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Personal Niches of Parenting Abroad: Social-Ecological Resources and Parental Stress among Hungarian Parents in Western Europe

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Abstract

International relocation can strain family life even when it is planned and voluntary. For parents, moving abroad may require personal adaptation and the maintenance of everyday routines while supporting children's adjustment to a new social and institutional environment. This theory-guided exploratory study examined whether social-ecological resources predict parental stress and satisfaction among relocated Hungarian parents living primarily in Austria, Germany, and France. An online questionnaire was completed by 186 partnered parents with at least one child under 15. We tested a two-by-two model distinguishing more distal and proximal resources, and ecological/material and social/relational resources: perceived neighborhood quality, social ties abroad, home-related experiences, and perceived partner dyadic coping. Partial least squares structural equation modeling showed that home-related experiences were the most consistent predictor. More positive home experiences were associated with higher parental satisfaction and lower parental stress, both before and after adjustment for sociodemographic and relocation-related variables. Social ties abroad showed a weaker negative association with parental stress, whereas perceived neighborhood quality and partner dyadic coping did not show reliable unique associations. The findings highlight the home as a central socio-physical resource in relocated family life and suggest that preventing parental stress abroad should attend to home-making and social embeddedness.

Introduction

International relocation is a demanding life transition, even when it is planned, voluntary, and not tied to emergency migration. Families moving abroad must establish daily life in a new sociocultural setting, often while navigating cultural novelty, disrupted routines, language demands, the loss of familiar support systems, and practical challenges related to housing, work, schooling, and local institutions [1, 2]. This adaptation process unfolds within a social-ecological and personal niche [3, 4], where more distal contextual conditions (such as the availability of social relationships and services in the neighborhood) and proximal everyday resources (for example, close relationships and living conditions) interact with family functioning [3, 5, 6].

For parents, the demands of moving abroad may be heightened because relocation is not only an individual adaptation process but also a caregiving task: parents are expected to support children's emotional, school-related, peer-related, and cultural adjustment while maintaining family routines and their own well-being [7, 8]. Consequently, research on migration and international family mobility has shown that family adjustment, social support, acculturative stress, and parent-child relationships are closely linked to parental stress and adaptation.

Understanding parental stress among relocating parents and its correlates is especially important because parental functioning is part of the ecology of children's adjustment. In immigrant-family research, caring and supportive parenting and parental monitoring have been identified as protective factors, whereas parent-youth acculturative conflict, general parent-youth conflict, interparental conflict, parental withdrawal, and parental mental health problems are linked to poorer youth mental health outcomes [12]. In this sense, parental stress abroad may reflect not only parents' own adaptation burden but also the pressure to regulate, organize, and emotionally support the family transition. Moreover, parental stress may be associated with the resources available within parents' everyday niches.

Neighborhood quality is one of the more distal ecological/material conditions that may affect parental stress and parental satisfaction in multiple ways. Although only a limited number of studies directly examine neighborhood experiences abroad and parental functioning, immigrant-family research suggests that neighborhood characteristics may matter for parental stress. Pei et al. (2023), for example, found that neighborhood economic disadvantage was associated with higher parenting stress among Asian immigrant families, partly through lower social support and cultural-orientation pathways. Perceived neighborhood characteristics may also shape how cultural stress is associated with family members' emotional and behavioral outcomes in recent-immigrant families [13].

Alongside neighborhood-related conditions, social ties abroad may provide important resources for relocated parents. In migration-related research on parental stress, social support is among the most frequently examined protective or mediating factors [9]. Studies of immigrant parents suggest that social support may mediate links between parental stress and positive parenting practices [11], and that it is closely connected with acculturative stress and parenting stress among migrant mothers with preschool children [10]. Recent work on migrant families in Switzerland also highlights the relevance of both local and transnational support networks for parental stress [14].

In the proximal everyday niche, the home environment may serve as a place of recovery, security, familiarity, and control [15]. Migration research conceptualizes home not as a static condition but as an ongoing process of searching for, making, and maintaining home in a new setting [16]. Environmental-psychological research also suggests that home can serve as a restorative setting for worn-out parents, although this function may depend on family and role-related conditions [17]. This idea aligns with the notion of environmental self-regulation and personal niches, in which individuals actively use and shape places, routines, and relationships to regain security and support well-being [3]. Conversely, household chaos and low predictability may undermine child and family functioning in immigrant or migrant-family contexts [18, 19].

Finally, processes within the couple relationship may also play a key role in buffering relocation-related stress and supporting parenting. Dyadic coping, in which partners respond to and cope with stress together, provides a useful, resource-oriented framework for this proximal social/relational domain [20]. In Latino immigrant couples, for example, supportive and shared dyadic coping moderated associations between immigration stress and relationship satisfaction [21]. In immigrant-family research, fathers' emotional involvement and mothers' perceived social support have also been associated with lower maternal parenting stress [22]. In addition, a Hungarian study found that relationship satisfaction was associated in the expected direction with both parental stress and parental satisfaction in a general parent sample [23].

