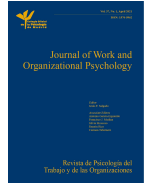




# Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology

<https://journals.copmadrid.org/jwop>



## Social Support and Well-being among Relocating Women: The Mediating Roles of Resilience and Optimism

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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 21 December 2020

Accepted 10 May 2021

Available online 1 June 2021

#### Keywords:

Women work relocation

Resilience

Optimism

Well-being

### ABSTRACT

The relative lack of research on the relocation of women to foreign assignments prompted this study that focused on a large online community of women in relocation. We examined the relationship between two support types, perceived social support (PSS) and online support, and well-being measures (meaning in life, depression, and loneliness) in the new setting. Based on the literature, we hypothesized that (a) PSS and online support positively relate to personal resilience and optimism, (b) resilience and optimism positively associate with well-being levels, and (c) resilience and optimism mediate the association between both types of support and well-being. Two waves of data (T1 & T2) were collected in the current study. The results largely reflected the propositions, with some deviations from the expected model, and indicated that resilience was the more prominent mediator at both T1 and T2. A complex pattern of relationships was documented between various types of virtual support and well-being. Women who received social support could foster a positive, optimistic future perspective experience and an increased sense of meaning in their lives. This study engendered implications for organizations' appropriate preparation of relocating staff, in general, and the relocation of women employees, in particular.

### El apoyo social y el bienestar en las mujeres expatriadas: el papel mediador de la resiliencia y el optimismo

### RESUMEN

La relativa falta de investigación sobre las mujeres expatriadas ha propiciado este estudio, centrado en una amplia comunidad online de mujeres en esa situación. Analizamos la relación de dos tipos de apoyo, apoyo social percibido (ASP) y apoyo online y las medidas de bienestar (sentido de la vida, depresión y soledad) en el nuevo escenario. De acuerdo con la literatura científica planteamos las hipótesis de que a) el ASP y el apoyo online se relacionan positivamente con la resiliencia personal y el optimismo, b) estos últimos se asocian positivamente con el nivel de bienestar y c) median en la asociación entre ambos tipo de apoyo y bienestar. Se recogieron dos oleadas de datos (T1 y T2) en el presente estudio. Los resultados reflejaban ampliamente las proposiciones con alguna desviación del modelo esperado e indicaban que la resiliencia era el mediador más sobresaliente tanto en T1 como en T2. Se documentó un complejo patrón de relaciones entre diversos tipos de apoyo virtual y bienestar. Aquellas mujeres que habían recibido apoyo social podían albergar una experiencia perspectiva futura optimista y una mayor sensación de significado en su vida. El estudio tiene implicaciones para la adecuada preparación de las organizaciones para la asignación de un trabajo en el exterior su personal y en particular a las mujeres empleadas.

#### Palabras clave:

Mujeres expatriadas

Resiliencia

Optimismo

Bienestar

The world has become a global and accessible village. Consequently, many opportunities have been created in the world of work to relocate workers beyond the borders of their current country of residence, thus to become expatriates (Taylor & Freeman, 2010). Specifically, expatriates are legally working individuals who reside temporarily in a country where they are not citizens to accomplish a career-related goal, being relocated abroad either by

an organization, by self-initiation, or directly employed within the host-country (McNulty & Brewster, 2017, p. 46). As can be expected, relocation presents many challenges. Relocating to a new country requires adapting to a new language and culture, distancing from immediate support systems such as family and friends, and coping with stressors that attend the new role (Fischlmayr & Kollinger, 2010).

Cite this article as: Sagi, L., Bareket-Bojmel, L., Tziner, A., Icekson, T., & Mordoch, T. (2021). Social support and well-being among relocating women: The mediating roles of resilience and optimism. *Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 37(2), 107-117. <https://doi.org/10.5093/jwop2021a11>

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According to the 2016 Global Mobility Trends Survey, which included respondents from 163 global companies representing over 11 million employees, 73% of expatriates were accompanied by a partner (Brookfield Global Relocation Services, 2016). Moreover, studies indicate that about 80% of those relocating for work purposes to a new country are men, and only 20% are women (Whitaker, 2010). Consequently, the vast majority of the previous literature on the subject focused on the adjustment of male expatriates, while paying little attention to their women partners (Kanstrén & Mäkelä, 2020; Sterle et al., 2018).

There are several reasons why it is relevant to investigate adjustment among relocating women. First, when moving abroad, women who accompany their partners are often forced to give up a meaningful career in their country of origin (Ulrich et al., 2015). Moreover, they often bear responsibility for the successful adaptation of the whole family, especially the children, to the new place (Cooke & Speirs, 2005). As indicated by Sterle et al. (2018), relocating women struggle with a new residence, changing family routines, coping with cultural differences, their children's adaptation to new schools, and coping with increased role conflicts. While wrestling with these challenges, women are disconnected from their circles of support in their country of origin exactly when they need them the most. So, it is no wonder that relocation can produce the experience of vulnerability among relocating women (Takeuchi, 2010). According to the Conservation of Resources theory (COR) (Hobfoll, 2002), when encountered with challenges, people turn to their resources. People who possess more resources, or have resources that fit the demands, are more capable of striving in stressful circumstances. Lazarova et al. (2010) noted in an investigation of expatriates' partners during the transition to a different country that social "and" personal resources play a significant role in predicting their well-being levels. Moreover, following the "thriving through relationships" theoretical perspective, in the face of adversity social support may promote eudemonic, psychological, and social well-being (Feeney & Collins, 2015). Eudemonic well-being refers to a sense of purpose and meaning in life; psychological well-being refers to the absence of mental health symptoms or disorders; and social well-being refers to a sense of deep and meaningful human connections. Feeney and Collins (2015) proposed that in the face of adversity (such as relocating to a different country), social support may facilitate positive attributions and motivations such as optimism and resilience, which in turn enhance eudemonic, psychological, and social well-being.

