

# **EXPLORING PERCEIVED ORGANISATIONAL SUPPORT AND RESILIENCE AS ANTECEDENTS OF EXPATRIATES' WORK AND NON-WORK SPHERES AMID THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Expatriates face more challenges when they are exposed to hostile environments in a foreign country. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, most expatriates are stranded abroad without adequate support mechanisms. The aim of this paper is to empirically investigate the role of perceived organisational support (POS) and resilience in predicting expatriates' perception of non-work constraints and work adjustment, and in turn, their withdrawal intention. Using the convenience sampling, questionnaire data was collected through social networking platforms from 205 expatriates across various industries in Malaysia. Partial least squares-structural equation modelling was employed to test the hypotheses. The results revealed that POS is influential in expatriates' resilience, but not in their perceived non-work constraints and work adjustment. Spillover effects occur when perceived non-work constraints influence withdrawal intention. However, perceived non-work constraints are not significantly related to work adjustment. Further, work adjustment has a negative relationship with withdrawal intention. The results indicate that organisations should customise their human resource policies to improve expatriates' resilience through webinars and counselling services during the COVID-19 crisis, which are likely to impact their work outcomes. The contribution of this study is its application of the conservation of resources theory to enrich the sparse literature on expatriation in a hostile environment.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, expatriates, perceived organisational support, resilience, work adjustment, perceived non-work constraints, withdrawal intention.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, organisations in different parts of the world have continuously faced unprecedented challenges involving a range of complex issues, such as climate change, recession, and political instability. The recent coronavirus disease 2019 (later referred to as COVID-19) pandemic, has posed considerable effects on the individual and organisational factors that impact expatriates' well-being (Dickmann & Oleškevičiūtė, 2021). When social isolation and work-from-home measures are implemented, expatriates find it difficult to integrate into their organisations and local communities (Dickmann & Oleškevičiūtė, 2021), especially for those with problems adapting to the local culture (Cooper, 2021). According to Cooper (2021), 44% of expatriates wanted to return home during the pandemic. Their reasons included uncertainties about international travel, family reasons, job opportunities, and healthcare systems (Rowlinson, 2020). In response to these issues, we examined the factors influencing expatriates' withdrawal intention in the face of the COVID-19 outbreak. Withdrawal intention is defined as expatriates' thoughts of returning home prematurely during their assignments (Black & Stephens, 1989).

Although the COVID-19 crisis has affected all types of employees (Charoensukmongkol & Phungsoonthorn, 2020), expatriates are an interesting group to study because their career concepts and adjustment processes are different from domestic employees (Mello & Tomei, 2021). Despite the benefits of international assignments, expatriates are confronted with personal and professional challenges during the pandemic, which are likely to impact their personal and work domains (Mello & Tomei, 2021). Selmer and Fenner (2009) pointed out that expatriates' boundaries between life domains are often tenuous. The COVID-19 crisis is likely to exert some spillover effects on expatriates, where their non-work domains directly impact their work domains (Mello & Tomei, 2021). The effects can be negative, given that a lack of non-work activities can ruin an individual's work life. Previous studies have indicated that non-work domains can predict expatriate outcomes such as work adjustment (Selmer & Fenner, 2009), job performance (Bader et al., 2015), and turnover intention (Bader et al., 2019).

Considering that the COVID-19 pandemic has invaded people's livelihood, it is crucial for organisations to establish a strong support mechanism for their expatriates. Drawing on the conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989), there are four types of resources that help individuals be productive in any circumstance: objects (e.g., money), conditions (e.g., social support), personal characteristics (e.g., resilience), and energy (e.g., knowledge). Both perceived organisational support (POS) and resilience are identified as key resources that protect employees from being engulfed in stressful situations (Labrague & Santos, 2020). The COR theory suggests that people are motivated to obtain and protect valuable resources that help them achieve goals when their resources are threatened in the presence of stressors (Hobfoll, 2002). Specifically, the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on expatriation indicate resource losses in different categories. For example, enforced work-from-home (WFH) policies and social distancing have threatened expatriates' support from organisations (condition resource) and resilience (personal resource). Given the COR theory's emphasis on resource loss (Fu & Charoensukmongkol, 2021) as well as its prior application to hostile environments (Davies et al., 2019), this theory is suitable for predicting both expatriates' work and non-work outcomes amid the pandemic. Caligiuri et al. (2020) noted that organisational support and personal resilience are essential for employees in the ambiguous spheres of both global work and the pandemic. Therefore, the main objective of this study was to investigate the roles of POS and resilience in explaining expatriates' perceived non-

work constraints and work adjustment, and in turn, the latter's effect on withdrawal intention during the outbreak of COVID-19.

This research was undertaken in Malaysia as it is the world's fourth best destination for expatriates to work and live in (InterNations, 2021). Nonetheless, the country has not been exempt from the COVID-19 infection and its effects; social life is no longer the same because everyone must obey standard operating procedures (SOPs) in public spaces (e.g., wearing face masks and taking body temperature). In fact, individuals who fail to observe these SOPs are fined for non-compliance. Despite a third wave of the pandemic, Malaysia remains undeterred and has become one of the safest places for its citizens and expatriates to live (Krishnan, 2020). This has drawn high praise from expatriates who are reassured of their safety by considering Malaysia as their home (Krishnan, 2020). However, the Malaysian government announced that expatriates are not permitted to travel overseas for holidays or business needs during the pandemic (Landau, 2020), which has placed some restrictions upon their work and non-work lives.

