

feelings of depression following a move when one is coping with the loss of friends, place in school, neighbourhood and home. They found no evidence of long term emotional disturbances for children

2.7 Psychological, interpersonal, social and other factors

According to the literature reviewed, the factors that influence a person's adjustment after relocation can be broadly categorised as psychological, interpersonal and social in nature. Apart from the wide range of contributing factors there is a considerable degree of individual variation in reaction to the demands of relocation. Although these are discussed separately, there is an interaction between these factors.

2.7.1 Psychological factors

2.7.1.1 Personality characteristics and successful relocation

As mentioned before, psychological indices show a higher association with adaptation than social indices (Lieberman, 1978).

We see that *the ideal transferee* has:

- * a high self-esteem (Hausman & Reed, 1991; Munton & West, 1995), and a strong self-concept (Carlisle-Frank, 1992),
- * an internal locus of control (Luo & Cooper, 1990; Carlisle-Frank, 1992),
- * the ability to cope with change (Shahnasarian, 1991),
- * and similarly, stress tolerance in situations of uncertainty, novelty and complexity (Carlisle-Frank, 1992),
- * flexibility (Dunbar, 1992),
- * enjoys subjective well-being as a stable trait (Munton & West, 1995),
- * has orientation towards conceptual intellectual processes (Carlisle-

Frank, 1992),

- * an open-minded attitude and
- * a willingness to make use of new information (Frye, 1991),
- * a realistic expectation of what he or she is going to find (Fisher & Shaw, 1994),
- * an ability to experience and express a wide range of emotions freely and safely (Hausman & Reed, 1991),
- * a high exploratory tendency (Stokols et al., 1983), and
- * specific attributions about relocation (Hausman & Reed, 1991).

This kind of information has implications for the selection of successful candidates for overseas assignments. But Kozloff found that the chief criteria reported by companies for international assignment selection are technical skills and willingness to relocate. At the same time, these companies name personality characteristics and interpersonal style as the principal contributors to failed assignments and poor performance (1996).

Hatfield (1987) raises a question about the viability of using standard personality tests which measure traits under static conditions in order to make predictions about a person who will experience transition.

Kozloff (1996) believes that we have to look at the way people think and act, at their beliefs, at how they manage tasks, make choices and interact with others in order to predict whether they will adapt in a foreign environment

According to Kozloff international adjustment and job performance share certain personality characteristics:

- confidence and emotional maturity,
- social intelligence and interpersonal skills,
- critical thinking and decision-making skills,
- ability to handle new situations and conditions,

- independence and self-reliance, and
- the ability to withhold rash critical judgments.

We will take a closer look at some of the recommended personality traits and cognitive styles in terms of adjustment.

1 *Self-concept and self-esteem*

A person's view of himself constitutes his self-concept, whilst self-esteem is the evaluative aspect of his self-concept (Gerdes, Ochse, Stander & van Ede, 1981). Aspects of the self-concept, such as self-esteem, self-efficacy, mastery and absence of denigration, facilitate adaptive forms of coping when positive. A person with a good self-concept will evaluate stressful circumstances as less threatening and be less susceptible to stress (Vercruyssen & Chandler, 1992).

A person with high self-esteem can recognize and accept ambivalent feelings about a change and will negotiate change with a minimum of emotional turmoil - such a person is seen as resilient (Hausman & Reed 1991).

In fact a person's self-esteem plays a bigger role in the adjustment strategies he chooses than the characteristics of the job itself. High self-esteem is associated with innovative actions in a new job and innovation is seen as an important coping mechanism (Munton & West, 1995).

On the other hand, persons with low self-esteem tend to feel victimized and helpless and will choose ineffective strategies to resolve stress in order to maintain a view of the self as a victim (Hausman & Reed, 1991).

2 *Flexibility versus rigidity*

Interestingly very rigid persons "adapt" quite easily mainly because they do very little adapting. They experience few frustrations due to their insensitivity to another culture (Kealey & Rubin, 1983 in Dunbar, 1992). It is however difficult to imagine a rigid person as being capable of good interpersonal relations.

