

Relationships, Loneliness, and Life Satisfaction: Emotional Well-Being of Executive Expatriates during Midlife in Singapore

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How to cite this paper: Hsu, L., & Tripathi, S. (2025). Relationships, Loneliness, and Life Satisfaction: Emotional Well-Being of Executive Expatriates during Midlife in Singapore. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 13, 490-506.

<https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2025.139029>

Received: August 14, 2025

Accepted: September 23, 2025

Published: September 26, 2025

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Abstract

This paper explores the emotional well-being of executive expatriates navigating midlife transitions while managing personal and professional demands in a foreign environment. Drawing on qualitative data from in-depth interviews with fifteen mid-career expatriates in Singapore, the study investigates the impact of relationships, loneliness, and life satisfaction. Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), it identifies recurring themes such as marital dissatisfaction, parenting pressures, emotional isolation, workplace stress, and adaptive coping strategies. Findings reveal a significant discrepancy between outward professional success and inner emotional struggle. While some participants highlighted the importance of cultivating strong social ties and non-human companionship to manage loneliness, others relied on introspection, resilience, or unhealthy coping mechanisms. The paper underscores the importance of intentional relationship-building, emotional safety in professional settings, and organizational support for expatriates' mental health and relational needs during midlife. It calls for future research and policy innovation to foster holistic well-being in global professional populations.

Keywords

Executive Expatriates, Midlife Transition, Emotional Well-Being, Marital Dissatisfaction, Parenting Stress, Loneliness and Isolation, Social Support, Coping Strategies, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), Expatriate Mental Health

1. Introduction

In today's globalized world, professional mobility has emerged as a defining feature of the corporate landscape, with increasing numbers of executives accepting international assignments as part of their career trajectories (Hack-Polay, 2020). While the economic and career advantages of expatriation are widely acknowledged, there is growing recognition of its emotional and psychological toll—particularly during midlife, a developmental phase often characterized by reflection, emotional vulnerability, and identity shifts (Cantoni & Galavotti, 2021). This study examines how executive expatriates experience midlife while managing emotional well-being, relational dynamics, and life satisfaction in foreign cultural and organizational contexts (Wurtz, 2022).

Midlife, generally defined as occurring between the ages of 40 and 60, has long been recognized as a period of introspection and psychological reassessment. According to psychosocial theories such as Erikson's stages of development, individuals in midlife grapple with challenges of generativity versus stagnation (Infurna et al., 2020). Many reassess their life choices, accomplishments, relationships, and aspirations. For expatriates—who often face additional stressors such as cultural adjustment, isolation, and professional expectations—these developmental challenges can be significantly magnified (Koveshnikov et al., 2022).

The executive expatriate demographic, particularly those in leadership roles, often navigate immense pressure to perform, adapt, and represent their organizations globally. The strain of these professional responsibilities, coupled with the personal sacrifices inherent to relocation, can lead to emotional disconnection, relational strain, and profound loneliness (Riemer, 2000). In particular, expatriates may experience a disconnect between their perceived success and inner emotional well-being. The psychological dissonance between external achievement and internal emptiness is a key phenomenon explored in this study (Whitehead, 2017).

Singapore, one of Asia's most prominent expatriate hubs, provides a pertinent context for this research. With its cosmopolitan infrastructure, diverse population, and highly competitive job market, Singapore attracts thousands of executive-level expatriates (Wan et al., 2003). While Singapore is widely regarded as an expatriate-friendly destination, some professionals still encounter personal challenges such as emotional fatigue, feelings of isolation, or uncertainties about future. These experiences can occasionally surface during longer stays or at midlife transition points, even within Singapore's supportive environment, rich cultural diversity, and vibrant lifestyle (Farwin et al., 2023).

This study adopts a qualitative approach to understanding the emotional lives of these individuals. Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), the research examines the lived experiences of 15 executives expatriates from diverse industries and backgrounds. The aim is to uncover how participants perceive and manage relationship dynamics, emotional isolation, and life satisfaction during a pivotal phase of their lives.

