

A multi-dimensional analysis of the subjective well-being of self-initiated expatriates: The case of Nigerian expatriates in Germany

Hemant Merchant¹ | Rekha Rao-Nicholson²  | Eromosele Golden Iheikhena³

¹Professor of Global Business, Muma College of Business, University of South Florida, Tampa, Florida, USA

²Professor of Management, Essex Business School, University of Essex, Colchester, UK

³German Graduate School of Management & Law, Heilbronn, Germany

Correspondence

Rekha Rao-Nicholson, Professor of Management, Essex Business School, University of Essex, Colchester, UK.
Email: rekha.raonicholson@essex.ac.uk

Abstract

This paper examines the role of four types of influences on the Subjective Well-Being of Nigerian self-initiated expatriates in Germany: (1) Individual, (2) Group, (3) Social, and (4) Organizational. Based on survey data from 377 respondents, we find that variables in all four categories influence subjective well-being. Our findings generally agree with the results predicted by the theory, albeit a few counter-intuitive findings. Above all, our results indicate the potency of social- and group-level influences. The individual- and organizational-level influences, too, are significant, although to a slightly lesser extent. Overall, our results suggest that “soft” factors play an important role in augmenting perceptions about one's own well-being in the context of international assignments.

KEYWORDS

group factors, individual factors, organizational factors, self-initiated expatriates, societal factors, subjective well-being

1 | INTRODUCTION

The studies on expatriation have highlighted that the expatriates move to new cultures and work environments due to five reasons, namely, adventure or travel reasons, work reasons, family reasons, financial reasons, and life change (Doherty, Dickmann, & Mills, 2011; Graham & Pettinato, 2002; Selmer & Lauring, 2010). Although emerging from different antecedents, every expatriate has to go through a phase of adjustment of separation from their families, entering a new social life, taking responsibility for new roles and jobs in a new culture. Earlier studies have explored the emotions involved in the expatriation process both from the ego-focused emotions (like anger, frustration, pride) and other-focused emotions (appreciation, empathy) (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). They,

furthermore, note that these issues are also related to the cultural background of the individuals. The ego-focused emotions typically emerge from individuals' internal conflicts and attributes (Selmer & Lauring, 2014), whereas the other-focused emotions emerge from the interaction with the social environment in the foreign context (Lauring & Selmer, 2018). These challenges put high stress on individuals and could lead to unhappiness. Past research has indicated that an unhappy and dissatisfied employee cannot work effectively (Gustainiene & Endriulaitiene, 2009) with high expatriate premature return rates (Andresen, Goldmann, & Volodina, 2018; Kumarika Perera, Chew, & Nielsen, 2017; Shay & Tracey, 1997; Shen, Wajeeh-ul-Husnain, Kang, & Jin, 2021) and the costs of premature returns (Shay & Baack, 2004; Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010) both at organizational and personal levels (Harzing, 2017). Researchers have found evidence that happiness is associated with and precedes outcomes like job satisfaction, turnover intentions (Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010; Van Praag, Frijters, &

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Ferrer-i-Carbonell, 2003; Wright & Cropanzano, 2000) as well as the behavioral success (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005).

An expatriate's ability for cultural adjustment is influenced by the expatriate's ability to adapt to the host country and confidence in their capacity to live and work abroad (Kumar, Budhwar, Patel, & Varma, 2019; Markoulli, Lee, Byington, & Felps, 2017; Peltokorpi & Jintae Froese, 2009; Peltokorpi & Zhang, 2020; Pustovit, 2020; Singh, Edward Pereira, Mellahi, & Collings, 2021; Valenzuela & Rogers, 2021; Varma, Yoon, & Froese, 2021; Wang & Varma, 2019). This evaluation of one's own life and work and domain satisfaction is referred to as Subjective Well-Being (Farid & Lazarus, 2008; Presbitero, 2020). Ormel, Lindenberg, Steverink, and Verbrugge (1999: 61) refers to Subjective Well-Being (SWB) as "an individual's appraisal of his or her life situation overall—the totality of pleasures and pains, or quality of life." Frey and Stutzer (2002) suggest that SWB is an individual's evaluation of experienced positive and negative affect, happiness, or life satisfaction. From their perspective, SWB is the combination of cognitive and affective aspects of an individual's life. The affective part has to do with the feelings that individuals get from their close associations, like the relationships with the spouse, children, relatives, and friends. The cognitive part has to do with individuals' perception and evaluation of how their lives are in comparison to the standard norms all over the world or to their neighbors. Shaffer, Kraimer, Chen, and Bolino (2012) note that SWB is an intrinsic career outcome, whereas recent works have incorporated SWB in the context of expatriates' social and personal environment (Mäkelä, Lämsä, Heikkinen, & Tanskanen, 2017; Marques, Miska, Crespo, & Branco, 2021; Waibel, Aevermann, & Rueger, 2018). It is within this background the current study is undertaken to study SWB among expatriates.

The review of the literature indicated that there are two different kinds of expatriates (Siljanen & Lämsä, 2009), that is, Organizational expatriates (OEs) and the Self-initiated expatriates (SIEs). The OEs are those expatriates who a firm sends to other countries to live and work (like the international managers), while the SIEs are those expatriates that freely choose to go to other countries to live and work without any firm sending them (Jintae Froese & Peltokorpi, 2013). SIEs might choose to leave their home country because of adventure or travel reasons, for work reasons, for family reasons, for financial reasons, and/or for a life change or escape reasons (Selmer & Lauring, 2010). Studies have noted the differences between these two types of expatriates (Doherty et al., 2011; Peltokorpi & Jintae Froese, 2009; Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010). Jintae Froese & Peltokorpi (2013) observe that SIEs have higher adjustment within their local context compared to the OEs while on the other hand, as SIEs typically work under host country supervisors, they are likely to experience lower job satisfaction compared to OEs.