Moreover, most studies stress the importance of flexibility for easier adjustment. One assumes that greater flexibility can result in relatively easy adaptation but at the cost of changes to the self-concept and identity, resulting in greater alienation from the home country. There is probably an optimal level of flexibility.

Kozloff (1996) reasons that a person who is intolerant and knows it, but acts with social sensitivity, is in reality more tolerant than someone who deludes himself that he is tolerant.

3 *Orientation of personal control beliefs*

According to Gerdes et al (1981), locus of control refers to where a person believes the control lies for what happens to him during his life. If it is seen as external then other persons, events and circumstances are seen as responsible for what happens to him. But if the locus is internal, he takes responsibility for what happens.

Luo and Cooper (1990) state that an internal locus of control is associated with good adjustment. The more a person is convinced that he cannot control the problems related to relocation, the higher his stress levels both before and after the move (Martin 1996). Carlisle-Frank (1992) hypothesized that control beliefs in terms of perceived effectiveness before and after a move should remain the same for optimum adaptation.

4 *Attributions*

The causes that people attribute to events have significant consequences for the way in which they react to those events (Antaki & Brown (1982), in Martin, 1996) and affects the intensity of their feelings (Hausman & Reed, 1991).

If relocation is seen as advancing one's career, adjustment is easier (Dunbar, 1992). This raises a question about the rest of the family? If the family has to relocate because of the job requirements of one member, the others become

vulnerable to feelings of loss of control, ambivalence and resentment (Hausman & Reed, 1991).

Families where all members accepted the reason for moving and were in agreement, adjust better (Gulotta & Donohue, 1982) and their commitment to a common goal could actually bring them closer together (Hausman & Reed, 1991). But if the move is seen as symbolic of a disruption of the family, obstacles can be expected (McCubbin 1979).

5 *Attitude*

Frye (1991) considers an open-minded attitude and a willingness to make use of new information to be cardinal to the adjustment process. Self-statements have been found to predict the approach towards an event like relocation (Hausman & Reed, 1991).

6 *Expectations*

Knowing what to expect helps adjustment by reducing uncertainty (Fisher & Shaw, 1994), especially initially. Having unrealistically positive expectations can result in a feeling of being let down that is hard to overcome. Negative expectations sometimes allow for pleasant surprises that can sustain one during the adjustment phase.

7 *Expression of emotion*

Specific losses are experienced when relocating and mourning for these losses is considered normal. Letting go of the past is also necessary so that new attachments can be formed.

Hausman and Reed (1991), found that being unprepared for the range and intensity of one's own reactions after relocating can complicate adjustment if the beliefs a person has about feelings, compels him to suppress rather than to experience and express a wide range of feelings safely.

8 *A tendency to explore*

A personal tendency to explore new places is seen as adaptive when expressed as exploring behaviour (Stokols & Shumaker, 1982). I would like to add curiosity about another culture as having an adaptive function. Taking an interest in local customs and beliefs makes it possible for one to relate to people.

2.7.2 The interpersonal arena and social factors

The interpersonal and social arena refer to the social context of a person's life abroad and include host country nationals, the international diplomatic and expatriate community, and the South African transferred families at the diplomatic mission.

The quality of interpersonal relations between the transferred official and the host country personnel constitutes an important aspect of adjustment and functioning.

Awareness, knowledge and involvement with host country persons are important dimensions of performance abroad. Cross-cultural efficacy is related to increased acceptance by host country persons, better personal adjustment and satisfaction with living abroad (Dunbar, 1992).

Kozloff (1996) regards social intelligence and interpersonal skills as important qualities in the person who has to live abroad.

He lists the following as specific "skills" of a person who adapts well:

- language skills,
- awareness of non-verbal communication,
- friendships with host country persons,
- interest in host country,
- recreational participation, and

- initiative to travel.

2.7.2.1. The role of the community

It seems clear that interpersonal and community support play a critical role in individual and family adjustment (Cornille 1993).

One role of the community is that of providing norms and expectations of how families can best deal with an event. The community offers social support through interpersonal relations (McCubbin, 1979) and newly relocated people are especially receptive to outside influences (Moos & Schaefer, 1986).