Adopting the COR and the "thriving through relationships" theoretical frameworks (Feeney & Collins, 2015; Hobfoll, 2002), our aim in the current study was to explore the role of (a) perceived (traditional) social support (PSS) and (b) online support in promoting the three types of well-being among 'women in relocation'. Specifically, we examined the relationship between the aforementioned two support dimensions in (i) increasing a sense of meaning in life, (ii) reducing depression, and (iii) reducing loneliness. We also investigated the mediating role of resilience and optimism in preserving women's well-being.

## Social Support

Social support is defined as social interactions or relationships that provide individuals with assistance or with a feeling of attachment to a person or group perceived as caring or loving (Hobfoll et al., 1990, p. 467). There is broad agreement in the ample literature that perceived social support (PSS) is highly beneficial for positive adjustment among expatriates and their families (e.g., Aycan, 1997; Feldman & Bolino, 1999; Ward & Chang, 1997).

Following Zimet et al. (1990), the three primary sources of social support are family, friends, and spouse. Briody and Chrisman (1991) indicated that social support operates on several aspects of the

women's psyche ('emotional' social support), namely, empowerment and perception, sense of belonging, psychological security, and self-esteem. Social support also operates by providing essential data acquired from significant others that enriches an individual's resources ('instrumental' social support). In this instance, the practical information required assists in the adaptation process (Briody & Chrisman, 1991; Whitaker, 2010).

A spouse plays a very significant supportive role (Allan, 2010; Caligiuri & Tung, 1999). Taylor and Napier (1996) attributed that to the fact that the spouse produces a renewed confirmation of a woman's "professional self" in the relocation process. Indeed, employees consider various spousal factors in their career decision-making and, especially among women employees, the family-relatedness of relocation decisions is particularly strong. In addition to peer and spouse support, family support was found to help women in relocation harness the psychological strength to deal with relocation challenges by expressing confidence in their ability to cope (Caligiuri & Lazarova, 2002).

To the traditional source of support, in the current study, we added online support, which is potentially highly significant to people relocating. Online support helps relocators to network and overcome social distancing. They can maintain close relationships from afar and also network with others in their situation (Bargh & McKenna, 2004). In the current study, therefore, we focused on a large Facebook community of more than 23,000 women undergoing relocation assignments in different parts of the world. As an online community, women share experiences in the country of relocation, disclose information, and offer encouragement and help to relocated women worldwide.

The "thriving through relationships" theoretical perspective suggests that in the face of adversity, social support may promote eudemonic, psychological, and social well-being by enhancing positive attributions (Feeney & Collins, 2015). In the following section we present evidence to support the suggested relationships between social support and each type of well-being.

**Meaning in life.** Eudemonic well-being refers to a sense of meaning in life (Feeney & Collins, 2015). Meaning in life can be defined as a purpose, mission, or overarching aim in life (Steger, 2009). People who perceive their lives as meaningful have a higher sense of well-being than their peers who perceive their lives as less meaningful (Brassai et al., 2011). Meaning in life has also been accredited in the literature as facilitating adaptation in employment (Littman-Ovadia & Steger, 2010). Other researchers have indicated that it mediates the effects of stressful life events on depression and the ability to cope with post-traumatic stress disorders (Krause, 2007; Owens et al., 2009).

There are many indications that social support serves as a source of meaning in life (Hicks & King, 2009; Shuv-Ami & Bareket-Bojmel, 2020; Stavrova & Luhmann, 2016; Williams, 2007) and that its absence produces a sense of meaninglessness (Lambert et al., 2013; Twenge et al., 2003). Even when the lack of support is temporary, the lack decreases the sense of meaning in life (Zadro et al., 2004).

**Depression.** One major definition of psychological well-being refers to the absence of mental health symptoms or disorders, usually referring to depression (Feeney & Collins, 2015). Depression refers to an acute mood disorder that accompanies physical, emotional, and behavioral symptoms, and significantly impairs functioning. In addition to the experience of subjective distress, these feelings may lead to functional difficulties in other aspects of life, such as employment and interpersonal relationships.

Puskar and Ladely (1992) conducted a study of young women and found that 18 percent of study participants experienced clinical depression during relocation. A further study found an association between relocation, stress, and depression linked to low social support (Hovey & Magana, 2000). Another investigation of women who immigrated for marriage purposes also indicated that relocation

often involves stress and depression (Chae et al., 2014). Therefore, we have included depression as an indicator of psychological well-being in the current study.

**Loneliness.** Social well-being refers to a sense of deep and meaningful human connections (Feeney & Collins, 2015). Following Feeney and Collins' (2015) conceptualization, loneliness was included in our study as an indicator of social well-being, especially since previous investigations indicated that feelings of isolation constitute a significant challenge in the transition period of relocation. Researchers have defined loneliness as a situation in which a person suffers from a lack of social connections and social needs are not met (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). During the transition period, relocates disconnect from circles of support and are required to adapt to a new and unfamiliar environment. Loneliness generates fear, a sense of alienation, and even depression (Fischlmayr & Kollinger, 2010). Specifically, loneliness was indicated in studies of the relocation experience of unmarried women in long-term relationships with a partner in the country of origin (Linehan & Scullion, 2001). Similarly, this lonely feeling was exhibited by married women in relocation who were forced to interrupt careers and had failed to create a strong network of support and meaning for their new lives in the destination country (Shaffer & Harrison, 2001).

**Online social support.** In addition to the effects of PSS on the mental health of relocating women, we chose in our research model to investigate the influence of virtual (online) support on well-being. In recent years, notably, social support has expanded beyond PSS to online platforms and virtual communities, primarily through the development of the Internet and its associated virtual platforms (e.g., Wang et al., 2015).

Specifically, online support is defined as receiving support from a person in the virtual space through the Internet platform (Nick et al., 2018). Online support overcomes distance and time barriers and allows for a significant expansion of social networks, such as connections with people who could not be reached in any other way, generally focusing on shared interests (Bargh & McKenna, 2004). Online support also allows for anonymity that is sometimes effective when dealing with emotional issues (Walther & Boyd, 2002). Of interest, studies have dealt with the negative impact and dangers of these online platforms (e.g., Cassidy et al., 2013). However, research on the Internet's benefits, such as social support, is rather limited.

