

Female Self-Initiated Expatriates, Systematic Reviews on Motivations and Challenges

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ABSTRACT

Expatriation generally more inclined to male talent and less of female becoming expatriate. Overtime expatriation is becoming more popular to female talent. Expatriation has two main types, organization assigned and self-initiated by the individual. It is interesting to understand motivations and challenges being self-initiated expatriate particularly for the female expatriates. The systematic reviews are sought to explain what motivates female to be self-initiated expatriates. Existing research is lacking holistic findings of motivations and challenges experienced by female self-initiated expatriates in the foreign country. The review done on past literatures from three database namely Scopus, Web of Science and Google Scholar focusing on literatures with data related to motivation factors and challenges experienced. Findings show that motivations and challenges experienced by female self-initiated expatriates were different as compared to those female talent being assigned by the company. Based on the review, organization planning to adapt self-initiated expatriate as one of the talent development paths needs to be prepared to support the female talent with specific policy. This systematic literature review contributes to the scarce research on female self-initiated expatriates and acknowledge female self-initiated expatriates as part of member in the community which is male dominated in general.

Introduction:

Transcending beyond one's own comfort zone to work abroad is no longer something that is peculiar and difficult to achieve. Individuals endeavour work mobility

based on their own choice [1], organizational assignments [2], relocations in response to forces beyond their control [3] and personal development [4].

In the past, expatriation without support from organization emerges as one of the alternatives for talents to leave their comfort zone and they are known as self-initiated expatriates. (e.g. [5];[6]; [7]; [8]; [9]; [10]; [11]. Past literatures named the individuals with various names such as 'free travellers' [12], "self-initiated foreign work experiences" [13], "independent internationally mobile professionals" [14] and, more recently, "self-initiated expatriates" or SIEs (e.g.[15]; [16]. Most past researches (example: [14]focus on differentiating between assigned expatriates (AE) and self-initiated expatriates (SIE). Existing work unearth the motivation factors influencing their decision and common challenges to be self-initiated expatriates. Nonetheless, there are still eclipse in understanding the multi-faceted issues encompassing such talents; [17];[18]. Very little is known about female self-initiated expatriates although the numbers of females' talents in various context, realms and positions have grown. [5]confirmed that lacking research on subpopulations of self-initiated expatriates. [19]indicates very little research focus on female self-initiated expatriates, [20]

Self-initiated expatriate

According to ([21]; [13], past research on expatriates were mainly focused on assigned expatriates, who sent to overseas by their own company. Contrary to the assigned expatriates, the self-initiated expatriate who find employment outside their home country is nevertheless equally an important research subject.[22]. According to Crowley-Henry 2007, a self-initiated expatriates refers to any person who is seeking employment abroad on his/her own initiatives and hired as a local in the host country. [5]

Self-initiated expatriate is an individual who decide on their own to migrate to other country for work. [12]indicated the new and different global career patterns includes flex patriates, frequent flyers, short-term assignees, virtual global employees and international business travellers. According to [23] main differentiator between Traditional Expatriate and Self-Initiated Expatriate is the initiator of the foreign work assignment. The traditional expatriate or assigned expatriate usually employed by large organization or multinational and has experience working in lesser number of different foreign locations. The traditional expatriate normally spent shorter time for specific period at foreign country. From previous research, it is also found that less female involved in the traditional expatriate and if they do usually more at professional levels. On the other hands, self-initiated expatriate is self-directed, work for smaller organization at national or regional foreign organization. Naturally self-initiated expatriate not only for professional workers but include unskilled workers. Surprisingly self-initiated expatriate attract more female compared to traditional expatriates. [23]

2. Materials and methods

In conducting the review, Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) was used. The review of current and past research utilized three journal databases, namely Scopus, Web of Science and Google Scholar. Through the search, a total of fourteen (14) articles found relevant to be analysed systematically. The review managed to formulate three main themes around the motivation factors to encourage the female to be self-initiated expatriate namely, financial, career growth and individual development both personal and work related. In the area of challenges, they faced, main themes found are namely, acceptance of women in the host country culture, family concern, work-life balance and coping with loneliness, ability to network and having social interaction. The review is limited to research conducted between year 2010 till year 2021. Due to limitation of articles found on women or female self-initiated expatriates, the review looks at female or women

being assigned by the organization to expatriates as comparison on their motivation and challenges.