For the purpose of this study, we are interested in the SIEs, among other reasons, namely that these expatriates do not have the same level of corporate training and support as the OEs. Also, in many cases, SIEs have to identify their destinations and choose their means to get to these countries (Al Ariss & Özbilgin, 2010; Froese & Peltokorpi, 2020; Hussain & Deery, 2018). Similarly, these expatriates have to make crucial career choices in a foreign context (Sarpong &

Maclean, 2019), and in many cases, expatriates are working at jobs with fewer qualifications even though they might be highly qualified (Coates & Carr, 2005) (e.g., doctors from Africa or Syria working as taxi drivers [Bygnes, 2021]) or lower-level jobs with host country supervisors (Froese & Peltokorpi, 2013) and face discrimination (Kustov, 2019; Tatli, 2011). Moreover, considering limited factors undermines the findings' practical applications and weakens future SIE research. It is pertinent to consider the suite of factors that might impact SIEs' SWB and have a *holistic* view of SWB. Given this unique situation of personal choices and relocation to a foreign context, our study focuses on the SWB of the SIE.

The empirical context of this study is Germany, a country that has experienced high levels of immigration in recent years. Also, other studies have explored this rich empirical context looking at the issues and challenges of expatriation, migration, and employment outcomes (Kawai & Mohr, 2015). Selmer (2007) examined the expatriation of American managers to Canada and Germany and noted that managers did not demonstrate any differences in the extent of adjustment in these countries. As studies like these focus on the relocation of developed country managers, we note that managers and other expatriates' movement from developing countries to developed countries is an under-researched topic (Cao, Hirschi, & Deller, 2013; Cao, Hirschi, & Deller, 2014). Furthermore, the works of Varma and colleagues have examined the role of cross-country differences as well as host country factors like supervisory support in expatriation (Varma et al., 2021; Wang & Varma, 2019). Similarly, the SWB is typically not considered in these studies, and the focus summarily rests on job or work satisfaction. Thus, our study addresses a significant gap when it examines the SWB of SIE in Germany.

On the other hand, Nigerians have consistently discussed expatriation as a means to find a better job and overcome economic hardship (Isbell & Ojewale, 2018). In their study, they found that one out of three Nigerians has considered emigration. Thus, this is an interesting group to examine as this group is expected to contribute continually to the expat pool around the world. From the SIE perspective, Germany might not be considered as a natural destination for Nigerian SIEs as, unlike other European countries, Germany has no colonial history with Nigeria. Similarly, there are no linguistic ties with German (Mair, 2020). Yet, Nigerians have consistently chosen Germany as a destination to relocate to and continue to be one of the largest Sub-Saharan African groups in Germany. Hence, it is pertinent to examine the Nigerian SIE in Germany.

The current paper attempts to bridge this gap and focuses on the determinant factors of the SWB of the Nigerian SIEs in Germany, looking at the individual, group, organizational, and societal factors. These determinant factors can either enhance SWB or reduce it. Our study attempts to contribute to the literature by analyzing a *comprehensive* array of variables at multiple levels. Moreover, it provides insights related to SIEs from a developing country (here, Nigeria) working in a developed country (here, Germany). The rest of the paper is organized as follows. First, we present the literature review and our conceptual model for analysis. Next, the data and methodology are presented, which is followed by the results section. Following this, we have the discussion section, and lastly, we conclude our study.

2 | LITERATURE REVIEW

This section will explore the various factors that underpin the Subjective Well-Being of the expatriates in a country. The extant literature eludes four potential sets of factors that can influence Subjective Well-Being: personal, group, societal, and organizational.

2.1 | Subjective well-being

Subjective Well-Being is a broad construct that includes aspects of individuals' positive and negative affective responses, their satisfaction with specific aspects of their lives (e.g., work and family), and global judgments of life satisfaction (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). SWB is the cognitive and the affective aspect of an individual's life. SWB is the interplay of body, mind, and spirit within a dynamic environment (Leung, Cheung, & Liu, 2011). Frey and Stutzer (2002) added that SWB refers to an individual's evaluation of experienced positive and negative affect, happiness, or life satisfaction.

Past research has indicated that SWB is one of the core psychological constructs which helps an organization develop a better understanding of peoples' values, behavior, and satisfaction and, in turn, helps control economic costs of unhappy employees in terms of job satisfaction and job performance (Chang, Gong, & Peng, 2012; Çule & Fulton, 2012; Diener, Sapyta, & Suh, 1998; Schimmack, Radhakrishnan, Oishi, Dzokoto, & Ahadi, 2002). If an organization understands the factors which affect the SWB of an employee, the control can be extended to creating an environment that symbiotically supports SWB and human resource competence. However, being an emotional construct, understanding the SWB construct is a difficult task because of the construct's subjectivity.

Emotions are universal and partially biologically determined, yet they are always situated and embedded in specific cultural contexts (Uchida, Norasakkunkit, & Kitayama, 2004). Research has indicated that the construct of SWB being an emotional state is more frequently influenced by differences in social relationships, societal level differences, wealth, public health indicators, access to democratic institutions, and enjoyment at work, culture, and personality (Busseri, Choma, & Sadava, 2011; Diener & Diener, 2000; Diener & Seligman, 2004; Schimmack et al., 2002).

Researchers through cross-cultural studies have indicated that SWB in people from Asian cultures tends to be at lower levels of life satisfaction and positive affect than North Americans (Diener, Diener, & Diener, 1995; Kitayama, Markus, & Kurokawa, 2000). The research has also established that people with an independent social orientation view themselves as metaphysically discrete and separate from other persons with an orientation toward autonomy and differentiation, which in turn affects SWB (Kitayama et al., 2000). This subjectivity of the construct makes the case of understanding SWB of human resources, which travels across cultures, endures differences in social relationships, societal level differences, and wealth even more complex.