2.7.2.2 Social support

The relationships between stress, illness and extent of social support have been thoroughly researched. We know that social support acts as a buffer between a person and negative life events, but what happens in the absence of a familiar social support system?

When a social support system changes or falls away, as in relocation, a person's well-being is affected. A sense of well-being is related to a person's ability to feel secure and to lead a meaningful life. Security is linked to a sense of control over one's life (Hausman & Reed, 1991).

The loss of social contacts is translated as a break in social continuity and increased isolation for family members. Hausman and Reed (1991) speak of an experience of social anonymity.

Jones (1973) equates relocation with social disorganization. However, this finding was based on immigrant studies. Although all the hitherto important and familiar people in one's life disappear from one day to the next when a diplomatic

family moves abroad, the social disruption is of a temporary nature. Moreover, in most postings a diplomatic or expatriate community can be found to accommodate newcomers.

Cornille (1983) draws our attention to the importance of both social support systems and social networks. In a support relationship, the family plays an active role in using the help, the affirmation and association provided by outside groups.

Social support which includes a sense of acceptance, being valued and being part of a network for problem solving is a valuable family resource during relocation (Cornille, 1993). Depending on whether a sense of goodwill and a culture of helpfulness exists within a mission, such help is generally extended to new diplomatic families on an informal basis. When no such help is forthcoming, adjustment can be very difficult.

It is interesting to note how little change occurs for American military families who relocate between bases and who report no problems related to such moves. The military has been innovative through the establishment of family service centres where families receive assistance in all aspects of the settling down process.

Military families are possibly even more mobile than the diplomatic community, thus increasing the chances of finding at least one old friend at a new base. Old friends are a source of information which helps reduce anxiety (Fisher & Shaw, 1993). This is possibly because a resumption of contact with an old friend gives a sense of continuity to one's life. It is the one person, or family, in your new surroundings for whom you have an identity, for whom you are not anonymous.

2.7.2.3 Social networks and time

Starker (1990) undertook a study of the development of new social networks and the changes that occur within networks over time. She showed that though



intimacy levels do increase over time, new networks are unstable and in transition even after several months. It takes time to build up a new social support system and even then it can take from two and a half to four and a half years in a new community before stable levels of intimacy can be achieved. She suggested that the absence of a social network several months after relocation should be seen as a normative phase of the move and not as a disturbance in interpersonal relationships.

Carlisle-Frank (1992) hypothesizes that persons with varied circles of friends will adapt more easily than those with limited or no support systems.

McCubbin (1979) emphasizes the value of actively building and maintaining supportive relationships between family members and the community in the management of stress.

2.7.2.4 A religious community

Religion and religious beliefs play an important role in a family's ability to manage stress, especially in more severe situations (McCubbin, 1979). A strong link between family life and church affiliation predicts success in integrating into a new community (Cornille, 1993). In a sea of foreignness, a church represents a community of people who share similar values and belief systems.

2.7.2.5 Role of support groups

Clinicians found support groups helpful for newly relocated people. It provides a safe way to express negative feelings and helps reduce feelings of loneliness and loss. A balance of ventilation and problem-solving can be nurtured in a non-clinical setting (Cornille, 1993).

How can any of the foregoing findings on community and social support apply to a family arriving in a virtual social void? Hausman and Reed (1991) remind us

that openly communicative families find and receive support more easily. Even so, diplomatic families are particularly affected as communities know that diplomats are only staying temporarily and are often not keen to initiate anything more than casual contact.

2.7.3 Other contributing factors

The following section groups together those factors contributing towards adjustment as found in the literature.

2.7.3.1 Time

Time needs to be considered as a variable in the adaptation process (Munton & West, 1995). Lundy (1994) feels that the generally accepted period of six months to adjust is too short. Transferred employees take an average of 8 months to adjust at work; upper-level managers need nine and a half months (Benjamin & Eagles, 1991). If adjustment includes the time needed to settle in, establish new roots and deep friendships, it takes from six to eighteen months (Carlisle-Frank, 1992). None of these studies included the specific context of the new environment as a variable.

