety-related intra-family tension significantly impedes expatriates’ work performance. Perceived organizational support can help to diminish this influence. We discuss our results and conclude with further implications for theory and practice.

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1. Introduction

Multinational corporations (MNCs) often send some of their staff on expatriate assignments. The objectives of foreign assignments range from the coordination and control of foreign subsidiaries and the transfer of technologies and organizational practices to career advancement and personal development (e.g. Edström & Galbraith, 1977; Harzing, 2001; Stahl, Miller, & Tung, 2002). As traditional markets have gradually become saturated, the focus of MNCs now is often on emerging economies, such as India or Russia, and smaller, but potentially profitable, markets (Cheng & Lin, 2009; Li & Scullion, 2010; Sparrow, 2012). However, many of these lesser-developed countries do not only offer attractive growth rates and shiny business outlooks, but also present more risks for firms in many ways, such as political risk (Henisz, Mansfield, & Von Glinow, 2010; Slagen & van Tulder, 2009).

In this study, we focus on one of the most severe risks, which is the prevalence of violent conflicts and terrorism (Bader & Schuster, 2015; Czinokta, Knight, Liesch, & Steen, 2010; Driffield, Jones, & Crotty, 2013; Getz & Oetzel, 2010). The National Counterterrorism Center (2012) reports more than 10,000 attacks just in the year 2011, killing or injuring almost 45,000 people in 70 countries. Despite the relatively low likelihood for an individual of actually becoming a direct victim of an attack, compared to, for instance, being killed in a car accident, indirect effects prevail. Reade and Lee (2012) found that operating in a terrorism-endangered area has a tremendous negative effect on the organizational commitment of the workforce. More concretely, Bader and Berg (2013) analyzed the impact of terrorism on expatriates, finding that expatriates who experience stress from terrorism perform worse than those who are not affected by this.

While looking at expatriates is important, the picture is incomplete if an assignee has a significant other. Data show that many expatriates are in a stage of their life in which they have family (Brookfield Global Relocation Services, 2013). It is quite common that the spouse and maybe children accompany an expatriate on his or her assignment abroad. In an extensive survey on expatriate assignments, KPMG (2012) found that only 36% of expatriates are unaccompanied, meaning their spouses and family remain in the home country. Brookfield Global Relocation Services (2013) even report only 20% of expatriates leave their spouse behind. Thus, at least a mere two thirds move with their partners.
Black and Gregersen (1991) examined this important topic, focusing on the antecedents of spouse cross-cultural adjustment. By providing evidence that spouse adjustment is a major factor of the mission’s success, they paved the way for more specific studies analyzing the role and influence of an expatriate’s significant other. While there is a general consensus in the literature, acknowledging that family issues are very important for an expatriate to perform well and work effectively (e.g., Harrison, Shaffer, & Bhaskar-Shrinivas, 2004; Haslberger & Brewster, 2008; Kittler, Holtrügge, & Ungar, 2006; Lazarova, Westman, & Shaffer, 2010) the domain needs more attention in order to get a deeper understanding in special contexts.

Since effects of the home life spill over to the work life of an assignee, it is very important for the entire family to be well-adjusted (Bauer & Taylor, 2001). Family characteristics and the family’s perception of the assignment is crucial for the adjustment process and the success or failure of a foreign assignment severely depends on intact intra-family relations (Caligiuri, Hyland, Bross, & Joshi, 1998; Caligiuri, Hyland, & Joshi, 1998; Kittler et al., 2006). Haslberger and Brewster (2008), for instance, analyzed the adjustment process of expatriates and their families in a foreign country. Mohr and Klein (2004) explored various factors influencing the adjustment of American expatriate spouses in Germany and demonstrate its impact on expatriate well-being and performance. Lazarova et al. (2010) combine the spillover effects between work and family context as well as potential crossover effects between the expatriate and his or her spouse.

Overall, having found evidence for the spouse’s general ability to influence the work outcomes of the expatriate, a further analysis of this phenomenon in more specific situations is promising. In particular, findings of the existing literature need to be extended by empirically investigating and confirming the occurrence of spillover effects. Moreover, the consideration of the various country conditions that may affect expatriate performance and well-being in different ways is necessary.

Global relocation involves many changes and stressful challenges. For instance, learning a new language, adapting to different cultural norms, and establishing a new social network are some of the possibly associated challenges (Caligiuri, Hyland, Bross, et al., 1998; Selmer, 2001). In terrorism-endangered countries, these challenges are multiplied by safety concerns (Bhanugopan & Fish, 2008; Wagner & Westaby, 2009). For example, Bader and Berg (2013) found evidence that terrorism-induced stress lowers an expatriate’s work attitudes, increases his or her disaffection with host country nationals (HCNs), and eventually impedes his or her performance. If the expatriate’s family members are accompanying him or her on the assignment, they are also exposed to these dangers (Shimoni, Ronen, & Roziner, 2005). However, even if the spouse stays in the home country, there is potential for disputes about the safety situation, since mutual concern and regular contact is assumed to be given in the nuclear family. Thus, it is promising to incorporate the role of spouses and family members when investigating performance consequences for expatriates.

Applying family systems theory, we investigate this issue in an increasingly important context for international business, i.e., countries suffering from regular terrorist attacks.

The purpose of this study is to better understand the performance antecedents of expatriates with families assigned to terrorism-endangered countries. Our central research questions are: (1) does safety-related tension within the nuclear family compromise an expatriate’s performance? (2) does it make a difference if the expatriate has children and if he or she is accompanied by his or her family, and (3) is perceived organizational support (POS) qualified as a stress buffer in such a special setting?