The current study aims to make three contributions. First, it contributes to the COR theory and the scarce literature on expatriates working during a crisis period. To date, only a handful of studies have looked into the importance of resilience for expatriates (Davies et al., 2019; France et al., 2019; Jannesari & Sullivan, 2020). From a COR viewpoint, we mainly focus on whether POS and resilience can be salient resources that affect expatriates' perceptions of non-work constraints and work adjustment, and their association with withdrawal intention. Second, we contribute to the existing literature on spillover effects between non-work and work domains in the context of a medical emergency. As prior studies have explored spillover effects on expatriation in terrorism-endangered environments (Bader et al., 2015; Bader et al., 2019), we conceptually and empirically integrate the consequences of perceived non-work constraints on expatriates' work adjustment and withdrawal intention during the pandemic. Third, we contribute to the literature on expatriation in the Malaysian context. It is an internationally recognised investment destination, which is still reliant on expatriates to facilitate knowledge and technology transfer in various industries (Ram, 2020). As expatriate studies in Malaysia have emphasised the predictors and outcomes of expatriate adjustment (Chan et al., 2021a; Chan et al., 2021b), we undertook this research to explore the notable impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on expatriates working across different industries in the country.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT**

### **2.1. *Perceived Organisational Support (POS)***

Based on the COR theory, POS is a contextual resource that exists within an employee's social and environmental contexts and affects their behaviours (DePasquale, 2020). POS is a global belief formed by employees on whether their organisation shows appreciation for their contributions and sacrifices (Eisenberger et al., 1986). This belief is crucial for employees to achieve positive work outcomes such as job performance, job satisfaction, and organisational commitment. Hobfoll (2011) theorised that POS is an aspect of resource caravan creation and organisational ecologies sustenance. These ecologies are expected to create passageways where resources can be fostered, protected, and supplied. The concept of resource caravan passageways

reflects working conditions that can enrich employees' resources in traumatic situations (Hobfoll, 2011). When organisations fail to provide these resource passageways in the form of support, employees may become inefficient.

POS serves as a buffer against stress from the consequences of calamities, disasters, and emerging infectious diseases (Labrague & Santos, 2020). It is the most essential contributor of personal resilience (Labrague & Santos, 2020), especially in the uncertain global work environment and COVID-19. Hartmann et al. (2020) highlighted that work resources can promote resilience as a personal resource, which is produced by social resources from the contextual environment. The notion of 'resource caravan' in the COR theory assumes that people use existing resources to generate additional resources to improve their attitudes and behaviours (Hobfoll, 2002). In other words, an employee's personal resources (e.g., optimism) can be acquired from supportive work organisations (Hobfoll, 2011). For instance, organisations can provide resources for employees to build resilient behaviours (King et al., 2015). Subsequently, the presence of these resources in one's work life builds his/her capacity for resilience or enhances his/her likelihood of exhibiting resilience.

In the international setting, when expatriates are constricted by limited social support, they tend to seek organisational support in the host location (Fu & Charoensukmongkol, 2021; van der Laken et al., 2016). From the social exchange perspective, organisations can offer expatriates unique types of support (e.g., adjustment-related support, career support) to maintain their well-being in the host country. Since expatriates experience disorientation and isolation in a foreign country, POS is even more important for them to succeed in international assignments (van der Laken et al., 2016). For example, organisational resources such as career-oriented support and mentoring can strengthen expatriates' resilience (France et al., 2019). However, to the best of our knowledge, no studies have examined the relationship between POS and resilience in the expatriation context. We applied the COR theory and drew from empirical evidence to argue that POS is a primary resource that contributes to an expatriate's resilience during the pandemic. Therefore, we hypothesised that:

*H1: POS has a positive relationship with resilience.*

Furthermore, when organisations support employees' private lives, the latter are less likely to encounter conflicts within their non-work domain (Sturges & Guest, 2004). This phenomenon is known as the spillover effect, which postulates that an expatriate's experiences at work can influence his or her experiences at home, and vice versa (Takeuchi et al., 2009). The COR theory asserts that individuals have difficulties maintaining their resource caravans in circumstances beyond their control, such as devastating disasters that prevent safe activities (Hobfoll, 2002).

During a crisis period, organisations should directly engage in providing long-term assistance and support for expatriates (McNulty et al., 2019). When non-work constraints occur, expatriates may feel threatened with resource loss and begin developing a strong need for organisational support. Takeuchi et al. (2009) reported that organisations provide a wide range of support to address issues in non-work spheres to enhance expatriates' general adjustment. DePasquale (2020) suggested that such contextual resources from organisations can facilitate an employee's resource accumulation, producing personal resources that benefit their socioemotional needs and non-work experiences. Further, the foundation of the COR theory argues that workplace support

is a resource that may spill over to employees' life outside of work (Ferguson et al., 2015). This signifies that POS serves as a valuable resource for expatriates to mitigate strains from negative perceptions of non-work restrictions during the pandemic. Accordingly, we developed the following hypothesis:

*H2a: POS has a negative relationship with perceived non-work constraints.*

## **2.2. Resilience and Perceived Non-Work Constraints**

Resilience is defined as an individual's ability to quickly bounce back from stressful events and adversity (Connor & Davidson, 2003). Drawing from the COR theory, resilience has been conceptualised as a personal resource that prevents resource loss and upholds an individual's status quo after going through unpleasant incidents (King et al., 2015). Resilience is thus clearly and increasingly important in today's hectic working environment. It is considered a key resource that can be transferred between work and non-work domains (Kelly et al., 2020). Research on resilience has its basis in the notion of positive psychology, which prioritises positive human strengths that vary across industries and professions (Hartmann et al., 2020). Unfortunately, employees with lower resilience have difficulties focusing on recovery initiatives after adverse events, thereby entailing their inability to cope with the effects of those events.