Preliminary findings reveal five overarching themes: (1) marital dissatisfaction and the emotional strain of unfulfilled intimate relationships; (2) family stressors, including parenting responsibilities and maintaining familial closeness from afar; (3) loneliness and isolation, particularly among single or divorced individuals; (4) coping mechanisms—ranging from social networking and pet companionship to unhealthy behaviours such as alcohol consumption; and (5) the professional environment as both a source of purpose and emotional tension.

Participant narratives demonstrate that marital relationships often suffer under the pressures of middle-age life. Some described feeling emotionally distant from their partners or remaining in unfulfilling marriages due to social or parental obligations. Parenting, too, emerged as a source of both stress and motivation, as expatriates worked to provide for and connect with their children, often in unfamiliar cultural settings. These family dynamics frequently shaped emotional well-being and identity (Malek et al., 2013).

Loneliness was another recurring theme. Divorced and single participants in particular described feelings of profound isolation. Without the support of extended family or longstanding friendships, many expatriates struggled to find emotionally fulfilling connections (Lijadi & van Schalkwyk, 2017). While some made efforts to establish new social networks or engage in community activities, others found solace in non-human companionship such as pets. However, these adaptive strategies were not always sufficient; several participants admitted to relying on alcohol or emotional withdrawal to manage their sense of disconnection (Lowe et al., 2022).

Workplace relationships played a complex role in participants' emotional landscapes. On one hand, professional identity and achievement were often sources of pride and structure (Sanderson et al., 2020). On the other hand, participants frequently described their workplaces as emotionally unsafe, competitive, and politically charged. Trust issues, job insecurity, and a lack of empathetic leadership often heightened their sense of emotional alienation (Liu & Miao, 2022).

This paper builds on previous scholarship concerning expatriate adjustment, cross-cultural psychology, and midlife development, while contributing a relational and emotional perspective often missing from human resource and management literature (Rohman et al., 2023). The research emphasizes that executive expatriates cannot be understood merely through the lens of performance metrics or organizational fit; their emotional and relational realities are central to understanding their overall well-being and effectiveness (Anderson, 2005).

Ultimately, the paper advocates for a more holistic, human-centered approach to managing expatriate populations. Emotional safety, psychological support, relational well-being, and life satisfaction must be prioritized alongside career progression and financial success. Organizations, policymakers, and researchers are urged to consider the deeper emotional dimensions of expatriate life, particularly during midlife, to better support those who contribute significantly to global commerce and cross-cultural exchange (Qomariyah et al., 2022).

2. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design grounded in Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to explore the lived experiences of executive expatriates (Senior executive role of the company) during midlife. IPA was chosen for its strength in capturing subjective experiences and interpreting how individuals make sense of significant life events. Given the study's focus on emotional well-being, relationships, and life satisfaction, IPA provided the most appropriate framework to examine the nuanced and deeply personal nature of these phenomena.

Research Design and Rationale: The qualitative design allowed for rich, detailed accounts of participants' internal emotional landscapes, facilitating a deep understanding of the complexities surrounding midlife challenges in the context of expatriation. The primary goal was to explore the intersection between personal and professional experiences, identify patterns of emotional struggle or resilience, and interpret how participants negotiate their identities and well-being.

Participant Selection: Fifteen executive expatriates residing in Singapore were recruited through purposive and snowball sampling. Inclusion criteria required that participants:

1. Were between 40 and 60 years of age (midlife range);
2. Held mid- to senior-level professional roles in multinational corporations;
3. Had lived and worked in Singapore for a minimum of two years;
4. Were fluent in English to facilitate effective communication.

Table 1. Participant demographics.