The present study

Despite a growing body of research on relocation- and migration-related parenting, parental stress among Central and Eastern European parents living abroad remains underexplored, particularly in non-emergency migration contexts. This gap is especially relevant given the large-scale migration from Central and Eastern European countries to Western Europe following EU enlargement in the early 2000s, which involved several million individuals of prime parenting age [24].

To understand the factors that may predict parental stress abroad, we propose a two-by-two model that, on the one hand, integrates distal and proximal social-ecological resources within parents' everyday niches, and, on the other hand, distinguishes ecological/material from social/relational aspects. In the present study, more distal ecological conditions are represented by perceived neighborhood quality, whereas more distal social/relational conditions are represented by the perceived strength of social ties abroad. Furthermore, proximal ecological/material resources are represented by home-related experiences, and proximal social/relational resources are represented by perceived dyadic coping provided by the partner.

Consequently, using a social-ecological and personal niche framework, the present study tests whether perceived neighborhood quality, perceived strength of social ties abroad, home-related experiences, and perceived partner dyadic coping predict parental stress and parental satisfaction among relocated Hungarian parents (see also Fig. 1). Moreover, because parental stress and parental satisfaction may also vary by sociodemographic and family-context characteristics, we test whether the hypothesized associations hold after controlling for selected sociodemographic and relocation-related background variables. Previous research suggests that parental stress and satisfaction may differ by factors such as parent gender, age, number and age of children, education, and socioeconomic status [25–27].

Methods

Sample and procedures

This study was conducted as part of a broader research project on the psychological and social experiences of Hungarians living abroad. It received ethics approval from the Ethics Board of Sigmund Freud Private University, Vienna (approval dated 24.9.2025). All methods were performed in accordance with the ethics approval and relevant guidelines and regulations, including the Declaration of Helsinki. Participants were recruited through convenience and snowball sampling, primarily via invitations shared on social media channels and online groups for Hungarians living abroad. Recruitment targeted Hungarian-speaking parents living outside Hungary, in Western Europe, mainly in Austria, Germany, and France. We excluded non-parent respondents from the present analysis.

Participants completed an online, cross-sectional questionnaire administered in Hungarian via the LimeSurvey platform, received written information about the study's aims and data management procedures, and provided informed consent. The questionnaire indicated an expected completion time of approximately 15–18 minutes and assessed parents' experiences related to relocation, social and environmental factors, family, and well-being abroad. The sample includes 186 respondents who reported having at least one child under 15, were in a stable partnership, and provided sufficient valid data on the main study variables. Table 1 summarizes sample characteristics across several sociodemographic and relocation-related dimensions.

Table 1
Sample descriptives

Age		**M**	**SD**	**min**	**max**
		41.07	**6.243**	**26**	**60**
Years living abroad		9.672	6.407	1	31
Years in current home		4.656	3.392	0	0.18
		N		**%**	
Gender	Man	21		11.03	
	Woman	164		88.02	
	Nonbinary	1		0.5	
Education	Elementary level education or lower	1		0.5	
	Vocational school	6		3.2	
	High school graduate	22		11.8	
	Higher-level vocational training	23		12.4	
	College or university level education (or higher)	134		72	
Employment status	University student	5		2.7	
	Employee	125		67.2	
	Freelancer	27		14.5	
	Full-time childcare	14		7.5	
	Unemployed	13		7	
	Other	1		0.5	
	Missing	1		0.5	
Relationship status	Married	151		81.2	
	Cohabiting	34		18.3	
	In committed relationship without cohabitation	1		0.5	
Number of children under 15 years	One child	95		51.1	
	Two children	77		41.4	
	Three children	11		5.9	
	Four or more children	3		1.6	
Host country language proficiency	No practical proficiency	8		4.3	
	Elementary proficiency	24		12.9	
	Intermediate proficiency	62		33.3	
	Advanced proficiency	70		37.6	
	Native proficiency	22		11.8	

Measures

Before administering the psychological scales, participants reported their gender, year of birth, citizenship, highest level of education, current employment status, and relationship status. They also reported whether they lived with children under 15 in the same household, the number of such children, their partner's demographic characteristics (where applicable), the year they moved to their current country of residence, their self-rated proficiency in the host country's language, and their current country of residence. These variables will be used to describe the sample and, where theoretically relevant, as control variables in the predictive models. Unless otherwise indicated, higher scale scores indicate greater levels of the construct.