Resilient people have the ability to positively deal with negative emotional experiences and stressful life events. Resilience is known as the product of a dynamic process, which can be influenced by situational factors in the context of adversity (Connor & Davidson, 2003). In the non-work domain, expatriates struggle with the pandemic's effects on their international travel and social life (InterNations, 2021). Consequently, those living in such a noxious environment endure the depletion of personal resources as they have little room for personal activities. In this case, stressors such as non-work constraints weaken an expatriate's coping strategies and personal resources, i.e. resilience (Jannesari & Sullivan, 2020). The COR theory claims that resilience is a possible source of energisation (Davies et al., 2019) which allows expatriates to overcome non-work constraints proactively and move forward with a new lifestyle amid the pandemic. In light of this basis, we formulated the following hypothesis:

*H2b: Resilience has a negative relationship with perceived non-work constraints.*

## **2.3. Work Adjustment**

One of employees' challenges stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic is the need to make drastic changes to their work conditions, such as WFH that minimise human contact (Caligiuri et al., 2020). Work adjustment is associated with an expatriate's job scope, supervisory duties, working conditions, and performance standards (Black & Stephens, 1989). However, employees often resist changes that are disruptive to the work routines and social relationships they typically use to finish important tasks (Shin et al., 2012). The main reason is that employees undergo stress from the introduction of and adjustment to new tasks, new relationships, and new organisational goals (Shin et al., 2012).

Expatriates' adjustment is formed through a person-environment relationship where the interaction between individuals, environments, and situations take place to necessitate adjustment behaviours (Haslberger et al., 2013). If the adjustment is not successful, a misfit between personal behaviours and environments is developed, which triggers expatriate failure (McNulty et al., 2019). In response to this, expatriates can empower themselves to make substantial changes by acquiring new resources, reducing work demands, and reinterpreting experiences (Haslberger et al., 2013). During the current pandemic, there is a growing chasm between an expatriate's needs and their work conditions, potentially leading to ineffective work adjustment. This situation has forced expatriates to gain more support and information about new workplace norms from their organisations to ease their adjustment. Within the COR theory, POS acts as a job resource which is readily available for expatriates to achieve assignment goals (Chan et al., 2019; Chan et al., 2021a). McNulty et al. (2019) agreed that quality organisational support has positive crossover effects for organisations in terms of expatriates' enhanced welfare and performance. Indeed, organisational support is necessary to help employees adjust to the current dynamic work environment (Chan et al., 2021b). For example, organisations can grant expatriates support via efficient communication, a safe work environment, and training related to COVID-19 to boost their work adjustment.

Apart from that, resilient employees tend to take the initiative to gain valuable resources that inculcate positive work attitudes (Hartmann et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2019). This underscores the importance of resilience as a personal resource; thus, it is plausible that resilient expatriates are able to recover from negative experiences in ambiguous work conditions during the global pandemic. Inversely, expatriates with lower resilience are incapable of recovering from internalised stress associated with uncertain work environments that alter their responsibilities and performance standards. In line with this, Davies et al. (2019) noted that resilient expatriates take a more optimistic look at stressors compared to their non-resilient peers, thereby developing a more effective level of work adjustment. Following the COR theory, we view successful expatriates' work adjustment as a reflection of their personal resilience. Based on these arguments, we hypothesised that:

*H3a: POS has a positive relationship with work adjustment.*

*H3b: Resilience has a positive relationship with work adjustment.*

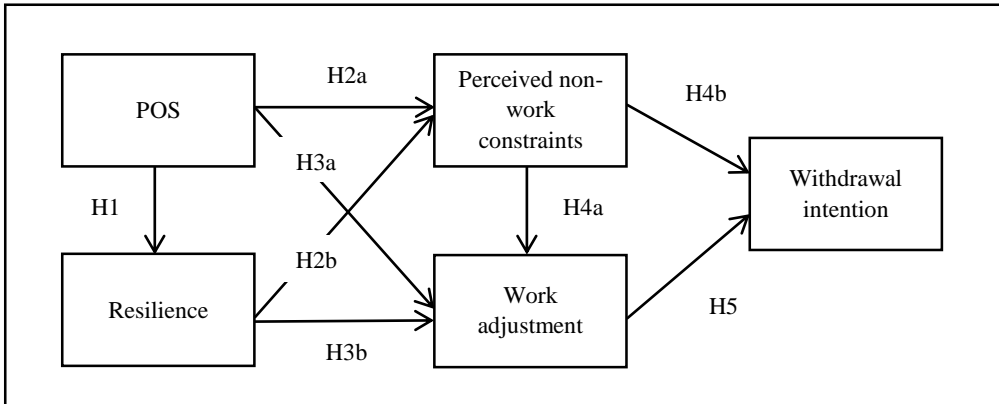
#### **2.4. Perceived Non-Work Constraints, Work Adjustment, and Withdrawal Intention**