After nine months in a new environment, children display a higher level of anxiety than those who have been there for a year. The first year seems to be the most critical (Alston & Nieuwoudt, 1991).

Somewhat confusingly, Humke and Shaefer (1995) find that it takes an average of 23 days for adolescents to establish peer relationships and 17 days to adjust academically. It seems rather short, but it is important to note that their study refers to domestic relocation presenting similar academic situations.

At three months after a move children report

- * having fewer best friends,
- * spending less time with friends (especially boys),
- * spending less time in sports,
- * reading less for pleasure, and
- * and spending less time with their parents (especially for adolescents) than before the move (Humke & Schaefer, 1995).

Time, of course, has a particular relevance when it comes to the development of relationships (Werner et al., 1992), as there is still no such thing as an instant relationship.

2.7.3.2 Relocation history

Pre-move history:

Martin (1995) found that the longer a family had been in an area prior to moving, the higher the resultant general stress levels when they relocate. Stokols and Shumaker, (1982) have suggested the concept *place dependence*, which is defined as a person's subjective perception of being strongly attached to a place, to explain this effect. Carlisle-Frank (1991) calls it *pre-location attachment* and predicts that high pre-move attachment will slow down adjustment. In the light of the foregoing, Fisher and Shaw's (1993) suggestion that a first move away from a place where people have lived for a long time, will be more traumatic than any number of subsequent moves, seems understandable.

This brings us to a consideration of the frequency of moving and its effect on people. Let me note that Munton and Forster (1995) and Humke and Schaefer (1995) have called for longitudinal studies to measure the attitudes and emotions of family members over the course of relocation.

Number of moves:

The literature has produced mixed results on this variable. Jones (1973) found that the more one moved the quicker one adjusted. But each overseas move presents unique problems and past experiences in other places may not be relevant (Fisher & Shaw 1994). Martin (1995) adds that the fewer times one moves, the more stress one experiences each time. There seems to be agreement that first time movers have more problems (Lehr & Hendrikson in Gulotta & Donohue, 1982), excepting Dunbar (1992), who found no difference between novice expatriates and experienced movers in terms of well-being. He adds that prior experience abroad is more useful in the sense that one learns appropriate inter-cultural behaviour and cognitions. Prior experience also seems to help in bringing about more realistic expectations about a move (Shaw & Fisher, 1993).

In addition Humke and Schaefer (1995) point out that a higher rate of mobility is in fact associated with more adjustment problems and a higher risk of maladjustment and dysfunction. The risk of children having to repeat grades and exhibiting behavioural problems also increases with the number of moves.

2.7.3.3 Extraneous Problems

Problems - such as housing problems, having to stay in a hotel for a long time, a family separation - can also have an affect on one's attitude to adjustment (Fisher & Shaw, 1994).

This is an important variable as moving problems are virtually inevitable and as such certainly contribute to the stress of relocation. In fact, much of relocation stress and irritability is contributed to the various problems and obstacles encountered. Problems often become an important focus for a family and are invested with an inordinate amount of emotional energy. Once a problem or obstacle has been eliminated, that energy available for adjusting to the new surroundings.

Jones (1973) specifically mentions the arrival of furniture and personal effects as contributing to adjustment. Werner et al. (1992), describe the psychological function of decorating a new house as twofold: it results in a sense of attachment to the new home and a sense of control over the environment.

2.8 Relocation and mental health

Contrary to the traditional view, relocation is not an acute or short-term life stressor that has uniformly negative effects on health occurring at the time of moving. This earlier view ignored the longer term health consequences of relocation. (Stokols et al., 1983). This means that some people may experience relocation as an acute time-limited stressor whilst others may experience it as a chronic state of imbalance, both having a specific effect. Thus both the traditional view and the view proposed by Stokols et al. (1983) become relevant in relocation.

In some cases relocation itself becomes a coping strategy for dealing with some problem in one's life (Stokols et al., 1983). But *blocked mobility* - the inability to improve one's life situation through moving - can be more harmful than the move itself.