To answer these questions, we develop a research model and test it by applying hierarchical regression analysis. Analyzing data from a survey among 121 expatriates assigned to a terrorism-endangered country, we investigate the role of safety-related tensions within the family and resulting impact on the expatriate’s performance. Moreover, we consider the general stress level of the individual and analyze a potential buffering role of social support (Brown, 2008; Cohen & Wills, 1985; Takeuchi, Shay, & Jiatao, 2008). Thus, our study aims at enhancing existing literature on global assignments by extending the role of the family beyond the context of sole adjustment. Finally, we seek to fill the gap of research on assignments in hazardous regions, expanding the focus of analysis in expatriation management.

The remaining part of this article is structured as follows. In the next section, we introduce the conceptual framework and derive a set of hypotheses. After explaining the methodology, we present and discuss the findings of our study. We then summarize its main contributions and derive implications for future studies as well as for practitioners.

2. Conceptual framework and hypotheses

In order to realize our research objectives derived in the previous section, we follow Caligiuri, Hyland, and Joshi’s (1998) reasoning and apply family systems theory (Hill, 1949; Minuchin, 1974) to explain the processes within the family, and spillover theory (Aldous, 1969; Cruiter, 1984; Piotrkowski, 1979) to explain the transfer of family matters into the work sphere. Moreover, we adopt the buffering concept of Cohen and Wills (1985) to analyze potential moderating effects of POS in this context. Fig. 1 illustrates our research model.

Family systems theory focuses on the functioning of a family as a closed system in which relationships between family members are in equilibrium (Aldous, 1969; Brett & Stroh, 1995; Minuchin, 1974). The family constitutes a unit, rather than a set of individual members, with reciprocal relationships and mutual impact on one another (Caligiuri, Hyland, & Joshi, 1998). These relationships can be understood as a family system, consisting of three components, namely family structure, family development, and family adaptation (Minuchin, 1974). In a well-functioning family, these relationships should be balanced.

Family members are primary stakeholders for the assignee and thus have a very strong influence on him or her (Takeuchi, 2010). In a work context, this means that individuals will adjust their behavior depending on the family members’ attitudes and judgment, which also have a direct impact on their work outcomes. This interdependence between work life and private life is the key focus of spillover theory which has been frequently applied in the expatriate literature (Caligiuri, Hyland, & Joshi, 1998; Takeuchi, Yun, & Tesluk, 2002).

According to family systems theory, the inner-family equilibrium can be imbalanced by factors from inside the family, such as tensions between family members, or from outside the family (Minuchin, 1974). Expatriation can be a potential external cause for an imbalance (Rosenbusch & Cseh, 2012). When assigning an individual to work in another country, the relocation to a new environment can be very challenging. The more challenges and pitfalls coming with the expatriation, the higher chances to create an imbalance, especially in the family structure. It can be expected that challenges are bigger and more severe when an expatriate is assigned to a terrorism-endangered country, as he or she is confronted with additional danger and problems, strengthening the imbalance. Such imbalance can be very disturbing for the expatriate, and in the worst case, can lead to an early termination of the assignment, dissolution of the family, or both (Haslberger & Brewster, 2008; Tung, 1988).
Since the family system is very tight and requires a lot of communication, it is essential whether the expatriate is accompanied by his or her family. As the vast majority of expatriates chooses to relocate together with their spouses (Brookfield Global Relocation Services, 2013), it can be assumed that individuals prefer to be surrounded by their kinship, rather than opting for a long-distance relationship. However, such behavior exposes the spouse to the same challenges and adjustment issues as the expatriate him- or herself. Brett and Stroh (1995) state that managers with low satisfaction with their relationship are less likely to relocate internationally because they fear an increasing deterioration of the relationship. This means, that employees who are willing to relocate internationally are likely to be happier with their relationship in general. They do this together, perceiving the benefits of taking their family on the assignment superior to a separation. Being surrounded by their loved ones, keeping up the family unit’s structure and solving problems together as a unit strengthens the family ties.

So far, there has not been any research analyzing the benefits and drawbacks of family accompaniment in high-risk countries. The general expatriate literature reveals that family well-being is one of the most important prerequisites of successful foreign assignments (Black & Gregersen, 1991; Hasberger & Brewster, 2008). This is obviously particularly difficult to ensure in high-risk countries. Moreover, one can assume that expatriates will expose as little family members as possible to the danger. Hence, it would appear logical to leave the family back in the home country, as this could also contribute to a lower risk perception of the expatriate. Concerning the immediate danger, e.g. becoming victim of a terrorist attack, the expatriate only has to worry about him- or herself, knowing the family being safe. However, the disadvantages of long-distance relationships cannot be denied. Despite modern communication technology, such as email or video calling, being physically separated for a long time is a severe liability for almost every family. The family system can lose its balance since a joint family life is not possible for the time of the assignment.

On the other hand, an expatriate who is accompanied by his or her family has a familiar place of retreat. According to family systems theory, this strengthens the reciprocal relationships and mutual impact on each other. Moreover, it allows expatriates to better balance their work-related tasks with family issues. This may in turn have a positive impact on their work outcomes (Gupta, Banerjee, & Gaur, 2012; Lauring & Selmer, 2010). Based on these considerations, we propose:

**Hypothesis 1.** Expatriates in terrorism-endangered countries who are accompanied by their family perform better than those separated from it.

While the aforementioned hypothesis contains the family as a whole, including children, the next section considers the question of the potential effect of children on expatriate performance in particular. Generally, it is often argued that raising children brings joy and can enrich an individual’s life. Children extend the dyadic structure of a couple and multiply interpersonal relations within a family (Minuchin, 1974). Therefore, expatriates who are not accompanied by their children during their foreign assignment are expected to be less satisfied with their situation abroad and perform worse (Kittler et al., 2006).

In high-risk countries, however, we suggest a different argumentation. According to family systems theory, balancing different individual needs is more complex, the more family members are involved. Large families require more communication and the intra-family equilibrium can be imbalanced more easily by external events (Minuchin, 1974). Such disturbing events are likely to occur particularly in high-risk countries.

