

## **European Expatriates in Jordan: Does Age Affect The Ability to Adapt to Arab Culture?**

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*This study examined the relationship between the age of European expatriates and their adaptability to the Arab culture of Jordan using quantitative comparative correlational methods. Data for this study was collected through an online survey collected from 87 European expatriates who are of different age categories and currently working in Jordan. The findings of this study indicate to the significant relationship between the age of European expatriates and their level of adaptability to the Arab culture of Jordan. It was found that European expatriates of the age category of "51 or elder" are more likely to adapt to the Arab culture of Jordan than those of the age of 50 years or younger. This result reinforces previous studies related to the impact of age of expatriates on their cross-cultural adjustment. The limitation of this study is due to the small size of participants who are currently working only in Jordan. Thus, future research might replicate and expand this study to all Arab markets and with a larger number of participants.*

### **1. Introduction**

International Human Resources managers are facing obstacles and challenges related to expatriates performance and selection process. Some of the challenges are related to high turnover, performance, and hesitation of expatriates to accept the assignments. On the other hand, expatriates are also facing several challenges when posted in an international location. Such challenges are related to cultural difference, family adjustment, financial satisfaction, and work performance. One of the most important factors that lead to such complications is the wrong selecting of expatriates and the lack of appropriate criteria to guide and assist international HR managers when selecting an expatriate. While previous research has investigated several areas of expatriates performance, no research was found that investigates the impact of age on European expatriates performance in Arab markets. In particular, European expatriates' age may play a major factor in their success when posted in Arab markets. Thus, to bridge this gap in the knowledge, this study examined the impact of European expatriates' age on their adaptability to Arab culture in Jordan where adaptability is an indicator of work performance. The comparative exploratory correlational approach is employed to reveal the relationship between European expatriates' age and adaptability to the Arab culture of Jordan. Section 2 of the paper will present the important related previous literature then Section 3 will state the hypothesis and research question. Sampling procedures will be explained in Section 4 then followed by Section 5 which presents and examines the used methodology. Section 6 will present the study results, and finally, Section 7 will discuss the conclusion of the study.

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## 2. Related Literature

In the past decades, researchers started to explore the importance of investigating the reasons behind expatriates low performance and high turnover. In 1991, Stone conducted a research to identify the reasons for expatriates' failure due to the poor selection process by international HR managers. The author interviewed and surveyed managers from 60 multinational organizations who are expatriates in different countries around the world. The sampled population included senior HR managers and expatriates who were posted in an international market at the time of the survey. The author concluded that HR managers are not aware of the differences in complexity level between international and domestic hires. It was also argued by Mendenhall, et al. (1987) that, HR managers must take into consideration the differences between domestic and international hire. The problem of failure among expatriates still exists, and the percentage of failures when doing business across different cultures is still high (Conner, 2000; Forster, 2000; Lobel, 1990; Suutari, 2002). According to Suutari (2002), 85 percent of U.S. Fortune 500 companies think they do not have an adequate number of prepared global leaders. The Arab region represents an area with significant economic growth in several industrial sectors. Navigating non-Arab expatriates through Arab markets represents a great cultural challenge, with leadership style becoming a crucial success factor (Wright, 1981).

In a study by Aljbour (2011) to investigate the impact of expatriates' characteristics on work performance in the Arab markets, the author conducted extensive research to measure the impact of characteristics, task complexity, and cultural training on expatriates' performance. After distributing and collecting surveys from 175 non-Arab expatriates who were working in the United Arab Emirates, the author concluded to the fact that, non-Arab expatriates' performance is directly affected by their personal characteristics. It was also suggested that international HR managers must take into consideration psychological tests to identify candidates' personality fit with Arab culture when selecting expatriates to work in any Arab market.