2.2 Resources

The review methods of present study use three databases, namely Scopus and Web of Science and one secondary database, Google Scholar. Scopus and Web of Science are both considered the leading indexing systems for citations. Both databases were accessed through institutional subscription-based services and provides comprehensive citation search functions.

2.3 The systematic review process in selecting the articles

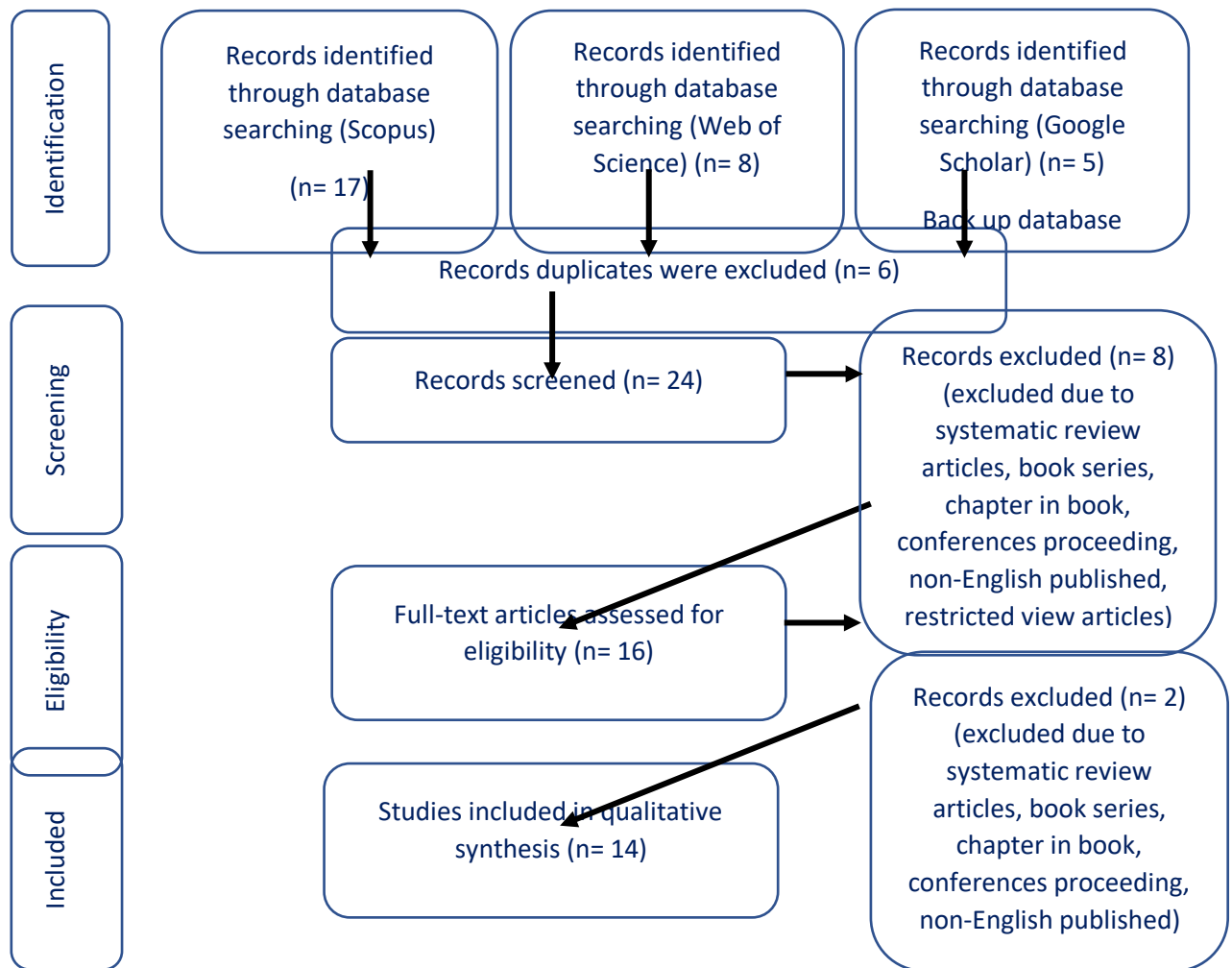


Fig.1. The flow diagram of the study (Adapted from Moher et al, 2009)

2.3.1 Identification

The process of selecting relevant articles to be systematically reviewed done in three main stages. The search starts with identification of keywords and finding the related or similar terms based on the thesaurus and dictionaries. Search strings were developed as per in Table 1. Using the search strings, managed to retrieve a total of thirty articles from the three database which is Scopus, Web of Science and Google Scholar.