Moreover, expatriates in highly stressful work situations that are expected to be found in terrorism-endangered countries are likely to have little energy left to take care about their children extensively and to engage in social activities with them (Van Der Zee, Ali, & Haakasma, 2007). On the contrary, they expose them to a hostile environment that leaves not much room for spontaneous activities and adventures. Thus, the presence of children contributes to a higher amount of psychological strain (Takeuchi, Wang, & Marinova, 2005) which, according to spillover theory, will in turn have a negative effect on expatriate performance. Based on these considerations we suggest:

**Hypothesis 2.** Expatriates in terrorism-endangered countries with children (younger than 18 years) perform worse than those without children.

Higher risk and latent fear of terrorism requires adequate coping behavior and needs to be addressed within the expatriate family. Every relocation can be problematic for the intra-family equilibrium (Brett & Stroh, 1995). The family as a unit is structured by an “invisible set of functional demands that organizes the ways in which family members interact” (Minuchin, 1974, p. 51). As soon as the set of demands changes, the interaction among the family members changes as well. As a consequence of adapting to a

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Fig. 1. Conceptual framework.
new environment, families have to discuss the new situation and must try to find a common way to solve emerging problems. This is even more crucial when the host country is in the grasp of terrorist groups and has suffered from previous attacks. In this case, safety issues become relevant and can cause discrepancies, i.e., a change in the set of demands of the family members. Often, expatriation is also connected to high involvement at work. Such involvement, while potentially good for performance, can also be detrimental when there is an expatriate's family involved. Shih, Chiang, and Hsu (2010) found that in such context work-family conflict is increased, which in turn decreases the expatriate's performance.

Moreover, in most host countries spouse dissatisfaction due to maladjustment is a major concern and responsible for problems in the couple's relationship (Black & Gregersen, 1991). High levels of dissatisfaction can cause intra-family disputes. When the couple is living in a terrorism-endangered environment, additional issues, like threatened safety, could also contribute to such tensions. Since relocation to such a region means that the expatriate, and in many cases the entire family, is exposed to that risk, the expatriate and his or her family will inevitably have to face this danger. This also includes talking about the risk and taking protective measures. Concerns about the family's well-being, permanent fear and restrictions in the freedom of movement, as well as arguments about the necessity of exposing themselves to such danger can contribute to an imbalance of the family equilibrium. Since family systems theory suggests causal relationships from expatriate to spouse and vice versa (Brett & Stroh, 1995), it is important to maintain an equilibrium by respecting the thoughts, feelings, and needs of both.

However, as soon as one partner raises concerns, a spiral of smaller imbalances can be triggered that eventually disturbs the overall family equilibrium. Terrorism does not only injure and kill people, it also brings along a severe social impact by spreading fear, amplified through its representation in the media (Prieto-Rodriguez, Rodriguez, Salas, & Suarez-Pandiello, 2009). Especially attacks gaining a lot of media coverage may become a topic of an expatriate family living in the country of the attack. Since there is a strong interaction and mutual influence within the nuclear family (Minuchin, 1974), as soon as one partner perceives terrorist attacks and threats differently than the other, arguments can be a consequence. A terror strike can trigger discussions between the expatriate and his or her spouse, raising issues such as sufficiency of safety measures and why the family (or at least the expatriate, if he or she is not accompanied) needs to be exposed to this risk. This could even raise doubts about the entire rationality of the assignment.

Ongoing arguments and inadequate coping may lead to relationship strains, which are perceived as very stressful and thus are crucial for the success of the assignment (Brown, 2008). Once a certain point is exceeded, it ceases to be a merely family issue, but also has consequences for the expatriate's work domain. The interplay of the work domain and private life (spillover) is vital for organizations, since it influences both organizational stress and the employees' personal life (Bragger, Rodriguez-Srednicki, Kutcher, Indovino, & Rosner, 2005). According to spillover theory, stress, attitudes, and feelings in the non-work environment also impact the individual's work environment (Grzywacz, Almeida, & Mcdonald, 2002; Shay & Baack, 2006; Takeuchi et al., 2002). In particular, these negative attitudes can impede the ability to adjust to the work domain or lead to lowered job satisfaction or an intention to return early. In other words, expatriates whose family equilibrium suffers due to terrorism are likely to perform worse. Thus we propose:

**Hypothesis 3.** Safety-related intra-family tension impedes the expatriate's job performance.

Analyzing the role of the organization assigning the expatriate in a terrorism-endangered country, we now focus on perceived organizational support. Literature suggests that POS is an important factor that lowers the employee's stress level, increases work attitudes, and contributes to his or her well-being (Bader, 2015; Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986; Eisenberger, Faso, & Davis-Lamastro, 1990; Kramier & Wayne, 2004; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Takeuchi et al., 2008). Eisenberger et al. (1986, p. 501) define POS as the "global beliefs concerning the extent to which the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being." They state that individuals judge such support by the same attributional processes people use to infer the commitment of others to social relationships.

Bader and Berg (2014) have modeled POS to moderate the relationship between the stressors and the stress-level emanating from terrorism. We pick this up and extend it by following Cohen & Wills, (1985) and consider it as a stress buffer. According to this perspective, POS has a moderating or buffering role. In general, social support applies a lever to the individual's stress level; if the support is perceived as valuable, the negative effects of stress can be diminished. POS can occur, for instance, by providing favorable job conditions or treating the employee fairly (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Applied to our research context, addressing the expatriates concerns about terrorism, POS can be expressed by assuming the expatriate that everything possible is done to protect him or her on the assignment. This may include, for example, security measures or evacuation plans in the case of an attack (Elango, Graf, & Hemmsti, 2008). Moreover, Guzzo, Noonan, and Elron (1994) highlight the importance of emergency leave programs. The expatriate needs to know at all times that his or her safety is number one priority and that the assignment will be discontinued if the situation becomes too dangerous.

