

Towards a dynamic conceptual model for understanding the impact of social isolation on SIE women's adjustment and career development

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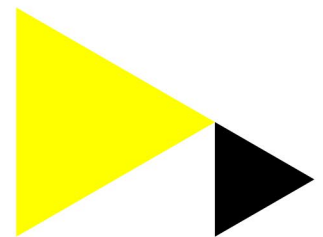
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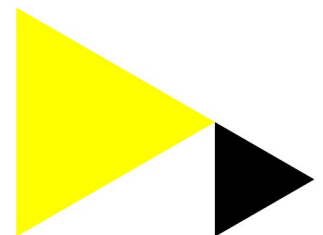
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A dynamic conceptual framework for understanding SIE women's adjustment in a multiplex crisis context

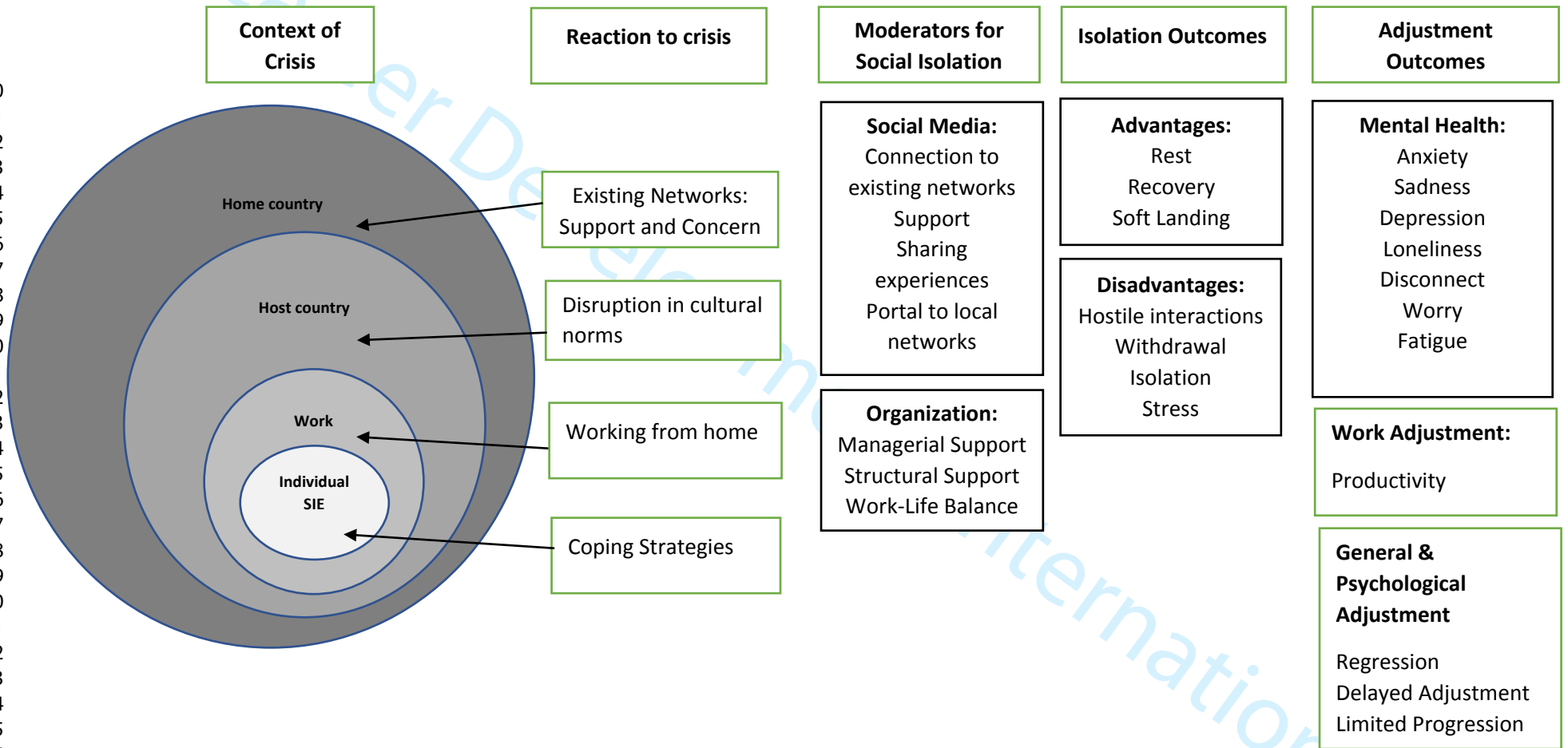
Journal:	<i>Career Development International</i>
Manuscript ID	CDI-06-2022-0148
Manuscript Type:	Research Paper
Keywords:	Covid-19, Adjustment, crisis context, Social Support, Self-Initiated Expatriate Women

Table I . Demographic information of participants

Participant	Age	Sector/Industry	Organisational level	Marital status	Time in NL at time of initial lockdown
Gemma	29	Research/Education	Middle Management	Married, no children	11 months
Nathalie	39	Nuclear Medicine	Middle Management	Married, 3 children	11 months
Jenny	19	Research/Education	Starting Graduate studies	Single	3 weeks
Larissa	52	Chemical/Petro-chemical Child Development	Senior Scientist	Married, 2 children	3 weeks