Parental stress and parental satisfaction

Parental stress and parental satisfaction were assessed with the Hungarian version [23] of the Parental Stress Scale [28]. The Hungarian validation suggested a two-factor solution comprising a 13-item subset that distinguished the Parental Stress and Parental Satisfaction subscales. Both subscales showed good internal consistency and theoretically consistent associations with perceived stress, depression, life satisfaction, parental resilience, and relationship satisfaction. In the present study, participants rated these 13 statements about their feelings and experiences related to their child or children on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree." Items covered both demanding aspects of parenting, such as time, energy, responsibility, role strain, and reduced flexibility, and rewarding aspects, such as joy, closeness, love, and meaning in the parental role. Separate scores for the parental stress and parental satisfaction domains were computed in accordance with the recommendations from the Hungarian validation (Simon-Zámbori et al., 2026).

Perceived neighborhood quality

Perceived neighborhood quality was assessed using four self-developed rating items based on environmental qualities that were associated with well-being [e.g., 29]. Participants evaluated the neighborhood of their current place of residence using 7-point bipolar scales for perceived public safety (1 = very much unsafe, 7 = very safe), public transportation quality (1 = very poor, 7 = very good), availability of local services such as shops (1 = very poor, 7 = very good), and residential density (1 = very crowded, 7 = not crowded). The items were developed to capture qualities of the residential environment that may affect quality of life in a city.

Social ties abroad

Social ties abroad were assessed with four self-developed items concerning the availability of friendships and social connections in the respondent's current place of residence. Participants rated the extent to which they had established friendly relationships with Hungarian-speaking residents abroad, other immigrants or internationally relocated people, and local residents, as well as their overall satisfaction with the social relationships and friendships they had developed abroad. Responses were given on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = "not at all" to 5 = "completely."

Home experiences

Home-related experiences were assessed using six self-developed items referring to the respondent's current home during the previous month [cf. 30]. Three items assessed active agency in shaping the home for recovery, for example, whether respondents had arranged or modified their home in ways that supported their restoration. Three further items assessed the subjective restorative quality of the home, including feeling recovery at home. Responses were given on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = low to 5 = high agreement.

Dyadic coping

Dyadic coping was measured with an 18-item, shortened version of the Dyadic Coping Inventory. The original Hungarian version of the Dyadic Coping Inventory [31] was shortened into an 18-item set focusing on stress communication and positive/supportive and negative responses to stress within the couple [32]. In this study, the partner's perceived dyadic coping responses were used for the analyses, indicating the respondent's perceptions about how the partner typically responds to the respondent's stress. Items were rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = low to 5 = high frequency. Items include supportive behaviors, such as listening, empathy, reframing, problem-solving, and taking over tasks, as well as unsupportive behaviors, such as blaming, minimizing, or helping unwillingly.

Statistical analyses

Given the theory-guided exploratory and pilot nature of the present study, the main hypotheses were tested using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). PLS-SEM was chosen instead of covariance-based SEM because the present study was not designed as a strict confirmatory test of an already established model, but rather as an exploratory examination of theoretically grounded associations between social-ecological resources and parental stress-related outcomes. In this context, PLS-SEM is particularly appropriate for prediction-oriented models, for examining explained variance in endogenous constructs, and for working with complex models in relatively modest sample sizes [33, 34].

The analyses proceeded in two main steps. First, the theory-based model was estimated without control variables. This model included five exogenous predictors: perceived neighborhood quality, social ties abroad, home-related experiences, positive perceived partner dyadic coping responses, and negative perceived partner dyadic coping responses. The two endogenous constructs were parental stress and parental satisfaction.

Second, the model was re-estimated with control variables to examine the robustness of the main associations after adjustment for relevant sociodemographic and relocation-related characteristics. The controlled model included age, years living together with the partner, years living abroad, years living in the current home, host-country language proficiency, number of children, gender, university degree, and active employment status. Gender was coded as 0 = male and 1 = female; other responses were omitted from this dichotomized control variable due to low cell count (n = 1). The number of children was dichotomized as one child versus more than one child in the household. Education was dichotomized according to whether the respondent had a university degree, and employment status according to whether the respondent was actively employed at the time of data collection. We used dichotomizations because several categories had small subsample sizes and would not have formed analytically meaningful subgroups in the present sample.

Before estimating the structural paths, the reflective measurement model was evaluated. Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability indices, and convergent validity was examined using average variance extracted (AVE). Discriminant validity was evaluated using the heterotrait–monotrait ratio [HTMT; 35]. Indicator loadings were inspected to guide item composition refinement. For the structural model, multicollinearity was assessed using variance inflation factors (VIF). VIF values below 5 were considered acceptable. Path coefficients were estimated using bootstrapping with 5000 resamples. Ninety-five percent bootstrapped confidence intervals are also reported.