Since expatriates live and work in a foreign country largely because of their employer's request, POS is a very valuable source of social support (Kramier & Wayne, 2004). If organizations express credible reliability and that they care about the expatriate, it is likely that such behavior will be reciprocated (Chen, Ding, & Kim, 2010). In particular, POS helps the expatriate to let the effects, which the general stress level has on the relationship between safety-related intra-family tension and expatriate performance, appear less severe. In addition, POS can also help to decrease the direct impact of perceived general stress on expatriate performance. In other words, for expatriates who receive higher amounts of POS, the detrimental effects of general stress should be less severe than for those receiving little POS. In line with theory, we suggest:

**Hypothesis 4a.** Perceived Organizational Support (POS) moderates the impact of the perceived general stress level on expatriate job performance. For expatriates with higher levels of POS, the negative impact of the stress level is less severe.

**Hypothesis 4b.** Perceived Organizational Support (POS) moderates the impact of the perceived general stress level on the relationship between safety-related intra-family tensions and expatriate job performance. For expatriates with higher levels of POS, the negative impact of the stress level is less severe.

Finally, previous studies revealed that family-related aspects of foreign assignments are affected by the general level of stress an expatriate experiences abroad (Brown, 2008; Harrison et al., 2004). Research on stress is well-established, concerning that negative stress can impede an individual's psychological well-being as well as other outcomes (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Cohen, 1980; Manning, Jackson, & Fusilier, 1996; Sullivan & Bhagat, 1992). Lazarus and Folkman (1984) found that people rate stressful situations as either potentially beneficial or potentially threatening. In the latter case,
(negative) stress arises which can trigger a change in the individual’s emotions and behavior. Eventually, stress can decrease the individual’s job performance (Lepine, Podsakoff, & Lepine, 2005). To better illustrate the situation of an expatriate’s current level of stress which is caused by everyday events, such as dealing with personal things and managing occurring difficulties in life, we also incorporate the perceived general stress level in our analysis.

In particular, we expect that the negative effects resulting from safety-related intra-family tension will have an even more severe impact if the expatriate is very stressed in general. In an early review of stress effects on performance, Cohen (1980) found that especially unpredictable stressors are the most impactful ones. A terrorism-endangered environment should by nature expose the expatriate to these unpredictable stressors more often and more severely than a safe environment would. Uncertainty there is higher, the expatriate has to deal with a latent threat for his or her life, and at the same time must manage to get the job done properly. Thus we can expect that expatriates in terrorism-endangered countries experience higher levels of general stress just because of the location.

If difficulties and important things in the expatriates’ lives pile up too high and the pressure of managing daily life gets too big, the stress will precipitate in outcomes such as work attitudes or the adjustment process (Bader & Berg, 2014; Kraimer, Wayne, & Jaworski, 2001). However, it can be expected that such pressure will also impact the way an expatriate processes safety-related arguments with his or her spouse. While a dispute that would be over and crossed off the list quickly when an individual is relatively relaxed, with a higher level of general stress chances are that it continues to have an effect for a longer time. For instance, the partner’s complaint about once more canceling their weekend plans due to an elevated threat level might normally only have a small impact. However, if the expatriate is extremely stressed in general, this argument is be perceived more severely. Hence, we suggest:

**Hypothesis 5.** The negative impact of safety-related intra-family tension on expatriate performance is higher for those individuals with a higher level of perceived general stress.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Research design and sample

Our hypotheses and overall model proposed above was tested using a data subset based on Bader and Berg (2013), analyzing a different set of variables and, in regard of the purpose of our study, only including respondents who actually had a spouse. Data was obtained from a survey among 143 expatriates assigned to terrorism-endangered countries with an American or European MNC. In order to identify countries with a high risk of terrorism, three different sources indicating elevated terrorist activity were assessed: the International Country Risk Guide’s (ICRG) terrorism rating, NCTC data (National Counterterrorism Center, 2012), and the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office’s terrorism classification. If at least two sources supported this notion, the host country was included in our analysis. The countries and number of assigned expatriates represented in our study are specified in Table 1.

Email invitations to expatriates being currently on assignment were sent out, asking them to participate in the survey by answering an English language questionnaire. After a pilot study and preliminary attempts of creating data, we realized the difficulty of identifying potential respondents in such countries. Therefore, we had to rely on non-probability sampling, as there was no feasible alternative (Cascio, 2012). Since there is no directory of executives abroad and many companies were not willing to provide the necessary contact information to address their expatriates or forward the questionnaire, we decided to choose a split approach. In a first step, we identified potential expatriates of European and US companies doing business in HRCs. Therefore, we hand-picked names and researched email addresses based on information given by the expatriates in an online social network. Doing so yielded a total of 1140 potential respondents, who we emailed our invitation including a personal link to our survey platform. In addition, we sent a reminder two weeks after our initial mailing. Overall, we retrieved 108 usable data sets, comparing to a response rate of slightly below 10%. Considering that we addressed senior-level expatriates, whose willingness to participate in academic surveys often is limited, this response rate is comparable to other mail surveys aiming at top executive respondents (Baruch, 1999; Cyckota & Harrison, 2006).