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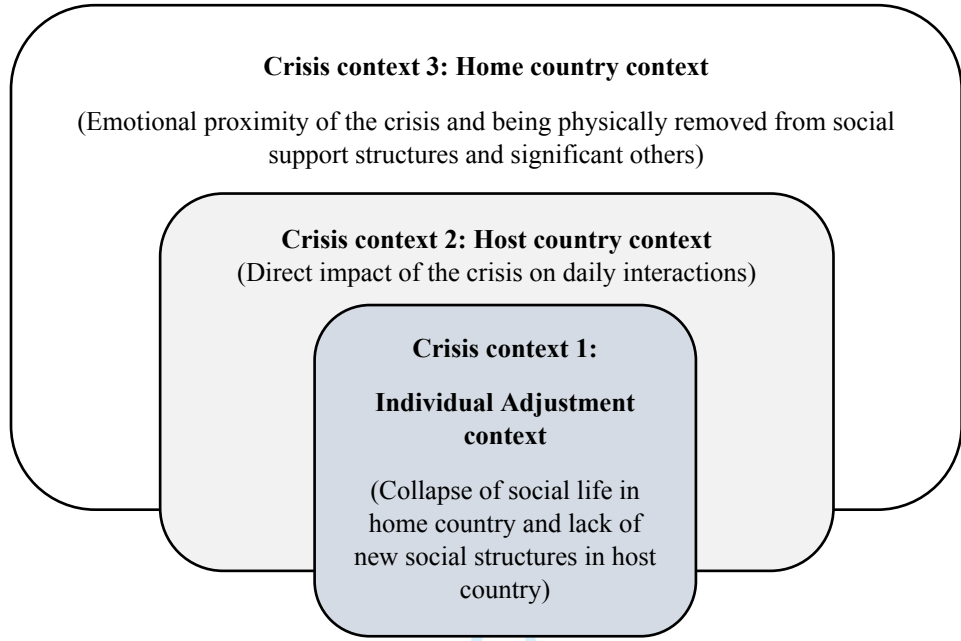
Figure 1. A conceptual framework for understanding the impact of social isolation during the corona crisis on SIE adjustment outcomes



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Figure 2: Multiplex crisis context



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3 **A dynamic conceptual framework for understanding SIE women’s adjustment in a**
4 **multiplex crisis context**
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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to extend the conceptual framework of expatriate women's adjustment (Caligiuri and Lazarova, 2002) to account for the unknown impact of sudden disruptive changes in the adjustment context. An in-depth account of the impact of isolation and loneliness on the work, psychological and general adjustment of a group of South African SIE women in the Netherlands during the Covid-19 pandemic is presented.

Design/methodology/approach – An exploratory case study method is employed. Data was collected through an in-depth focus group, e-mail correspondence with participants, participant reflections and informal conversations/observations over the period between February 2020 – January 2022.

Findings – The pandemic caused a multiplex crisis context and hysteresis at the individual, host country and home country levels. Three danger zones for further fit-dependent crisis due to potential maladjustment are identified: Feelings of displacement, loneliness, anxiety, isolation, stress, job insecurity and hyper-productivity. A conceptual model for exploring adjustment within a crisis-context is presented.

Originality – This study contributes to the theoretical understanding of SIE women's adjustment by contributing and expanding on an existing static model of adjustment to account for the dynamic processes of disruptive context changes that affect adjustment on various levels in order to provide avenues for further research.

Keywords: self-initiated expatriate women, Covid-19, adjustment, crisis context, social support

Article classification: Conceptual Paper

1. Introduction

Social interaction and social support are seen as key drivers for intercultural adjustment (Adelman, 1988; Allen *et al.*, 1999; Bayraktar, 2019; Caligiuri and Lazarova, 2002). However, very little is known about the role of context within which individual adjustment takes place and its influence on career development and management support practices in times of uncertainty and change (Caligiuri *et al.*, 2020). Adjustment is very stressful and for some vulnerable groups, it can be a personal crisis which is expounded or creates a breeding ground for further (fit-dependent) crises in other spheres of life (Fitzpatrick, 2017; Ljubica *et al.*, 2019).

There has been a steady increase of South Africans relocating to the Netherlands. In 2019, 3400 South Africans relocated to the Netherlands (Building Holland, 2020). The Covid-19 Pandemic has fueled the interest of South Africans to leave the country with a 48 % increase in emigration-related inquiries during the first two quarters of 2020 (Blewer and Nicklin, 2020). Despite some limited research on South Africans abroad, not much is known about the specific challenges experienced by South African SIEs when adjusting to different cultures, let alone within a specific similar context. HRM practitioners and managers need to understand the impact of social isolation on SIE women during sudden disruptive crisis in order to effectively respond to their needs in order to enhance employee satisfaction, facilitate successful adjustment and anticipate potential fit-dependent crises that may result from the crisis (Saxena and Shekhar Gautam, 2020).

According to Fitzpatrick (2017, p. 292) there is a need to explore the specific contexts within which adjustment takes place in order to create “richer and thicker accounts of actual situations” through qualitative methods in order to understand factors individuals are challenged with when entering new contexts in order to draw out the strategies used to adjust. This research aims to provide rich, thick accounts of the experiences of a particular acculturating group within a multiplex crisis context to advance the existing theoretical conceptualization of women’s adjustment. A conceptual framework of SIE women’s adjustment is presented, followed by an anecdotal analysis of the impact of social isolation on SIE adjustment.

2. The importance of exploring social support in facilitating SIE women's adjustment

SIE's can be defined as 'skilled individuals from either developed or developing countries who move abroad on their own initiative without national sponsorship and/or full-time employment in a host country (Shao and Al Ariss, 2020, p. 1). The interconnection between identity and social relationships is very pronounced for women (Myers and Pringle, 2005; Van den Bergh, 2014). Relocation to a new country and culture means that relationships that reinforce a women's sense of self and belonging are stripped away, which may lead to identity crisis and maladjustment (Haslberger, 2005; Selmer and Leung, 2003). Being a woman *and* being lonely are considered critical triggers for women's mental health problems during the Covid-19 pandemic (Gijzen, *et al.*, 2020). From a career development perspective, social support is critical for socialization and interaction in the workplace, accrual of career capital and supporting overall cross-cultural adjustment (Caligiuri and Lazarova, 2002). However, due to their 'outsider' status, SIEs find it difficult to obtain career capital due to lack of access to, or isolation from informal networks at work (Shao and Al Ariss, 2020).