In the literature, a bulk of research has investigated the relationship of SWB on various organizational and management indicators like

job satisfaction, performance etc. (Bergman & Daukantaite, 2006; Çule & Fulton, 2012; Diener et al., 1998; Downie, Koestner, & Sook, 2007; Nicherson, 2007; Salanova, Cifre, & Martin, 2004). Some of the research work has also studied the role of various factors in subjective well-being such as demographic variables (e.g., gender, age, marital status, income, education, social class, religion, etc.), external factors (e.g., life events, work, leisure time activities, etc.), or/and some psychological factors (e.g., social relationships, attachment styles, self-concept, etc.) (Argyle, 2003; Myers, 2003). However, these studies have not taken a comprehensive view of these factors, and the issues in the context of expatriation have not been fully explored.

2.2 | Personal antecedents of subjective Well-Being

The personal antecedents of SWB in the expatriation context are factors that are unique to an individual like age, gender, marital status, leisure, whether the spouse is a host country national (HCN) or not, personal health, personality, children, aspirations, income growth. Examining 41 countries using data from the World Value Survey from 1995 to 1997, it was indicated that for happiness and life satisfaction, good health, close social relations, the financial wealth of a country, political freedom, the extent of a welfare state, and financial satisfaction were crucial (Haller & Hadler, 2006). Various researchers have indicated that a high level of wealth brought about comfort (Haller & Hadler, 2006; Nieboer, Lindenberg, Boomsma, & Bruggen, 2005; Ormel et al., 1999). The comfort of living in the host country included both the social and physical well-being like not feeling homesick all the time, feeling comfortable around HCN, being physically fit, and having some material possessions that could give an individual some levels of life satisfaction. Researchers have indicated income as an essential factor for enhanced SWB (Becchetti & Rossetti, 2009; Cummins, 2000; Yang, 2008). D'Ambrosio, Jäntti, and Lepinteur (2020) observed from their study that permanent income and wealth are better predictors of life satisfaction than current income and wealth.

However, it is crucial to mention here that Easterlin (1974), in his Easterlin Paradox, stated that higher income does not necessarily mean increased happiness on the societal level even though there was an increased Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita. He demonstrated that there was a marked positive association between income and happiness within nations more than it was across nations and, an increase in income results in an increase in happiness until a point is reached when a further increase in income does not result in any marked increases in happiness (Easterlin, 1974). Diener and Biswas-Diener (2002) and later Stutzer and Frey (2004) supported this argument by showing that increments in the income of middle or upper-class individuals living in wealthy countries will not increase their SWB (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2002; Stutzer & Frey, 2004). Linssen, Van Kempen, and Kraaykamp (2011), examining data on 697 individuals in rural India, showed that income does not enhance SWB. However, despite this divergent view, the consensus amongst researchers exists that income had a marked association with happiness.

A review of the literature indicated that, at a personal level, there was a negative correlation of happiness with various issues like inequality, inflation, unemployment, and criminality, while not being divorced and long life expectancy had a positive correlation with happiness (Rynko, 2009). Furthermore, the same study found evidence that higher or better values for factors like work-life balance, age, health, family life, gender, race, nationality, education, employment, religion, personality traits, and amount of leisure time higher the SWB. For example, Lee, Grace, Sirgy, Singhapakdi, and Lucianetti (2018) observe the work-life balance's influence on the employee's life satisfaction and happiness.

Other studies have evidenced that SWB is influenced by education (Helliwell, 2003), life aspirations (Headey, 2008; Helliwell, 2003), personality, social status, and aspirations (Knight, Song, & Gunatilaka, 2009). Similarly, research has noted the importance of marital status on SWB (Becchetti & Rossetti, 2009; Haller & Hadler, 2006; Joshi, 2010; Putnam, 2000, 2001; Selmer & Lauring, 2011; Stutzer & Frey, 2006; Yang, 2008). These studies indicate that marriage brings happiness to people by providing that first, immediate companionship which an individual needs. This proximal support is incomparable in the expatriate setting, where the individual is experiencing major changes in their life and work.

The level of SWB an individual has is also determined by how happy the spouse is. In the case of an expatriate, spouse happiness plays a significant role in the stability of the home. Problems could emanate from the home if the spouse is not happy, and this will lead to a drop in the overall SWB in that home. A consequence of this could be divorce or separation of the couple. Spouse job status could also be a factor in SWB. Van der Zee, Ali, and Salome (2005) demonstrated in a study that not having an adequate balance between demands at home and demands at work has an effect on the SWB of an expatriate and the spouse. These researchers indicated that a negative emotional effect runs from the SWB of one partner to the SWB of the other (Van der Zee et al., 2005). Gröpel and Kuhl (2009) supported this when they tested the hypothesis that an adequate amount of time available for social life increases the SWB because it enhances the satisfaction of personal needs (Gröpel & Kuhl, 2009).

Thus, we observe that several personal-level factors directly impact the SWB of the SIE, and these factors range from the influence of domestic matters to personal issues.

2.3 | Group-level factors of subjective Well-Being

Typically, many expatriates find home comforts in a foreign country by associating with other home country expatriates. Similarly, other expatriates find support networks within host country citizens to develop their language skills or find employment. Researchers have indicated that social capital or social relations are determinants of SWB (Bayraktar, 2019; Becchetti & Rossetti, 2009; Chen, 2010; Gröpel & Kuhl, 2009; Joshi, 2010; Kang & Shen, 2018; Mamdouh & Harold, 2008; Singh et al. (2021); Varma, Mathew, Wang, Budhwar, & Katou, 2021). Thus, these group-related factors can impact the SWB of

the individual through social relations like with their supervisor at work, their co-employees, their spouse, socializing with the home country and other nationals living in the host country, the frequency of home country visits, spousal encouragements and support, supervisor's support towards host-country language development and educational advancement, and the number of host country friends. Focusing specifically on the SIEs, Singh et al. (2021) note the salience of host country nationals' support for the SIEs to adjust to their work environment. Ballesteros Leiva, Poilpot-Rocaboy, and St-Onge (2018) have noted the positive impact of the organizational support, especially that of the co-worker, on the SIEs' perception of conflicts within their work context.