In order to increase the contact effort (Cascio, 2012), the second step was distributing an invitation to participate in our survey sent out by the BDAE, a German Association of expatriates. The invitation was distributed via email to the about 3500 BDAE members, yielding another 35 responses from expatriates actually assigned to countries qualified for our analysis. The response rate of 1% is lower as the invitation was part of a newsletter mailing, not personally addressing the recipient. In addition, and most importantly our study aims at expatriates in terrorism-endangered countries. This excludes the vast majority of BDAE members. Hence, with regard to other internet-based surveys, our overall response rate can be considered acceptable (Deutschens, de Ruyter, Wetzels, & Oosterveld, 2004). T-tests revealed no significant differences between the respondents in the two sub-samples in terms of demographic characteristics, hence we combined them, removed respondents without a partner, and obtained a final sample consisting of 121 entries. Finally, comparing early and late responses, as well as tests for non-response bias did not reveal any problems with our data (Armstrong & Overton, 1977). While all our respondents were either married or lived in a committed relationship, 76 brought their family to the host country. With 94 men, there was a dominance of male expatriates, 59 had at least one child younger than 18 years (which is the age of majority in most home countries). The mean age was 43 years, the average duration of the assignment 34 months, and previous expatriate experience about 6.5 years. In general the education level of the respondents was high. 110 respondents held a Bachelor’s degree or higher, 52 are senior/top managers, another

### Table 1

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61 managers and supervisors. These demographic characteristics are in line with previous research on foreign expatriates (Black, Gregersen, & Mendenhall, 1992; Puck, Kittler, & Wright, 2008; Takeuchi et al., 2002).

Also with regard to previous studies of expatriate assignments, we control for four factors. The first one is the manager’s age. Older managers have greater life experience and should be better able to adapt to new challenges and situations (Puck, Mohr, & Rylg, 2008). This experience in general is likely to have a positive influence on job performance. Moreover, age may correlate with the expatriate’s number of children. Secondly, we controlled for the manager’s gender. Even though Sinangil and Ones (2003) found that men and women had similar job performance ratings on average, gender roles can be of importance (Selmer & Leung, 2003). Olsen and Martins (2009) found that there are special circumstances that are more beneficial for males, others for females. While overall neither gender seems to prevail in performing better in general, the special context might show different results. Also, there is evidence that female expatriates are accompanied more often by their family than males (Kittler et al., 2006). Our third control variable is the manager’s hierarchical position. In their detailed literature review on expatriation, Harrison et al. (2004) state that higher-level managerial positions are beneficial for a variety of reasons. For instance, higher-level managers have more autonomy and control. It can also be expected that individuals higher in hierarchy are more likely to gather extensive information about the situation in their host country and then base their decisions on that. As a consequence, an enhanced performance is supposed. Finally, we controlled for previous expatriate assignments. Having been assigned to a foreign country before, gathering experience as an expatriate, helps individuals to better adjust to new situations and to integrate themselves in new teams (Caligiuri, 2000; Kraimer et al., 2001; Puck, Kittler, et al., 2008; Puck, Mohr, et al., 2008).

3.2. Measures

Unless indicated otherwise, all items were queried using a 5-point Likert scale with 1 = “strongly disagree” to 5 = “strongly agree.” Besides the items concerning safety-related intra-family tension, which were modified to fit the terrorism context, all items used are standard scales adapted from the literature. Our control variables as well as whether the family is accompanying the expatriate on the assignment and whether he or she has children were queried with either multiple selection or direct input (age, number of children, gender [women = 0, men = 1], previous assignment duration in months, position as top down selection from senior/top management (=1) to supervisor (=3)). Safety-related intra-family tension was measured based on Spector and Jex’ (1998) considerations of interpersonal conflicts. This measure has been frequently applied in expatriate research (Brett & Stroh, 1995; Takeuchi, 2010) and the family systems theory literature (e.g. McCubbin, 1988). We adapted the items to the background of our study in order to find out whether safety issues are a discussion topic within the family. Therefore, questions targeted at finding out whether safety issues are a discussion topic within the family and whether they are a concern that can imbalance the family’s equilibrium. Items included, for instance, “me and my spouse discuss safety issues more than in my home country,” and “how often do you think your spouse is concerned about your safety?” In order to measure the perceived general stress level, we used Cohen, Kamarck, and Merlmeistin’s (1983) four-item version of the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS). It measures “the degree to which situations in one’s life are appraised as stressful” (Cohen et al., 1983, p. 385). The PSS is the most frequently used measure of perceived stress and has been frequently applied in the family systems theory literature (e.g. Judge & Colquitt, 2004) and studies on work-family conflicts (e.g. Ramos, Mustafa, & Chin, 2012). Items include statements, such as “In the last month, how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?”. This is intended to query the level of stress on a broad scope of things. The degree to which the expatriate felt supported by the assigning organization (POS) was measured using three items from Eisenberger et al.’s (1986) “Survey of Perceived Organizational Support.”

In line with previous expatriate studies (Grant-Vallone & Ensher, 2001; Kraimer & Wayne, 2004), we adapted items of this scale that are appropriate for the purpose the of our study, namely “the organization values my contribution to its well-being,” “the organization really cares about my well-being,” and “the organization fails to appreciate any extra effort from me.” With Cronbach’s α = .869, the internal reliability of this measure revealed to be very high. Expatriate performance as our dependent variable was measured using Black and Porter’s (1991) five-item performance scale. Asking individuals about their performance can be somewhat difficult, since people might overestimate the true value. In order to overcome these problems, Black and Porter (1991) did not query performance directly but rather made the items relative and let the respondents rate themselves against a clearly defined peer group, in our case other subsidiary managers. For instance, a value of 80% would mean that the expatriate performs better than 80% of other subsidiary managers in a comparable position. Incorporating five dimensions of job performance (overall, getting along with others, time management, quality of work results, and goal achievement) helps to get a thorough picture of the reported performance. By rating one’s own performance relative to one’s peers, potential reservations about self-reports can be deemphasized. Theory of self-perception states that people judge their own actions in the same way they infer other peoples’ attitudes by observing their actions (Bem, 1972). Moreover, more recent research considers self-report bias overrated, arguing that there is strong accuracy in self-assessment of job performance (Latham & Weather, 1994; May, Korczynski, & Frenkel, 2002).