Caligiuri and Lazarova (2002) propose a conceptual framework for describing the antecedents of female expatriate adjustment through the use of relationships to become cross-culturally adjusted. This framework is based on a stable adjustment context for *organizational-sponsored* female expatriates but does not account for dynamic changes in the environment. There has been an increased focus on recent literature on highlighting the impact of various types of crisis events on successful adjustment (McNulty *et al.*, 2019). However, within the context of a natural crisis such as Covid-19, relatively little is known about a single acculturating group. Figure 1 below extends the framework by Caligiuri and Lazarova (2002) to account for the unknown impact of a sudden disruptive change in context and physical/social isolation in the adjustment process. The shaded blocks highlight the main questions this paper aims to explore, namely: How does a sudden disruptive context change through social isolation and crisis impact social interactions? Are there additional barriers or enablers that impact social interactions during the adjustment process? How do the types of interactions change? How is cross-cultural adjustment affected by the crisis context? What happens when the local culture is also experiencing a sense of culture shock due to a sudden disruption such as was the case with the Covid-19 pandemic? What does adjustment look like when the traditional sources of social support are disrupted by both internal and external crisis events at the same time?

[INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE]

3. A conceptual framework: crisis-as-adjustment-context for SIE women

Crisis as an adjustment context

According to Bordeaux's theory of practice, a crisis can lead to adjustment problems when there is a mismatch between the individual and the context, a situation known as hysteresis (Strand and Lizardo, 2017). The sudden shift to working-from-home during the Covid-19 pandemic and resultant social distancing measures added an additional disruption to the daily context in the host country, resulting in a multi-layered mismatch between the perceptions of the environmental norms where both the SIE and host country nationals had to adjust to new sets of rules that were not matched with their expectations of acceptable norms for behavior and interaction.

Crisis-as-context theory advocates two important elements that impact the perceptions and experiences of a crisis event, namely proximity and reactions to the crisis at an individual or systems level (Meyer and Moore, 2006). Proximity to the crisis determines reactions to the crisis and the resultant adjustment to the new situation (Meyer and Moore, 2006). The Covid-19 pandemic posed a crisis-as-an-adjustment-context for SIEs at multiple levels, namely the individual adjustment context; the host country context and the home country context. Figure 2 below illustrates the multiplex crisis context within which adjustment takes place:

[INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE]

3.1 Crisis context 1: individual adjustment

The first context disruption at individual-level is the crisis of adjustment caused by moving to a new country. The personal context is disrupted through self-initiated expatriation whereby one's life in the home country context collapses: Existing goals, plans, networks, and spaces fall away and are replaced by unfamiliar people, places, and norms. This is the sphere in which most of the literature is focused on in terms of intercultural adjustment and eventual fit-dependent crisis due to maladjustment and lack of support.

3.2 Crisis context 2: host country context

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3 The second context disruption occurs in the host country culture. A sudden disruption due to
4 uncontrollable external events causes hysteresis within the host culture: Existing norms are
5 disrupted, and new norms have not yet been established, leading to uncertainty and anxiety.
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10 *3.3 Crisis context 3: home country context*

11 To add to the complexity of adjustment-in-a-crisis-context, proximity in a global health crisis
12 extends beyond the immediate environment to the home country context: An imbalance in
13 habitus occurs in two physically removed but psychologically close contexts which contributes
14 to a sense of ‘double crisis’, with resultant feelings of guilt, living simultaneous lives across
15 space, time and degrees of pandemic gravity (Chao, 2020).
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20 These disruptions have a ripple-effect that spill over to interactions and relationships with
21 family and friends in the home country as well as fragile, newly developed friendships in the
22 host country.
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27 *3.4 Sources of interactions*

28 Social interaction and social support are seen as key moderators for intercultural adjustment
29 (Adelman, 1988; Allen *et al.*, 1999; Bayraktar, 2019; Caligiuri and Lazarova, 2002) and social
30 support from different sources such as home country nationals, host country nationals, other
31 foreigners as well as support from different life domains (work, psychological and social) have
32 been extensively explored in the literature (Bayraktar, 2019; Van der Laken *et al.*, 2019).
33 Relationships provide insight into the new culture and help expatriates understand and appreciate
34 their new environment and make sense of potentially conflicting values (Yavas and Bodur,
35 1999).
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43 Women tend to view the self-initiated expatriate experience from a relational perspective
44 where good relationships and long-term friendships are very important (Myers and Pringle,
45 2005). These relationship building-building skills are considered to have a positive influence on
46 women’s careers (Haslberger, 2010).
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51 *3.5 Family*

52 The family forms an integral part of the overall adjustment of women as a source of personal
53 security, emotional support and stability (Hartl, 2004). However, work-life conflict can become a
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3 serious barrier to SIE women's adjustment when there is a lack of support or too much pressure
4 on the home-front (Van den Bergh, 2014).
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7 8 *3.6 Colleagues, managers and organization* 9

10 For women, social support is critical for socialization and interaction in the workplace, accrual of
11 career capital and supporting overall cross-cultural adjustment (Caligiuri and Lazarova, 2002).
12 However, negative interactions with locals, discrimination by other expatriates and feelings of
13 isolation can lead to relationship breakdown (Ljubica *et al.*, 2019); disrupt career opportunities
14 or lead to significant maladjustment or crises in other spheres of life (fit-dependent crisis)
15 (McNulty *et al.*, 2019).
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20 Whilst organizations can play an important role in facilitating work adjustment, SIEs are
21 often not included in formal support structures that can enhance their adjustment (Shao and Al
22 Ariss, 2020). They are often employed on local contracts with semi-permanent residence in the
23 host country, whereby there are no ties to a home country headquarters of other traditional
24 avenues of support for crisis prevention (McNulty *et al.*, 2019). According to Mostert (2013),
25 South African SIEs tend to have higher work adjustment than general adjustment and they
26 overcome the uncertainty of temporary contracts through networking. Covid-19 has created a
27 form of career shock for many employees and social relationships are important moderators for
28 maintaining career capital in order to capitalize on the positive spin-offs of the crisis (Akkermans
29 *et al.*, 2020). However, for SIEs who have not yet had time to establish networks in their
30 organizations are in a precarious position due to the many restrictions to social interactions
31 throughout the pandemic. Furthermore, SIEs who have not yet found new employment at the
32 beginning of the pandemic, or in their early careers may face significant challenges when trying
33 to enter the labor market or establish a career path for themselves.
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44 Supportive managers and colleagues play an important role in moderating crisis
45 experiences related to adjustment (McNulty *et al.*, 2019). Work adjustment is facilitated by
46 similarities between content of work, procedures, policies and requirements between the home
47 and host country (Black, *et al.*, 1991). Unfamiliar procedures or unclear task requirements may
48 lead women to feel a lack of control in their new workplaces, which may consequently affect
49 their subjective adjustment experiences (Selmer and Leung, 2003).
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Host nationals