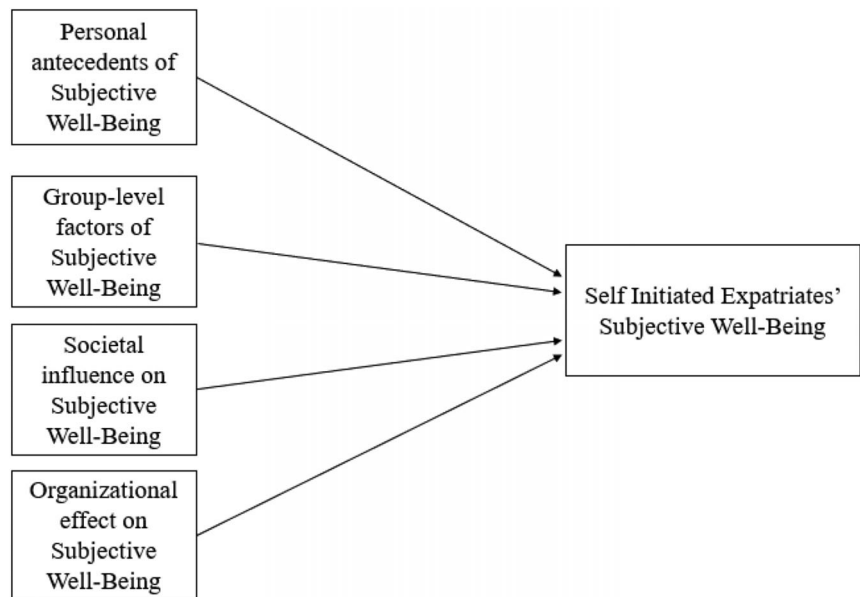
The social capital–network theory (Inkpen & Tsang, 2005; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998) suggests that the members of a network as points in the network and they are all connected together by lines and ties. Putnam (2000, 2001) has shown the measures of SWB with individual and societal level factors to point out the relation between social network relationships, health, income, and marital status to the individual SWB. Helliwell (2003) found that social capital enhances SWB at the individual level and that there is a positive relationship between the levels of connectedness and SWB. Claus, Lungu, and Bhattacharjee (2011) saw social capital as the degree of connectedness, bringing different individuals together where they can influence one another. They also demonstrated evidence that the local language skill of a host country is important for an expatriate adjustment which will undoubtedly increase SWB. Hence, we note that there are several group-level factors ranging from work-related relationships to personal social relations that might drive SIEs' SWB.

2.4 | Societal influence on subjective Well-Being

The SWB of an individual can be influenced by the variables related to society in the host country like equality at work and school, socialization, comfort level and Stress living and working in the host country. Studies have also shown that inequality is negatively related to happiness (Alesina, Di Tella, & MacCulloch, 2004; Chen, 2010). Studies have shown evidence that equality enhances the SWB of individuals (Haller & Hadler, 2006; Mamdouh & Harold, 2008; Rynko, 2009). Tsai (2000) indicated that a central positioning in a network, which is an important part of social capital, can enhance an individual's employment possibilities.

Biggart and Castanias (2001) also pointed out in their findings that individuals use social relationships to generate information that is useful to the individual (Biggart & Castanias, 2001). The individual-level social and socio-cultural integration of a person is highly relevant for happiness (Haller & Hadler, 2006). Literature has shown that there are three dimensions of Social Capital (Inkpen & Tsang, 2005; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998; Tsai, 2000; Tsai & Ghoshal, 1998; Yli-Renko, Autio, & Sapienza, 2001). These are trust and trustworthiness, positioning of an individual in the network and lastly, cognitive dimension deals with the share of values, norms, background, vocabulary, narratives that members in a network exhibit. These 'social capital' dimensions state that the members of a social group must know each other and have respect and trust for the rest of the members.

FIGURE 1 Factors influencing self initiated expatriates' subjective well-being



Research also indicated that comfort was a determinant factor of SWB. It comes in the form of social and physical well-being, for example, not feeling homesick, feeling comfortable around HCN, being physically fit, not having pains, and having some material possessions that could give an individual some life satisfaction levels. Therefore, the more diverse the relationship one builds, the better in terms of the support received. These supports can be very helpful, especially during times of stress as SIEs live and work in the host country. Thus, several of these societal factors can greatly influence the SWB of SIEs in the host country.

2.5 | Organizational effect on subjective Well-Being

Another category of factors found to influence the SWB of an individual were job-related variables like job satisfaction, job status, employment status, number of years employed, spouse employment status, and education. Spieß and Stroppa (2010), in their study, examined the effects of social support on the satisfaction and stress of 127 expatriates. They showed that the sources of support could come from family, friends, co-workers, and superiors or supervisors at work. The support from superiors at work is more instrumental and helps reduce stress which in turn leads to higher job satisfaction, while the support from family and friends enhances their SWB. Yet, the finding on organizational support's role to enhance the SIE SWB is not particularly robust as Ballesteros Leiva et al. (2018) have noted no significant influence of the organizational support on SIEs within their work context.

The conceptual model used in this research is presented in Figure 1. In this study, we consider the impact of four contextual factors on the SWB of the SIEs. These factors, namely, personal, group,

societal and organizational, will either enhance or diminish the SWB of SIEs.

3 | METHODOLOGY

3.1 | Data

We collected data for this study via a survey that we developed based on an extensive review of the SWB literature. Our survey comprised of 49 questions, of which one question related to SWB (our dependent variable) and the remaining 48 questions related to influences in the Personal, Group, Societal, and Organizational categories ($n = 29$) as well as control variables ($n = 19$). To ascertain the validity of our data, we ran confirmatory factor analysis on all 29 independent variables in the four categories noted above. Based on factor loadings of 0.70 or higher, we identified 24 “usable” independent variables (10, 4, 5, and 5 variables in the Personal, Group, Societal, and Organizational categories respectively). We considered only these 24 shortlisted independent variables in additional analysis. We did not conduct factor analysis on the set of 19 controls because these variables were not of direct interest to our study. We ignored four of these 19 controls from further consideration as they seemed to be better represented by some of the remaining 15 control variables. For example, the variable “Income” better represented the respondent's economic status than “Number of cars owned” variable. Thus, our final dataset consisted of 24 independent and 15 control variables, plus the dependent variable. Due to limitations on manuscript length, our appendix only describes 16 independent and nine control variables that were statistically significant in our main analysis. However, details about the full list of variables and factor analysis results are available upon request.