The impact of online social support on well-being in relocation has been demonstrated in several studies (Chen, 2013; Gonçalves et al., 2011; Gruzd et al., 2011; Mikal et al., 2015; Mikal & Grace, 2012; Shaw & Gant, 2002). For example, Ye (2006) found that virtual support offered by peers of similar ethnic groups improved well-being, by reducing stress among non-resident students. Chu et al. (2012) studied overseas students studying in China. Positive emotional outcomes of online support were stronger in women than men. It was posited that because women tend to reveal and share emotions and ask for help (Rudolph, 2002) they are more likely to gain from online platforms.

Nick et al. (2018) developed an online support scale that integrated the four primary sources of online support: emotional, social, informative, and instrumental.

(1) Emotional support is provided through genuine interest in the relationship, positive reinforcements, building a sense of ability and empowerment, acceptance, intimacy, respect, and empathy.

(2) Social support is the support provided through a sense of belonging, joint activity, and shared interests.

(3) Informative support offers the recipient helpful advice and meaningful knowledge that helps in dealing with problems.

(4) Instrumental support provides the recipient with practical assistance, such as financial or material assistance.

Indeed, much is known about the direct beneficial role of social support on well-being and adjustment (e.g., Feeney & Collins, 2015). However, less is understood regarding (a) the specific contribution

of various vehicles of support and (b) the possible mediating processes linking social support and well-being. Thus, beyond the exploration of PSS and virtual social support as direct resources for adjustment that heightened well-being among relocating women, the current study additionally is designed to contribute to a better understanding of the "indirect" manner in which social support impacts adjustment well-being among relocating women.

### The Mediating Variables: Resilience and Optimism

According to the 'architecture' of Cervone's (2004) model of personality, behavior is based on knowledge structures and appraisal processes. Knowledge structures precede and shape the appraisal processes. Within this personality architecture, optimism and resilience are appraisals; in our context, they are the relocators' expectations of the future (optimism), and their self-perceptions of their ability to bounce back from adversities (resilience). In the same vein, the "thriving through relationships" model (Feeney & Collins, 2015) suggests that specific appraisals, such as optimism and resilience, mediate the relationship between social support and well-being.

**Resilience.** Extensive literature refers to the concept of resilience as an attribute of personality (Oshio et al., 2018). Resilience is defined as the human ability (a) to adapt to challenging events and pressures (Newman, 2005) or (b) after Bonanno et al. (2004) to maintain stability and balance during stressful life events. For Hobfoll (2011), resilience is defined as a person's ability to return to the previous level of functioning after a stressful event, and even grow out of it.

People with high resilience are emotionally stable (Masten, 2001) and their emotions tend to be more positive than negative (Smith et al., 2008). Several studies have demonstrated that people with high resilience will find meaning in their lives during difficult times (Brassai et al., 2011; Masten et al., 2009; Nygren et al., 2005). Similarly, Steger et al. (2008) proposed that those professing a meaningful life exhibited fewer negative emotions and life problems, hence higher resilience. More specific examples demonstrate that these outcomes also cut across generations and cultures (Du et al., 2017; Mohseni et al., 2019).

**Optimism.** Optimism can be defined as the tendency to hold generalized positive expectancies even in the face of adversity, hence, to reflect a person's belief that desired outcomes are easily attainable (Carver & Scheier, 1994). Individuals with higher levels of optimism, unlike those with lower levels of optimism, believe that positive events are more stable and frequent than negative events; they think they can avoid daily problems and prevent them from happening (Conversano et al., 2010). Individuals with higher levels of optimism pay more attention to positive stimuli, ignore contradictions, and neglect threatening information (Isaacowitz, 2005; Kelberer et al., 2018). Moreover, optimists believe that they are more likely to experience positive events, while adverse events generally affect others (Sharot, 2011). Also, optimists frequently tend to have protective attitudes and are inclined to use more appropriate coping strategies (e.g., positive reframing, acceptance, humor) (Solberg Nes & Segerstrom, 2006). As a consequence of their optimism, these individuals are more resilient to stress.

A number of correlational studies have demonstrated the positive associations between dispositional optimism and well-being (e.g., Busseri & Choma, 2016; Carver & Scheier, 2017; Segerstrom & Sephton, 2010). Longitudinal studies also indicate that the positive outcomes of optimism are long-term (e.g., Daukantaitė & Zukauskienė, 2012; Layous et al., 2013). Furthermore, several studies indicated that the "perception" of strong social support leads to enhanced optimism and, consequently, to better well-being. Hence, the investigations fostered the conclusion that optimism serves as a mediator between social support and well-being (Ekas et al., 2010; Karademas, 2006).

The current study aims to extend the previous work, investigating whether optimism mediates between social support and well-being among relocating women.

We suggest that PSS can be understood as viewing the world as friendly, which in turn results in (a) appraising the future as positive (optimism) and (b) appraising the self as having a high propensity to bounce back from adversity (resilience). The result is higher well-being. Following previous research, which demonstrated a positive relationship between optimism and resilience (e.g., Miranda & Cruz, 2020; Vos et al., 2021), the suggested model assumes that the two mediating variables are positively correlated.

## The Current Study and Study Hypotheses

Figure 1 presents the model explored in the current study of women in a relocation assignment. We examined the impact of traditional and online social support on the following well-being variables: depression, loneliness, and meaning in life. We identified personal resilience and optimism as mediators in this process – hence, perceived social and online support were hypothesized to lead to an increase in resilience and optimism, and increase psychological adjustment in the relocation process.