In order for expatriates to succeed in overseas assignments, they have to preserve resources (i.e. POS and resilience) that facilitate their international career. Kelly et al. (2020) ascertained that an individual's non-work experiences have an obvious impact on his/her performance and well-being in other aspects. Although prior studies have proven that changes in non-work domains can influence employees' work behaviours, many have emphasised the effects of family-work interactions on career outcomes (Kelly et al., 2020; Mello & Tomei, 2021). In fact, spillover effects from non-work to work domains have been identified among expatriates in terrorism-endangered countries (Bader et al., 2019). This is in accordance with Black et al.'s (1991) pioneering contribution on spillover effects during expatriation. Following the literature, we proposed that non-work constraints spill over to expatriates' work adjustment and withdrawal intention during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The global pandemic instigates non-work constraints, changing the ways expatriates work and raising difficulties in meeting job expectations and performance standards (Caligiuri et al., 2020). As mentioned earlier, numerous stressors (e.g., social distancing, travel restrictions) pervade the non-work domain, which can negatively influence expatriates’ work adjustment and decision to continue their assignment. As expatriates are highly involved in work, the interplay between non-work and work domains is imperative for their personal life and organisational success (Bader et al., 2015). In this case, spillover effects exist when expatriates’ cognition and feelings in the non-work environment affect their work environment. In particular, those with negative thoughts may undermine their own ability to adjust, eventually leading to assignment withdrawal. In other words, expatriates who suffer from non-work constraints due to COVID-19 are likely to demonstrate poor work adjustment and frequent withdrawal intention. For instance, Bader et al. (2019) indicated that expatriates in terrorism-endangered countries face additional challenges in the non-work domain (e.g., security), which triggers their intention to leave the country. Based on the above discussion, we proposed the following hypotheses:

- H4a: Perceived non-work constraints have a negative relationship with work adjustment.*
- H4b: Perceived non-work constraints have a positive relationship with withdrawal intention.*
- H5: Work adjustment has a negative relationship with withdrawal intention.*

**Figure 1:** Conceptual Framework



Source: Authors

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1. Data Collection and Respondent Profile

The sample of our study comprised expatriates working across various industries in Malaysia. Realising that a complete sampling frame of expatriates is not available to identify the expatriate population, we performed a power analysis using the G\*Power software to generate the sample size (Faul et al., 2007). The results of the analysis recommended at least 85 respondents for our

proposed model. The convenience sampling technique had to be applied for data collection due to issues accessing the respondents during the movement control order (MCO) in Malaysia in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, referring to other expatriate studies (Bader et al., 2019; Davies et al., 2019), we located profiles of 1,000 potential respondents through social networking platforms such as InterNations, LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram. The three criteria for selecting the respondents were that they had to (i) be expatriates, (ii) be employed by an organisation situated in Malaysia (instead of self-employed, in order to measure POS), and (iii) have stayed in the country for at least six months. Before data collection began, the survey instrument was pre-tested by a total of six professionals, including academics, expatriates, and human resource managers. The purpose of the pre-test was to improve the instrument's clarity and refine the survey items before actual distribution to the respondents. After we received comments from the professionals, minor modifications were made to the vocabulary of the survey items for better readability. The survey also contained a cover letter stating the purpose of the study and an assurance of anonymity.

The survey was administered online using Google Forms. Data collection was carried out for four months from August 2020 until December 2020. From a total of 1,000 surveys distributed to the respondents, 210 were successfully received and completed. However, five responses were excluded due to invalid data, thus yielding a final response rate of 20.5%. Out of the 205 expatriates, 62% were males. The sample comprised majority of self-initiated expatriates (80.5%). Most of the respondents (67.8%) were below 40 years old. In terms of marital status, 52.2% of the expatriates were married. Most of these married expatriates were accompanied by their spouse (86.9%), but only 50.5% of them brought their children. The sample consisted of top managers (13.1%), middle managers (45.4%), and non-managers (41.5%). Most expatriates (57.1%) did not have prior international work experience. Over half of the respondents (52.2%) were not fluent in the host country language. In addition, 91.2% of the expatriates had been working in Malaysia for more than a year, while 85.8% of the respondents had been working in their current organisation for more than a year. Interestingly, a large number of the respondents were from Asian countries (59.5%), with 32.7% from South Asia (e.g., India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka), followed by 16.1% from Southeast Asia (e.g., Philippines, Indonesia). As for the European region, 21% of the respondents were from Northern Europe (e.g., United Kingdom and Ireland). The remaining respondents were from African (4.4%), American (3.9%), and Oceanic countries (3.4%). Over a quarter of the expatriate respondents worked in the education industry (26.8%) and the information technology industry (25.4%). The rest were from the service (16.1%), oil and gas (5.9%), transportation (5.4%), and finance (4.9%) industries.