3.2 | Sample

After pilot-testing our 49-item survey and making necessary modifications, we administered it to a sample of Nigerian expatriates in Germany in English. Contemporary studies have noted that Nigerian expatriates continue to use English after expatriation (Mair, 2020). Our focus on this group was due to the personal interest of one of this study's authors on whose Master's project this manuscript is based. Given the survey's length, we ruled out administering it via an online platform. Instead, we conducted the survey "in-person" to increase our sample size and address potential queries from respondents. Due to resource constraints, we focused on three German states where we had the highest access to the Nigerian expatriate community: Baden-Wurttemberg (in the southwest), Bavaria (in the southeast), and Lower Saxony (in the northwest). Consistent with our objectives, we administered the survey only to self-initiated expatriates (as opposed to organizational expatriates) and collected 377 usable responses.

3.3 | Methods

In addition to factor analysis, we conducted a stepwise regression analysis, which has also been employed in previous work (e.g., Park, Oh, & Choi, 2012). This technique represents a systematic approach to model building in cases where many independent variables exist; recall that our study had 24 (shortlisted) independent and 15 control variables. Model building in these situations "...is difficult because the interpretation of multivariable interactions and higher-order polynomials is tedious" (Mendenhall & Sincich, 1986:190). Consequently, an *objective* screening procedure can help to identify salient predictors of the dependent variable (Mendenhall & Sincich, 1986). Indeed, the 'stepwise' regression method for analyzing data has been previously employed in studies with a similar focus (e.g., see Demirbag & Mirza, 2000; Sim & Ali, 1998; Singh & Mahmood, 2017; Xu & Chen, 2017; Yussuf, 2018). In general, stepwise regression *dynamically* computes various parameters with the goal of identifying the most relevant statistical model. This technique begins by

TABLE 1 Regression results—Singular effect of four types of influences on SWB

Types of influence on SWB →	Personal factors	Group factors	Social factors	Organizational factors
Model F-statistic	21.63 ($p < .0000$)	23.67 ($p < .0000$)	72.97 ($p < .0000$)	25.29 ($p < .0000$)
R-square	41.63%	33.98%	61.34%	40.86%
Adjusted R-square	39.70%	32.54%	60.49%	39.24%
Sample size	377	377	377	377
Independent variables				
Homesick	0.0608 ($p < .147$)			
Income growth	0.3032 ($p < .006$)			
Property ownership	0.1752 ($p < .071$)			
Recurrent health issues	0.0720 ($p < .061$)			
Visits to Nigeria	0.1139 ($p < .009$)			
Work-life balance	0.1391 ($p < .000$)			
Encouragement from Nigerians		0.0600 ($p < .083$)		
Comfort level in Germany			0.4356 ($p < .000$)	
Equality at work			0.2474 ($p < .000$)	
Frequency of socialization			0.2456 ($p < .000$)	
Encouragement from boss				0.1492 ($p < .000$)
Number of years employed				−0.0945 ($p < .070$)
Relationship with co-workers				0.2051 ($p < .000$)
Control variables				
Age		0.1286 ($p < .059$)	0.2036 ($p < .000$)	0.2042 ($p < .004$)
Employment status - respondent		0.0891 ($p < .075$)		0.1513 ($p < .002$)
Employment status - spouse			−0.0531 ($p < .111$)	
Fulfillment of purpose	0.3527 ($p < .000$)	0.3920 ($p < .000$)	0.2035 ($p < .000$)	0.3493 ($p < .000$)
German language proficiency	0.2286 ($p < .000$)	0.2852 ($p < .000$)		0.2348 ($p < .000$)
Income bracket	0.1521 ($p < .008$)	0.1173 ($p < .057$)	0.1043 ($p < .020$)	0.1694 ($p < .006$)
Nationality of spouse	−0.1992 ($p < .093$)	−0.2100 ($p < .075$)		
Number of children	−0.1591 ($p < .000$)	−0.2181 ($p < .000$)	−0.2095 ($p < .000$)	−0.2128 ($p < .000$)
Respondent's gender	0.1750 ($p < .136$)			0.1985 ($p < .089$)

Note: Dependent variable = Subjective Well-Being (1 = Low satisfaction, 7 = High satisfaction).

TABLE 2 Regression results—Collective effect of four types of influences on SWB

Model F-statistic	44.55 ($p < .0000$)
R-square	64.93%
Adjusted R-square	63.47%
Sample size	377
Independent variables: Personal factors	
Marital status of respondent	−0.0493 ($p < .060$)
Personal health	−0.0999 ($p < .022$)
Work-life balance	0.0709 ($p < .008$)
Independent variables: Group factors	
Encouragement from Nigerians	0.1150 ($p < .000$)
Independent variables: Social factors	
Comfort level in Germany	0.0561 ($p < .000$)
Equality at work	0.2313 ($p < .000$)
Frequency of socialization	0.2024 ($p < .000$)
Independent variables: Organizational factors	
Encouragement from boss	0.0500 ($p < .021$)
Number of years employed	0.0957 ($p < .021$)
Relationship with boss	−0.0916 ($p < .059$)
Control variables	
Age	0.2008 ($p < .000$)
Fulfillment of purpose	0.1890 ($p < .000$)
German language proficiency	0.1045 ($p < .040$)
Income bracket	0.1512 ($p < .001$)
Number of children	−0.1969 ($p < .000$)

Note: Dependent variable = Subjective Well-Being (1 = Low satisfaction ... 7 = High satisfaction).

considering all specified variables and evaluates the contribution of each variable to the overall model. This technique then discards the variable that least contributes to the model—but “holds” it for possible consideration at a later stage—and reevaluates the contribution of all remaining variables. The process repeats itself until the process finds an optimal model (i.e., when no more variables can be added or dropped from the analysis without statistical deterioration).

