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THE IMPACT OF CONTEMPORARY GLOBAL MOBILITY ON THE FAMILY WHO STAYS BEHIND

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Human Resource Management at Massey University, Albany, New Zealand

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2017
Abstract

This thesis considers the impact of contemporary global mobility on the lives of the stay-behind family. Organisations are increasingly utilising flexible modes of global mobility to meet their international obligations, including frequent international business travel, commuting, and short-term assignments. However, research has continued to lag practice. The aim of this study is to understand the work and non-work implications of living with contemporary global mobility. Specifically, the research is guided by two questions: i) how have the home lives of the stay-behind family members been affected by the contemporary global mobility of their partner or parent? and ii) how has the career of the stay-behind partner been impacted by the global mobility undertaken by their partner?

Through a lens of social constructionism, this study uses qualitative semi-structured interviews to give voice to the families of international sailors, who are employed across the continuum of contemporary global mobility. The limitations of the context-specific sample are considered justifiable in exchange for access to the often ignored voice of the child.

The findings make theoretical, methodological and practical contributions to contemporary global mobility, work-family, and career scholarship. They enhance understanding of the demands borne by those who stay behind, and the resources they utilise to manage their ever-evolving situation. The development of the Work Family Mobility Framework, as viewed through the lens of contemporary global mobility, is the overarching contribution of the thesis. The applicability of the Kaleidoscope Career to contemporary global mobility is the primary career contribution. Incorporating children makes a methodological contribution, while the practical suggestions emerging from the findings provide focus for improving the lives of those who stay behind.

Future research is required to test the Work-Family Mobility Framework in other contemporary global mobility communities, and with a sample including both male and female travellers. Longitudinal studies are recommended to investigate the impacts of this global mobility over time. Finally, it is recommended that the Kaleidoscope Career Model be further explored within the global mobility context.
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank those who have made my journey possible.

Dr Kaye Thorn and Dr Margot Edwards, your unwavering faith gave me the confidence to believe I could complete this life changing challenge. Your guidance has been instrumental in ensuring the academic rigour, and the clarity, of my thesis.

To my fellow PhD candidates based on the Albany campus, I enjoyed our group learning sessions, but even more so, I appreciated those five minute chats while waiting for the kettle to boil in the staff longue. It was those collegial moments that proved invaluable, in terms of mutual understanding, and also in prompting the occasional academic epiphany.

To my lifelong friends Rachel and Lee, thank you for always asking after my research, even though the halls of academia are worlds away from your busy and successful corporate lives. You were my intelligent, yet uninformed audience, whose questions often proved incredibly insightful.

To the women and children from the contemporary global mobility community, thank you so very much for gifting me your time. I hope my work has done your stories justice, and that in some way my contributions will make your lives just that little bit easier.

Finally, to my family. I would like to thank my mother who through her life lived has shown me that strong women are capable of achieving anything. I would also like to thank her and Paul for being my second and third pair of hands when I was the stay-behind parent. And to the faux farmer and my two beloved children, without your love, support, and sacrifice this would not have been possible. Thank you.
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