Participants	Gender	Country/Region	Age	Marital Status
P1	F	USA	51	Married, no kid
P2	F	Korea	49	Divorced, 2 kids
P3	M	Australia	46	Married, 1 kid
P4	M	Taiwan Region	59	Married, 1 kid
P5	F	India	43	Divorced, no kid
P6	M	India	46	Married, 1 kid
P7	M	Taiwan Region	54	Married, 2 kids
P8	M	India	53	Married, 2 kids
P9	F	Taiwan Region	53	Married, 2 kids
P10	F	Taiwan Region	48	Married, 2 kids
P11	F	Taiwan Region	44	Separated, no kid
P12	M	USA	50	Single, no kid
P13	M	India	49	Divorced/Remarried, 3 kids
P14	F	India	45	Married, no kid
P15	M	India	52	Married, 1 kid

The final sample included a diverse group of men and women from varied professional sectors, including finance, consulting, education, and healthcare. This heterogeneity allowed the study to capture a wide range of perspectives while maintaining a shared context of expatriate professional life in Singapore (Table 1).

Ethical Considerations Ethical approval was obtained from the university's institutional review board (IRB). All participants received detailed information about the study's purpose, their rights, and the confidentiality of their data. Informed consent was obtained through a multi-step process:

1. Participants were provided with an information sheet outlining the study's objectives, procedures, and data handling practices.
2. Participants were given the opportunity to ask questions before signing the consent form.
3. A written consent form was signed by each participant, confirming their voluntary participation.
4. Participants were reminded that they could withdraw from the study at any point without any negative consequences.

To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms were used, and any identifying information was removed during transcription and analysis.

Data Collection Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted either in person or via secure online platforms, depending on participant preference and availability. Interviews lasted between 60 to 90 minutes and were audio-recorded with consent. The interview guide focused on the following areas:

1. Experiences of relationships and emotional connection (personal and professional);
2. Reflections on midlife changes and emotional well-being;
3. Coping strategies in response to loneliness, professional pressure, or relational dissatisfaction;
4. Perceptions of life satisfaction and meaning.

Participants were encouraged to share narratives and explore topics freely, allowing the interviewer to follow emergent lines of inquiry and build rapport.

Data Transcription and Analysis All interviews were transcribed verbatim and reviewed for accuracy. The data were then analyzed using IPA's six-step framework:

1. **Reading and Re-Reading:** Immersion in the data by reading transcripts multiple times.
2. **Initial Noting:** Exploratory comments made on descriptive content, linguistic use, and conceptual reflections.
3. **Developing Emergent Themes:** Notes were transformed into concise statements capturing the essence of the text.
4. **Searching for Connections across Emergent Themes:** Related themes were grouped into clusters to identify superordinate themes.
5. **Moving to the Next Case:** The process was repeated for each participant, treating each case on its own terms.

6. Looking for Patterns across Cases: Cross-case analysis was conducted to identify recurring themes and unique insights.

Trustworthiness and Reflexivity To enhance credibility, multiple strategies were employed:

1. Member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary findings with select participants for validation.
2. Peer debriefing with academic supervisors and colleagues was used to refine interpretations.
3. A reflective journal was maintained throughout the research process to document the researcher's assumptions, emotional responses, and potential biases. This methodological rigor ensured that the findings authentically represented participants lived experiences while allowing room for interpretative depth. The next section presents the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the analysis, supported by rich, illustrative quotations from the participants.

3. Findings: Themes and Sub-Themes

This section presents an interpretative account of the emotional experiences of executive expatriates, structured around three major themes and six sub-themes. Each theme reflects a central aspect of participants lived experiences during mid-life, offering a window into their emotional landscapes and the strategies they employ to navigate personal and professional challenges.

Theme 1: Marital and Family Relationships This theme explores how executive expatriates experience significant emotional tension within their closest familial relationships. Many participants described midlife as a turning point for re-evaluating the quality of their marriages and their roles as parents. Family life, while a source of identity and grounding, also emerged as a domain of conflict, guilt, and longing.

Sub-Theme 1.1: Marital Dissatisfaction—Emotional Estrangement and Entrapment in Expatriate Marriages

The midlife experiences of executive expatriates are often marked by a reevaluation of long-term relationships, particularly marriage. For many participants in this study, marital dissatisfaction emerged as a deeply felt and unresolved emotional challenge. While their professional lives were characterized by mobility, prestige, and financial stability, their marital relationships were strained, emotionally hollow, or fraught with resignation (Berman et al., 1975).