Selmer et al. (2009) examined the relationship between expatriates age and their work performance in the Chinese market. The authors reviewed the literature to uncover the previous researches related to the relationship between expatriates' age and their actual performance in the host countries. The authors indicated the impact of culture on the perception of age in China and the role that may play in expatriates success and satisfaction in the host country. To collect data from expatriates in Greater China of Hong Kong, China, Singapore, and Thailand, the researchers distributed paper and online survey along with personal contact interviews with valid responses of 212 replies. After analyzing the results to measure the relationship between expatriates' age and work performance using Likert-type scale, the authors found that age plays a significant factor on expatriates' performance in Greater China. It was found that, since Chinese culture pays more respect to the elderly, such respect may play as a supportive tool to assist expatriates in performing better at their work.

McEvoy and Buller (2013) research intended to assist international HR managers in identifying reasons behind the low performance and involvement of expatriates in cross-cultural training programs. The authors reviewed the previous literature and also conducted several interviews with international HR managers to answer the research questions and identify the challenges

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faced by them. Previous researchers emphasized the importance of the selection and recruitment process on the success of expatriates. However, most organizations are still selecting candidates based on their technical competencies only. The authors interviewed international HR managers from seven multinational organizations who are responsible for 300 expatriates posted in 40 different countries. To assist in generalizing the results, the authors incorporated survey results of 660 international HR managers from previous researches. The authors indicated that international HR managers face several difficulties which are not yet discussed in the literature such like the difficulty of convincing candidates to accepting expatriates offers, reaching to an agreement on the financial compensation, and the lack of interest of expatriates and their families to enroll in cross-cultural training.

Aljbour et al. (2013) conducted a research to measure the impact of cross-cultural training on performance of non-Arab expatriates in Arab markets. The authors collected data from expatriates of different ages who are posted in various Arab markets through an online survey. The authors surprisingly found no significant influence of expatriates' cross-cultural training on expatriates' performance in Arab markets.

Tye and Chen (2005) explored the decision-making process of international HR managers when selecting an expatriate for an international assignment. They investigated the impact of several factors, such as characteristics, gender, and technical skills, on the decision of HR managers of hiring expatriates. The findings indicated that HR managers are attempting to measure candidates by their international experience, extraversion, and stress tolerance when making decisions to hire expatriates.

Aljbour and Hanson (2015) conducted a research to examine expatriates' performance differences between their previous assignments and their post in the United Arab market. The authors conducted a survey design non-experimental research by sending the survey to 325 participants who were working in Arab markets. After collecting the data and analyzing it, the authors concluded that task complexity of expatriate assignment in Arab markets is higher than other markets. International HR managers must take into consideration that Arab culture represents a more challenging market than others and selecting expatriates must take into consideration both personal and professional characteristics of expatriates before deploying them to an Arab market.

Doing business in Arab markets is different than other markets, and expatriates who are successful in other markets are not necessarily going to succeed when posted in an Arab market (Neal, Finlay & Tansey, 2005). The cultural differences between Arab culture and European culture are great, and HR managers must take those differences into consideration when selecting an expatriate for an Arab market. According to Hofstede Center for Cultural Dimensions (2015), the dimension of time orientation for the Arab region is recorded at 7-16 out of 100 which is very low. That means people in such society have a strong concern for traditions and respect for the older people. The Arab region is also recognized under the past orientation (Short-term Orientation) dimension in which respect is shown for ancestors, predecessors, and older people. On the other hand, European countries' score is ranging from 50-86 which is very high. That means European society is not rigid to culture and have high flexibility when dealing with differences.

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Elsaman and Arafa (2012) conducted a research to explore the Arab society responsibility for the elderly population. The authors mentioned the relationship of Arab traditions and Islamic region with their respect to their parents, grandparents, and the elder persons. The authors reviewed several religious and cultural practices from Islam and the Arab culture to investigate the demands and obligations of Arab toward the older people. It was found that Arab culture and Islam forces obligations to all members of the society to respect and obey the older people. The finding also explained that the older people of parents, relatives, neighbors, friends, and others have the right of respect and priority over younger population in the Arab society.