The local community normally provides cues for appropriate behavior in support of the successful adjustment (Ramalu *et al.*, 2012). The duration and intensity of interaction with the local culture are positively correlated with socio-cultural adjustment over time and moderated by attainment of social skills within the new cultural environment (Fitzpatrick, 2017). The ability to develop relationships with host country nationals will also have a spillover effect to work-adjustment where expatriates who can develop mentorship ties with host nationals will adjust more quickly at work (Liu and Lee, 2008).

Disruptive relationship behaviors between host country nationals and expatriates can lead to a negative dyadic evaluation of the relationship leading to detachment from relationships (Ljubica *et al.*, 2019) and consequently have a detrimental effect on overall adjustment (McGinley, 2008).

Barriers and enablers to adjustment

The ability to establish relationships in all spheres of life is an important moderator in determining the relative success with which a person is able to integrate into society. This ability is influenced by variables such as cultural learning ability, acquisition of social skills in the host culture (Selmer *et al.*, 2007); confidence in one's own abilities; language ability and willingness to use the host country's language (Liu and Lee, 2008).

Language is generally critical for adjustment. In a crisis situation, not having access to critical information, or not having the confidence to express oneself can have life-threatening consequences when an individual is unable to obtain reliable healthcare or gain access to other forms of support.

Affiliating personality characteristics include openness, willingness to communicate, extroversion and the ability to form new relationships with others (Caligiuri and Lazarova, 2002). However, for some people, contacts with unfamiliar people may have a detrimental effect on adjustment and lead to "counter-productive self-inflicted isolation" because these new networks are not able to provide "private spaces to help them organize their thoughts and find meaning in the current reality" (Hack-Polay, 2020, p. 14). Forming relationships can be a tiring experience and some individuals may completely defer from forming new relationships as a coping mechanism (Richardson and Zikic, 2007). According to Banerjee and Rai (2020),

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3 loneliness due to self-isolation during the Covid-19 pandemic, poses a major risk to mental and
4 physical health. In the case of SIEs, being far away from one's familiar habitus may lead to a
5 heightened sense of segregation from self-identity and increased feelings of displacement (Hack-
6 Polay, 2020; Van den Bergh, 2014).
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10 11 12 **Cross-cultural adjustment**

13 Cross-cultural adjustment can be defined as an overarching concept that encompasses all the
14 components related to dealing with culture at a personal, work and social level (Bayraktar, 2019;
15 Black *et al.*, 1991; Caligiuri and Lazarova, 2002; Selmer and Leung, 2003). A well-adjusted
16 individual is able to maintain a positive psychological state, actively or passively, in order to
17 achieve a degree of comfort and familiarity in the new environment and to fit into the new
18 environment (Al-Waqfi, 2012; Yavas and Bodur, 1991). Thus, adjustment is an individual-level
19 variable that reflects a person's ability to navigate the emotional, psychological and social
20 processes related to dealing with other cultures successfully (Van den Bergh, 2014). There are
21 significant spillover effects between different life spaces which will affect the degree to which an
22 employee is able to successfully adjust and become a productive member of the workforce in the
23 host country (Bayraktar, 2019). Usunier (1998) emphasizes the importance of the
24 interrelatedness of work and family lives, arguing that one cannot disregard the possibility of an
25 individual's being highly successful at work, while totally failing in terms of personal and family
26 adjustment.
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38 According to Mostert (2013), South African SIEs are well equipped to deal with cultural
39 differences because they are used to living in a hostile environment where multiple cultures and
40 ethnicities co-exist in different spheres of life. Thus, when applying Bourdieu's theory of
41 practice (Akkermans *et al.*, 2020), one can conclude that the hardiness and resilience that one
42 acquires from dealing with an unstable habitus prior to moving the host country provides coping
43 skills for dealing with the mismatch between individual and disrupted context.
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Methodology

Procedure

The purpose of the study was to us to give a voice to a vulnerable group to share the lived experiences of social isolation during the pandemic from a common perspective (Northcutt and McCoy, 2004).

An exploratory, holistic case study research design forms the basis of this study (Scholtz and Tietje, 2002). Since the Covid-19 crisis led to various disruptions in the daily lives of participants, and the outcomes of the pandemic cannot be predicted, this design provides the opportunity to ‘gain insight into the structure of a phenomenon in order to develop hypotheses, models, or theories’ (Scholtz and Tietje, 2002, p. 12).

Data was gathered through various sources, including reflective essays, an online focus group, asynchronous, unstructured e-mail interviews, and face-to-face, unstructured follow-up interviews in accordance with the guidelines of Scholtz and Tietje, (2002).

Case selection

Cases were selected to achieve maximum variation between participants in terms of life and career phases in order to gain rich and deep narratives in relation to the role of social/physical isolation on adjustment during the Covid-19 pandemic (Flyvbjerg, 2006). In the beginning of March 2020, we posted an invitation to participate in the research on several South African social media communities on LinkedIn and Facebook. Interested participants were then asked to complete a biographical information sheet, and based on their characteristics, were invited to further participate in the research.

Participants had to comply with the definition of a self-initiated expatriate (thus moving to the Netherlands of their own accord and not via company transfer); they had to have been in the Netherlands for less than one year at the start of the study, thus in their early adjustment phases. Van den Bergh (2014) highlights the lack of research available on the impact of life phases on SIE women’s adjustment and career development. Through the case selection, we accounted for life and career phases to include women in different career and life phases, with children and without children, across different age groups.