A one-way ANOVA analysis was carried out to assess the variance in the main variables across the expatriates' different job positions (see Appendix 1). The mean results revealed significant differences in POS, resilience, and withdrawal intention among the three job levels. A Tukey's post-hoc test was performed to statistically determine where these differences exist. The results showed that middle managers and non-managers reported significantly lower POS and resilience than top managers. However, there were no differences in these two variables between middle managers and non-managers. The results also indicated that middle managers possess relatively higher withdrawal intention than top managers and non-managers.



### 3.2. Measurement Scales

To design the research instrument, we applied well-established scales to measure the variables.

*POS* was measured using a nine-item global scale developed by Eisenberger et al. (1986). This section included expatriates' perception of organisational support during the COVID-19 pandemic. The responses were rated on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). An example of the items was 'My organisation in the host country considers my goals and values'.

*Resilience* was captured using a six-item scale established by Smith et al. (2008). Expatriates provided their responses on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A sample item read 'I tend to bounce back quickly after hard times'.

*Perceived non-work constraints* were measured with a four-item scale by Bader et al. (2019). The items were modified to suit the COVID-19 context in the host country. Expatriates indicated how often they perceived constraints in their private life during the pandemic. The responses were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always). An example of items was 'mobility and travel'.

*Work adjustment* was assessed by applying Black and Stephens's (1989) four items of work adjustment. This scale was adopted to enquire expatriates' degree of adjustment to work during the COVID-19 pandemic. The items were also designed on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly unadjusted) to 5 (strongly adjusted). An example of the items was 'How adjusted or unadjusted are you to the specific job responsibilities?'

*Withdrawal intention* was measured using Bader et al.'s (2019) scale. A five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) was used. A sample question in this scale was 'I plan to leave the present assignment location'.

*Control variables.* Several individual demographic factors served as control variables that might influence resilience, work adjustment, and withdrawal intention. First, we controlled for gender (1= male; 2= female), as female expatriates tend to have lower job satisfaction and performance than their male counterparts (Bader et al., 2019). Second, age was included because older expatriates are able to deal with new challenges and difficult situations effectively (Bader et al., 2019). Third, we controlled for prior international work experience (1= yes; 2= no) as expatriates with overseas experiences have a stronger ability to adjust to new environments (Bader et al., 2015). Fourth, we acknowledged host language fluency (= yes, fluently; 2= yes, partly; 3= no) since expatriates who can speak the host language are able to mingle with local people well (Davies et al., 2019). Fifth, we controlled for duration in the host country (years), given research findings that adjustment is a time-dependent process (Black et al., 1991). However, none of the control variables had a correlation with perceived non-work constraints, and duration in the current organisation (years) did not have a correlation with any of the dependent variables. Therefore, we excluded the relationships between these variables from our analysis.

#### 4. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

For hypotheses testing, partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) was employed to run both the measurement and structural models for three reasons. First, PLS-SEM is appropriate for a research with prediction-oriented purposes (Richter et al., 2016) like ours, given that we sought to determine if expatriates' work and non-work domains are influenced by POS and resilience in response to COVID-19. Second, the structural relationships in our model may serve as an early phase of theory development or extension, and offer an opportunity to explore a new phenomenon (Richter et al., 2016), especially expatriation in a global pandemic. Third, PLS-SEM has the ability to handle our complex model (five main variables and 26 items) without imposing the minimum number of items on each variable. Congruent with our research objective, PLS-SEM was deemed suitable for this study.

##### 4.1. Measurement Model

The measurement model aims to evaluate the consistency and validity of the constructs. Internal consistency reliability was assessed based on composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach's  $\alpha$ . An acceptable value of CR and Cronbach's  $\alpha$  is more than 0.70 (Hair et al., 2017). Convergent validity can be assessed by examining the outer loading of each indicator and the average variance extracted (AVE). As a rule of thumb, the outer loading of an indicator should exceed 0.708, whereas the AVE of each construct should exceed 0.50 (Hair et al., 2017). As depicted in Table 1, several items (RES02, RES05, RES06, and PNWC01) were deleted due to low outer loadings (< 0.708). The CR and Cronbach's  $\alpha$  values of most constructs were above the threshold value of 0.70, except for resilience which had a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  value of 0.633. However, it was considered acceptable for an exploratory research related to the global phenomena of expatriation and the COVID-19 crisis. Meanwhile, the AVE values of all the indicators were greater than 0.50.

**Table 1:** Measurement Model Results

Item	Loading	CR	Cronbach's $\alpha$	AVE
Perceived organisational support				
POS01	0.857	0.964	0.958	0.747
POS02	0.868			
POS03	0.897			
POS04	0.848			
POS05	0.867			
POS06	0.862			
POS07	0.881			
POS08	0.831			
POS09	0.866			
Resilience				
RES01	.790	0.803	0.633	0.577
RES02	Deleted			
RES03	0.767			
RES04	0.719			
RES05	Deleted			
RES06	Deleted			
Perceived non-work constraints				
PNWC01	Deleted	0.843	0.721	0.642
PNWC02	0.815			

PNWC03	0.852			
PNWC04	0.732			
Work adjustment				
WA01	0.928	0.944	0.920	0.807
WA02	0.932			
WA03	0.903			
WA04	0.826			
Withdrawal intention				
WI01	0.931	0.953	0.926	0.870
WI02	0.920			
WI03	0.947			

Discriminant validity can be measured using the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT) to ensure that the measurements are not correlated with each other. The HTMT is considered the most conservative method to assess discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015). The recommended threshold value of HTMT should not exceed 0.90 (Gold et al., 2001). Table 2 displays that the correlation values were lower than 0.90. Therefore, the results ascertained discriminant validity in this study.