Anwar and Shaker (2003) indicated that one of the main reasons behind the failure of non-Arab expatriates in the Arab markets is due to cultural differences, and there is no indicator that Arab culture is changing or adapting to any other culture. The authors mentioned that "It is interesting to observe that although the business culture of the U.A.E. is in transition, the society still retains traditional Islamic and Arabian values" (2003, p. 54).

Aljbour (2015) conducted a quantitative non-experimental research by sample European expatriates who are working in Jordan. The purpose of the study was to identify the impact of gender of European expatriates on their performance. The author concluded female European expatriates might perform less than their counterparts when assigned in an Arab market. There are minimal efforts among researchers to investigate the impact of age on expatriates' performance, and international HR managers are not taking age as a factor when selecting expatriates. No research was found that explains the relationship between age and performance of European expatriates in the Arab markets and this represents a gap in the literature.

### 3. Hypothesis and Research Question

This research was conducted to fill the gap in the literature related to the relationship between age and performance of European expatriates in Arab markets. The purpose of this research is to assist international HR managers in making the right decision when selecting European expatriates for posts in Arab countries. Moreover, a study by Selmer et al. (2009) revealed the relationship between age and expatriates performance in China, and that raises the question of such relationship between European expatriates' age and their performance in Arab markets. This finding highlights the need to investigate the role of European expatriates age on their performance in Arab markets. Therefore, the following hypothesis is tested in this study:

**H<sub>1</sub>:** Age of European expatriates significantly influence their adaptability to Arab culture.

The study will answer the following research question which was not answered by any previous study:

**RQ<sub>1</sub>:** Does age of European expatriates significantly influences their adaptability to Arab culture?

### 4. Sample and Procedures

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To test the hypothesis mentioned above, 87 European expatriates who are currently working in Jordan were recruited for this study. They came from United Kingdom, Hungary, Bulgaria, Ireland, France, Italy, and Germany. Due to the small size of the Jordanian market, the number of European expatriates who are currently working in Jordan is not identified but is assumed small. Thus, this sample size is deemed acceptable and the participants representative of the population of interest.

The data was collected via an online survey distributed by email, whereby a link to the website was sent to 300 expatriates' email addresses. To filter the responses, a demographic section was included, allowing the nationality and age of the participants to be determined. To increase the response rate and protect the respondents, the participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Two weeks after sending the initial email, a reminder email was sent to encourage more participants to contribute to the study. As three weeks after the first invitation email 137 responses were received, the survey was closed. However, after filtering the completed surveys by respondent's nationality, 87 participants remained, corresponding to 29 percent response rate. These 87 surveys were stored in a secured file for further analysis.

## 5. Methodology

This research is a comparative exploratory correlational study, aiming to examine the relationship between European expatriates' age, as an independent variable, and their ability to adapt to the Arab culture of Jordan, as a dependent variable. A survey questionnaire was distributed to European expatriates who are working in Jordan during the months of August and September of the year 2015. The two-part questionnaire was used to measure variables related to age and the level of adaptability of European expatriates to the Jordanian. The first part of the questionnaire sought to obtain demographic information and included items about the respondent's nationality and age which was used to filter responses and analysis. The participants were asked to select one age category out of five. The first category was the age of fewer than 31 years old. The second category was for the age between 31 and 40 years old. The third category was for the age between 41 and 50 years old. The fourth category was for the age between 51 and 60 years old. The last category was for the age of 61 years old or elder. The second part of the questionnaire was adapted from the study conducted by Aljbour (2011), in which the author explored the impact of culture on expatriates in Arab culture. This section attempted to identify the level of adaptability to Arab culture by asking the participants to respond to a set of ten questions using a Likert-type scale to indicate their level of agreement/disagreement with a particular statement. Thus, the coding scheme for the second section was 1 = Very Low, 2 = Low, 3 = High, and 4 = Very High. More specifically, the ten questions were related to the ability to adapt to the host culture, family adaptability, human relations, understanding the host culture, knowledge of the Arabic language, communication skills, emotional stability, openness to others, self-confidence, and trust in the local employees.