Table I below provides a detailed overview of the participants that were finally selected for participation in this study.

[INSERT TABLE I HERE]

Data collection and analysis

Qualitative data was collected to make sense of the narratives and experiences of the four women going through the adjustment process through e-mail exchanges, an online, semi-structured focus group session and participant diary entries. Through capturing ongoing life experiences in a timely and unstructured manner (Bolger *et al.*, 2003); rich and deep insight into the lived experiences of these four women was obtained. All qualitative information was analyzed through AtlasTi Cloud, utilizing Thematic content analysis and narrative analysis was used to organize data and draw out key themes.

Appendix I summarizes the key themes that emerged from all four narratives.

Findings and discussion

Crisis context 1

Participants had a strong sense of hysteresis within a disturbed adjustment context which had a spillover effect between different life spaces. The first context disruption was that of moving to a new space, prior to the crisis. The context changes and the home country context/life space collapse, existing goals, plans, networks and spaces fall away and are replaced by unfamiliar people, places and norms.

During this critical phase where lack of social support could have significant consequences on overall adjustment and well-being, with strong potential for the development of fit-dependent crisis, our participants were exposed to a disruptive context change. Various triggers for potential fit-dependent crisis seemed to have emerged from this initial phase of adjustment: Anxiety, fear, loneliness, isolation and feelings of depression, in alignment with the findings of previous authors such as Bayraktar (2019) and McNulty *et.al.* (2019).

Crisis context 2: disrupted host country culture

The second crisis context is the external disruption to daily life and adjusted cultural norms because of the public health crisis and measures that were taken due to the Covid-19 outbreak in March 2020 in the Netherlands. Measures to combat the virus became progressively restrictive

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3 within a short period of time, starting with social distancing measures, closing of schools and
4 universities and an intelligent lock-down which lasted several months (Rijksoverheid, 2020).
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6 Hysteresis occurred for HCNs which influenced the interactions with our SIEs – a friendly and
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8 welcoming community became anxious and hostile, with negative interactions between SIEs and
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10 home country nationals. These negative interactions warrant further exploration in the context of
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12 the pandemic situation, since disruptive relationships with HCN's can increase relationship costs;
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14 lead to negative categorization, detachment from the relationship and disruptive relationship
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16 behaviors that eventually lead to relational breakdown (Ljubica *et al.*, 2019).
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18 19 **Crisis context 3: home country environment**

20 To add to the complexity of adjustment-as-a-crisis-context, proximity extended beyond the
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22 immediate environment to the home country context. The contrast between how the Netherlands
23
24 and South Africa were handling the crisis, types of measures that were being taken and receiving
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26 regular updates from friends and relatives created feelings of relief, guilt, and concern. Following
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28 news and updates in two countries, in combination with concern for the well-being of significant
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30 others, and the contrast between measures between the two countries caused further hysteresis,
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32 feelings of guilt, doubt, physical and mental exhaustion, and a heightened sense of isolation.

33 There was a sense of 'double' crisis: imbalance in habitus in two physically removed but
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35 psychologically close contexts which lead to feelings of guilt for making the choice to move
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37 (Chao, 2020). These disruptions have a ripple-effect that spills over to interactions and
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39 relationships with family and friends in the home country as well as fragile, newly developed
40
41 friendships in the host country.
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43 **Types of interactions**

44 The gravity of the crisis impacted the nature of interactions in different spheres of life, including
45
46 family; colleagues, managers, and employers; and HCNs.
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49 **Family**

50 During the pandemic, family in both the home and host countries, which is traditionally seen as a
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52 source of support for SIE's, has become a source of concern. Mixed feelings of guilt, relief,
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54 worry, and concern contributed to feelings of fatigue and anxiety. Concern for the well-being of
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3 family in South Africa was compounded with concern for one's family in the host country and
4 the pressures of living and working in the same house for an extended period, with limited other
5 social contacts, were significant stressors. Tripathi and Singh (2021) highlight that concern for
6 family can be a long-term stressor for expatriates as the pandemic continues. The emotional
7 stress and physical separation caused by travel bans are additional sources of pressure.
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13 **Organizational support**

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15 Temporary contracts, hiring freezes and fear of losing their jobs or not finding suitable
16 employment in the first place was a constant source of concern. As a result, participants felt the
17 need to work extra hard while working from home. Building essential career capital through
18 socializing with colleagues was also an implicit barrier to career development.
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22 Empathic managers who had understanding for their unique personal circumstances as
23 SIEs had a positive influence on work adjustment. Regular check-ins, flexible working schedules
24 and providing more leniency for working-at-home with young children were mentioned as
25 helpful in shifting to working from home and positively influenced motivation and commitment.
26 Work adjustment seemed to be experienced the most positively by our participants, in contrast to
27 other areas of adjustment.
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34 **Host country nationals**

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36 For our participants, a regression in general adjustment took place due to hostile interactions
37 with locals, social withdrawal, and language barriers. Jenny made various attempts to establish
38 relationships with host nationals. She felt torn: on the outside pretending to be happy in front of
39 her new friends, whilst on the inside feeling sad and lonely.
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43 For Gemma and Nathalie, the crisis occurred at a moment of their adjustment where they
44 were starting to feel settled enough in terms of the practical aspects of life, that they were able to
45 invest more energy in building up social networks in the local community. The disruption led to
46 a significant regression into their integration with the local community. Gemma did not manage
47 to recover from this disruption and is moving on to the UK. Nathalie maintained some marginal
48 contact in the local community due to her dog-ownership and her church community.
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3 Larissa found the break from social interactions a welcome moment to recollect herself
4 during the first weeks of adjustment, but the continuous rudeness of strangers in the street made
5 her feel very distraught.
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8 All participants agreed that the first 40 days of the lockdown was manageable, and after
9 that they reached a crisis point where they felt anxious and depressed. At this moment, they took
10 the time to reflect on their options and choices. Nathalie emphasized the importance of self-care
11 as a strategy to recollect oneself. Larissa used the analogy of Noah's ark, at day 42 of the
12 lockdown, she realized that she had been in isolation with her family for longer than Noah had
13 been in the ark. It is at this point where Gemma started craving familiar friendships with people
14 who did not actually require any effort to engage with. She reverted to her familiar networks in
15 South Africa and gradually started withdrawing from the group. Nathalie on the other hand,
16 realized that it is almost her birthday and that she could have four guests in her home. She
17 reframed the situation positively and took a small break from the social distancing measures by
18 inviting South African friends who would hug her on her birthday.
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29 **Barriers and enablers to adjustment**