Model evaluation focused on the size and direction of path coefficients, bootstrapped confidence intervals, two-tailed p-values, effect sizes, multicollinearity, and explained variance. Both R^2 and adjusted R^2 are reported in the tables, whereas adjusted R^2 is emphasized in the text. Effect sizes were evaluated using f^2, with values of approximately .02, .15, and .35 interpreted as lower thresholds for small, medium, and large effects, respectively. Overall model fit indices, including SRMR and RMS theta, are reported descriptively, but they were not used as the sole basis for evaluating the model, in line with current recommendations that PLS-SEM should not be judged by covariance-based SEM fit logic alone [33]. All analyses were conducted in JASP version 0.98.1 [36].

Results

Preliminary analyses

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations among the final scale scores used in the main analyses. The scale scores reflect the item-retention decisions described in the measurement model assessment below. This approach ensures that the descriptive and correlational results correspond to the constructs used in the structural analyses, whilst simultaneously facilitating the assessment of collinearity, a fundamental methodological prerequisite for PLS-SEM. The preliminary correlations indicated that variables representing niche resources were negatively correlated with parental stress, although the magnitude of the associations was low to medium, and, for perceived neighborhood qualities, they did not reach the conventional threshold of significance. Similarly, all niche resources were positively correlated with parental satisfaction; however, only correlations with home-related experiences and positive partner dyadic coping were significant. Interestingly, home-related experiences significantly correlated with all other niche resources in the expected direction.

Table 2
Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlations for study scales

No.		Descriptives				Pearson correlations					
	Variable	M	SD	min	max	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	Parental Stress	2.83	0.89	1.00	4.86	-					
2	Parental Satisfaction	4.64	0.50	2.17	5.00	− .353***	-				
3	Perceived neighborhood quality	5.69	1.10	2.00	7.00	− .099	.077	-			
4	Social ties	3.41	0.96	1.00	5.00	− .311***	.110	.192**	-		
5	Home-related experiences	4.19	0.82	1.33	5.00	− .345***	.329***	.179*	.349***	-	
6	Positive partner dyadic coping	3.51	1.14	1.00	5.00	− .172*	.193**	.074	.020	.286***	-
7	Negative partner dyadic coping	2.08	0.95	1.00	4.67	.149*	− .052	− .083	.029	− .227**	− .679***

Note. Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlations are based on composite scale scores calculated from the final item sets after item-retention decisions. These descriptive statistics and preliminary correlations are not based on the latent construct correlations from the PLS-SEM output.

*** p < .001; ** p < .01; * p < .05

Measurement model assessment

The reflective measurement model was evaluated before interpreting the structural paths. Internal consistency, convergent validity, and discriminant validity indices are summarized in Table 3, and indicator loadings are presented in Table 4. Overall, internal consistency was acceptable for most constructs. Reliability was strong for parental satisfaction, parental stress, positive perceived partner dyadic coping responses, home-related experiences, and social ties abroad. Reliability was weaker for negative perceived partner dyadic coping responses and especially for perceived neighborhood quality. The

neighborhood construct was nevertheless retained in the model for theoretical reasons, but it should be interpreted as a short exploratory index rather than as a fully validated latent construct.

Convergent validity was adequate for parental satisfaction, positive perceived partner dyadic coping responses, home-related experiences, and social ties abroad. AVE was below the conventional .50 threshold for parental stress, negative perceived partner dyadic coping responses, and perceived neighborhood quality. However, these constructs were retained because the study was exploratory, the scales were short, and the constructs were theoretically central to the model.

Discriminant validity was generally acceptable, although the association between positive and negative perceived partner dyadic coping responses approached or exceeded the conventional HTMT threshold. This suggests that the two dyadic coping constructs were closely related in the present data. They were nevertheless retained as separate predictors because they represent theoretically distinct partner-response dimensions. Indicator loadings were inspected to guide final refinement of item composition. See Table 3 for reliability and validity indices and Table 4 for indicator loadings.

Table 3
Measurement model summary for the baseline model

Construct	Retained items	Cronbach's alpha	AVE	Loading range	Measurement note
Parental Stress	7	.839	.411	.427-.813	AVE below .50; all items retained
Parental Satisfaction	6	.905	.604	.666-.885	all items retained
Perceived neighborhood quality	3	.573	.182	.190-.510	item 4 (residential density) removed; weak reliability
Social ties	3	.825	.608	.705-.847	item 1 (ties with Hungarian-speaking residents abroad) removed
Home-related experiences	6	.931	.683	.781-.878	all items retained
Positive partner dyadic coping	5	.890	.562	.642-.826	all items retained
Negative partner dyadic coping	3	.655	.272	.269-.759	all items retained; weak reliability/AVE

Note. Measurement values are from the baseline PLS-SEM output.

AVE was computed from the reported standardized loadings.