Table 1

List of strings

Database	Search for	Search in	Search Filter	No of entries
Scopus	“Female self-initiated expatriate” OR “wom?n self-initiated expatriate”	Title	Year range 2010-2021 English	17
Web of Science	“Female self-initiated expatriate” OR “wom?n self-initiated expatriate”	Title	Year range 2010-2021 English	5
Google Scholar	“Female self-initiated expatriates”	Title	Year range 2010-2021 English	8

In summary the number of publications from 2010 to 2021 by the three databases selected

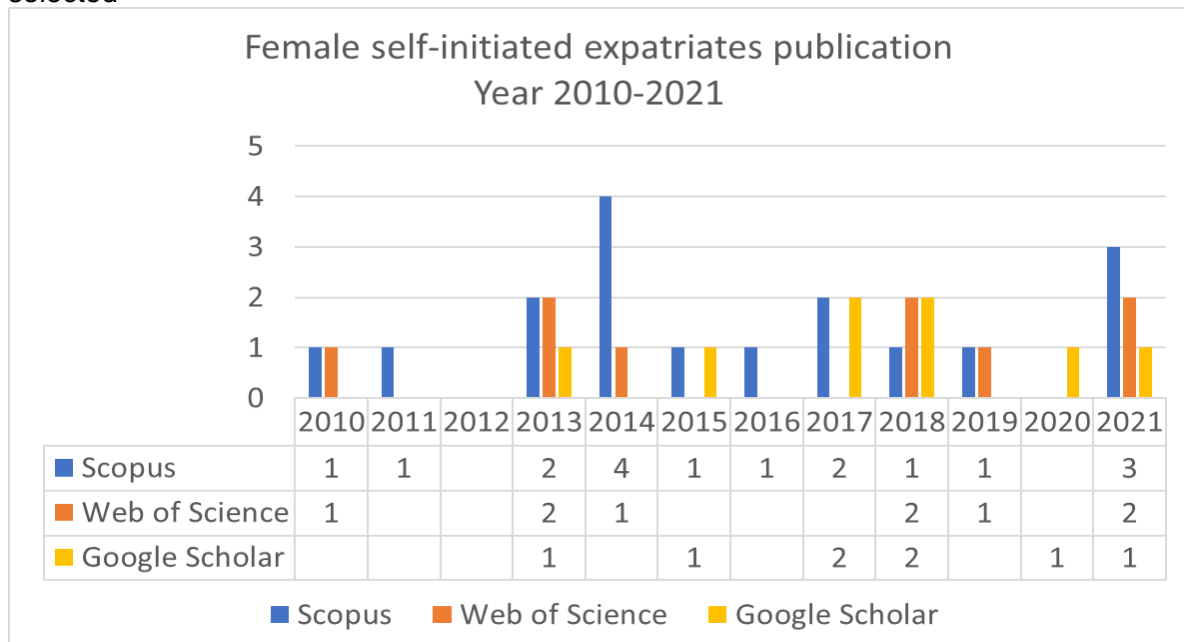


Figure 2: Number of publications from three database from 2010-2021

2.3.2 Screening

This process is done with purpose to exclude all duplicate articles. During the process, a total of sixteen (16) articles were excluded. The balance of articles was further screened using the inclusion and exclusion criteria determined earlier.

2.3.3 Eligibility

From the very beginning several eligibility and exclusion criterion are determined. The criteria include literature type where only article journal with empirical data is selected and all review article, book series, book, chapter in a book and conference proceeding are excluded. Secondly only English articles are included. Thirdly, the articles must be published from 2011 to 2021. Lastly, in line with its objective which focuses on female self-initiated expatriates, only articles focused in female self-initiated are selected.

2.4 Data abstraction and analysis

The eligible articles were assessed and further analysed based on specific studies that responded to the questions. The analysis was done by reading the abstract and full articles in depth. Identification of appropriate themes and sub-themes was generated from the analysis.