However, when symptoms of mental or emotional disturbance are present, they are due to the reaction to change and these reactions vary from person to person (Hausman & Reed, 1991). The psychological state of imbalance that results from relocation can lead to physiological, affective and behavioural stress reactions. If these are acute or long lasting, illness symptoms may occur (Stokols & Shumaker, 1982).

Negative symptoms can occur even if the move was seen as desirable (Bayes, 1986), but Stokols and Shumaker (1982) state that desirable events are definitely not related to health problems! It does not seem useful to pursue this line of

enquiry unless the person's total life context is taken into account.

For some individuals part of the distress experienced during relocation may be related to unresolved experiences of separation and loss linked to childhood trauma (Hausman & Reed, 1991).

2.8.1 Frequent relocation

Stokols et al. (1983) found a direct relationship between frequent relocation and a high number of distress symptoms. The intensity of the reaction to relocation is mediated by factors such as desirability of the move and degree of predictability of what will happen to one.

Frequent moves drain a person's emotional and physical resources, lessening motivation to invest time and energy into reestablishing credentials. This can result in isolation and depression (Seidenberg (1973) in Brown & Orthner, 1990).

High mobility individuals report a higher number of illness symptoms than low mobility persons (Starker, 1990). High mobility has been linked specifically with high coronary heart disease figures (Luo & Cooper, 1990). Starker (1990) quotes research that found the rate to be twice as high as in low mobility subjects.

2.8.2 Symptoms

Relocation adjustment can be accompanied by an increased sense of well-being (Luo & Cooper, 1990) especially initially, but may also produce symptoms of anxiety, stress and uncertainty (Noe & Barber, 1993), sleep problems, depression and unhappiness, and a feeling of being on edge, (Jones, 1973), as well as experiences of pain, anger and confusion (Hausman & Reed, 1991).

One study found that mobile wives are particularly vulnerable to depression,

often given to substance abuse and described as defeated women (Seidenberg in Starker, 1990). Physical symptoms include headaches, eating and sleep disturbances, and muscle spasms (Hausman, 1991).

2.8.3 Psychopathology

Are these symptoms indicative of psychopathology? Not necessarily, says Lundy (1994), and even ineffective responses are not evidence of mental disturbance as they can be seen as normal reactions to overwhelming circumstances (Hausman & Reed, 1991).

Many people cope effectively with very serious crises (Moos & Schaefer, 1986) as people are generally fairly creative problem solvers. However, professional help should be sought when excessive discomfort is experienced beyond a reasonable time period (Hausman & Reed, 1991).

2.9 Coping strategies

This section represents a review of the ways in which people cope with the stress and negative symptoms experienced during and after relocation. Coping behaviour is an important dimension of family adaptation to stress and is broadly defined as a strategy for managing stress. Such behaviour is effective when a sense of security and meaning in one's life can be re-established (Hausman & Reed, 1991).

Martin (1996) noted that an exploration of the ways in which people deal with relocation problems as such will increase our understanding of its impact.

2.9.1 A crisis calls for strategies

The more active and problem-focused a person's coping strategies, the better his

adjustment (Munton & West, 1995; Starker, 1990).

Negative reactions activate coping strategies to reestablish daily routines and to manage unpleasant feelings. The success or failure of these attempts determines whether a person will grow in this process or become ill. Life crises force the development of new cognitive and personal skills for effective adaptation. Our need for psychological and social equilibrium, impels us to use strategies to restore such balance. The inability to deal effectively with a situation, may result in future problems in dealing with transitions and crises (Moos & Shaefer, 1986).

Ineffective strategies compound problems and include:

- * excessive drinking and or working,
- * increased dependence on a partner for emotional security, and
- * destructive aggression

(Cornille, 1993).

Munton and Forster (1995) report that people seem to have fewer coping resources following relocation. It is worth bearing in mind, that there are several ways in which stress-related problems can be dealt with. Skills that are effective in one situation may not be so in another (Moos & Schaefer, 1986). When symptoms cannot be dealt with in the usual way, people will resort to other mechanisms in a trial and error way (Cornille, 1993).