Table 4
Indicator loadings retained in the baseline measurement model

Construct	Short item content	Loading	95% CI
Parental Stress	Childcare requires more time and energy than available	.498	.255, .719
	Child as the main source of stress	.513	.236, .742
	Limited free time and flexibility because of the child	.755	.576, .920
	Financial burden of having a child	.427	.190, .642
	Difficulty balancing different tasks because of the child	.622	.401, .786
	Burden of parental responsibility	.754	.558, .922
	Reduced choice and control because of having a child	.813	.635, .962
Parental Satisfaction	Happiness in the parental role	.885	.717, .993
	Willingness to do almost anything for the child	.666	.297, .905
	Feeling close to the child	.700	.484, .886
	Enjoyment of being with the child	.859	.680, .987
	Child as an important source of love	.690	.413, .895
	Great joy in the child	.831	.661, .953
Perceived neighborhood quality	Perceived transportation quality	.510	− .194, .952
	Perceived availability of local services	.499	− .394, .964
	Perceived public safety	.190	− .339, .683
Social ties	Friendships with other immigrants/internationally relocated people	.780	.569, .962
	Friendships with local residents	.847	.691, .972
	Satisfaction with social relationships abroad	.705	.442, .912
Home-related experiences	Home shaped to support restoration	.790	.648, .905
	Home rearranged to support restoration	.839	.691, .960
	Home environment created to support restoration	.781	.617, .955
	Feeling restored at home	.878	.761, .972
	Good mood at home	.878	.719, .991
	Positive effect of home on mental state	.788	.612, .920
Positive partner dyadic coping	Partner helps reframe the stressful situation	.800	.434, .987
	Partner suggests concrete solutions	.642	.164, .934
	Partner listens and tries to understand	.762	.329, .971

Note. The neighborhood and social ties constructs are shown following the item-reduction decisions.

Construct	Short item content	Loading	95% CI
	Partner responds empathically	.702	− .023, .956
	Partner takes over tasks to provide relief	.826	.510, .990
Negative partner dyadic coping	Partner blames respondent for poor stress handling	.759	− .374, .991
	Partner does not take the stressful situation seriously	.411	− .264, .802
	Partner helps unwillingly or reluctantly	.269	− .271, .742
Note. The neighborhood and social ties constructs are shown following the item-reduction decisions.			

All loadings are standardized.

CIs are bootstrapped 95% intervals based on 5,000 resamples

Structural model assessment

Baseline model

The theoretical model was first estimated without control variables (baseline model; Table 5, upper part). Multicollinearity diagnostics revealed no substantial concerns, as all VIF values were below the predefined threshold of 5. The model explained a small-to-moderate proportion of variance in the two outcomes. The adjusted R^2 was .121 for parental satisfaction and .233 for parental stress. RMS theta was .056, and SRMR was .095. Given the exploratory nature of the PLS-SEM framework, these fit indices were considered descriptive rather than decisive criteria for model evaluation.

Table 5
Structural paths in the baseline and controlled models

Model	Outcome	Predictor / control	beta	SE	z	p (two-tailed)	95% bootstrap CI	f^2	VIF
Baseline	Parental Stress	Perceived neighborhood quality	-0.026	0.240	-0.109	.913	-0.505, 0.436	0.002	1.086
		Social ties	-0.281	0.143	-1.968	.049	-0.513, 0.011	0.096	1.285
		Home-related experiences	-0.261	0.121	-2.149	.032	-0.505, -0.045	0.055	1.341
		Positive partner dyadic coping	0.175	0.399	0.438	.661	-0.361, 1.135	0.005	1.526
		Negative partner dyadic coping	0.347	0.416	0.834	.404	-0.319, 1.307	0.008	1.387
	Parental Satisfaction	Perceived neighborhood quality	0.058	0.181	0.320	.749	-0.320, 0.386	< .001	1.086
		Social ties	-0.040	0.126	-0.315	.753	-0.270, 0.182	< .001	1.285
		Home-related experiences	0.366	0.108	3.394	< .001	0.148, 0.557	0.098	1.341
		Positive partner dyadic coping	0.287	0.384	0.748	.454	-0.291, 1.040	0.014	1.526
		Negative partner dyadic coping	0.209	0.422	0.494	.621	-0.470, 1.036	0.002	1.387
Controlled	Parental Stress	Perceived neighborhood quality	-0.003	0.228	-0.015	.988	-0.402, 0.424	< .001	1.102
		Social ties	-0.273	0.157	-1.733	.083	-0.560, 0.024	0.073	1.726
		Home-related experiences	-0.293	0.126	-2.330	.020	-0.520, -0.054	0.093	1.577
		Positive partner dyadic coping	0.128	0.424	0.301	.763	-0.453, 1.099	0.008	1.433
		Negative partner dyadic coping	0.303	0.458	0.661	.509	-0.372, 1.365	0.004	1.252
		Age	0.106	0.131	0.808	.419	-0.151, 0.336	0.013	2.001
		Gender	0.081	0.090	0.890	.373	-0.116, 0.221	0.019	1.055
		Higher education degree	0.159	0.117	1.361	.174	-0.050, 0.393	0.024	1.248
		Active employment	0.111	0.099	1.114	.265	-0.076, 0.291	0.020	1.098

Note. Two-tailed p-values were recalculated from the JASP z-values using $p = 2 \times [1 - \Phi(|z|)]$.