As we used a self-report questionnaire, collecting data at the same time from the same participant, deriving independent and dependent variable from the same respondent, common method variance (CMV) may be a concern (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). Since it was unrealistic to retrieve performance information from the expatriate’s supervisor, in an ex-ante step we tried to use CMV-reducing questionnaire design. This was done by ensuring the respondents full confidentiality and anonymity of our study (Chang, van Witteloostuijn, & Edan, 2010). We also avoided items that could be ambiguous, vague, or unfamiliar to the respondents, formulating items as concisely as possible. Finally, following Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, and Podsakoff (2003), we used different scale endpoints and formats for the predictor and criterion measures, in order to avoid biases caused by anchor effects and commonalities in the endpoints. The criterion was measured on a percentage scale, while the predictors were measured either by direct input or on 5-point Likert scales. As an ex-post measure, a Harman’s single-factor test for common method variance was applied (Harman, 1976; Podsakoff et al., 2003). With the highest value of 34%, no single factor accounted for the majority of the variance. Hence, combined with our ex-ante measures, common method variance was not regarded as a problem.

3.3. Analysis and results

In order to test our hypotheses, hierarchical regression with four models was conducted using the IBM SPSS Statistics 22 package. Calculations regarding the moderated-mediation effect are based on the SPSS PROCESS macro by Hayes.
The first model was calculated with the control variables only. The family-related variables (Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3) were then added. In Model 3, in order to test the moderation of the effect of perceived general stress on expatriate performance by POS (Hypothesis 4a), we added the variables perceived general stress, POS, as well as the respective interaction term. Finally, Model 4 incorporated the three-way-interaction between POS and the general stress level (Hypothesis 4b) as well as the perceived general stress level moderating the relationship between safety-related intra-family tension and expatriate performance (Hypothesis 5). Means, standard deviations, scale reliabilities, and correlations among the variables are reported in Table 2. All models are statistically significant (4.685 < F < 7.059, .01 ≤ p ≤ .001), with Model 4 explaining 39.2% of the variance in expatriate performance (R² adjusted). Since the antecedents of expatriate performance are manifold and complex (Mol, Born, Willemsen, & van der Molen, 2005), this R² value is reasonable, as the explanatory power focuses only on a specific set of predictors.

Table 3 shows the regression results on expatriate performance in terrorism-endangered countries for all four models. Step 1, only considering the control variables, reveals that previous expatriate assignments, gender, and the position of the expatriate have a significant positive impact on performance. However, age does not matter. By adding the family-related variables, the amount of explained variance (R² adj.) raises from 10.9% to 31.1%, attributing noteworthy explanatory power to this set of variables. Data show that while expatriates who are accompanied by their family and those with children perform better, both coefficients are not significant. The results did not change after adding all variables of our analysis (Model 4), hence Hypotheses 1 and 2 are not supported. Safety-related intra-family tension has a highly significant negative impact (β = −.240) in all models, i.e. expatriates whose family equilibrium is disturbed perform worse than others. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 is supported.

Steps 3 and 4 extend our model by adding the moderated relationships. In particular, this is the interaction between perceived general stress and POS on performance (Hypothesis 4a), the three-way interaction developed in Hypothesis 4b, as well as the interaction between stress level and safety-related intra-family tension on performance (Hypothesis 5). While the degree to which an expatriate perceives the organization caring about him or her does not directly impact the performance, in line with the buffering hypothesis, POS shows a significant interaction effect with the general stress level (β = .182). Thus, Hypothesis 4a is supported by our data. However, this buffering role does not occur when investigating the moderation of POS on perceived general stress moderating the relationship between safety-related intra-family tensions on performance. Therefore, the proposed three-way interaction (Hypothesis 4b) could not be confirmed. Finally, while expatriates who are stressed in general obviously take this stress to work and perform worse (β = −.241), this effect does not affect the negative impact of safety-related intra-family tension on performance. Hence, Hypothesis 5 is not supported.

4. Discussion

Contrary to our assumption in Hypothesis 1 the results show that expatriates who are accompanied by their family do not perform significantly better than those separated from it. One explanation for this unexpected finding may be that the beneficial effects of having the family on the assignment are outweighed by the dangers in terrorism-endangered countries. The family acting as a unit goes along with higher marital satisfaction and hence a better satisfaction with one’s private life (Minuchin, 1974), which should also transfer to the work domain. However, this positive impact on performance may be compensated by exposing family members to endangered environments. While a family staying in the home country can be considered relatively safe, accompanying family members are confronted with the same risks as the expatriate. There is always a trade-off between trying to live a normal life, moving freely and participating in social events, and at the same time increasing the risk for the family and being trapped in a guarded living compound, doomed to just wait for the expatriate until he or she comes home from work. This could increase unhappiness and thus impede the positive effects of having the family abroad. Hence, it is possible that expatriates who actually are accompanied by their families experience such dramatic changes in their family structure that the benefits of staying together vanish. In addition, affordable air fares, which allow regular visits of the family, and modern communication techniques, such as video calling and email, may allow expatriates to maintain intensive family relations without having their loved ones with them.

We could also find no support for Hypothesis 2, which predicted that expatriates with children perform worse than those without children. A possible explanation for this finding is the gender distribution of our sample. 39 out of 44 expatriates with children and with their family on the assignment, and 14 out of 15 expatriates leaving their family at home are males. On the contrary, only 10% of our respondents with children are female. This gender distribution becomes even clearer when considering that more than one in two male expatriates had children versus only one in five for females. In other words, it is primarily men who are integrating job and children. Since for women it is presumably harder to combine the role of a mother and that of an employee, our results appear less surprising. While men leave for work and