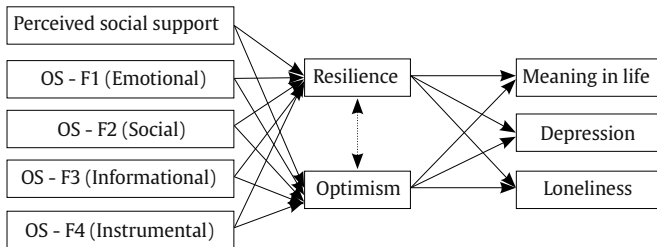


Figure 1. Research Model.

In order to explore the generalizability of our conclusions, we conducted a ‘two-waves of measurement’ design on the same population, three months apart. One hundred and forty-seven women on a relocation mission, who were members of a relocation group on Facebook, participated in both waves. The first wave of data was collected during January 2020; the second wave, during April 2020 at a peak of the COVID-19 crisis. The COVID-19 outbreak was expected to significantly affect women adapting to a new country, because of the lack of an immediate support system. So, notably, in the second wave, two crises, personal and international, interweaved. It was, thus, very appropriate to explore whether the proposed model would be replicated in the face of a dual crisis

Thus, we examined the following hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 1:** Perceived social support and online support are related to high resilience and optimism among women in relocation.

**Hypothesis 2:** Resilience is related to high (levels of) well-being as expressed through (a) high meaning in life and (b) low levels of depression and loneliness.

**Hypothesis 3:** Optimism is related to (a) high meaning in life and (b) low levels of depression and loneliness.

## Method

### Participants

Since we focused on the influence of PSS vs. online support on women’s well-being in relocation, the target population constituted members of a large Facebook community composed of women who relocated outside of Israel. The online community incorporated

22,800 members. In this study, out of 423 subjects sampled at T1, 147 completed the T1 and T2 surveys. Thus, the final sample consisted of 147 participants.

Based on recent scholarly suggestions and information (Porter et al., 2019; Shkoler et al., 2021; Talsma et al., 2018; Zyphur et al., 2020) we addressed our subjects as a panel data, consisting of two time-periods (T1 and T2), conceding the bigger (but whole) sample size.

The participants were all women who had relocated to another country, following their work (26.5%), following the work of their partners (54.4%), or mutual consensus between the two in search of new opportunities (19%). The subjects were between the ages of 26 and 63 years ( $M = 39.75$ ,  $SD = 7.39$ ), and had 12–22 years of education ( $M = 16.85$ ,  $SD = 2.66$ ). Their working hours were between 0 and 60 hours per week ( $M = 23.84$ ,  $SD = 18.56$ ). Women’s relocation destinations were the USA (46.9%), Canada (7.5%), the UK (6.1%), Australia (4.8%), Germany (4.8%), and other countries such as Romania, France, China, The Netherlands, and more.

### Procedure

Both first and second waves of data were collected by posting the current study as a fifteen-minute Qualtrics survey. Second wave’s survey was sent directly to the email of first wave’s participants. Participation was voluntary, yet women were encouraged to respond with the inducement of entering a lottery where they could win six gift vouchers worth between 50 and 100 USD.

### Measures

**Perceived social support** was gauged by a scale elicited from Zimet et al. (1988). The scale consists of 16 Likert-type items ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*); e.g., “My family really tries to help me”. In the current research, this variable has a reliability coefficient of  $\alpha = .88$  for T1 and  $\alpha = .86$ , for T2.

**Online support** was gauged by a scale elicited from Nick et al. (2018). The scale consists of 16 Likert-type items ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). Every four items converged to create a different dimension of the Online Support scale (emotional, social, informational, and instrumental); e.g., “The online community people are interested in me as a person”. In the current research, the “emotional” factor has a reliability coefficient of  $\alpha = .82$  for T1 and  $\alpha = .85$ , for T2; the “social” factor has a reliability coefficient of  $\alpha = .77$  for T1 and  $\alpha = .74$ , for T2; the “informational” factor has a reliability coefficient of  $\alpha = .79$  for T1 and  $\alpha = .72$ , for T2; and the “instrumental” factor has a reliability coefficient of  $\alpha = .79$  for T1 and  $\alpha = .72$  for T2.

**Meaning in life** was gauged by the MLQ scale elicited from Steger et al. (2006). The scale consists of 10 Likert-type items ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*); e.g., “My life has a clear purpose.” Item 9 is reverse-coded. In the current research, this variable has a reliability coefficient of  $\alpha = .62$  for T1 and  $\alpha = .78$  for T2.

**Depression** was gauged by the short depression index for women (Melchior et al., 1993), a shorter, validated version of Radloff’s (1977) CES-D scale. The scale consists of 8 Likert-type items ranging from 1 (*rarely*) to 6 (*most of the time*); e.g., “I felt that I could not shake off the blues even with help from my family or friends”. In the current research, this variable has a reliability coefficient of  $\alpha = .92$  for T1 and  $\alpha = .87$  for T2.

**Loneliness** was gauged by a scale elicited from Hughes et al. (2004). The scale consists of 3 Likert-type items ranging from 1 (*never*) to 6 (*very frequently*); e.g., “How often do you feel isolated from others?”. In the current research, this variable has a reliability coefficient of  $\alpha = .91$ , for T1 and  $\alpha = .86$ , for T2.