**Table 2: HTMT Results**

Constructs	1	2	3	4
1. Perceived non-work constraints				
2. POS	0.133			
3. Resilience	0.106	0.232		
4. Withdrawal intention	0.181	0.255	0.224	
5. Work adjustment	0.113	0.183	0.490	0.129

#### 4.2. Structural Model

Our structural model started with the assessment of collinearity. Table 3 provides information on the variance inflated factor (VIF) scores for all exogenous constructs. The VIF scores were less than the cut-off value of 5.0, suggesting that collinearity was not an issue in our study. Next, Cohen (1988) suggested that  $R^2$  values of 0.26, 0.13, and 0.02 represent large, medium, and small predictive accuracy of the model, respectively. The results of the structural model revealed a medium  $R^2$  for resilience (0.13), work adjustment (0.15), and withdrawal intention (0.19). Meanwhile, the results showed a small  $R^2$  for perceived non-work constraints (0.04).

Following this, an effect size analysis ( $f^2$ ) was performed, guided by Cohen's (1988) recommendation that  $f^2$  values of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 are indicative of small, medium, and large effect sizes of exogenous constructs on endogenous constructs, respectively. Specifically, POS had a small effect on resilience ( $f^2 = 0.041$ ). In fact, resilience showed a medium effect on work adjustment ( $f^2 = 0.153$ ). Furthermore, perceived non-work constraints exhibited a small effect on withdrawal intention ( $f^2 = 0.029$ ). Similarly, work adjustment had a small effect on withdrawal intention ( $f^2 = 0.023$ ). The effect sizes of POS on work adjustment ( $f^2 = 0.015$ ) and perceived non-work constraints ( $f^2 = 0.015$ ), resilience on perceived non-work constraints ( $f^2 = 0.000$ ), and perceived non-work constraints on work adjustment ( $f^2 = 0.005$ ) were weak.

Then, the blindfolding procedure (omission distance= 7) was run to generate  $Q^2$  values to assess the predictive relevance of the model for the endogenous construct. The results revealed that the  $Q^2$  values for resilience (0.04), work adjustment (0.12), and withdrawal intention (0.10) were above zero (Hair et al., 2017), supporting satisfactory predictive relevance for these endogenous constructs.

The bootstrapping technique with 5,000 subsamples was applied to test the statistical significance of the hypotheses. As presented in Table 3, the results indicated that POS had a positive relationship with resilience (H1:  $\beta = 0.193$ ,  $p = 0.005$ ). Contrary to our expectations, POS did not show a significant relationship with perceived non-work constraints (H2a:  $\beta = 0.122$ ,  $p = 0.099$ ) and work adjustment (H3a:  $\beta = 0.113$ ,  $p = 0.059$ ). Although resilience did not establish a significant relationship with perceived non-work constraints (H2b:  $\beta = 0.012$ ,  $p = 0.451$ ), it was discovered to have a positive relationship with work adjustment (H3b:  $\beta = 0.376$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). Moreover, an insignificant relationship was found between perceived non-work constraints and work adjustment (H4a:  $\beta = 0.075$ ,  $p = 0.178$ ). As predicted, perceived non-work constraints showed a negative relationship with withdrawal intention (H4b:  $\beta = 0.169$ ,  $p = 0.019$ ). The results confirmed that work adjustment exerts a negative impact on withdrawal intention (H5:  $\beta = -0.150$ ,  $p = 0.018$ ). Therefore, H1, H3b, H4b, and H5 were accepted, while H2a, H2b, H3a, and H4a were rejected.

Finally, of all the control variables, the analysis results reported that age ( $\beta = 0.185$ ,  $p = 0.010$ ) and international work experience ( $\beta = 0.167$ ,  $p = 0.010$ ) have a positive effect on resilience. Age was found to have a negative effect on withdrawal intention ( $\beta = -0.156$ ,  $p = 0.019$ ). Host language fluency demonstrated a significant relationship with work adjustment ( $\beta = 0.156$ ,  $p = 0.011$ ) and withdrawal intention ( $\beta = 0.154$ ,  $p = 0.016$ ). As for duration in the host country, it was found to exert a significant effect on resilience ( $\beta = -0.155$ ,  $p = 0.014$ ) and withdrawal intention ( $\beta = 0.134$ ,  $p = 0.036$ ).

**Table 3: Structural Model Results**

Hypotheses	Beta	Standard error	t-value	p-value	Decision
H1: POS → Resilience	0.193	0.074	2.596	0.005	Supported
H2a: POS → Perceived non-work constraints	0.122	0.095	1.287	0.099	Not supported
H2b: Resilience → Perceived non-work constraints	0.012	0.097	0.122	0.451	Not supported
H3a: POS → Work adjustment	0.113	0.072	1.565	0.059	Not supported
H3b: Resilience → Work adjustment	0.376	0.069	5.429	0.000	Supported
H4a: Perceived non-work constraints → Work adjustment	0.075	0.081	0.923	0.178	Not supported
H4b: Perceived non-work constraints → Withdrawal intention	0.169	0.081	2.086	0.019	Supported
H5: Work adjustment → Withdrawal intention	-0.150	0.071	2.107	0.018	Supported

## 5. DISCUSSION

This article serves as an extension of the literature on expatriation and the COVID-19 pandemic by examining the effect of expatriates' POS and resilience on perceived non-work constraints and work adjustment, and in turn, on their withdrawal intention. Since the COR theory has been applied to explain expatriates' behaviours (Chan et al., 2021a; Davies et al., 2019), we contend that resource loss in terms of POS and resilience, accompanied by non-work constraints, may influence expatriates' assignment outcomes in the midst of the pandemic.