Based on the responses given to these questions, it was possible to measure and compare the adaptability of European expatriates for each age category using Pearson Chi-square. The difference between the adaptability levels of the two groups was analyzed, with  $p \leq 0.05$  chosen as an indicator of statistical significance. Correlation analysis for the significance level was then employed to test the correlation between age and adaptability to Arab culture. To test Hypothesis 1, European expatriates' age significantly impacts their ability to adapt to the Arab

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culture, skewness and kurtosis tests were adapted to examine whether the data was normally distributed. To test the variance between the five age groups, the author conducted a simple histogram test for each of the groups' data. Besides, cross-tabulation regression analysis using residual statistical test was employed.

The above-mentioned methodology is an extension of previous studies by expanding the testing methodology from identifying the impact of age on cultural adjustment to clearly specifying the age category that has better chances to adapt to the host culture.

## 6. Results

The study examined the relationship between the European expatriates' age and their ability to adapt to Arab culture in Jordan. The data used for this analysis was sourced from survey responses provided by 87 European expatriates. The results showed that 15% of the European expatriates were less than 31 years old, 23% were between the age of 31 and 40, 25% were between the age of 41 and 50, 31% were between the age of 51 and 60, and 6% were elder that 60 years old as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Frequency Distribution of European Expatriates Age Categories**

	Age of Participant	Cases				
		Valid		Missing		Total
		N	Percent	N	Percent	N
Ability of Adapting to Arab Culture	under 31	13	100.0%	0	0.0%	13
	31-40	20	100.0%	0	0.0%	20
	41-50	22	100.0%	0	0.0%	22
	51-60	27	100.0%	0	0.0%	27
	61 or above	5	100.0%	0	0.0%	5

Pearson Chi-square of 7.521 was obtained, based on the analysis with three degrees of freedom, which is very close to the critical value of 7.81. Besides, Asymptotic Significance value is .821, which is higher than the alpha value of 0.05. Based on the standardized residuals, most values are within the level of significance of -1.96 and +1.96 which indicates a significant influence of different age categories on adaptability to Arab culture. Finally, based on the minimum expected count of 87 and the sample size requirement for the chi-square test, the independence is satisfied (See Table 2).

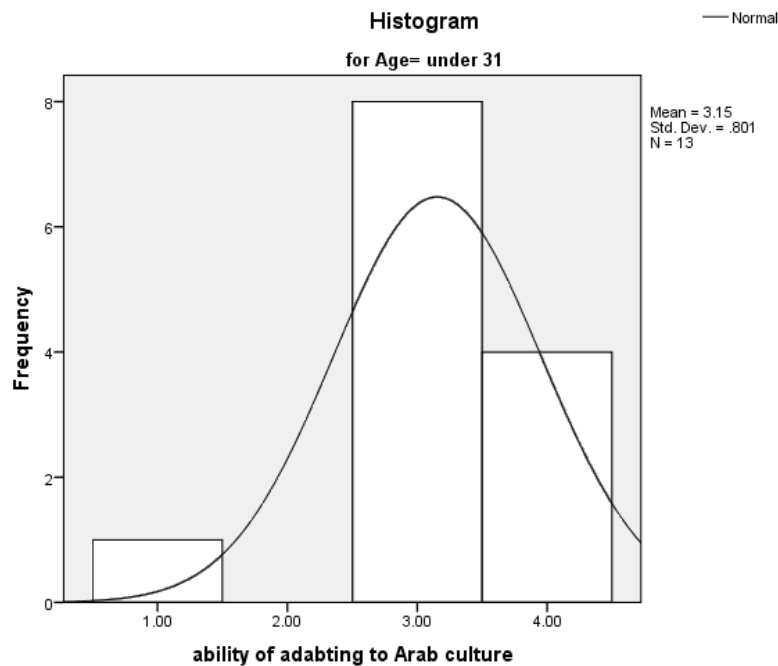
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**Table 2: Chi-Square Tests**