The pressures of expatriate life—ranging from cultural adjustment and high-stakes careers to frequent travel and physical dislocation from family support—can exacerbate already fragile marital dynamics. Participants shared how their marriages had transformed into functional partnerships centered around child-rearing or social appearances, with emotional intimacy and romantic connection having long faded (Williams & Cheadle, 2015).

Participant P6:

“The biggest dilemma is my marriage. We can't separate because of my

daughter. Marriage is the biggest faulty institution. When you are married young, you don't even know yourself... We are unhappy. But I don't know what will happen eventually."

This statement reflects the existential weight of marital commitment sustained by obligation rather than affection. It suggests that many expatriates, particularly those married young, lacked the emotional tools or foresight to build enduring relational foundations. As midlife invites introspection, unresolved marital dissatisfaction surfaces more acutely.

Participant P2:

"You become two strangers, just parenting under the same roof. There is no romance or emotional connection. We are like flatmates, and sometimes I wish I had chosen differently."

This quote speaks to the slow erosion of emotional connection over time, with participants describing marriages that had become cohabitation arrangements devoid of relational intimacy. The lack of familiar support structures in the host country further intensified such dynamics. Unlike in their home countries, where extended family, close friends, or community might have provided emotional scaffolding, many expatriates experienced this marital strain in isolation, with limited outlets for emotional processing (McNulty, 2015).

Moreover, cultural norms and social expectations often discouraged divorce or separation, especially for those with children. As a result, participants remained in emotionally unfulfilling marriages, experiencing a sense of entrapment. Their emotional well-being was caught in a bind between maintaining family stability and acknowledging personal discontent—creating a deep internal conflict (Mathis, 1998).

Sub-Theme 1.2: Parenting and Family Stress—Emotional Burdens of Global Parenthood

Parenting, often viewed as a source of purpose and joy, became a double-edged sword for many executive expatriates. While their commitment to providing better opportunities for their children was unwavering, this aspiration came at a significant emotional cost (Sarwar & Zeeshan, 2019). Participants conveyed a range of emotions—guilt, frustration, anxiety, and sadness—over the quality of family relationships, particularly when professional responsibilities compromised physical presence.

Participant P4 emphasized the enduring value of familial bonds:

"The most important thing is family relationship bonding—I am very close with my mother, wife, and daughter. Family is there for you when stressed and old age. Don't forget to build relationships even with work stress."

This reflects an awareness of the long-term importance of nurturing family connections, even when time and energy are scarce. It also points to the participants'

internal tension between maintaining professional excellence and investing in emotional presence at home (Wahjuningdiah & Paskarini, 2022). Yet many expatriates struggled to achieve this balance.

Participant P9 shared

“I feel guilty almost every day that I am not around for dinner with my son. I came here to give him a better life, but sometimes I wonder if I am losing him in the process.”

This quote encapsulates a deep emotional paradox: expatriates moved abroad to offer their children a superior life—better education, safety, and cultural exposure—yet, in doing so, found themselves physically and emotionally distanced. The guilt associated with this trade-off was a recurring sentiment, suggesting that professional sacrifice often came at the cost of emotional proximity (Butt, 2017).

Moreover, raising children in an unfamiliar cultural environment created additional stress. Parents were not only concerned with their children’s academic success but also with their identity formation, integration into host culture, and emotional well-being. For some, the lack of a co-parenting system that shared these emotional burdens intensified the stress (Partington et al., 2022).

Many participants reported that they missed milestone moments, bedtime conversations, or simply being “there” when their children needed them. Over time, these absences accumulated into emotional debts—manifesting in self-reproach and anxiety about the long-term impact on their children (Yarosh & Abowd, 2011).

Theme 2: Loneliness and Isolation—The Hidden Cost of Expatriate Success

Despite holding prestigious positions, living in cosmopolitan cities, and earning high incomes, many executive expatriates described experiencing profound loneliness and emotional disconnection. Beneath their successful professional exterior lies a more complex emotional reality—one where solitude, emotional invisibility, and a lack of meaningful support (Whitehead, 2017) systems cast long shadows over their daily lives. This theme reveals that loneliness is not simply a lack of physical companionship, but an emotional state shaped by internal voids and the absence of resonant connection (Rossetti et al., 2024).