3.4 | Models

Our study ran five regression models, one “reduced” model for each of the four categories of SWB influences (Personal; Group; Organizational; Societal) and a ‘full’ model that included variables in all four categories. Such analyses have empirical precedent in the literature (e.g., see Klijn, Reuer, Buckley, & Glaister, 2010). Our analyses thus identify significant variables *within* each category of SWB influences and *across* all four categories. Tables 1 and 2 report these results.

4 | RESULTS

The results in Table 1 showcase the singular effect(s) of each of the four categories of SWB influences. As reported in the table, each of the four regression models is highly significant (all $p < .0000$), with adjusted explanatory power between 33% (for Group factors) and 61% (for Social factors). The adjusted explanatory power of Personal and Organizational factors is approximately 40% each.

In the Personal category, five of six variables retained by the model are significant, usually below or near the 5% level; the sixth variable (Homesick) is not significantly below the 10% level. The five significant variables are: (1) Work-Life balance, (2) Property Ownership, (3) Recurrent Health Issues, (4) Income Growth, and (5) Visits to Nigeria. The positive coefficients of these variables suggest that higher (i.e., more favorable) levels of each of these variables increase favorable perceptions of SWB.

Turning to the Group and Social category of variables, only one variable in the former category (Encouragement from Nigerians) is significant ($\beta = .06$; $p < .083$). In contrast, all three variables in the Social category are highly significant (all $p < .000$): (1) Comfort Level in Germany, (2) Equality at Work, and (3) Frequency of Socialization. These variables, too, have positive coefficients, suggesting that greater comfort, greater perceived fairness in the workplace, and more frequent socialization all improve perceptions of one's own SWB.

Finally, all three organizational variables retained in the model are statistically significant, albeit one variable (Number of Years Employed) has a counter-intuitive sign ($\beta = -.0945$). The remaining two variables, Encouragement from Boss and Relationship with Co-workers, have positive coefficients (both $p < .000$), suggesting that favorable SWB perceptions increase at higher levels of these two variables.

The results in Table 2 strongly reaffirm the findings reported in Table 1, albeit there are some departures in the Personal category of SWB influences. To recall, the results in Table 2 are based on *collective* modeling of Personal, Group, Social, and Organizational variables. This model, too, is highly significant ($p < .000$) and has an adjusted explanatory power of almost 65%. Given the slight departure in findings between Tables 1 and 2, it is instructive to focus on the differences between these two sets of results.

While the *collective* assessment of influences on SWB continues to emphasize the favorable effect of Work-Life Balance ($\beta = .0709$; $p < .008$), Marital Status and Personal Health assume a more central—and somewhat counter-intuitive—role in relation to the statistically significant Personal variables reported in Table 1 (i.e., Income Growth, Property Ownership; Recurrent Health Issues; Visits to Nigeria), indeed, both above-mentioned variables have a negative coefficient ($\beta = -.0493$ and $\beta = -.0999$ respectively).

As reported in Table 2, Marital Status and Personal Health gain more prominence ($p < .06$ and $p < .022$ respectively). For the Marital Status variable, our results indicate a less favorable perception of SWB for “single” respondents ($\beta = -.0493$). Counter-intuitively, a less favorable perception of SWB also emerges when respondents are more satisfied with their personal health ($\beta = -.0999$).

In the Organizational category, Relationship with Boss gains prominence over Relationship with Co-workers (per Table 1, $\beta = 0.2051$; $p < .000$). Surprisingly, a more positive relationship with the boss *decreases* perceptions of SWB ($\beta = -0.0916$; $p < .059$). Likewise, even though the Number of Years Employed continues to be significant in Table 2 ($p < .021$), its relationship with SWB ($\beta = 0.0957$; $p < .021$) is opposite to that found in Table 1 where this relationship was negative. The positive relationship reported in Table 2 suggests that the length of respondents' employment in Germany increases their perceptions of SWB.

5 | DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The results reported above suggest several interesting patterns. One, it is notable that personal, group, social, and organizational factors all play an important role in influencing perceptions of SWB, albeit they do so in varying degrees. In our data, there seems to be a hierarchy among these influences, with social influences being the most potent, followed (concurrently) by personal and organizational influences and (to a slightly lesser extent) group influences. Two, at a social level, it seems that a combination of “acceptance” by peers (denoted by Equality at Work) and the broader society (denoted by Frequency of Socialization) contributes favorably to perceptions of SWB. Such an interpretation of parity appears to be supported by the higher levels of social status, or at least some self-confidence and/or security, exuded via comfort level Nigerian SIE experiences in Germany.

Three, our results suggest at least three dimensions of personal influences on SWB: (1) a *financial wellness* dimension suggested by ownership of more property and income growth, (2) a *family wellness* dimension suggested by fewer recurrent health issues, low level of homesickness, and more visits to the home country, and (3) an *individual wellness* dimension suggested by greater work-life balance. Consequently, it would be prudent to view “person” as being much more than “self” in relation to perceptions of well-being.

Four, at an organizational level, it is obvious that more favorable perceptions of SWB are influenced by positive vertical and lateral relationships. While a supportive supervisor and good rapport with peers are important in any organizational setting, these factors resonate even more intensely when self-initiated expatriates are involved. Yet, the above findings muddle our understanding of why a longer employment duration (not necessarily in the same organization) lowers perceptions of SWB. Perhaps this finding is merely a statistical anomaly. Perhaps the finding suggests a career-related issue, such as burnout or (perceived) stagnation.

Finally, somewhat surprisingly, our results indicate that encouragement from fellow home-country nationals is the most salient ‘group’ support that augments perceptions of SWB. It is likely that this bridge-building mechanism offers psychological reinforcement which “carries” self-initiated expatriates. Indeed, it is likely that both trust of fellow countrymen and women and their empathy may be “in play” at a group-level, creating a strong embrace within the home-country

community. Such bonds can offer communal safeguards and render expatriation challenges more palatable.