**Resilience** was gauged by the BRS scale from Smith et al. (2008). The scale consists of 6 Likert-type items ranging from 1 (*rarely*) to

**Table 1.** Constructs' Reliability Coefficients and Descriptive Statistics for T1 and T2

Variable	$\alpha_{T1}$ ( $\alpha_{T2}$ )	$SD_{T1}$ ( $SD_{T2}$ )	$M_{T1}$ ( $M_{T2}$ )	t-test	r
Perceived social support	.88 (.86)	0.83 (0.67)	4.70 (4.77)	1.23	.66***
Online support (F1 <sup>1</sup> = emotional)	.82 (.85)	0.86 (0.81)	4.28 (4.13)	2.06	.46***
Online support (F2 = social)	.77 (.74)	1.05 (0.89)	2.90 (2.95)	0.53	.41***
Online support (F3 = informational)	.79 (.72)	0.86 (0.73)	4.37 (4.18)	2.87	.50***
Online support (F4 = instrumental)	.79 (.72)	1.03 (0.84)	3.10 (3.12)	0.16	.56***
Resilience	.81 (.79)	0.81 (0.70)	4.10 (4.24)	2.30	.52***
Optimism	.80 (.76)	0.70 (0.59)	4.14 (4.23)	1.86	.61***
Meaning in life	.62 (.78)	0.64 (0.70)	3.94 (4.01)	1.29	.56***
Depression	.92 (.87)	1.25 (0.86)	2.57 (2.43)	1.59	.50***
Loneliness	.91 (.86)	1.50 (1.17)	3.34 (3.38)	0.49	.68***

Note. <sup>1</sup>F = factor. Differences between means were tested using t-tests for paired-samples. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

6 (*most of the time*); e.g., “I tend to bounce back quickly after hard times.” Items 2, 4, and 6 are reverse-coded. In the current research, this variable has a reliability coefficient of  $\alpha = .81$  for T1 and  $\alpha = .79$  for T2.

**Optimism** was gauged by a scale from Scheier et al.'s (1994) work. The scale consists of 10 Likert-type items ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*); e.g., “In uncertain times, I usually expect the best.” Items 3, 7, and 9 are reverse-coded. In the current research, this variable has a reliability coefficient of  $\alpha = .80$  for T1 and  $\alpha = .76$  for T2.

Descriptive statistics and reliabilities are presented in Table 1. Additionally, difference tests via paired-samples t-tests were also utilized to gauge the mean-delta between T1 and T2. Pearson correlation coefficients were also calculated.

**Results**

First, a zero-order Pearson correlation matrix was calculated among all the variables (in both T1 and T2), as presented in Table 2. Most of the variables are stable across time, apart from two instances in which there were borderline p-values. The mean-differences were minor, as well.

To test the mediational model (see Figure 1) in each time (T1 and T2), SEMs were utilized in AMOS software package (v. 22), with 95% bias-corrected bootstrapping (5,000 resamples). The results are presented in Tables 3 and 4, displaying path analyses and indirect effects tests respectively. It should be noted that the research mediational model in T1 had near-absolute fit (see Byrne, 2010):  $\chi^2(5) = 23.17, p = .000, \chi^2/df = 4.63, CFI = .95, NFI = .95, GFI = .97, ECVI = 0.84, SRMR = .08, RMSEA (90\% CI) = .15 [.10-, .23], p\text{-close} = .003$ . However, the (same) model boasts an absolute fit in T2:  $\chi^2(4) = 7.02, p = .135, \chi^2/df = 1.78, CFI = .99, NFI = .98, GFI = .99, ECVI = 0.75, SRMR = .05, RMSEA (90\% CI) = .07 [.00-.16], p\text{-close} = .274$ . In addition, Z-tests were calculated to identify significant differences between the regression estimates (beta) of T1 and the same coefficients in T2. The path diagrams are displayed in Figures 2 and 3 (the figures depict “only” the statistically significant paths to facilitate readability and coherence of the models).

To test the indirect effect, as mentioned, a bootstrapping (95% CI) for the standardized indirect effects was calculated. Table 4 shows “only” the significant indirect paths. The results indicate that resilience is the more prominent mediator in both T1 and T2.

**Table 2.** Zero-order Correlations among the Research's Variables

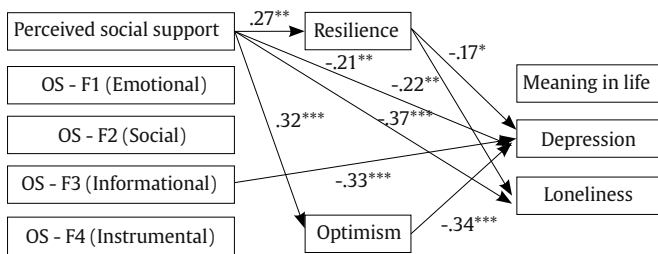
	PSS <sub>1</sub>	PSS <sub>2</sub>	OS-F1 <sub>1</sub>	OS-F1 <sub>2</sub>	OS-F2 <sub>1</sub>	OS-F2 <sub>2</sub>	OS-F3 <sub>1</sub>	OS-F3 <sub>2</sub>	OS-F4 <sub>1</sub>	OS-F4 <sub>2</sub>	Res. <sub>1</sub>	Res. <sub>2</sub>	Opt. <sub>1</sub>	Opt. <sub>2</sub>	MiL <sub>1</sub>	MiL <sub>2</sub>	Depr. <sub>1</sub>	Depr. <sub>2</sub>	Lone. <sub>1</sub>	Lone. <sub>2</sub>	
PSS <sub>2</sub>	.68***																				
OS-F1 <sub>1</sub>	.36***	.25**																			
OS-F1 <sub>2</sub>	.28***	.42***	.46***																		
OS-F2 <sub>1</sub>	.29***	.26***	.39***	.26***																	
OS-F2 <sub>2</sub>	.20**	.30***	.33***	.55***	.41***																
OS-F3 <sub>1</sub>	.23**	.18*	.55***	.39***	.48***	.35***															
OS-F3 <sub>2</sub>	.16*	.19**	.23**	.53***	.29***	.62***	.50***														
OS-F4 <sub>1</sub>	.29***	.22**	.48***	.34***	.60***	.32***	.60***	.29**													
OS-F4 <sub>2</sub>	.23**	.18*	.32***	.40***	.42***	.56***	.51***	.54**	.56***												
Res. <sub>1</sub>	.29***	.18*	.10	.01	.07	.08	.03	.01	.11	.04											
Res. <sub>2</sub>	.14*	.13	.07	-.08	-.01	-.09	.09	-.13	.19**	.14*	.52***										
Opt. <sub>1</sub>	.33**	.28***	.11	.19**	.13	.22**	.11	.10	.12	.14*	.45***	.37***									
Opt. <sub>2</sub>	.15*	.22**	.02	.03	.00	.12	.10	.02	.07	.14*	.35***	.55***	.61***								
MiL <sub>1</sub>	.12	.01	.11	.03	.09	.08	.11	.00	.16*	.08	.04	.03	.15*	.10							
MiL <sub>2</sub>	.01	.04	.05	.06	.05	.07	.04	-.05	.00	.06	.14*	.17*	.26**	.32***	.56***						
Depr. <sub>1</sub>	-.42***	-.29***	-.13	-.21**	-.16*	-.17*	-.29***	-.15*	-.18*	-.08	-.36***	-.26***	-.49***	-.25***	.05	-.10					
Depr. <sub>2</sub>	-.09	-.23**	.03	-.11	-.01	-.03	-.08	-.04	-.08	-.02	-.29***	-.24**	-.36***	-.40***	.10	-.12	.50***				
Lone. <sub>1</sub>	-.53***	-.41***	-.16*	-.20**	-.14*	-.10	-.15*	-.04	-.19**	-.05	-.37***	-.17*	-.33***	-.19**	.05	.00	.52***	.40***			
Lone. <sub>2</sub>	-.35***	-.41***	.00	-.11	-.10	-.08	-.11	-.03	-.17*	-.13	-.33***	-.29***	-.26***	-.25***	.09	.00	.35***	.45***	.68***		