2.9.2 Adequate preparation for a move

Munton and West (1995) state that one cannot actually *prepare* for moving as you learn to cope with moving by moving. Jones (1973) says that a little training can help but agrees that the actual moving is the learning process.

But moving is not just a physical process and inadequate preparation exacerbates eventual adjustment problems (Dunbar, 1992). Carlisle-Frank



(1991) also believes in the value of preparedness as a way to reduce uncertainty. These researchers are referring to preparation in terms of specific information about the host country and information about cultural differences.

2.9.3 Coping is an attitude

Coping begins with the right attitude towards relocation. For those who view change as an opportunity and relocation as a challenge, and who are prepared to take action to make things happen, adaptation comes more easily (Neims, in Starker, 1990).

Attitude towards a move is reflected in the kind of *self statements* we make. A person who is given to catastrophizing, judging or overgeneralization will not only expect such outcomes but also believe them to be true. This in turn will lead to negative emotional experiences. For example, believing that you will never make friends again or that this move represents the worst thing that has ever happened to you, is not going to help anyone to adjust happily.

On the other hand, telling yourself that you will make the best of the situation, or being open-minded about meeting new people will help (Hausman & Reed, 1991).

2.9.4 Explore your surroundings

Stokols et al. (1983) speak of a high level of exploratory behaviour as helping adjustment. Individual coping skills are important in accessing services (Cornille, 1993).

2.9.5 A normal schedule

The sooner a normal schedule can be established, the better for the family

(Jones ,1973).

The most important task is to make friends, whilst retaining contact with old ones. This reduces the sense of loss (Cornille, 1993).

2.9.6 The spouse

Corporate wives cope by: *fitting into the corporate lifestyle; by developing self; and by becoming more independent* (Gulotta & Donohue, 1982). Lundy (1994) does not consider this approach as adaptive or sound in terms of an equal partnership. In a discussion on the effect of relocation on the spouse, she points out that all three coping mechanisms have one thing in common, namely it is the woman who must adapt. She must identify with her husband's job and be satisfied with his career successes. She should rely on herself for getting her needs met and develop outside interests. This leads to a minimilisation of the husband's role in the family (as she takes care of everyone's adjustment needs) and undermines the mutual interdependence that can exist in a marriage. Furthermore, if a woman is still unable to adjust she is seen as the problem.

2.9.7 Children and adolescent coping

Current conceptualizations of adolescent coping is still in an early stage as it has not been as well researched as adult coping behaviour (Vercruyssen & Chandler, 1992).

Adolescents who use approach strategies as opposed to avoidance strategies adjust better (Vercruyssen & Chandler, 1992). Girls are more likely to complain about stress and seek support than boys (Raviv et al., 1990). It is not clear whether this strategy is effective.

Children who are copers report less anxiety than those who catastrophize in imagined stressful situations. Catastrophizing is quite common among younger

children. Coping behaviour increases with age so that at sixteen twice as many coping skills are used as at eight years of age. Positive self-talk is the most commonly used strategy across all age groups (Brown et al., 1985).

2.9.8 Parental involvement

It seems important to discuss the reasons for moving with children before departure and allow the child some level of control during times of confusion: for instance, allow him to decide which of his favourite possessions should stay behind, travel by sea or remain with him during the trip.

Humke and Schaefer (1995) found a significant correlation between adolescent companionship and intimacy with new friends on the one hand and active *parental involvement* (e.g. enabling proximity to peers and meeting other parents) in the adolescent's social world following relocation. This is an important adjustment strategy to help counteract the well documented difficulties that adolescents experience with peer relations after relocation (Cornille, 1993).

A helpful approach for children and adolescents include the following:

- approach the move as an adventure;
- facilitate contact between the teens in the new city and your teens in advance to discuss schools, activities and allay fears;
- arrange a pen pal at the new school for a head start with a friend;
- subscribe to the school newspapers before moving; and
- clarify course requirements in advance

(Benjamin & Eagles, 1991).

In summary it seems that a positive, constructive attitude, combined with a willingness to explore new surroundings in order to create a new comfort zone, will facilitate adjustment.