30 The three most relevant factors that influenced the adjustment experience for our participants
31 included Cultural Toughness, Language barriers, Loneliness, Positive Isolation and Cognitive
32 Re-framing.
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38 **Cultural toughness**

39 South Africa is a country of many challenges which requires a certain mental strength and
40 resilience from its residents (Mostert, 2013), our participants echoed this sentiment by
41 highlighting that their experiences of living in South Africa has made them 'tough' – a unique
42 source of strength that helps them overcome the stress of the crisis. A greater source of stress and
43 anxiety was interacting with the hysteresis in the host culture where people were sensitive and
44 not used to dealing with uncertain threats in the environment. Thus, when applying Bourdieu's
45 theory of practice (Akkermans *et al.*, 2020), our participants felt that the hardiness and resilience
46 they acquired from dealing with an unstable habitus in their home country, provided coping
47 skills for dealing with the mismatch between individual and disrupted context in the host country
48 during a crisis.
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Language

During the crisis, language prevented access to essential services and medical attention. Gemma for example fall within the risk category for Covid-19 and fell ill prior to the lockdown. She was too afraid to call the doctor or seek medical attention due to her language ability.

Larissa also indicated that being a stranger to the system and most likely due to language barriers and lack of information, was unable to visit her doctor to obtain chronic medication for herself.

Not having access to critical information, or not having the confidence to express oneself in the medical system can have life-threatening consequences.

Language classes were also stopped during the lockdown was a further barrier to adjustment and potential cause for fit-dependent crisis.

Loneliness

According to Banerjee and Rai (2020), loneliness due to self-isolation during the Covid-19 pandemic, poses a major risk to mental and physical health. In the case of SIEs, being far away from one's familiar habitus may lead to a heightened sense of segregation from self-identity and increased feelings of displacement (Hack-Polay, 2020; Van den Bergh, 2014). Our participants all indicated a heightened sense of being an 'outsider', questioning their decision to move to the Netherlands in the first place. Feeling lonely was compounded by language barriers and hostile interactions with locals. In the beginning of the crisis, all participants indicated a need to revert to their familiar friends and support structures in South Africa, which was both a source of concern and support to them. Contact via social media, Zoom, Tinder, WhatsApp and HouseParty helped to reduce feelings of loneliness but did not compensate for the skin hunger and need for live human interaction outside of a camera or screen.

Positive self-isolation

Our participants all indicated that they initially actually appreciated the break from having to deal with the challenges of adjusting in the new country. This notion of incorporating a break from adjustment certainly warrants further exploration as no previous research has specifically looked at the benefits of having a 'bubble' or safe space during the adjustment process. It seems as if voluntary isolation can be beneficial shortly after arrival for SIEs, as it provides a soft

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3 landing for newcomers who are socially and physically exhausted from the move and during the
4 recovery phase of culture shock, a slower pace and time to rest and recover is beneficial for
5 mental and physical well-being.
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8 9 10 **Cognitive re-framing**

11 Our participants engaged in a noticeable strategy of cognitive reframing to help them deal with
12 the severity of the crisis. This is an interesting finding that is not yet accounted for in extant
13 adjustment literature. Alike to the process of Meta-Cognition as coined by CQ theory, our
14 participants tried to re-evaluate their experiences and frame them positively despite the severity
15 of the situation.
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22 **Conclusions**

23 Social networks play an important role in maintaining mental health, moderating the negative
24 impact of culture shock and provide a buffer against stress (Caligiuri and Lazarova, 2002; Hack-
25 Polay, 2020). SIE's are often considered to be more motivated to develop social ties with locals
26 in the host country, with broader and more multiplex relational ties with locals (Mäkelä and
27 Suutari, 2013). Through exploring the disruption of the adjustment context at various levels, a
28 dynamic variation to the framework of Caligiuri and Lazarova (2001) is created, accounting for
29 the unknown effects of unexpected, multiplex context disruption during the adjustment process.
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36 Our case study highlights the impact of a sudden disruption in the adjustment context due
37 to social distancing measures and physical isolation during Covid-19 pandemic by providing
38 anecdotal evidence of a small group of SIEs in the early phases of adjustment. The sudden
39 disruption of daily life due to the pandemic adds an additional layer of complexity to the
40 adjustment process where hysteresis can occur in the host country, home country, personal,
41 work, and social networking contexts.
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46 It seems as if the hostile home country environment in South African provides tools for
47 adjustment in the work context despite potential crises in the personal sphere (Mostert, 2013).
48 However, the social network domain is crucial for employee well-being and performance as it
49 moderates potential fit-dependent crisis arising from maladjustment (McNulty *et al.*, 2019).
50 Isolation from colleagues, friends, HCNs and other forms of support can lead to withdrawal and
51 regression in general and psychological adjustment. The ripple-effects of the crisis as catalyst for
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3 further fit-dependent crisis is yet unknown, but looking at the current discourse of our
4 participants, a few danger zones can be identified: Feelings of displacement, loneliness, anxiety,
5 isolation, stress, job insecurity and hyper-productivity due to a heightened sense of responsibility
6 to the workplace, are recurrent.
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10 11 12 **Implications for further research**