The results of our study showed that POS has a positive relationship with resilience. This indicates that when expatriates believe that organisations care about their well-being, they become highly motivated to heighten their resilience. This finding is consistent with the concept of the resource caravan passageway in the COR theory (Hobfoll, 2011), which posits that POS acts as a contextual resource that can bolster expatriates' resilience. A similar result was reported by Chen and Bonanno (2020), who concurred that individuals should seek support to maintain resilience amid the pandemic. Therefore, organisations should offer useful sources of support (e.g., counselling, webinars on mental health) to raise expatriates' morale.

Although organisations should provide sources of support that restore expatriates' well-being during a crisis (McNulty et al., 2019; Tripathi & Singh, 2021), we could not confirm a significant relationship between POS and perceived non-work constraints. This finding can be explained by the fact that even if organisations can provide instant support for expatriates (Chan et al., 2019), the former are only able to provide effective support mechanisms for the expatriates to conquer work constraints instead of non-work constraints surrounding travel, leisure, and social events during the pandemic. Given that all citizens and non-citizens in Malaysia must adhere strictly to SOPs enforced by the local authorities, organisations do not have much control over expatriates' movements outside work, which are subject to the unsettled COVID-19 situation.

Apart from that, POS did not appear to play a vital role in enhancing work adjustment, despite prior studies reporting that organisations are supportive of expatriates with maladjustment in hostile environments (McNulty et al., 2019). The insignificant finding can be associated with the respondents' job positions, as the majority of them were middle managers and below (86.9%) who, compared to top managers, generally perceived lower organisational support in facilitating their work adjustment during the pandemic. This finding is echoed in Chan et al.'s (2021a) research, which discovered that expatriates in lower positions perceive less organisational support than their peers in top positions in Malaysia. In the Asian context, expatriates with higher positions enjoy more privileges and resources at the organisational level (Chan et al., 2019). On the contrary, expatriates in lower positions might not be able to enjoy special types of support from their organisations (e.g., insurance coverage, special handling for kids) that facilitate their adjustment to work in difficult times.

Concerning the impact of resilience on perceived non-work constraints, an insignificant relationship was found between these two variables, contrary to the hypothesised direction. As COVID-19 has forced many countries to implement lockdowns and quarantines, most individuals are expected to be resilient (Chen & Bonanno, 2020). However, the Malaysian government has gradually allowed 'normal lifestyles' to resume, albeit with SOPs, after the implementation of the

MCO. This makes continuing expatriates feel safe in Malaysia in spite of the drastic increase in new infected cases at the end of 2020 (Krishnan, 2020). Based on this evidence, the pandemic does not hinder expatriates from engaging in non-work activities. From the perspective of the COR theory, resilience is a resource that enables individuals to 'remain vigorous, committed, and absorbed in important life tasks, even amidst significant challenges' (Hobfoll, 2011, p.128). Thus, we argue that being able to live a 'normal lifestyle' does not threaten expatriates' well-being that requires them to build resilience.

As predicted, resilience proved to be a significant factor of work adjustment, which is in line with the past literature (Davies et al., 2019; Liu et al., 2019). Referring to the COR theory, resilience is an essential individual resource that influences expatriates' ability to adjust to work domains at this time of uncertainty. In fact, the theory has established resilience as a personal resource that improves expatriates' work adjustment in South Korea despite long working hours, poor work-life balance, and strict hierarchies (Davies et al., 2019). In the case of COVID-19, on the other hand, resilient expatriates who are regularly exposed to ambiguities at work (e.g., WFH policies) are able to keep their momentum and be responsive to changes in work routines. This result concludes that resilience is a personal resource which is more important than POS for expatriates to stimulate work adjustment. They should cultivate their own resilience rather than relying on organisations to become more optimistic and tenacious. These attributes are likely to reinforce expatriates' work adjustment in the face of uncertainties.

Contrary to the proposed hypothesis, our results failed to prove a significant relationship between perceived non-work constraints and work adjustment. In the beginning of the pandemic, the Malaysian government has imposed SOPs on people's movements (e.g., ban on international travels and social gatherings) to limit their personal activities. As time passes, expatriates become familiar with such SOPs in the non-work domain, which do not seriously spill over into their adjustment abilities in the work domain. When expatriates start to adapt to new work protocols, they feel less overwhelmed as they might have greater flexibility at work in the new normal (Tripathi & Singh, 2021). Hence, there is no negative spillover effect discovered in the expatriates, where limited non-work activities may jeopardise their work. The finding implies that COVID-19 crisis is not a major obstacle to expatriates' adjustment to the uncertainties in both work and non-work domains.