Note. PSS = perceived social support; OS = online support; F = factor; Res. = resilience; Opt. = optimism; MiL = meaning in life; Depr. = depression; Lone = loneliness. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

**Table 3.** Path Analyses for T1 and T2

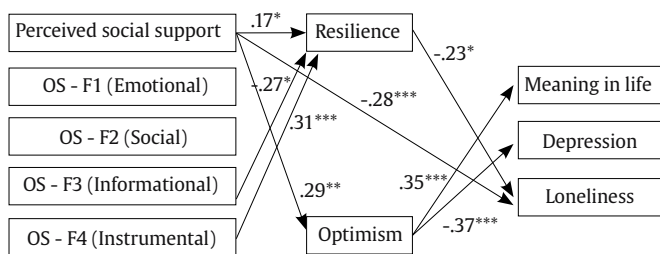
Path	Time 1			Time 2			Z-test
	$\beta$ (SE)	t-test	Sig.	$\beta$ (SE)	t-test	Sig.	
PSS → Resilience	.27 (.08)	3.28	.001	.17 (.09)	2.01	.045	0.73
PSS → Optimism	.32 (.07)	4.03	.000	.29 (.07)	3.41	.000	0.23
OSS.F1_Emo → Optimism	.03 (.09)	0.29	.773	-.13 (.09)	-1.34	.179	0.66
OSS.F1_Emo → Resilience	-.03 (.08)	-0.31	.760	-.13 (.08)	-1.29	.196	1.13
OSS.F2_Soc → Resilience	-.03 (.08)	-0.28	.780	.02 (.09)	0.14	.891	0.29
OSS.F2_Soc → Optimism	.03 (.07)	0.27	.789	.09 (.07)	0.77	.441	0.39
OSS.F3_Inf → Resilience	-.10 (.10)	-0.89	.375	-.27 (.10)	-2.49	.013	1.15
OSS.F3_Inf → Optimism	.04 (.09)	0.39	.699	-.09 (.09)	-0.82	.411	0.86
OSS.F4_Inst → Resilience	.11 (.09)	0.97	.334	.31 (.08)	3.14	.002	1.42
OSS.F4_Inst → Optimism	.01 (.08)	0.12	.907	.15 (.07)	1.55	.122	0.96
PSS → MLQ	.08 (.07)	0.95	.343	-.08 (.09)	-0.97	.332	1.34
PSS → Depression	-.21 (.11)	-2.91	.004	-.09 (.11)	-1.12	.264	1.30
PSS → Loneliness	-.37 (.14)	-4.81	.000	-.28 (.15)	-3.34	.000	0.87
OSS.F1_Emo → MLQ	.01 (.08)	0.14	.892	.12 (.09)	1.24	.214	0.86
OSS.F1_Emo → Depression	.13 (.12)	1.62	.104	-.12 (.10)	-1.26	.206	2.06**
OSS.F1_Emo → Loneliness	.04 (.15)	0.46	.643	-.04 (.14)	-0.38	.706	0.60
OSS.F2_Soc → MLQ	-.04 (.06)	-0.35	.726	.07 (.09)	0.64	.523	0.72
OSS.F2_Soc → Depression	.03 (.10)	0.39	.695	.10 (.10)	0.93	.351	0.39
OSS.F2_Soc → Loneliness	.05 (.13)	0.50	.619	.04 (.14)	0.38	.701	0.05
OSS.F3_Inf → MLQ	.01 (.08)	0.10	.922	-.18 (.11)	-1.68	.092	1.39
OSS.F3_Inf → Depression	-.33 (.13)	-3.56	.000	-.07 (.12)	-0.66	.509	2.14**
OSS.F3_Inf → Loneliness	-.07 (.17)	-0.68	.497	.02 (.17)	0.18	.858	0.60
OSS.F4_Inst → MLQ	.14 (.07)	1.21	.225	.04 (.08)	0.42	.674	0.47
OSS.F4_Inst → Depression	.04 (.11)	0.45	.654	.09 (.10)	0.93	.351	0.27
OSS.F4_Inst → Loneliness	-.06 (.15)	-0.62	.538	-.07 (.14)	-0.69	.490	0.02
Resilience → MLQ	-.06 (.07)	-0.61	.545	-.03 (.10)	-0.32	.749	0.11
Resilience → Depression	-.17 (.12)	-2.20	.028	-.06 (.11)	-0.64	.521	0.30
Resilience → Loneliness	-.22 (.15)	-2.75	.006	-.23 (.16)	-2.43	.015	0.54
Optimism → MLQ	.14 (.09)	1.45	.146	.35 (.12)	3.64	.000	0.10
Optimism → Depression	-.34 (.14)	-4.40	.000	-.37 (.14)	-4.00	.000	1.12
Optimism → Loneliness	-.11 (.17)	-1.36	.174	-.05 (.19)	-0.52	.603	0.10

Note. PSS = perceived social support; OS = on-line support; F = factor; Z-test are the Z-statistics from a difference test between-regression-estimate (standardized regression coefficients).