Model	Outcome	Predictor / control	beta	SE	z	p (two-tailed)	95% bootstrap CI	f^2	VIF
		Years living with partner	-0.098	0.127	-0.772	.440	-0.329, 0.137	0.012	1.909
		One child vs more children	0.062	0.110	0.566	.571	-0.119, 0.288	0.001	1.071
		Years living abroad	-0.040	0.130	-0.304	.761	-0.269, 0.233	0.004	2.033
		Years in current home	-0.183	0.133	-1.378	.168	-0.414, 0.085	0.033	2.011
		Host-country language proficiency	0.026	0.135	0.196	.845	-0.259, 0.248	0.005	1.561
	Parental Satisfaction	Perceived neighborhood quality	0.068	0.247	0.275	.783	-0.437, 0.512	< .001	1.102
		Social ties	-0.034	0.175	-0.196	.845	-0.337, 0.288	< .001	1.726
		Home-related experiences	0.368	0.131	2.808	.005	0.118, 0.597	0.093	1.577
		Positive partner dyadic coping	0.282	0.451	0.626	.531	-0.440, 1.202	0.014	1.433
		Negative partner dyadic coping	0.203	0.505	0.402	.688	-0.653, 1.257	< .001	1.252
		Age	-0.064	0.137	-0.467	.640	-0.309, 0.207	0.002	2.001
		Gender	0.032	0.071	0.456	.648	-0.118, 0.145	0.001	1.055
		Higher education degree	0.056	0.132	0.423	.672	-0.199, 0.289	< .001	1.248
		Active employment	-0.113	0.104	-1.084	.278	-0.297, 0.091	0.012	1.098
		Years living with partner	-0.139	0.149	-0.932	.351	-0.411, 0.166	0.013	1.909
		One child vs more children	0.005	0.103	0.047	.963	-0.185, 0.205	< .001	1.071
		Years living abroad	0.059	0.145	0.407	.684	-0.214, 0.338	< .001	2.033
		Years in current home	-0.019	0.126	-0.152	.879	-0.253, 0.227	< .001	2.011
		Host-country language proficiency	-0.059	0.128	-0.465	.642	-0.298, 0.152	0.002	1.561

Note. Two-tailed p-values were recalculated from the JASP z-values using $p = 2 \times [1 - \Phi(|z|)]$.

The confidence intervals are bootstrapped 95% intervals from JASP.

Control-variable coding is described in Methods.

As shown in Table 5, only home-related experiences were significantly associated with parental satisfaction, and the corresponding effect size for this positive association was small. None of the other predictors showed a statistically reliable association with parental satisfaction in the theoretical model.

For parental stress, home-related experiences were negatively associated with stress. Social ties abroad were also negatively associated with parental stress, as expected. However, a two-tailed p-value indicated that this association should be interpreted with caution, and the bootstrapped confidence interval included zero. Thus, the social ties path provides weaker evidence than the home-related experiences path. Perceived neighborhood quality and perceived partner dyadic coping responses were not reliably associated with parental stress in the theoretical model.

Controlled model

The controlled model was estimated as a robustness and adjustment check. The same theoretical predictors were retained, and age, years living together with the partner, years living abroad, years living in the current home, host-country language proficiency, number of children, gender, university degree, and active employment status were added as controls (see Table 5, lower part). All VIF values remained below 5, indicating no problematic multicollinearity. The adjusted R^2 for parental satisfaction was .119, similar to the theoretical model, and did not improve after adding the controls. In contrast, the adjusted R^2 for parental stress increased from .233 in the theoretical model to .333 in the controlled model. This suggests that the control variables, when considered alongside the baseline predictors, explained additional variance in parental stress.

The main pattern of theoretical predictors remained broadly similar after controlling for covariates. Home-related experiences remained positively associated with parental satisfaction and negatively associated with parental stress. Social ties abroad again showed a negative association with parental stress in the expected direction, but the evidence was weaker under two-tailed testing, and the confidence interval indicated uncertainty. The remaining theoretical predictors were not reliably associated with either outcome in the controlled model.

Among the control variables, no effect should be interpreted as strong or definitive. None of the control variables showed reliable associations with parental stress or parental satisfaction when two-tailed p-values were used.

