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## Plight of the trailing spouse

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What happens to you when your partner gets a job overseas? Hannah Edwards finds out.

SO YOUR partner has just scored a job overseas and, after much thought, you have decided to make the big move as well. Initially living overseas sounds exciting and glamorous, but often the reality can be very different, particularly for the "trailing spouse" as partners are referred to in corporate speak.

Settling in to the new locale should be the top priority for both partners as it can be crucial to the success or failure of the new posting, Southern Cross University researchers have found. But it seems few companies are taking spouses into account, usually examining only the employee's performance if the posting fails.

After giving up a job in Australia to move to the US with her husband, Yvonne McNulty found she got increasingly frustrated at not working and her newfound loneliness.

She conducted the research on trailing spouses for Southern Cross University, interviewing only fellow spouses. She found about three or four in 10 relocations involving partners and families failed. At least 80 per cent of the time the failure could be attributed to a lack of family or spouse adjustment.

McNulty wanted to find out what the needs of spouses were before they went overseas, while they were there and after they came back.

Better policies would help reduce the failure rate of overseas postings, she said. And companies should take heed of the findings as a failed posting is an expensive exercise the cost of sending an employee or family overseas is usually three to four times what their salary would be in their home country.

The main difficulties facing trailing spouses:

- \* Human resource departments lacking overseas relocation experience. McNulty said they often don't comprehend the importance of simple requests from overseas workers, such as allowing internet access at home for the spouse.
- \* A lack of acknowledgment from companies that when an employee moves overseas, their family usually goes with them (97pc of employees posted overseas were married). Policies should address family needs.
- \* There is often a lack of communication between the company and the spouse about the move, despite spouses usually organising the move.
- \* Spouses can become increasingly frustrated when the employees' working hours and business travel increase after the move. This leaves the spouse bearing full responsibility for moving and resettling.
- \* Often the spouse cannot work due to visa restrictions. They usually need something meaningful to do. Continuing study is a popular option and the company should chip in for costs.
- \* Spouses are usually aware there'll be losses moving overseas (career, family and friends) but they hope these are balanced by the gains from relocating. Companies can help by providing handy information on the destination to the spouse. To find out more about living overseas with your working partner visit the websites [www.thetrailingspouse.com](http://www.thetrailingspouse.com) and [www.expatexpert.com](http://www.expatexpert.com).

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