13 This research provides two significant findings which warrant further exploration, namely the
14 gains of social isolation, and the role of the organization in facilitating the adjustment process,
15 supporting initial findings by He *et al.* (2019).
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18 The ripple-effects of the crisis as catalyst for further fit-dependent crisis is yet unknown,
19 but looking at the narratives presented in combination with the research underlying the
20 conceptual framework, a few danger zones warrant further exploration: Feelings of
21 displacement, loneliness, anxiety, isolation, stress, job insecurity and the feeling that one needs
22 to work even harder when working at home to secure one's contract are all notes of concern.
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29 **Limitations**

30 The qualitative nature of this study, whilst leading to deep insights into a specific group of cases,
31 is not without limitations. The empirical basis for this research is limited and does not allow for
32 further generalizations. The reader is invited to participate in the sense-making of these
33 narratives in order to explore further themes for future research and empirical investigation.
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Appendix 1: Themes per participant

Theme	Jenny	Gemma	Nathalie	Larissa
Theme 1: Responses to the Corona crisis	<p>Denial: This is not a big thing</p> <p>A meme, a joke, this is not a big deal.</p> <p>Realization: This is a big thing</p> <p>This a huge thing. I can't have a normal life.</p>	<p>Awareness</p> <p>A gauge as to how serious it was.</p> <p>Just a matter of time</p> <p>This is serious. It's a matter of time before it impacts our lives here.</p> <p>Concern for family in SA</p> <p>What happens if it hits South Africa? What about my family and friends there?</p>	<p>Thankful</p> <p>Thankful that you are here. There are more resources available.</p> <p>Double crisis</p> <p>We were surrounded with all the news and all the experience double.</p> <p>Concern for family in SA</p> <p>An awful feeling: I can't take care of my family.</p>	<p>A question of timing</p> <p>Getting everything ready on time.</p> <p>Lucky and grateful</p> <p>We were lucky that it all happened in time .</p> <p>No time to worry</p> <p>We didn't have time to worry about our family, it was a new adventure for us.</p>
Theme 2: Impact of Corona Crisis on Social networks in the host country	<p>Starting over</p> <p>Suddenly you have to start all over again.</p> <p>Social isolation</p> <p>How am I supposed to make friends here?</p>	<p>Starting over</p> <p>It's hard to start over, it's hard to start to make friends.</p> <p>Building up</p> <p>I was very slowly building up this social life.</p>	<p>Just our family</p> <p>In the beginning we didn't have that many connections yet, just our five together.</p> <p>Finally, back into the social scene</p>	<p>Newcomer</p> <p>You're a newcomer, not being part of the community yet.</p> <p>Normally they are friendly people</p>

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	<p>More alone than ever</p> <p>I feel more alone than I've ever felt in my whole life.</p> <p>You can't be yourself</p> <p>You don't understand each other then you can't be as open or be yourself.</p> <p>Not actually socializing</p> <p>Socializing but not actually socializing.</p> <p>Dutch friends</p> <p>I wanted to make Dutch friends specifically.</p> <p>Corona Boyfriend</p> <p>I met my 'corona boyfriend' through tinder and made friends with his friends.</p>	<p>Grinding halt</p> <p>My social life came to a grinding halt.</p> <p>Disconnect</p> <p>I can't really connect with the friends that I have made.</p> <p>Withdrawing</p> <p>Withdrawing from those friends I have made here and reverting to my familiar friends in South Africa.</p> <p>Technology barrier</p> <p>I wasn't sure if they are the type of friends you can hop on a WhatsApp call to.</p>	<p>After six months we finally got into the social scene again.</p> <p>It had to stop</p> <p>It's just us...[our social life] had to stop.</p> <p>Corona Birthday</p> <p>I had my birthday, I realized: I am allowed to have 3 guests in my house at 1,5 meter distance. I'm having friends over.</p>	<p>Normally I find the Dutch people so warm. They are friendly people.</p> <p>You want to self-isolate</p> <p>[in the beginning you are] socially exhausted because everybody wants to see you to say good-bye, so for a few weeks not to see anybody, you actually want to self-isolate and just find yourself.</p>
<p>Theme 3:</p> <p>Changes in the local context</p>	<p>Crisis in the country</p> <p>The whole country went into this crisis.</p> <p>Covid Rules</p>	<p>Newcomer/Outsider</p> <p>With Covid I feel even more like an outsider.</p>	<p>Feeling of loss</p> <p>...when some of my Dutch friends said 'oh they can't visit their family' we kind of felt like</p>	<p>Fear and Anxiety</p> <p>People started acting strange. They were rude. Driven by fear.</p>

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	<p>You can't move, you can't go near people, you can't even greet people with hands anymore.</p> <p>Fear and anxiety</p> <p>The body language makes a person anxious, you can pick it up, you can feel how anxious everyone around you is.</p> <p>Living in a bubble</p> <p>There are bigger problems out there but [the Dutch people] are just living inside this bubble.</p>	<p>Customs, culture and Covid Rules</p> <p>I worry that I'm going to accidentally offend someone without knowing it that there's some rule or a custom or a culture here that I'm not aware of especially with things like Covid rules.</p>	<p>were already used to that feeling of loss.</p>	<p>Anxiety came out in their body language.</p> <p>Keep your distance</p> <p>People shouting at me. I wasn't even aware that I was that close to them that they had to shout at me.</p> <p>Rude and angry people</p> <p>I'm getting fed up with these rude and angry people.</p> <p>I'm a newcomer, what am I doing here?</p> <p>You already feel like an outsider, you're already feeling like an incomer. You are still wondering what are you doing here? You don't feel part of the community yet. And then all these people who are living here, who have a right to live here, shout at you, and you think: "What am I doing here?"</p>
<p>Theme 4:</p>	<p>My Dream</p>	<p>Seamless working from home</p>	<p>First Temporary contract</p>	<p>Work/Residence Permits delayed</p>