3. Results

3.1 General findings

3.1.1 Female self-initiated expatriate

According to [12-14], women self-initiated expatriates or SIEs were not significant and very little research was found on them. [23] found that the highly educated women professionals are neglected by the organizations Human Resources and also the policy makers in host countries. Potentially the female professionals can be essential resources in maintaining company's competitive advantage and as resources to the labour shortages. [12, 14, 15].

Past research has highlighted the lack of women in expatriation [4, 7, 11, 19], and more recent surveys proven that women account for only 25% of IAs [24]. The facts suggested that there are still very low presence of women in the international workforce.

In today's business world, globalizations have impacted how company conduct and grow their business, therefore it is essential for talent to serve in international assignments especially for multi-national enterprises, [25] Multinationals' focus on mobility as a workforce strategy supports career talent growth and global competitiveness of the organizations. The expatriate's trend will continue to grow in numbers worldwide, when last reported in 2009 by Mercer there were almost one million expatriates around the world. Merely nine years later in a research done by Financial Planning Today (2018) the global expatriate population has reached 66.2m and is forecasted to rise to 87.5 million by 2021. It is a huge population of expatriates with yearly growth of 5.8% annually since 2013. The numbers have folded more than sixty times since last reported by [19].

Nevertheless, having growth in the number of expatriates still does not address the gender gap, whereby in average there are only 19% women represented the respondent to the international assignees. Although the number of female assignees has risen steadily over the past 20 years and is double the amount from nearly two decades ago, companies still send significantly more men on international assignments than women.

(www.bgrs.com, 2020)

The question of low women representation in global expatriation has caught the attention of researchers since the early years of research done around women expatriation both for company assigned expatriate as well as self-initiated expatriates. One of the common reasons for the low representation is contributed by the stereotypical corporate perceptions of women's non capability to adjust abroad. This further influence by managers in the multinational companies to exclude women for international assignments, they worried of the non-acceptance by foreign country executives, colleagues, clients and others. They may view women as to be ineffective with their work. However, this fact is in contrary of findings by other research such as by [8, 10, 19, 26] who found that women expatriates were successful in their international assignments. [11] in research titled "Yes they can do it! Exploring female expatriates' effectiveness" found that women are as effective as men in International Assignments. The results of the study confirms that there are not significant differences in these outcomes between expatriate women and men.

Interested to understand why female is underrepresented in the global market, the systematic literature review under study research conducted between 2011 till 2019 to focus on two key areas; first is what motivates them to expatriate, second what were challenges faced by the female expatriates. The systematic literature not only focus on self-initiated expatriates but at the same time look at the company assigned expatriates to compare. Today due to change in how business operates and continuous talent war within organizations in the business world, talent mobility programs are one of the core components for global talent strategy especially for a multinational organization. [12] Global Talent Trends reported, 65% of employers across all industries are utilizing the mobility programs to develop talent and help to enhance the organization workforce strategies. The needs post challenges to the organization to manage expatriates cost but as benefits, it does contributes to drive business results in longer term. Organization and talent will both benefited from the global or foreign experience such as in the areas of career development, global experience, new skill sets and allow the company to relocate resources accordingly.

3.2 Findings and Discussion

It takes a lot for an individual to be self-initiated expatriate, let alone for female to be one. Past researches seem to understudy the motivation factors that help push female individual to be self-initiated expatriate. Study also found that the motivation factors were also varied between single female self-initiated expatriate as compared to female with life partner or family. The difference was also found in a female being self-initiated expatriates versus female being company assigned expatriates. In a case of company assigned expatriates, the expatriate experience is one of the critical determinant factors and therefore support from the organization is critical. One important factor that could affect their motivation is perceived organization support (POS). According to [27] how talent view POS thru their own experience influence the female expatriate to stay with the organization upon returning.

The systematic literature review done is focusing on past researches conducted to understudy female expatriates both self-initiated and company assigned within a small industry namely education and oil and gas industry.

3.2.1 Motivation for women to be self-initiated expatriate

Since year 2000, researchers have study a broad range of topics namely; reasons for going [8, 13]; career capital [11]; implications for HRM [22]; cross-cultural adjustment [27] career anchors [15]; modes of engagement and career development [28]; and career-related factors [24]. Through the past research findings, the self-initiated expatriation is accepted as formal career-enhancing experience. Through the expatriation, individual will develop a work-related and improve on personal skills.