**Figure 2.** Path Diagram for T1 with only the Significant Standardized Coefficients (beta).

OS = online support. F = factor.  
\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .



**Figure 3.** Path Diagram for T2 with only the Significant Standardized Coefficients (beta).

OS = online support; F = factor.  
\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

## Discussion

Social support has a significant impact on well-being (for a review, see Taylor, 2011) and is especially important in times of difficulty and distress, such as during the migration process or relocation to another country (e.g., Caligiuri & Lazarova, 2002). Not that much is known about the specific contribution of various sources of support (e.g., Canhilal et al., 2020), nor about the underlying mechanisms linking higher levels of support to better adjustment and thriving in the face of adversity (Feeney & Collins, 2015). Given the many challenges faced through a relocation experience, the role of social support for women relocating overseas – often leaving behind an extended family and workplace, and required to adapt to a new environment and culture – is of critical importance.

The current study examined two different types of support: (a) social support provided by family, friends, and a significant other, and (b) online support provided by a broad group of women the world over facing similar relocation challenges. The present study also examined the mediating role of two appraisal mechanisms, resilience and optimism, on eudemonic, psychological and social well-being by exploring decreasing depression and loneliness, and facilitating a sense of meaning in life.

The model was tested at two different time points, three months apart. The first measurement was during a “routine” period (time 1), when women’s main challenge was the adjustment to relocation. The second measurement was during the global crisis, the COVID-19 outbreak. Because the pandemic hit the entire world, it serves as a

**Table 4.** SEM Bootstrapping (95% CI) for only the Significant Standardized Indirect Effects

Path				LL	UL	Sig.	
Time 1							
Perceived social support	→	Resilience	→	Depression	-.16	-.03	.001
Perceived social support	→	Optimism	→	Depression	-.23	-.07	.000
Perceived social support	→	Resilience	→	Loneliness	-.16	-.02	.002
Time 2							
Perceived social support	→	Resilience	→	Loneliness	-.14	-.01	.044
Perceived social support	→	Optimism	→	MeL	.02	.19	.008
Perceived social support	→	Optimism	→	Depression	-.21	-.03	.007
Perceived social support	→	Optimism	→	Loneliness	-.13	-.01	.030
Online support (Instrumental)	→	Resilience	→	Depression	-.15	-.01	.046
Online support (Instrumental)	→	Resilience	→	Loneliness	-.14	-.02	.029

Note. LL = lower limit of CI; UL = upper limit of CI; MeL = meaning in Life.

'global lab' to examine how PSS and online support promote well-being. At time 2, participants had to face the challenges of a relocation experience and a major stressor: social distancing, home-working, and home-schooling, among other COVID-19 consequences.

The first finding of the current study was that women who reported higher social support from family, friends, and a significant other also experienced reduced depression (wave 1) and loneliness levels (waves 1 & 2) during their relocation experience. This direct positive relationship between primary support and psychological and social well-being supports the "thriving through relationships" theoretical perspective (Feeney & Collins, 2015) and extends previous findings indicating that social support directly promotes well-being in the face of adversity (e.g., Allan, 2010; Caligiuri & Lazarova, 2002).

The findings of the current study provide further understanding of the "indirect" relationship between social support and well-being. Specifically, the results yielded several significant indirect paths through resilience and optimism. The mediation model was partly verified at both times of measurement. At time 1 and at time 2, PSS was positively related to increased resilience; this, in turn, contributed to a decreased sense of loneliness. At both time 1 and time 2, PSS was positively related to increased optimism, which, in turn, led to decreased levels of depression.

In accordance with Feeney and Collins' (2015) theoretical model, which postulates that in the face of adversity, social support may facilitate thriving by enhancing positive attributions and motivations, these findings reinforce the idea that social support plays a vital role in mitigating loneliness and depression in times of personal and global crisis. The relocation experience is an experience with a high vulnerability to loneliness and depression (e.g., Magdol, 2002), outcomes that would likely be intensified during the COVID-19 crisis. Notably, we found that PSS effectively reduced loneliness and depression through strengthening personal resilience and optimism. More generally, these findings extend previous results pointing to the possible underlying psychological mechanisms that link social support and well-being in the face of adversity (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Wilson et al., 2020).

Of relevance here is the conservation of resources theory (COR) (Hobfoll, 2002; Hobfoll et al., 2018), namely that when encountering challenges, people turn to their resources. Resilience is tied to the available sources of support in the family, community, and social ties. Building on the COR theory, the findings of the current study strengthen and extend previous results suggesting that people who possess more primary support (resources) are more capable of striving in stressful circumstances (Hobfoll et al., 2007; Lazarova et al., 2010).

Our study aimed to understand the distinct roles of two different sources of support in facilitating well-being of a group of people of similar status, namely, women in relocation. We found that PSS seems critical to well-being both directly and indirectly, through

strengthening resilience and optimism. Online support, however, relates to well-being in more complex ways. Even though our participants were physically far from some of their primary support sources (family, friends), the significance of these primary "classical" sources of support appears to be unequivocal and more decisive than virtual support. Though somewhat surprising, this finding is in line with Utz and Breuer's (2017) longitudinal work demonstrating that online social support was not related to higher life satisfaction or reduced stress.

Specifically, a complex pattern of relationships was documented in the current study between various types of virtual support and well-being. In accordance with previous studies pointing to the significant role of virtual support in adjustment (e.g., Canhilal et al., 2020; Chen, 2013), "informational" online support (times 1 and 2) and "instrumental" online support (time 2) were the primary types of virtual support that had significant positive relations with the outcome variables. Notably, however, the emotional and social components of virtual support were not found linked to well-being during the relocation experience.