Moreover, our analysis revealed the positive effect of perceived non-work constraints on withdrawal intention. The result corroborates Bader et al.'s (2019) research which found that non-work constraints have a direct effect on country-leaving intention among expatriates living in terrorism-endangered countries. Turning to our study, since 52.2% of the expatriates were married, they are likely to experience a poor work-life interface that can be detrimental to their marital harmony, especially those with accompanying spouses. The main reason could be these expatriates spend most of their time at home dealing with challenges in both personal and professional life without having much freedom. This situation subsequently spills over into their work and increases their intention to quit the assignment during the pandemic (Mello & Tomei, 2021). We clearly confirm in this study that spillover effects exist, in agreement with past studies in the field (Bader et al., 2015; Takeuchi et al., 2009).

Finally, we found a negative relationship between work adjustment and withdrawal intention, which is consistent with Davies et al.'s (2019) work. The finding suggests that expatriates who

are unadjusted to work during the pandemic will withdraw from their assignments. Taking into account that the pandemic has driven expatriates to make substantial adjustments to erratic work conditions (Caligiuri et al., 2020), it is crucial for them to utilise personal resources (e.g. resilience) to overcome work stressors that prevent them from leaving their assignments.

### **5.1. Practical Implications**

Hiring expatriates incurs high costs associated with replacements, intensive training, and relocation expenses. Our study underscores the role of POS in enhancing expatriates' resilience and subsequent assignment outcomes during the COVID-19 pandemic. When the COR theory views POS as a resource caravan passageway (Chan et al., 2021a), expatriates are able to gain personal resources from their organisations to alleviate fear of the outbreak. In this regard, we intend to highlight two practical implications.

There is a need for organisations to develop expatriates' resilience through 'duty of care' obligations. Organisations should thus give special consideration to the hazards of the pandemic and communicate with their expatriates openly. In fact, organisations can prioritise support that stabilises work adjustment and state of mind, such as webinars on resilience or virtual counselling services in the workplace (Caligiuri et al., 2020; Jannesari & Sullivan, 2020). Liu et al. (2019) stated that resilience training is beneficial to employees' well-being. If expatriates do not perceive adequate organisational support, there is a possibility of them having poor stress management in times of crisis.

Second, organisations should make efforts to reduce expatriates' perception of non-work constraints, which is likely to eventuate assignment withdrawal. This might involve giving special assistance in the non-work domain such as inviting clinical psychologists to monitor expatriates' stress due to the COVID-19 exposure. Likewise, organisations should encourage their expatriates to regularly engage in healthy activities (e.g., meditation and yoga) that mitigate stress. These activities may cultivate expatriates' stronger emotional control in their personal daily routine to lessen non-work constraints during the pandemic.

### **5.2. Limitations and Future Research Directions**

Notwithstanding its practical implications, our study has several limitations. First, our sample consisted of expatriates working in Malaysia only, which restricts the generalisability of the findings to regional or global expatriates during the COVID-19 crisis. To address this, future studies should target a broader range of host countries to investigate the variation in expatriate outcomes. As the seriousness of the pandemic is unpredictable in Malaysia, the stress perceived by expatriates is subjective as well. A promising avenue of research would be the examination of expatriates' experiences in multiple host countries with different levels of exposure to the infectious disease, ranging from high to low risk.

Second, given that data was collected from one source (expatriates), common method bias (CMB) is a possible risk that contaminates the credibility of the findings. For this reason, Harman's single-factor test was performed to assess CMB. The results showed that the value of the first factor explained 24.85% of the total variance, which was below the threshold value of 50%

(Podsakoff et al., 2003). Therefore, we concluded that CMB was not an issue. However, the cross-sectional research design was suitable to assess expatriates' perceptions using self-report data and explore new relationships between constructs (Spector, 2019). To deepen our understanding of the research, future studies should use qualitative designs to elicit information from the respondents that cannot be captured by the current measurement scales.

Third, while several demographic variables were included, there are other possible factors that might affect the variables in our model. Considering that the conditions of COVID-19 may vary from one country to another, future research should incorporate additional variables related to cultural and institutional factors of the host country that are likely to stabilise or decrease expatriates' perceptions of stress during the pandemic. Besides, individual factors such as emotional intelligence should be of great interest for future studies to investigate their effects on expatriates' work and non-work domains.

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## APPENDIX

**Appendix 1: One-way ANOVA between Main Variables and Job Positions**

<b>Constructs</b>	<b>Job Position</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
POS	Top managers	27	4.25	1.97	5.395	0.005
	Middle managers	93	3.67	2.97		
	Non-managers	85	3.65	2.36		
Resilience	Top managers	27	3.95	1.49	4.312	0.015
	Middle managers	93	3.59	1.63		
	Non-managers	85	3.53	1.60		
Perceived non-work constraints	Top managers	27	3.19	1.75	0.060	0.942
	Middle managers	93	3.14	1.81		
	Non-managers	85	3.12	1.96		
Work adjustment	Top managers	27	4.21	1.34	1.480	0.230
	Middle managers	93	3.95	1.77		
	Non-managers	85	3.92	1.41		
Withdrawal intention	Top managers	27	2.12	1.86	3.358	0.037
	Middle managers	93	2.77	2.02		
	Non-managers	85	2.73	2.11		