Sub-Theme 2.1: Singlehood and Divorce—Emotional Invisibility in a Connected World

Divorced or single expatriates are uniquely vulnerable to emotional isolation during midlife, especially when living away from familial and cultural roots (Hwang et al., 2020). Their reflections indicate that while they may enjoy personal freedom and professional autonomy, these come at the cost of relational intimacy and day-to-day emotional reciprocity.

Participant P5 shared a poignant reflection on the experience of living alone:

“I am divorced and have been single for two years. I feel everyone is on their own. Even if you have a spouse, there is no guarantee to be happy... I am learning to do things alone like going to restaurants myself and plan to travel

on my own for the first time.”

This statement illustrates an adaptive mindset—the beginning of a journey toward self-sufficiency and self-companionship—but also reflects an underlying sense of emotional vacancy (Jang et al., 2021). Participants like P5 appeared to be navigating life transitions independently, yet carried a muted grief for the emotional warmth and support that once existed or was hoped for.

Participant P11 described a deeper, more existential void:

“It’s not about being single, it’s about being emotionally invisible. People assume you’re fine because you’re successful. But there’s no one to ask how your day really was.”

This quote touches on the paradox of modern expatriate life: surrounded by people and embedded in fast-paced professional circles, yet emotionally invisible. Many expatriates conveyed that they were “seen” for their titles and roles, but not for their emotional states, fears, or daily joys (Whitehead, 2017). Without a partner or emotionally attuned confidant, even simple relational gestures—like being asked how one feels—were profoundly missed.

These insights point to the core of this sub-theme: loneliness among single or divorced expatriates is not merely about being alone, but about not being emotionally acknowledged or cared for. In foreign environments where friendships are transient and emotional familiarity is rare, these feelings are often magnified.

Sub-Theme 2.2: Unhealthy Coping Mechanisms—Numbing the Pain through Avoidance

When emotional pain persists without sufficient outlets or relational buffering, individuals often turn to coping mechanisms—some of which may provide temporary relief but ultimately undermine mental health (Feingold & Bitan, 2022). Participants in this study openly acknowledged turning to workaholism, alcohol, or emotional withdrawal as attempts to fill the emotional void or distract from personal grief.

Participant P10 revealed his vulnerability with raw honesty:

“Alcohol is probably a bad excuse but at times I drank a lot to kill the loneliness. Unfortunately, it brings even more depression afterwards, and I need to be careful.”

This quote is significant because it demonstrates both awareness of the maladaptive behavior and an understanding of its cyclical consequences. While alcohol offered a short-term reprieve from loneliness, it deepened emotional instability over time (Mitincu-Caramfil et al., 2025). Several participants described this pattern—of using substances or compulsive behaviors to anesthetize feelings they did not have the time, space, or social safety to process.

Participant P3 offered another insight into a different form of avoidance:

“Sometimes I throw myself into work because if I slow down, the silence be-

comes unbearable. It's easier to stay in the office than go home to an empty apartment.”

Workaholism—often disguised as productivity—emerged as a silent, socially sanctioned coping mechanism. For some, being busy was a way to feel needed, validated, or purposeful. But as P3's reflection reveals, underneath the drive to remain productive lies a deep discomfort with emotional solitude. The “empty apartment” serves as a symbol for the inner emotional emptiness many expatriates fear confronting.

Collectively, these narratives highlight that unhealthy coping strategies are not simply a lack of willpower or discipline but rather responses to chronic emotional deprivation and the absence of relational mirroring (Dokpesi, 2015). Without institutional or communal support—such as mental health services, peer networks, or empathetic managers—these behaviors often go unaddressed and can evolve into longer-term issues such as depression, anxiety, or burnout (Rizzo et al., 2023).