There are certain actions parents can take to help their children adjust more quickly. Spouses need to be aware of possible changes in their relationship. Although there are few answers to issues that are currently in flux, an awareness of the issues can pave the way towards individual ways of dealing with them.

It seems relevant to relate these findings to the South African context.

2.10 South Africa, its diplomats and relocation

Taking all of the above into account, the situation for the South African context may not be much different. As mentioned earlier, a search of the literature revealed that no formal studies of this nature have been undertaken in this field with a specific focus on South African diplomats. Thus it becomes pertinent to relate the foregoing findings to South African diplomats who have to relocate and specifically to postings that fall in the hardship category. Because of the lack of formal research most of the information stated below is based on communications with South African Foreign Affairs officials or reflect my own knowledge and experience as a spouse of a South African Foreign Affairs official over twenty-five odd years. Although my intention was to be as accurate and reliable as possible, no claim can be made to completeness or preciseness. Nor are these views necessarily endorsed by the South African Department of Foreign Affairs.

2.10.1 Missions

Missions abroad range in size from a one man office to large embassies with representatives from several state departments. A typical mission would have a few representatives from the Department of Foreign Affairs, perhaps a Defense Attaché and an official from the Department of Trade and Industry. Foreign Affairs have a political division and an administrative division, the latter is responsible for managing the office.

Each mission develops its own specific culture and the mission's reaction to a newcomer seems to have a tremendous and enduring impact. Five of the seven missions I visited had been established since 1994. This newness had extra implications for transferred personnel. The persons opening up a new mission in a very different culture have to do pioneering work and are often left to their own devices.

They need to find buildings, employ local staff without knowing the local customs and systems. The teething problems of a new mission are worse in a hardship post in the absence of a clear formal sector. One example perhaps is that no telephone directory had been printed in Ethiopia for the five or six years prior to the opening of a mission.

It can take a long time to develop a strong cohesive internal dynamic in a mission which would ensure good cooperation. The more people battle initially and the more people feel that they are on their own, the less likelihood of cohesiveness.

The South African mission plays a complex role in the transferred official and family's life.

In the first place it represents a link with South Africa. Mail and newspapers arrive via the diplomatic bag.

Secondly, for a new family it represents an entity that has been in the foreign country for a while at least and as such it is expected to have a certain expertise that the new arrivals lack and need to be informed about. Thus there is an expectation of support at least on an informational level.

Thirdly the mission's administrative section makes a hotel booking for the family, and holds the key to all housing regulations. It determines, for example, whether a medical evacuation to another country is warranted or not and it grants

permission for home leave. The administrative section in turn is responsible to Head Office for all decisions that are taken.

2.10.2 Moving as a career imperative

The first question that arises is whether the current Western trend of resisting postings is reflected in South African Foreign Affairs families. If so, it would surely be a contradiction in terms since being a diplomat implies a readiness and indeed an eagerness to go on foreign postings.

2.10.3 Posting procedures

In the past South African diplomats seemed to have limited discretion in terms of either choosing or declining postings. Thus a diplomat may be reluctant to turn down a specific posting as it was felt that the official may then be discriminated against and not considered for other postings. This can be seen as a general tendency in most employee contexts.

During the five years before 1997, the South African Department of Foreign Affairs used a system whereby officials could apply for postings. This seemed to result in receiving no applications for the so-called "less desirable" postings. In August 1997 a policy was devised in which the world of foreign assignments was divided into three parts and each officer aspiring for transfer had to serve consecutively in each of these three world areas, ranging from so-called "most desirable" to "least desirable". These areas correspond roughly to the developed, the developing and the underdeveloped parts of the world, with the undeveloped world seen as the "least desirable" (Personal communication: A Senior FA official)

This system was also subsequently put on hold. The latter system may have ensured equity but doubtless, seemed not to suit everyone's preferences. Similar

to the finding of Noe and Barber (1992), it's apparent that a person may be unwilling to relocate to one place yet be quite willing to go to another. As of the year 2000, the South African Department of Foreign Affairs has reverted to the original policy of transferring officials according to departmental needs (Personal communication: A Senior FA official).

