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International HRM and cross-cultural management
Poster Session

Support issues for female international business travelers in dual-career families

The purpose of this paper is to evaluate experiences of female international business travelers living in dual-career families who have childcare obligations. The paper explores how these women handle childcare, and in which way different sources of support – in particular organizational support - are perceived as important. Because of the women´s regular absences due to business trips and their family role, challenges regarding childcare may occur. Consequently, support may be necessary to organize family and international career, and effectively perform in both environments (Fischlmayr & Kollinger-Santer, 2014).

THEORATICAL BACKGROUND

Previous research has recognized that family structures where each partner follows his/her own career opportunities (Demel & Mayrhofer, 2010) – the so-called dual-career family (DCF) – is growing. Based on this phenomenon, international business travel where frequent travelling is an underlying necessity of the job (Welch et al., 2007) is considered as more family–friendly to gain international experience which is seen as essential for career advancement (Shaffer et al., 2012). However, because of regular absences due to business trips, support may be necessary to organize childcare and fulfil household chores. Since companies aim to attract motivated, satisfied employees and want to be an appealing employer in times of a fierce war for talent, corporate support policies may reflect an organization's awareness and understanding for its employees' private lives and may increase employee commitment (Thompson et al., 2004). Support provided by the company can include material as well as immaterial resources. Opposed to expatriation contracts that often include services like childcare support or concierge services (Demel, 2010), international business travelers barely benefit from such forms of support. The variety of organizational support often depends on the percentage and size of the female workforce within companies, as well as on initiatives (Demel, 2010). It is, however, questionable how individuals perceive or whether they expect corporate initiatives.

This paper has two main foci: First, it examines how female IBTs living in DCFs respond to childcare obligations, especially during their absence because of international business trips. Second, it observes which sources of support are they using, and in how far organizational support is given and expected. These foci will be approached by the following research questions: How do female international business travelers living in dual-career families organize childcare obligations? Which relative importance do female international business travelers living in dual-career families attribute to different sources of support, in particular organizational support?

This paper is based on and contributes to the suggestion of Fischlmayr and Puchmüller (in press) to further examine women's experiences and thoughts on support - especially organizational support. In such, this study is significant since it complements and extends earlier research by highlighting support issues of female international business travelers in DCFs.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research approach is applied to approach the research questions. This method allows the researcher to gather first-hand information and grasp a more holistic, detailed picture of the phenomenon under research. The empirical results are drawn from qualitative narrative, problem-centered interviews. The interview guide includes questions on several topics, amongst them the following: the combination of business travel and the DCF; the organization of childcare also in regard to business travel; and expectations regarding

different forms of support – in particular organizational support. Interviews are planned to be held with around 45 women considered international business travelers living in a DCF with children below the age of 17. So far, interview data has been collected from 30 women. The women who were already interviewed originate from four different countries: nine are Austrian, five Canadian, seven Columbian and nine Taiwanese. The interview candidates for the remaining interviews will come from countries like Mexico, Germany, Serbia, Croatia, Finland and Australia. These nationalities allow receiving insights from a broad range of geographical areas including Western and Eastern European, North and South American, as well as Asian societies. In such, this study claims to not only to be cross-cultural in nature, but also to contribute to the few studies including a non-Western sample. The interviews will be analysed applying template analysis based on King (1998).

PRELIMINARY RESULTS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

The aim of this study is to highlight how different sources of support – in particular organizational support – are perceived in order to handle childcare duties while responding to international work obligations. Childcare and support, which have so far not received explicit focus in global career research, reveal as the number one topics in all interviews involved in the study, in particular when children are still very young and demand more supervision. As suggested by the literature, women remain taking over the lead in regard to household and childcare duties (Hutchings et al., 2012). One reason for this may be that they respond to their expected family role of being a "good" mother, as well as them not trusting their partners to manage childcare and household duties to their expectations (Fischlmayr & Puchmüller, in press). Preliminary results show that support is mainly derived from within family. Regarding institutional or organizational support, the reported expectations and perceived importance differ mainly because of local institutional and cultural conditions. The examined women value flexible working hours, as well as organizational childcare, but admit that corporate family policies can hardly be expected from companies in economically tense times.

To conclude, the study suggests that most female international business travelers already benefit from flexible working hours, and some even from on-sight organizational childcare facilities, but report that other forms of organizational support such as concierge services or nannies are not very likely to be introduced despite being regarded as helpful.

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