Discussion

To our knowledge, this is among the first attempts to examine distal/proximal and ecological/social resources together in relocated parents. Drawing on socioecological psychological conceptualizations, particularly the notion of personal niche construction, we conducted a theoretically guided exploratory/pilot study. We tested whether proximal and more distal niche resources predicted parental stress and parental satisfaction in a sample of Hungarian parents who had relocated to Western Europe. These niche resources included neighborhood qualities, social ties, and experiences related to the home environment and partnership. Our main assumption was that it is important to understand factors that may predict and possibly prevent parental stress among relocated parents. Relocation abroad, even when planned and controlled, presents specific challenges and stressors that may affect parental functioning and, consequently, offspring well-being. Notably, we also assessed parental satisfaction as an interrelated yet distinct dimension of parental functioning.

Taken together, the results indicate that home-related experiences were the most consistent predictor across both outcomes. More positive home-related experiences were associated with higher parental satisfaction and lower parental stress. Social ties abroad were negatively associated with parental stress, but this association was weaker and less robust, particularly when evaluated using two-tailed p-values and bootstrapped confidence intervals. Perceived neighborhood quality and perceived partner dyadic coping responses did not show reliable unique associations with the two parental outcomes in the multivariate models. The controlled model supported the overall robustness of the home-related findings.

It also suggested that the explanatory value for parental stress increased after adding sociodemographic and relocation-related controls. At the same time, none of the control variables emerged as a robust independent predictor of parental stress or parental satisfaction.

This study demonstrated the importance of home experiences—the possibility of creating and enjoying a restorative environment—in relation to parental functioning. This aligns with previous studies suggesting that home environments and the psychological experience of at-homeness may be important factors in self-regulation and well-being [30, 37, 38], especially in migration contexts [16, 39, 40]. The centrality of home environments as a secure base [41] and as a domain of active, autonomous shaping [3] may become even more explicit in life situations where broader socioecological conditions entail greater uncertainty. Home experiences may be directly linked to parental functioning by influencing the psychological resources available for recovery and stress relief. Moreover, home qualities may affect children's functioning. Through children's functioning, home qualities may also provide indirect feedback to parents about their parenting.

Social ties abroad showed a weak negative association with parental stress. In bivariate analyses, it was also associated with higher parental satisfaction. This may indicate that social isolation abroad is a risk factor not only for individual mental health and well-being [45]. It may also weaken parental self-confidence through the loss of social networks and support systems, overwhelming acculturative stress, and increased reliance on a limited number of close relationships [46–49]. Moreover, social ties may provide informational and practical access to resources that become vital for parents when coping with life-cycle-related challenges, such as navigating institutional demands and possibilities with children [50].

The relevance of social ties, together with the importance of home experiences, may provide a basis for stability and growth in relocated life. Home represents not only a starting point and a secure base but also a meeting place with the outside world. It is a place where "representatives" of the outside world can be invited and welcomed. In this sense, a stable home environment may create opportunities to strengthen social ties and, as a consequence, foster deeper social embeddedness abroad [51]. Future studies can explore how relocated people manage the complex interactions between home quality and sociality.

Despite our assumptions, perceived neighborhood qualities and perceived partner dyadic coping responses did not predict parental stress or parental satisfaction. The neighborhood qualities assessed here included broad aspects such as security and service availability. Although these non-significant results should be interpreted with caution, we assume that future studies may adjust the focus of these constructs. For example, neighborhood qualities were defined broadly and did not refer specifically to parenting or child-rearing practices. It is also possible that, because most respondents were middle-class, highly educated parents, broad neighborhood qualities were less variable in the sample. Finally, parents might have relied on other, more direct resources, such as their homes, that partly compensated for disadvantaged niche aspects.

In this regard, it is important to note that home experiences were associated with all niche resources in the bivariate analyses, including neighborhood qualities and dyadic coping experiences. This may mean that the personal ability to create a restorative home environment abroad, and the resulting home-related experiences, also capture social and environmental aspects of the personal niche. Home, as a socio-physical phenomenon, may reflect the perceived livability of the relocated environment and may be linked to broader processes of social embeddedness abroad.

Limitations

The study was guided by a theoretically grounded social-ecological model. However, the empirical test should be considered exploratory and partially pilot in nature. Therefore, the present findings need to be interpreted in light of several limitations.

First, the cross-sectional design does not allow causal conclusions about the direction of associations. Although the proposed model treats social-ecological resources as predictors of parental stress and parental satisfaction, reverse or

reciprocal associations are also plausible.

Second, several sampling-related limitations remain. We relied on a non-representative convenience sample, with participants recruited through online and snowball sampling. This may have biased the sample toward more connected, educated, or socially active respondents. Self-selection bias and low father participation also limit the generalizability of the findings. By including the dyadic coping construct, we further limited the assessment to partnered respondents. Future studies should aim to capture parental stress as a more gender-balanced family phenomenon.