Table 2
Correlation matrix.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Prev. assignments</td>
<td>78.6</td>
<td>98.3</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Age</td>
<td>42.9</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>.529*</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Gender</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>.414</td>
<td>.053</td>
<td>.317</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Position</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>.873</td>
<td>–.346</td>
<td>–.444</td>
<td>–.299</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Family accomp.</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>.479</td>
<td>–.090</td>
<td>–.054</td>
<td>–.051</td>
<td>.216</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Children</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>.878</td>
<td>.161</td>
<td>.156</td>
<td>.256</td>
<td>–.072</td>
<td>–.201</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Safety-rel. intra-family tension</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>–.175</td>
<td>–.010</td>
<td>–.117</td>
<td>.169</td>
<td>.118</td>
<td>.136</td>
<td>(.820)</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Perc. gen. stress</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>.869</td>
<td>–.132</td>
<td>–.073</td>
<td>–.156</td>
<td>.087</td>
<td>.035</td>
<td>.179</td>
<td>.627</td>
<td>(.831)</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 POS</td>
<td>3.24</td>
<td>.912</td>
<td>.176</td>
<td>.147</td>
<td>.132</td>
<td>–.233</td>
<td>–.015</td>
<td>–.146</td>
<td>–.414</td>
<td>–.547</td>
<td>(.869)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Performance</td>
<td>75.17</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>.204</td>
<td>.067</td>
<td>.207</td>
<td>.014</td>
<td>.055</td>
<td>.021</td>
<td>–.479</td>
<td>–.481</td>
<td>.321</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: n = 121; scale reliabilities (Cronbach’s α) in parentheses; standardized coefficients shown.

1 Level of significance: ≤.1.
2 Level of significance: ≤.05.
3 Level of significance: ≤.01.
4 Level of significance: ≤.001.

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have a partner to take care of the household and children, women are usually more involved in raising children and thus suffer more from such a double burden. Such gender distribution is in line with Tharenou’s (2008) research, pointing out that despite they are willing to work abroad, many women with family do not transform this willingness into action. In addition, perhaps trailing male spouses might just not be as supportive as females would be.

The empirical findings highlight the importance of an intra-family equilibrium, clearly supporting Hypothesis 3. Expatriates whose families suffer from an imbalance due to safety concerns and terrorist activity perform significantly worse than those with a balanced family structure and not suffering from safety-related intra-family tension. These results highlight the importance of a functioning family equilibrium. In line with family systems theory, a family that is not a unit anymore with the relationships between the respective family members being disturbed, has negative consequences (Minuchin, 1974). In particular, expatriates who suffer from safety-related intra-family tension perform significantly worse compared to those, whose intra-familiar relationships are balanced.

Against our assumption, Hypothesis 5, which suggests that the aforementioned relationship in Hypothesis 3 is intensified when the expatriate suffers from a high level of general stress, is not supported by our data. While, when including it as a predictor, general stress did negatively impact the expatriate’s performance, it did not moderate the relationship between safety-related intra-family tension and performance. One possible explanation for that might be rooted in Hypothesis 4a, which was confirmed by our data and will be discussed separately later on. It was predicted that POS is helpful to minimize the negative effects of stress. As we found significant support for this, perhaps POS helps to inhibit the influence of stress proposed in Hypothesis 4a. In other words, if an expatriate perceives a sufficient amount of support by his or her organization, at least the impact of general stress on other potential performance impediments can be lowered, though not completely averted, as the direct effect of general stress on performance shows. In addition, it is reasonable to assume that expatriates are aware of their stressful situation and also know how affecting the entire assignment can be for their kinship. Thus they might react very sensitive in terms of their family and try to keep out their general stress out of their home. Despite the argued overlaps between the private and the work life domain, they somehow seem to be able to not letting a high stress level affecting their already tense intra-family situation. In the light of family systems theory, this would mean that expatriates who are willing to live and work abroad in an endangered country do not only consider their family members as primary persons of reference but are also an important person of reference to them (Takeuchi, 2010). Therefore, if the expatriate experiences a lot of support by the company, he or she will be able to transmit this support to the family members as well.

As mentioned before, Hypothesis 4a was confirmed by our data. In order to get a better understanding of this two-way interaction, we conducted a simple slope analysis following Aiken and West (1991). Fig. 2 visualizes the slope of the regression of expatriate performance on perceived general stress, moderated by POS. As can be seen, if an individual receives high levels of POS, the effect on performance is nearly the same, no matter whether the individual perceives low or high amounts of stress. However, when looking at individuals receiving low amounts of POS, the picture changes. While for low perceived stress, there is no dramatic change compared to individuals receiving more POS, for highly stressed individuals who receive little POS, the negative impact on performance is detrimental. In other words, if an expatriate perceives high amounts of stress, POS is crucial to sustain performance.

5. Contributions, limitations and implications

In this study we focused on how family-related factors in terrorism-endangered countries influence the work performance of expatriates. By doing so, our study contributes to the existing literature in several ways. First, it extends the literature on terrorism and international business by addressing the role of expatriates and their families in terrorism-endangered countries. While previous research primarily analyzes the impact of terrorism on supply chains (e.g., Reade, 2009) or marketing (e.g., Czinkota, Knight, Liesch, & Steen, 2005), we focus on potential effects on human resources and foreign expatriates in particular. We show that their performance does particularly depend on their...
family situation and the perceived support by their employer. Moreover, POS is one of the most important tools in times of crisis that a company has in order to keep up the performance of their workforce abroad.

Second, we contribute to the literature on foreign expatriates by focusing on a specific group of host countries, namely terrorism-endangered environments. We show that determinants of expatriate performance, such as previous assignments and the hierarchical position, are also important in countries that are perceived as particularly dangerous, while the expatriates’ age or whether they are accompanied by their families seems not to matter in such a setting. Thus, future research on expatriates should not only explore the impact of culture (e.g. Stahl & Caligiuri, 2005) and economic conditions (e.g. Sparrow, 2012) on expatriate assignments, but conceptualize the environment in which expatriates live and work in a more fine-grained way.