Theme 3: Social Support and Friendships—Building Emotional Anchors in a Transient World

While much of the expatriate midlife journey is marked by emotional isolation and relational strain, this theme highlights a powerful counterforce: the human capacity to adapt, seek connection, and cultivate support systems even in challenging environments. Many participants demonstrated resilience by intentionally fostering friendships and non-human companionships. These relationships served as emotional anchors, helping participants navigate the instability and demands of expatriate life (Botha et al., 2022).

This theme provides a hopeful lens, showing that despite adversity, emotional well-being can be protected and even enhanced through deliberate social engagement and alternative forms of companionship.

Sub-Theme 3.1: Cultivating Friendships—Intentionality as a Form of Emotional Survival

Unlike in one's home country—where friendships often evolve organically through family networks, school communities, or long-term neighbors—expatriate life demands active and deliberate efforts to form meaningful relationships (Thomas, 2019). Participants described the transient nature of expatriate circles, where people frequently come and go due to job transfers, immigration status, or lifestyle shifts. In such a setting, building emotionally dependable friendships required not only effort but emotional vulnerability (Bergnéhr et al., 2020).

Participant P1 shared a compelling approach:

“I heard of a theory that you need 8 people close in life, and make sure you are on their top list of 8 also. Since then, I have been consciously cultivating meaningful relationships with family and friends, and today I am happy with 8+ close ones.”

This quote illustrates the intentional nature of friendship-building in the expat-

riate context. P1's reference to "being on someone else's list" reflects a deep desire for reciprocity, mutual emotional investment, and safety in social ties—a recurring theme in narratives of emotionally secure expatriates.

Participant P8 further emphasized proactive connection:

"You have to be deliberate about connection here. I make it a point to call someone each week, not for work, just to talk. Otherwise, days pass and the isolation creeps in."

This speaks to a common insight among emotionally resilient expatriates: connection does not just happen—it must be scheduled, pursued, and protected. Participants who practiced such deliberate outreach were better equipped to handle emotional fluctuations and stressful transitions (Farh et al., 2010).

The sub-theme also reveals that friendships serve more than companionship—they function as co-regulators of emotional well-being. These relationships allow expatriates to feel seen, heard, and understood, offering validation that may be missing from professional environments or emotionally distant family dynamics (English et al., 2020).

Sub-theme 3.2: Non-Human Companionship—The Silent Healing of Pets

For some expatriates, the stability and comfort they lacked in human relationships were found in non-human companionship—primarily pets. Participants described their pets as consistent sources of affection, emotional regulation, and unconditional presence, especially in environments marked by change, disconnection, or emotional distress (Liu et al., 2024).

Participant P7 described this emotional bond:

"My dog has become more than just a pet; he is a constant presence in my life, always there with unconditional love and comfort."

This statement reflects how animals offer non-judgmental companionship, which can be particularly soothing for individuals navigating complex emotional terrains. Pets provide routine, physical closeness, and emotional grounding—qualities often lacking in the unpredictable world of international assignments (Sable, 1995).

Participant P12 added another layer of reflection:

"I didn't expect to form such a strong bond with my cat. She's the one constant in this ever-changing city. Her presence has been healing."

The phrase "healing" reveals how animals are not just passive companions but active participants in emotional recovery. In the absence of stable human attachments, pets can fill critical gaps, offering touch, playfulness, and silent companionship that buffer against emotional fatigue (Silva & Osório, 2018).

Additionally, non-human companionship allows for the expression of nurturing instincts, particularly for those who live alone or have strained human relationships. The simple acts of feeding, grooming, or walking a pet reintroduce structure and purpose, which can enhance one's sense of meaning and emotional

rhythm.

These quotes suggest that animals offer a rare form of emotional reliability, helping expatriates manage stress, loneliness, and identity instability (Dotson & Hyatt, 2007). Pets can also facilitate social interactions by acting as social lubricants, offering a neutral conversation topic, and even replicating benefits derived from human relationships. Research indicates that pet ownership is associated with reduced stress and improved perceptions of social situations (Konstantinova et al., 2021).

4. Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the intricate interplay between emotional well-being, personal relationships, and social support among executive expatriates during midlife. Despite holding prestigious positions and achieving outward success, many participants expressed a disconnect between their professional identities and emotional lives (Wurtz, 2022). This dissonance becomes particularly salient in midlife—a period traditionally marked by reflection, reassessment of priorities, and heightened awareness of relational quality (Jackson, 2020).

Marital dissatisfaction was a dominant concern, where emotional intimacy had been replaced with routine, obligation, or estrangement. These findings support existing research suggesting that midlife can bring about increased vulnerability in long-standing relationships, particularly when partners grow in divergent directions or face external stressors such as relocation (OpenAI, 2024). For expatriates, geographic dislocation often compounds these challenges, as access to extended family and familiar social support systems is limited (Astruc et al., 2014).

Similarly, the stress of parenting in a globalized environment surfaced as a significant pressure point. While participants expressed deep love and responsibility toward their children, many also articulated feelings of guilt, inadequacy, and emotional fatigue (Kostara, 2021). These reflections point to the need for family-centered expatriate policies that consider the psychological and emotional dynamics—not merely logistical support—of international relocation (Riemer, 2000).

The theme of loneliness reveals how emotional disconnection extends beyond romantic or familial ties. Participants shared poignant stories of isolation masked by busyness or success. Single or divorced expatriates were particularly vulnerable to this sense of invisibility, often navigating life transitions without the emotional safety net that traditionally accompanies community or kinship (Rohman et al., 2023). In alignment with previous studies on expatriate mental health, our findings highlight that loneliness is not merely a result of physical distance but also stems from a lack of emotional resonance in one's environment (Farrugia & Muscat, 2023).

Importantly, some participants developed coping strategies that fostered emotional resilience. The intentional cultivation of friendships served as a protective factor, offering both psychological comfort and a sense of belonging (Ferreira et

al., 2024). Moreover, companionship with pets emerged as an unexpected but profoundly stabilizing force. These narratives support the broader psychological literature emphasizing the value of attachment and connection—whether human or non-human—as buffers against emotional distress (Applebaum et al., 2021).

However, not all coping strategies were adaptive. Some participants disclosed turning to alcohol or overworking as ways to fill the emotional void. While these mechanisms may offer temporary relief, they often exacerbate psychological strain over time. These insights point to the urgent need for culturally sensitive mental health interventions tailored to the expatriate population (Wurtz, 2022).

From an organizational standpoint, this study raises important implications. Employers often focus on logistical relocation support but neglect the emotional and relational needs of expatriates. Incorporating mental wellness programs, family counseling resources, and structured peer networks could foster a more holistic expatriate experience (Iha & Frangos, 2008). Emotional well-being should not be an afterthought in expatriate assignments; it must be integrated into the planning and support framework from the outset (Botha et al., 2022).

Overall, the discussion affirms that emotional well-being in expatriates is shaped not only by external circumstances but also by the quality of relational, psychological, and social engagements. Recognizing and supporting these dimensions is essential for sustainable global careers and healthy midlife transitions (Botha et al., 2022).

5. Conclusion

Executive expatriates face a unique set of emotional and relational challenges as they navigate midlife. While they often embody success on the surface, their inner worlds reveal complex dynamics of marital strain, parenting stress, emotional isolation, and evolving identity. This study highlights the importance of acknowledging and addressing these challenges through intentional relationship-building, adaptive coping strategies, and systemic support structures (Johnson et al., 2022).

Intentional social connection—whether through friendships or pet companionship—emerged as a key protective factor in enhancing emotional well-being. Conversely, the use of maladaptive coping mechanisms like alcohol and overwork serves as a warning sign for unaddressed emotional needs. These findings emphasize that mental and emotional wellness must be central to expatriate support strategies, not peripheral (Wurtz, 2022).

Future research should explore intervention-based studies that evaluate the effectiveness of mental health support programs tailored to expatriates. Furthermore, longitudinal studies could shed light on how emotional trajectories evolve over the course of expatriate assignments and reintegration phases. Ultimately, a holistic, human-centered approach is essential to foster emotional resilience and satisfaction among executive expatriates during midlife (Cantoni & Galavotti, 2021).

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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