The above-mentioned patterns mostly hold true even in the collective assessment of various influences on SWB (i.e., Table 2). This is particularly the case for Group and Social influences. This robustness hints at the fundamental role of these two “soft” categories on the SWB of self-initiated expatriates in our study. Similar robustness also exists for Personal and Organization influences, but there are some notable differences. In the latter category, the lateral relationship (with co-workers) is replaced by a vertical relationship (with job supervisor or manager) and with a counter-intuitive sign. A more positive rapport with the boss *decreases* perceptions of SWB, an outcome we have difficulty reconciling. Interestingly, the length of employment (not necessarily in the same company) now exerts a favorable SWB effect suggesting that—in a bigger picture—the expatriates' longer tenure suggests that expatriates in our study may be “settling down” in the host country.

Perhaps the most visible departure in Table 2 pertains to two previously excluded Personal influences: (1) respondents' marital status and (2) respondents' personal health; the favorable role of Work-Life Balance remains unchanged. In our sample, being “single” lowers SWB perceptions, hinting at the sanctity of a family bubble that can insulate the self-initiated expatriates from the daily rigors of their international assignment. Another anomaly pertains to the *negative* impact of respondents' greater satisfaction with their personal health on SWB. Our conjecture is that superior health may drive self-initiated expatriates to “want to do more” than they presently are and that this “Held back” effect, while seemingly negative, could, in fact, be a symptom of these expatriates' untapped/latent potential.

5.1 | Implications for theory

From our findings, we derive two theoretical implications based on the gaps in the literature in the following areas, one, the confluence of factors that impact SWB has been understudied in the SIE literature, and two, specifically, the role of societal influences on the SWB of the SIEs. Our findings have implications for theory on SWB of the SIEs (Froese & Peltokorpi, 2013; Mäkelä et al., 2017; Waibel et al., 2018; Presbitero, 2020; Marques et al., 2021). It has been observed that an unhappy and dissatisfied employee cannot work effectively (Gustainiene & Endriulaitiene, 2009). From our findings, it is clear that this satisfaction in the foreign location is driven by many underlying factors that emerge from social (Alesina et al., 2004; Chen, 2010), group (Bayraktar, 2019; Kang & Shen, 2018; Singh et al., 2021; Varma et al., 2021), individual (D'Ambrosio et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2018), and organizational level (Spieß & Stroppa, 2010), with social factor having the most impact on the SWB. From the theoretical point of view, our study is amongst the first to consider these distinctions between various drivers of SWB and test their relevance together in an empirical setting. Earlier studies have considered one or two of these factors together in the study of SWB. Since in this study we consider all the four characteristics together, we are able to provide a much-nuanced

contribution to the theory on SWB and help determine the crucial factors that influence SWB of the SIEs. The theoretical gap in understanding of the role of societal factors in the SWB of the SIEs is noted, and our work provides an exploratory view on the importance of social support, especially equality, in the host country (Haller & Hadler, 2006; Mamdouh & Harold, 2008; Rynko, 2009).

5.2 | Implications for practice

As our study finds, all factors, personal, group, social, and organizational, are crucial for the SWB, and also that some factors are more important than others. This has important practical implications, in the sense that firms hiring these expatriates need to adopt a more holistic view of their employees' SWB considering both personal aspects as well as organizational aspects that might impact their SWB. At the same time, these multiple layers of policies and practices can increase the cost of HR management within the organization, and for this, we suggest that at least as a minimum, the firms should focus on the social aspects that can improve the SWB as this was found to be most critical for the SWB. As these social aspects pertained to a combination of "acceptance" by peers and the broader society, firms can improve their socialization and integration process for their expatriate employees. Furthermore, organizations can devote efforts to improving the visibility of the contribution of their expatriate employees to the local community. The recent wave of nationalization, racism, and migration-phobia has shown that it is imperative for organizations to highlight the contribution that migrant employees make, and as an extension of this work, their employees would experience higher SWB. Also, our work indicates that expatriates continue to value self and family in their SWB, and as such, firms should devote efforts to improving their flexible work arrangement practices, especially in the earlier stages of expatriation when the employees are settling themselves and their families in the new foreign location. The results also show that it is incumbent on managers to take ownership of the SWB of their employees, at least in the context of work. This is very much true to create processes and practices that prevent employee burnouts and diminish SWB.

5.3 | Future avenues for research and limitations

Future studies can focus on, for example, the gender differences in the SWB of the SIEs or age-related differences in the SWB of the SIEs. Similarly, we focus only on one country context and one home country employee, and future studies can improve the generalizability by covering responses from various home and host countries. Also, we do not consider the temporal aspect of expatriation in this study, and we would suggest that scholars can focus on the dynamics of SWB in the SIEs as this can cast light on the factors that might be relevant in the earlier stages of expatriation as compared to those in the later stages of expatriation and repatriation. The other temporality not considered in this study relates to the waves of migration that the

country experiences and how SWB of the expatriates can vary with more migration from their home country or reduction in the migration from the home country.

There are a few limitations of this study that can also be addressed by future research. For example, we ask respondents to self-select themselves as SIE but do not control for OEs who might position themselves as SIE. Although this is standard practice, we would suggest that future studies can collect more organizational and expatriation journey information, which can help narrow any biases in the study.

6 | CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, our work suggests a complex, multi-level, multi-dimensional structure underlying the subjective well-being of respondents in our sample. Indeed, it is evident that greater perceived SWB has a strong social component to it and that several other positive drivers of this construct also contain elements of softness. Even though such elements may be harder to discern—and harder still to pin down from the perspectives of employers and self-initiated expatriates—these elements seem to be central to perceptions of SWB. It would therefore be useful to consider the *relative* impact of "masculine" versus "feminine" influences on SWB. Another useful extension would be to survey a wider, more diverse population of self-initiated expatriates. We could not implement this extension as our work is based on a Masters' project with a limited scope. A third extension could consider a gender-centric analysis: do male and female self-initiated expatriates view SWB differently? Our study did not pursue this avenue because of its focus on a single nationality (Nigerians), limiting the nature of insights that could be gleaned from such an analysis. Needless to say, our study is not without limitations—many of them arising from the nature of original work with a finite scope. These limitations must be kept in mind when interpreting our findings and evaluating our conclusions.

