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WORKING OVERSEAS – STRESSES AND SOLUTIONS?
ABSTRACT

The present study investigated whether those preparing for an overseas posting from within a British government department, find it to be a psychologically stressful experience, even though the majority of them perceive it as an attractive and welcome part of the job. Participants were 165 Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) employees – 55 of whom were preparing for an overseas posting, 55 who were frequent travellers and 55 who were a home-based comparison group. They were tested on four separate occasions using a battery of well-validated quantitative and qualitative measures. Participants were in general psychologically robust, in good physical health and appeared to be physically and psychologically well suited for their roles as diplomats.

Nevertheless, those preparing for an overseas posting identified difficulties, and participants in this group showed higher Hassle and Anxiety scores. All groups generally demonstrated good coping skills. Each found work overload to be the biggest stressor in the workplace, followed by relationships with colleagues and supervisors, and adapting to new technology. The majority of the participants were satisfied with the work that they were undertaking, but consistent with other large organisations such as the police service, they preferred to share their problems with friends and family rather than seek professional help. For some, there were concerns about confidentiality in the workplace. By identifying and highlighting the risk factors of psychological stress, future efforts can be made to give pertinent advice and guidance to management and to individuals, in order to minimise physical and psychological ill health both at home and overseas. Findings will be of relevance also, to those who work for other organisations where travel is central to their employment.