According to [29] female expatriate in general has a more complex career path and nonlinear in nature, unlike the male expatriate. The nonlinear career path is also reflected as 'snakes and ladders' or 'zigzags' according to [30]. Having to experience such a bumpy ride in their career, researcher is interested to know the motivation factors involved. The motivation factors that drive female to undertake the expatriation remains to be research topic and past research has the following findings;

[10] in their research thru an exploratory qualitative research conducted on twenty five (25) female self-initiated expatriate in Beijing found that among motivation factors moving to China includes reasons such as "looking for a different way of life", "boredom", "wanting excitement", "the influence of a significant other", and influence by "a partner's". The other influencing factors include factors driven by corporate such as "lack of opportunity", "clashing values", "marginalisation" and "lack of recognition at home". The research found multiple motivation factors that could push female to be

self-initiated expatriate. There was a question if financial is the motivation factors for female to go on expatriation but [26] in a study done in the oil and gas industry found that while the financial benefits of undertaking expatriation in the oil and gas exploration and production industry appears to be attractive, but from female expatriates' perspective money is not the main motivation factors. [26]

3.2.1.1 Career progression motivation

According to [12] one of the motivation for female to be a self-initiated expatriate is to escape from their routine in their home country. [18] found that the 'push factor' of a woman to expatriate was due to lack of opportunities at their home country. Just like their male counterpart, the female talent would have desire to be successful in their career. Lack or no opportunity locally trigger their move to go abroad. The experience working abroad will gives them new skills which will benefit their career progression. Past research also indicated that those female in corporate career mentioned about "lack of opportunity", "clashing values", "marginalisation" and "lack of recognition" at home as contributing factors pushing their move.

[22] found that professional women moved to Cayman Island due to opportunity to expand their career. Findings by [31] show similar factors although in different industry or work scope where female expatriate in the oil and gas industry career seems to be the motivation for accepting organisationally assigned expatriate [32] also confirmed that women initiating expatriation for the purpose of their career growth. This is especially when they are facing career barriers and limitation to move up the career ladder in their home country. In some cases, organization does not favour female employees to be in the leadership management position. Motivation factors are driven by individual and not so much by industry. Their decision is driven by the fact that they experienced dissatisfaction with their career advancement, lack of fairness in the selection and promotion process. Therefore, they look for fair and equitable career opportunities elsewhere.

[32], in the research also found that women take up expatriation more often for reason to develop their career and advance further. They are getting better employment opportunities, professional development and higher income to couple with it. Similar reason found by [33] thru a study done on American expatriates in Europe, personal career development became one of significant reason to expatriate. Career development and personal development were found to be cited the most in past research. Some research also cites that possibility of gender discrimination in career advancement as a push factor. [32]

[32] indicated that female expatriates choose to leave their company and experience expatriation because they dissatisfied with their career advancement. Prior research findings by [25] were similar lack of fairness in selection and promotion was also one of the reasons given by female when they choose to self-expatriating themselves. The research also found that career is reason that motivate female professional to expatriate. The consistent findings shows that limitation in career advancement locally remains one of motivation factor to move abroad.

3.2.1.2 Financial motivation

In past researches there were also findings on financial reasons as motivation factor for female talent to experience the expatriation. These financial related themes can be found across different industry and [14] in a study done for a group of self-initiated expatriate in academics field found that they were motivated to be self-initiated expatriates due to financial related factors. The opportunity to earn good money and able to save the extra income is motivating and this is also related to their intention to earn extra income to support their family. Similar findings by [34] where women with

children took the financial opportunity to keep it for her family. Those with spouse took it as a form of compensation to the loss of their spouse career or income.

Similar reason found in the oil and gas industry where financial underpin women's motivation to accept organization assigned expatriation. [7] in their research found some key motivators for expatriation which includes for financial betterment besides desire to explore and building their career. [9] found that one of the most cited motivation reasons for assigned expatriate is financial considerations.

3.2.1.3 Adventure and travelling motivation

Aside from career progression and financial, the female expatriates would also motivate by experience to expatriation due to a desire to adventure and travel around the world. These findings were supported by a common theme in [14] study. From the research, findings show that it has three main ingredients; desire to see the world more, searching of new experience and finally desire to adventure and experience different challenges.