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<p>Working from home/schooling from home</p>	<p>My dream of going to university is not going to happen, for a long time.</p> <p>Stuck</p> <p>I am stuck in a strange country at home with my parents.</p>	<p>The transition to working from home has been seamless.</p> <p>Anxious</p> <p>I felt anxious.</p> <p>Feeling supported</p> <p>I feel very supported by my company.</p> <p>Logistical support</p> <p>Support at a logistical level: they offered to drop off your office chair at home, sending ergonomic tips.</p> <p>Supportive Manager</p> <p>My manager made it clear that everyone is meeting enough deadlines, he's pleased with it.</p> <p>Structure</p> <p>At the beginning of Lockdown, I had a very structured day but I've dropped the good habits.</p>	<p>My contract was up for renewal, so I really wanted to do my best at work. Our residence permits are linked to my job.</p> <p>Crazy</p> <p>It was crazy. You just had to do so much at the same time.</p> <p>Schoolwork</p> <p>One kid had too much work and the other kid too little. At some stages they didn't have much motivation at all.</p> <p>Structural support</p> <p>We were able to just go pick up computer screens and bring it home.</p> <p>Understanding for my personal situation</p> <p>My company understood that we had some extra emotional needs.</p>	<p>Everything is closed and we could only finalize our work and residence permits by June.</p> <p>Job-seeking</p> <p>Looking for a job was a side-note.</p> <p>Schools are closed</p> <p>My son's school year will not begin for an undetermined period. Initially he was happy about this.</p> <p>Career Uncertainty</p> <p>I wanted to find a job. First the move, then it's corona, then it's summer holiday, you know, where will you find your feet in terms of a career again?</p>
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		<p>Hyper-Productivity</p> <p>I SHOULD be doing more. It's a privilege to be working from home. I'm probably twice as productive at home than I was in the office.</p> <p>Post-Covid gains</p> <p>It's great to see how much can be done at home. It's transforming the way that we work.</p> <p>Temporary Contract</p> <p>I'm anxious that my contract is not going to be renewed because there's a hiring freeze.</p>	<p>They really took care of us</p> <p>We had check-ins, ergonomic tips of how to work safely at home. I felt valued.</p> <p>I miss my Dutch work-friends</p> <p>I miss my lunch time with my Dutch friends.</p> <p>Mental health</p> <p>I had to remind myself that it's ok to go out there for a run...it was good for me to clear my head.</p> <p>Online School, Round 2</p> <p>Round 2 was better, us, the kids and the school were better prepared, we had better boundaries and also a tiny bit more flexibility.</p> <p>Stressful, round 2</p> <p>It was still stressful with lots of distractions in the mornings</p>	
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			<p>and with daycare closed - it meant that in the afternoons the distractions still continued.</p> <p>Temporary contract 2 With a fresh work contract distractions mean less productivity, I am anxious to lose my job.</p>	
<p>Barriers and support structures during the pandemic</p>		<p>Language Barrier The one thing that was a barrier between me and getting tested and going to a doctor was because I was worried about holding a conversation in Dutch and I knew that I couldn't.</p> <p>Access to healthcare I wasn't worried about what would happen if I would have to go on a ventilator.</p>	<p>Over-anxopis I was being over-sensitive, over-anxious about [my kids getting hurt] placing extra pressure on our healthcare system.</p> <p>The system can handle it Knowing that if the healthcare system can handle it.</p> <p>More resources available I was relieved that there's more resources available in the Netherlands than in South Africa.</p>	<p>Access to healthcare I can't go to my doctor for my chronic high blood pressure medication.</p> <p>Unfamiliar systems I am a stranger; I don't know how the systems work. I feel like I am playing Russian Roulette with my family's health.</p>
<p>South Africans are...</p>	<p>South Africans are tough South Africans are quite tough.</p>	<p>South Africans are hardy people</p>	<p>We can do this</p>	<p>South Africans are spoilt</p>

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		<p>South Africans (being quite hardy people), feel like they can beat covid or anything.</p>	<p>In the beginning I felt like, we can do this, we can just get to a new normal and maybe it's not that bad. As a South African, we did this, we went through this, and we're still ok. It's not impossible.</p>	<p>You're spoiled if you're from South Africa: you've got someone doing all your cleaning and ironing. I felt so sorry for myself because I've got to do this myself now.</p>
<p>Moving on</p>	<p>Jana experienced a severe personal crisis in October 2020. Her brother passed away in his sleep due to a seizure. She started her first year of higher education in August 2020 at a business school in Breda where she lived on campus with two other international girls. She broke up with her first corona boyfriend, found a new one and is currently studying Economics at the University of Utrecht. She finally realized her dream of moving out of her parent's house and following a mixture of live and online lessons.</p>	<p>Gemma and her husband could not find their niche in the Netherlands. The loneliness and disconnect from family were very hard for her and they decided to relocate to the UK in April 2022 to be closer to family and settle in a country with less language barriers.</p>	<p>Nathalie and her husband settled into a new house, navigated their way through the school system to find a suitable high school for her eldest child during two lockdown periods and are feeling more settled and connected. Their church community has provided them a lot of support and though they were still uncertain if or when they would be able to visit friends and family in South Africa, they managed to stay in contact with their loved ones via Zoom and WhatsApp.</p>	<p>Larissa decided to pursue a long-held dream to go apple-picking during the summer break and used her break in formal employment to do so in August 2020. This gave her insight into the culture and language from a different perspective. During this period, her son passed away in his sleep due to a seizure. This was a major crisis for their family: They had to host a funeral in a strange country in a church they had never even attended due to lockdowns, with travel restrictions and a livestream of the service to their family and friends in other parts of the world. She received a lot of support from the South African community in</p>

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				<p>her town during this time. She strongly feels like the Dutch health system failed her son and that his death could have been avoided if the doctor would have taken the time to treat his condition more seriously.</p> <p>To take her mind off things and provide some structure for herself, she started working in a sorting center for packages between November 2020-January 2022. She and her husband bought a house in the Netherlands and relocated to their new home to make a new start in December 2022. She tries to keep her professional career going and presented a paper about her experiences as a mother of a disabled child at a conference in 2021. She is currently re-evaluating next steps in her career.</p>
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Career Development International

Career Development International

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