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	7.521 <sup>a</sup>	12	.821
Likelihood Ratio	8.803	12	.720
Linear-by-Linear Association	2.474	1	.116
N of Valid Cases	87		

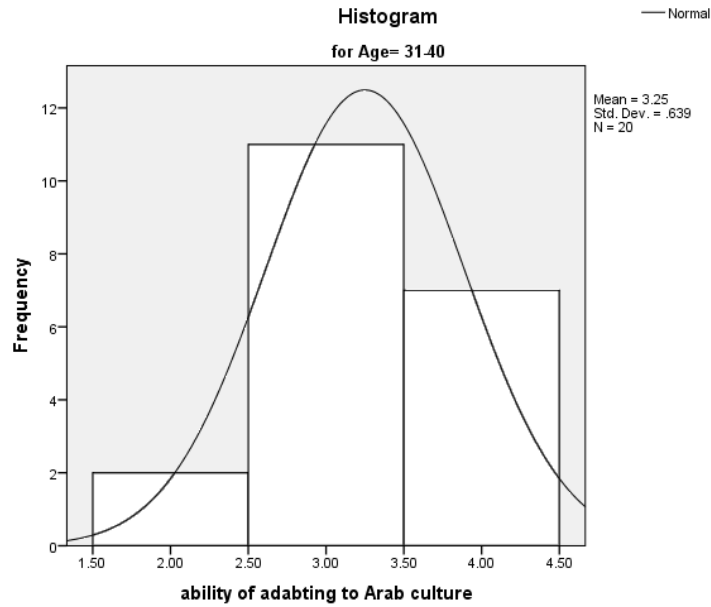
The skewness and kurtosis differed between age categories, whereby 0.616 and 1.191 were calculated for the participants of age less than 31, 0.512 and 0.992 were calculated for the participants of age between 31 and 40, -0.977 and 1.306 were calculated for the participants of age between 41 and 50, -0.416 and -0.720 were calculated for the participants of age between 51 and 60, and -0.609 and -3.333 were calculated for the participants elder than 60 years. The negative result for age categories of 41 to 50, 51 to 60 and elder than 60 indicate that the data distribution is negatively skewed and platykurtic while for age categories of less than 31 and 31 to 40 show a positively skewed distribution. Nonetheless, in all cases, the data is normally distributed. Moreover, simple histograms reveal a considerable variation in the ability to adapt to Arab culture between females and males (See Figure 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5).

**Figure 1: European Expatriates of Age Category “Less than 31” and Their Ability to Adapt to Arab Culture**

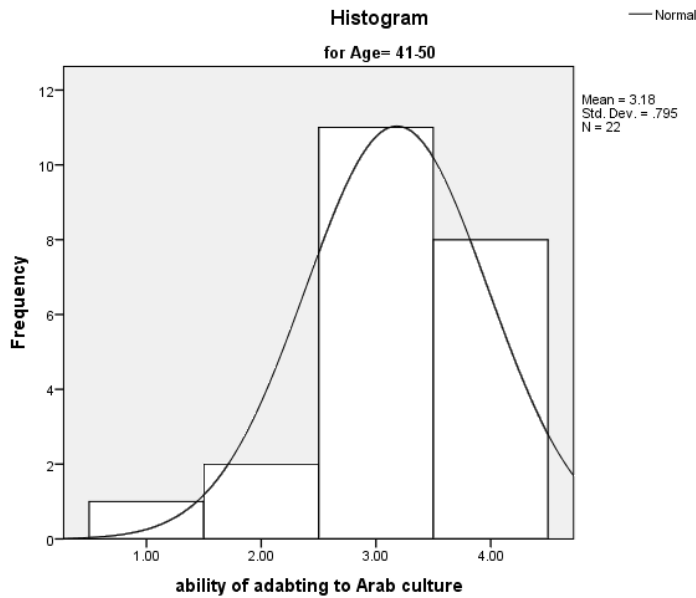


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**Figure 2: European Expatriates of Age Category “31-40” and Their Ability to Adapt to Arab Culture**