Third, by integrating family-systems theory into expatriate research this study allows for a more differentiated consideration of expatriates’ characteristics. In particular, we extend previous studies in this area (e.g. Haslberger & Brewster, 2008; Lazarova et al., 2010; Rosenbusch & Cseh, 2012) by showing that accompanying families and children do not affect the performance of expatriates per se, but that these factors are relevant only in the case of perceived safety-related intra-family tension. While previous research on foreign expatriates mostly analyzes the impact of demographic factors, such as age, gender, marital status and children (e.g. Aryee, Chay, & Chew, 1996; Olsen & Martins, 2009), we provide a psychological concept (i.e. safety-related intra-family tension) that may better explain variations in expatriate performance.

From a methodological perspective, our study goes beyond existing expatriate research that often focuses on the antecedents and consequences of expatriate adjustment (e.g. Caligiuri, Hyland, Bross, et al., 1998; Selmer, 2006; Shaffer & Harrison, 1998; Shimoni et al., 2005). Based on recent critique of the adjustment concept (e.g. Lazarova & Thomas, 2012; Puck, Kittler, et al., 2008; Puck, Mohr, et al., 2008; Takeuchi, 2010), we conceptualize expatriate performance as dependent variable and argue that this concept allows for a broader consideration of the outcomes of foreign assignments. While expatriates can be perfectly adjusted to a particular context without achieving high work results or meeting company goals, we believe that performance is a better predictor of the success or failure of expatriates because it includes also indicators that reflect the goals that a company pursues when delegating expatriates to other countries.

The study has also important implications for practitioners. First, it confirmed the importance of POS. As the simple slope analysis visualized in Fig. 2 depicts, this is especially important if expatriates perceive high levels of stress. If they do not feel a sufficient amount of support by their employer, there is a very strong negative effect on performance. Thus, organizational support is an appropriate instrument to mitigate performance impediments for expatriates who perceive high amounts of stress.

However, since organizational measures can only be effective if the expatriate perceives them as valuable, companies need to create a dialog with their staff abroad, trying to find out what is important to them and what they wish their employer to do. While typical forms of support, such as rewarding the employee’s effort or providing opportunities to move up the ranks, are perceived as valuable in any employment setting (Eisenberger et al., 1986), special consideration of the dangers in terrorism-endangered countries need to be taken into account and openly communicated to the expatriate. For instance, the company must credibly show what measures it has undertaken to protect the expatriate and his or her family and which evacuation processes will be initiated if the situation on-site escalates.

Another important implication is to involve the expatriate’s family, ideally from the outset of the assignment. Even though it is the employee who has to make the final decision about whether or not to go, the partner should participate in this decision and receive all the safety-relevant information the expatriate receives. The benefit of such a procedure is that it will be a common decision, minimizing the danger of mutual accusations within the family about who is responsible for the relocation. As our research shows, intra-family equilibrium is an important predictor of the performance on the job, thus a company must do everything in order to maintain this balance.

As every study, ours has some limitations as well. Due to the sensitive topic of research, finding potential respondents was very difficult, thus leading us to incorporate a quite broad set of host countries. Despite the fact that all of them are terrorism-endangered, there are numerous differences among these countries. For example, while countries such as Afghanistan or Iraq receive lot of media coverage and are associated with terrorism, often targeted at people with a different religion and (Western) foreigners in general, this is different in countries such as Israel or Russia, where local conflicts and terrorist acts prevail and the expatriates are not necessarily part of the actual target group but more prone to become a random victim. Also, we only included countries that are particularly endangered by terrorism. Therefore, we do not have a control group consisting of countries not suffering from terrorism. Future research could include a broader array of countries and compare differences between more and less endangered countries.

Moreover, our approach of identifying expatriates relying on self-posted (contact) information from social networks could mean

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that they do not feel too endangered because otherwise they would conceal this information. In addition, querying data at one fixed point in time of the expatriation can only provide insights for this particular moment. Even though we tried to consider this problem by asking the respondents to answer some items for a time-span (e.g. “in the last month” when evaluating the stress level), this study is a snap-shot of the expatriate’s here and now. Longitudinal studies could bypass this shortcoming by surveying expatriates before, during, and after their assignment. Using self-report measures could also be a potential limitation, since a systematic bias could occur when individuals misinterpret their feelings and behavior. However, even if identifying and convincing outside raters to participate in the study was possible on large scale, using third-party evaluations would pose a host of other problems to be addressed (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1989). As Latham and Wexley (1994) and Shay and Baack (2004) point out, self-evaluations using relative judgments rather than absolute ones helps to overcome problems connected with self-report bias.

For a deeper inside into intra-family relations, qualitative research could be conducted by interviewing the expatriate as well as his or her spouse independently from each other in order to detect potential perception gaps between the two. By doing so, it would also be possible to address other important issues afflicting an expatriate family on assignments in terrorism-endangered countries, such as expatriate networks or relations of family members to other expatriates and local families. Moreover, critical incident method may be applied in order to explore how expatriates and their families react on recent terrorist attacks, such as bombings or kidnappings.

Another avenue for future research may be the consideration of different forms of expatriate assignments. While our study focused on long-term assignments of two to five years, short-term assignments, commuter assignments and international business travel may be affected by terrorism-induced risks in different ways and may have a different impact on the family system (Collings, Scullion, & Morley, 2007; Mayrhofer, Reichel, & Sparrow, 2012). Moreover, it would be interesting to distinguish between company-assigned and self-initiated foreign expatriates (Biemann & Andreason, 2010), as the latter may have more realistic perceptions about safety issues in high-risk countries.

Finally, emerging market multinationals (EMNEs) are increasingly internationalizing (Holbrügge & Kreppel, 2012; Luo & Tung, 2007) and thus also have a strong need for safeguards. While our study analyzed the influences in families of Western expatriates, mainly from Central Europe and North America, it would be worthwhile to investigate whether our findings are different for expatriates from emerging economies. In particular, expatriates from other terrorism-endangered countries (e.g. Russian expatriates in Iraq) might be able to cope better with these specific challenges. Thus, the consideration of this specific group of individuals would allow to further enhancing our knowledge on expatriates in terrorism-endangered countries.

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G Model
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