And yet, these departmental needs may have consequences for the diplomatic families' needs, effect their adaptation and determine the future relationship between the diplomatic family and the DFA.

2.10.4 The diplomatic family dilemma

It makes intuitive sense that a diplomat may experience pressure from his family not to take up a seemingly difficult posting if there seems to be a clash with the needs of the family. This is particularly true for a family with children who are ready for High School education.

If this is the case, the choices are to 1) remain at Head Office (without the benefit of foreign allowances) and forfeit the opportunity and experience of working abroad; 2) resign from the Department; 3) leave a spouse behind to stay with the children and proceed alone; and 4) take a possibly reluctant family along in the hope that they may adjust eventually.

At present the chances for South Africa diplomats seem to be good that the latter choice will prevail, if career interests and avoidance of negative career consequences are likely to take precedence over misgivings about the effects on families, as the findings of researchers like Brett (1982) and Donahue & Gulotta (1983) suggest.

2.10.5 The dilemma of the spouse

The career-minded spouse faces different dilemmas as at present it is not possible for a diplomatic spouse to pursue an uninterrupted and independent career, unless a commuter relationship is desired. Nor is it possible to be gainfully employed during foreign postings. There are historic and actual reasons for this situation, such as reciprocal agreements between governments and issues of diplomatic immunity. South Africa is not unique in this aspect, as this regulation holds true in most foreign countries and applies to diplomatic spouses worldwide. The South African FDA will give spouses preference (above locally recruited personnel) by employing them in administrative positions at missions abroad should such positions be available. After democratization in South Africa in 1994, many of the new diplomats who joined the Department of Foreign Affairs in a career change, had spouses who were already established in their own careers.

A further dilemma is that a spouse generally needs to find short-term employment during home posting periods in Pretoria when foreign allowances fall away, resulting in a drop in living standards for the family. The common perception is that this becomes harder to enter the marketplace after a break of several years with nothing to show on a curriculum vitae.

In light of the above, it becomes all the more urgent to undertake a study of this nature and to test these observations against the experiences of officials and their spouses.

2.11 Summarised findings from literature.

1. The advent of dual-career families have resulted in a dilemma for the spouse who cannot follow a partner around the world and pursue a career at the same time. The dilemma is further complicated by the fact that the spouse has to contribute to the family's finances on home postings and may find it difficult to find work on a discontinuous basis. A lack of attention to the spouse's dilemma



is evident.

2. Relocation is a stressful event for the entire family. The more disruption, the worse for the family. The way a family copes, has to do with the adequacy of their preparation, personality characteristics, psychological and situational variables, coping strategies and social support.
3. The stress of relocation lies in its requirement to cope with the loss of a previous lifestyle and social network, and to create and adjust to a new lifestyle in a different community.
4. It would seem that the employee has the least stress, that children adjust in the long run and that the spouse has a pivotal role to play in the well-being of the family. There is a high association between a positive post-move attitude on behalf of children and their mother's well-being three months after a move.
5. There are four phases to adjustment, namely a preparation phase, the actual move and the arrival phase, the post-move crisis period and the post-move adjustment period.
6. Relocation has been found to have a significant impact on the course of a marriage. There is a strong link between relocation and decisions to either end a marriage, begin a new relationship or start a family.
7. Adequate international adjustment and job performance require certain characteristics such as self confidence and emotional maturity, social intelligence and interpersonal skills, critical thinking and decision-making skills, ability to handle new situations, independence and self-reliance and the ability to withhold rash critical judgments.
8. Cross cultural efficacy is related to increased acceptance by host country



persons, better social adjustment and satisfaction with living abroad. It takes time to build up a new social support network and to achieve stable levels of intimacy to counteract the initial experience of anonymity.

- 9 The symptoms of distress vary from behavioural problems and depression in children especially during the first year, to depression, alcoholism, eating disorders and anxiety in the spouses. These latter symptoms are also seen as ineffective coping strategies. People seem to have fewer coping resources after a move and will often resort to 'trial and error' procedures.
- 10 The situation of a South African family in a Foreign Affairs context seems similar to the assumptions in the literature and the findings in social international research.