Unlike those expatriating due to career or financial, [24] found that some novelty-seeking self-initiated expatriates were less motivated by material success but appreciate the positive new experience all together. This finding supported the facts that motivation may varies from view of their jobs or type of jobs. Secondly motivation also varies based on different stages of their career, early career stage or mid-career stage. Nevertheless, motivation to adventure and travel the world is the least reason found in the past researches.

3.2.2 Challenges of becoming female expatriates

While motivation factors push women to expatriate, challenges are something that they need to deal with, be it prior to expatriating or during expatriation period. Challenges are not gender specific and varied or different from individual to another individual. Past researches highlighted those challenges and focus on different demographic of female from single women, married and married with family commitment. Challenges in general can be sub-divided into two main themes, challenges at workplace and society challenges. However, to certain extend the two challenges are interrelated.

3.2.2.1 Culture challenges

One of the most frequent challenges indicated by expatriates is the cultural biases and language challenges. [13] found that female expatriates were facing cultural differences challenges. Having to work in foreign country it creates widespread external adjustment challenges that includes adjustment to a new culture and living environment. The depth of challenges will be even more for female expatriates with family as the family will also face same challenges and struggle together to overcome it.

[14] found that the differences in culture contexts while being away from home country lead to negative effects on the lives of the expatriates. [33] indicate one of the biggest challenges is ability to cope with cultural barriers. [35] also mentioned that in order to succeed, they need to adjust behaviour to fit host culture. The ability to adjust was found to be linked to their performance. According to [27] the international experience viewed as a positive moved and aligned to their experience, high salary and good benefits. Nevertheless, the reverse to that they experience new challenges such as language barriers, not familiar with local customs, lack of familiarity with new company culture and no support network from their home country. While the challenges are applicable for both genders, women may experience harder challenges to fit into especially to an assertive and masculine business environment. More so if

the female expatriates came from a culture with traditional values. For example, a female expatriate from a Western culture going to a country with prejudices against women.

Similar challenges faced by women expatriates in the masculine industries such as in oil and gas industry which is dominated by male workers. Traditionally the industry is also located in challenging geographical domains which includes climatically harsh, disease-prevalent, insecure and dangerous places. (insert citation) In that challenging environment, being the minority, itself is already a challenge. In addition to that, they also faced perceptions of host-country prejudice.

3.2.2.2 Networking and mentoring challenge

Past researches mentioned other challenges related to networking and mentoring. Working out of home country requires physical and emotional support. Being away from home country and sometimes alone is not an easy moment. On the other hands being new to the foreign country it is crucial for the talent to build network. [36] mentioned that in accepting the expatriate assignment, the female employee faced some complexity due to concern that the female expatriate will not receive support from family if they are alone. It is similar challenges to the family that accompany them to the foreign country. Having to spend most of their time focusing on work and family, limit the time they have to build their social network. [33]

[37], highlight that small number of female expatriates around the world making it more difficult and challenging to have networking among them. It is also same challenges for female expatriating in the industry where it is dominating by male. The small number of female around, makes networking even more challenging. [26]

4.0 Recommendation

The findings and systematic review process of the present study led to recommendation that might be useful for futures researches. First, the study on female self-initiated expatriate should be expanded into wider industry and geographical locations. This is important to help understand and clarify the different motivation for female expatriate from various industry and location. At present the study is more focus to certain industry such as oil and gas, education and healthcare. As previous studies learned the benefits of women to experience the expatriation, the learning method should be expanded to others from various industries and location. In the related previous researches were focusing at certain region or countries such as in Europe, China and New Zealand. The past researches discuss the motivation in general and there was no significant indication what could be the strong push factors that could help increase numbers of female or women expatriates. There should be more studies done to understand different motivation and challenges experience by female and male. This could also help organization to handle expectation differently based on gender. The need for long term solutions to motivate and overcome challenges is obvious to make expatriation as one of a way to develop talent.

5.0 Conclusion

The literatures on women self-initiated expatriate reflects an understanding of what motivates their move to expatriate. This has been discussed earlier that career, financial and adventure to travel becoming some of the main reasons for them. Nevertheless, there were also other motivation such as commitment to spouse or partner as the reason.

The review also gives clear indication of challenges they faced prior to expatriation and during expatriation. Challenges were also varying for single female versus female with spouse or family. The findings give good understanding for organization to

develop policy or support to their female employee who has the interest to be self-initiated expatriate, at least at the pre-departure stage.

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