ORCID

Rekha Rao-Nicholson  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0254-9569>

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Professor Merchant is an award-winning researcher who works on fundamental issues related to the drivers of company performance, both financial and non-financial performance. His current focus is on small- and medium-sized enterprises around the world. Professor Merchant has written extensively about value creation and the performance implications of strategic architecture for organic growth. He has published in several leading refereed IB/Strategy journals and (co)authored four books. Professor Merchant currently serves as a Consulting editor at Journal of International Business Studies, until recently served as the Editor-in-Chief of Journal of Asia Business Studies and serves on several editorial boards. Professor Merchant has taught in prestigious universities in Asia, Europe, and North America where he has been consistently recognized for his approach to developing enterprise excellence. Prior to joining academia, Dr. Merchant worked for a unit of Reliance Industries Limited, now a Fortune Global 500 company and India's largest private sector conglomerate.

Professor Rao-Nicholson (Ph.D Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies) is a Professor of Management in Essex Business School at University of Essex, UK. Her research interest includes innovation and strategy in developed, emerging, and developing economies. She has published widely, including Research Policy, Journal of World Business, Human Resource Management, International Business Review, International Journal of Human Resource Management.

Originally from Nigeria, Mr. **Eromosele Golden Iheikhena** (MBA, German Graduate School of Management and Law) is the Demand and Supply Planning Manager in one of the world's leading companies in the Power tools and Outdoor equipment industry. He has extensive experience in working with multi-cultural teams from around the world as a result of various management positions he has held in the Logistics and Supply Chain Management divisions in multinational firms.

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APPENDIX A

Details of variables used in the analysis

	Survey question	Scale (only some levels are reported below)
Dependent variable		
Subjective well-being	How satisfied are you currently with your life as a self-initiated expatriate in Germany?	1 = Completely dissatisfied 4 = Neutral 7 = Completely satisfied
Independent variables: Personal factors		
Homesick	How often do you feel homesick?	1 = Always feel homesick 4 = Sometimes feel homesick 7 = Never feel homesick
Income growth	Has your income gone up in the last 1–3 years?	1 = No 2 = Yes
Marital status of respondent	What is your marital status?	1 = Married 2–7 = Single (divorced; single; separated; widower; engaged)
Personal health	How satisfied are you with your current health situation?	1 = Completely dissatisfied 4 = Neutral 7 = Completely satisfied
Property ownership	How many properties (apartments or houses) do you currently own in Germany?	1 = Do not own any property 4 = Own 3 properties 7 = Own 6+ properties
Recurrent health issues	How often do you or anyone in your family have recurrent health issues of any kind?	1 = Always have recurrent health issues 4 = Sometimes have recurrent health issues 7 = Never have recurrent health issues
Visits to Nigeria	Since your arrival in Germany, how frequently do you visit Nigeria?	1 = Never visit Nigeria 4 = Occasionally visit Nigeria 7 = Always (regularly) visit Nigeria
Work-life balance	How often does your work interfere with your personal life?	1 = Work always interferes with personal life 4 = Work sometimes interferes with personal life 7 = Work never interferes with personal life
Independent variables: Group factors		
Encouragement from Nigerians	How often do fellow Nigerians encourage you to further your education and/or mix with other people in Germany?	1 = Never encourage me 4 = Sometimes encourage me 7 = Always encourage me
Independent variables: Social factors		
Comfort level in Germany	How comfortable do you feel living in Germany?	1 = Feel extremely uncomfortable 4 = Neutral 7 = Feel extremely comfortable
Equality at work	In relation to your co-workers, how often are you treated fairly at work by your job supervisor or manager?	1 = Never treated fairly 4 = Sometimes treated fairly 7 = Always treated fairly
Frequency of socialization	How often do you socialize in Germany with people from nationalities other than German?	1 = Never socialize 4 = Sometimes socialize 7 = Always socialize
Independent variables: Organizational factors		
Encouragement from boss	How often does your job supervisor or manager encourage you to further your education?	1 = Never encourages me 4 = Sometimes encourages me 7 = Always encourages me
Number of years employed	How long have you been working since you arrived in Germany?	1 = Working for few years (up to 5 years)

(Continues)

Survey question		Scale (only some levels are reported below)
		4 = Working for some years (16 to 20 years) 7 = Working for many years (more than 30 years)
Relationship with boss	How is your relationship with your job supervisor or manager?	1 = Have extremely poor relationship 4 = Have fair relationship 7 = Have excellent relationship
Relationship with co-workers	How is your relationship with your co-workers?	1 = Have extremely poor relationship 4 = Have fair relationship 7 = Have excellent relationship
Control variables		
Age	What age bracket are you in?	1 = Youngest age bracket (18 to 27 years) 4 = Inbetween age bracket (48 to 57 years) 7 = Oldest age bracket (78 years or more)
Employment status - respondent	What is your employment status?	1 = Retired 4 = Stay at home (searching for employment) 7 = Employed full time
Employment status - spouse	What is your spouse's employment status?	1 = Retired 4 = Stay at home (searching for employment) 7 = Employed full time
Fulfillment of purpose	How much have you fulfilled your purpose of coming to Germany?	1 = Not fulfilled any purpose 4 = Fulfilled enough purpose 7 = Fulfilled all purpose
German language proficiency	How good is your command of the German language?	1 = Extremely poor 4 = Fair 7 = Excellent
Income bracket	What income bracket are you in?	1 = Lowest income bracket (up to € 13,000 annually) 4 = Middle income bracket (between €34,000 and €43,000 annually) 7 = Highest income bracket (above € 64,000 annually)
Nationality of spouse	Is your spouse (or significant other) a German national?	1 = No 2 = YES
Number of children	How many children do you have?	1 = No children 4 = 3 children 7 = 6 or more children
Respondent's gender	What is your gender?	1 = Male 2 = Female