A further look into the results revealed that at time 1, online informational support was directly related to a decrease in depression. In contrast, at time 2, online information was related to lower resilience levels during the global crisis, contrary to the research hypotheses. It appears that informational support can be seen as a kind of "double-edged sword." On the one hand, in regular times, routine information may be a positive contributor to well-being. However, in times of crisis, the information may be overwhelming, contradictory, or negative in sentiment. Moreover, the information is often given by people whose claim to expertise is questionable or, under the conditions of the pandemic, difficult to apply in practice. In any event, the information may leave individuals with feelings of inefficacy that impair resilience.

Indeed, several recent studies have indicated that social media overload may be aversive (Islam et al., 2020) and that sizeable groups on Facebook hinder self-efficacy (Lee & Littles, 2020). Furthermore, a recent study indicated that a great deal of medical information provided during the COVID-19 pandemic to citizens impaired their level of compliance with guidelines (Pollak et al., 2020). Finally, further research on social media during the COVID-19 crisis revealed that the lack of clear distinction between data-based and non-data-based knowledge led to the emergence of phobias, panic anxiety, depression, and even stereotypic thinking (Dubey et al., 2020).

Comparing the two data waves also revealed a distinct effect of primary social support on the level of meaning in life. At time 1, a sense of meaning in life was not affected by the level of social support, neither directly nor through mediation. However, in wave 2, during the COVID-19 crisis, PSS was linked to meaning in life through the mediation of optimism. This finding can be explained by the fact that a crisis produces a greater need for meaning in life (Schneel,

2009), and all the more so during a global calamity (Pezirkianidis et al., 2016).

Optimism as a virtue is very relevant to creating a positive outlook for the future (Wengler & Rosen, 2000). Experiencing meaning in life is inherently related to positive affect (Shuv-Ami & Bareket-Bojmel, 2020; Schnell, 2011), and thus to optimism (Dursun, 2012; Ho et al., 2010). In line with these findings, we found that during the COVID-19 pandemic, women who received social support could foster a positive and optimistic future perspective experience and an increased sense of meaning in their lives.

## Limitations

The current study has several limitations. First, the study data were collected from a single source, which may run the risks of a social desirability base and common method variance (CMV). We used procedural design methods (confidentiality and anonymity, reversing the order of administration of the questionnaires, and separate questionnaire sections and instructions) to reduce this possibility (Podsakoff et al., 2003) – although some scholars have argued that CMV does not invalidate most research findings (Spector, 2006). However, we believe that having conducted two waves of measurement, wherein several findings were verified at both time points, validates our study's results.

Second, our study was correlational so that no causal conclusions could be drawn. As full experimental designs are not feasible when it comes to relocation experience (randomized selection is not possible), future research should focus on quasi-experimental and longitudinal designs (measuring data before, during, and after the relocation experience) to provide a deeper understanding of the role of support during relocation experience in the long term.

Finally, there was a dropout between the first and second waves. The second wave was conducted when it was difficult for the women to respond, thus limiting the number of respondents. Notably, however, (a) several results were replicated in both waves and (b) no differences were observable between the respondents of the two waves and the respondents that responded (only) once. These outcomes provide further validation of our findings.

## Implications

Beyond theoretical and empirical contributions, the current study suggests practical implications for women in relocation and for organizations: (a) the significance of social support during a relocation experience and (b) resilience and optimism are operating mechanisms in promoting psychological well-being. The first implication replicates previous findings; however, the application to women on international relocation assignments, in particular, should be internalized by organizations' management and HR departments. Organizations should foster support systems for outgoing employees, ensuring the availability of relevant information, exploiting the positive dimensions of online support, and encouraging continued meaningful relations with the relocators' human support sources. Specifically, we recommend periodic homeland visits as part of the relocation compensation package and instrumental support in times of distress that will go a long way to promoting well-being during the relocation assignment.

The study's findings also point to the importance of appropriate personal attributes (appraisals, resources) as necessary criteria to be accepted for an international assignment. From that perspective, employees with high resilience and optimism would be better qualified for relocation. Interventions could, therefore, be initiated to enhance those characteristics, so that individuals in transition mode are better able to cope and find meaning in their (new) lives with minimum levels of stress and anxiety. These coping strategies

present a significant challenge in times of calm and in times of crisis.

With respect to the individual resources that women bring to the table, when their employers offer the possibility of job relocation, it would be worthwhile for management to consider what motivates women to go overseas and abandon their current comfort zones. Based on a triangulated qualitative research model, Shortland (2016) identified the rationales and preconditions that women candidates for relocation tend to adopt, based on career considerations, family, and finances. Based on Shortland's findings, it would behoove the HR personnel of a given organization to build a profile of the ideal (optimal) nominee for foreign assignments that, among many other considerations, take into account personal resources, motivations, and the requirements of the job.

## Future Directions

The present study contributes to current conceptualizations in significant ways. First, the findings support previous findings that emphasize the importance of primary social support to relocating women. Moreover, attention to both primary and virtual forms of support broadens the discussion and underscores the reach beyond previous explorations of social support. Second, this investigation's results highlight the indirect effects and mechanisms that contribute to the well-being of women in transition relocating to foreign cultures.

In the face of the growing use of virtual platforms, future studies should serve to untangle the conditions in which social and virtual support are functional and effective, beyond a relatively confined set of subjects. Of particular interest, however, were the differential results of the online support before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, giving rise to the notion that under conditions of high stress, online communications can exacerbate the stress levels of relocating women. The conclusions drawn from this finding should be recognized by anyone attempting to assuage tensions during periods of emergency. Furthermore, future research might well explore in greater depth the potential roles of individual cognitive appraisals that foster well-being in the face of adversity.

## Conflict of Interest

The authors of this article declare no conflict of interest.

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