Third, the sample had an uneven geographical distribution, with respondents primarily living in Austria, Germany, and France. Country-specific institutional, cultural, welfare, school, and housing contexts may shape parental stress in different ways. However, the present sample does not allow robust country-level comparisons. Beyond country-level differences, participants may also have moved abroad for various reasons, including work, family, partnership, lifestyle, study, or economic opportunities. These motives may involve different levels of resources, constraints, and vulnerability, which the present model did not fully separate.

Fourth, our results are partly based on new or self-developed measures. Although some of these measures showed acceptable reliability in the present sample, further validation is needed before stronger conclusions can be drawn. Moreover, the use of relatively short scales may have supported participant involvement, but it may also have limited construct validity.

Fifth, the study relied on parents' self-reports. Partners' perspectives and dyadic processes were not assessed independently. We also did not assess children's adjustment, limiting the conclusions we can draw about family-level mechanisms.

Conclusions: practical aspects and suggestions for future research

Despite these limitations, the study makes an empirical contribution to an underexplored population: parents from Central Europe, specifically Hungary, who raise children after relocating internationally to Western Europe. We aimed to identify resources for parenting abroad and to provide anchor points for understanding elements of parents' niche-construction processes in a new environment. We conclude that the social-ecological model provides an integrative interpretive framework for understanding how internationally relocating parents strive to create new, personally meaningful environments, which we define as personal niches.

Future studies may focus on additional aspects of the broader niche-construction process. Relevant layers may include workplace conditions, childcare systems, legal status, discrimination, transnational family obligations, and children's school experiences [50]. These factors were not examined in the current empirical model. At the same time, future studies may examine home experiences in greater depth. The current study highlighted the primary importance of homes as secure bases for creating livable, less stressful conditions for parenting abroad. Qualitative exploratory studies may help to better understand the related personal and relational processes, including children's adaptation.

Finally, we did not test whether modifying these resources reduces stress. Nevertheless, the findings allow theory-informed suggestions for support programs. Public policies in both sending and receiving countries may focus on providing information about the potential challenges that relocating parents may face and the resources available to them. Specifically, community services could develop programs to support the construction of appropriate living conditions and home-making [39, 47]. Accordingly, individual helping programs may recognize the importance of the broader social-ecological environment and incorporate these aspects into the helping process [cf. 52].

Data Availability Statement

Data are available from the first author upon reasonable request.

Declarations

Competing interests statement

None declared.

Ethics declarations

The study received ethics approval from the Ethics Board of Sigmund Freud Private University, Vienna (approval dated 24.9.2025). All methods were performed in accordance with the ethics approval and relevant guidelines and regulations, including the Declaration of Helsinki. All participants received written information about the study's aims and data management procedures, and provided informed consent.

Author Contribution

TM: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Supervision, Writing - Original Draft, Writing - Review & Editing; GCs: Data curation, Formal analysis, Visualization, Writing - Original Draft, Writing - Review & Editing; MT: Writing - Original Draft, Writing - Review & Editing; CsL: Writing - Original Draft, Writing - Review & Editing ; PS-Z: Methodology, Writing - Review & Editing; LL: Investigation, Project administration; BK-T: Methodology, Supervision, Writing - Review & Editing; VS: Conceptualization, Funding acquisition, Methodology, Supervision, Writing - Review & Editing

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Data Availability

Data are available from the first author upon reasonable request.

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Figures

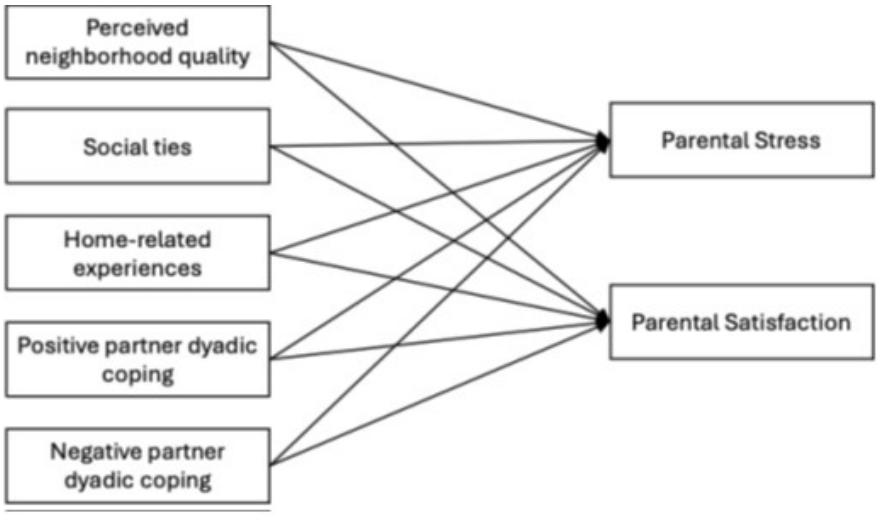


Figure 1

Conceptual model