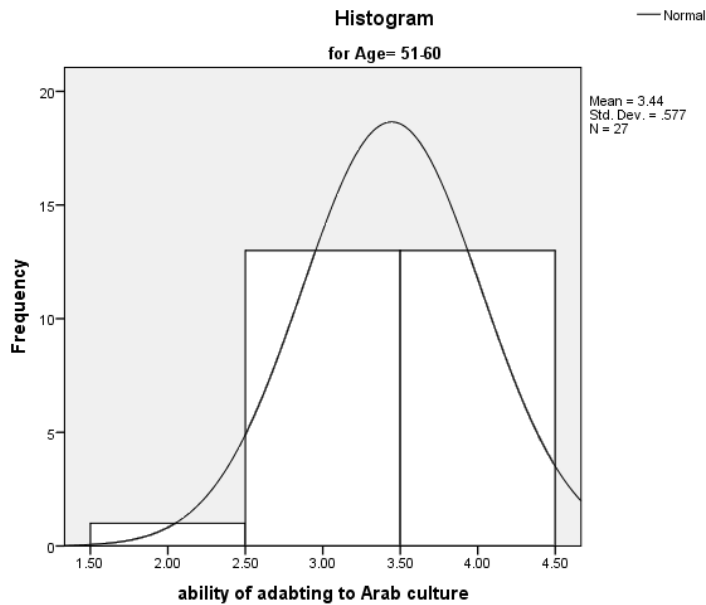
**Figure 3: European Expatriates of Age Category “41-50” and Their Ability to Adapt to Arab Culture**



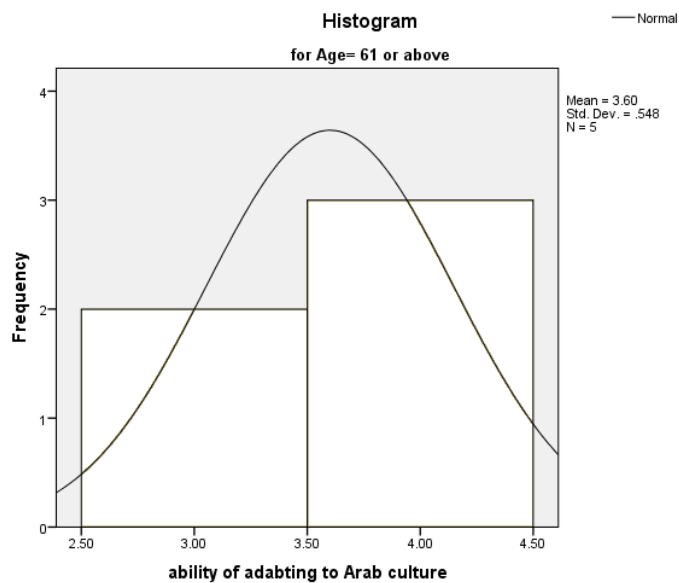


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**Figure 4: European Expatriates of Age Category “51-60” and Their Ability to Adapt to Arab Culture**



**Figure 5: European Expatriates of Age Category “61 and above” and Their Ability to Adapt to Arab Culture**



As can be seen in Table 3, the respondents who feel that they are highly or very highly adapted to Arab culture are those who are less than 31 years old with a percentage of 92%. A percentage of 90% goes for those who are between 31 and 40 years old, and 86% are for those who are between 41 and 50 years old. A percentage of 96% goes for those who are between 51 and 60 years old, and a percentage 100% goes for those who are 61 years old or elder.

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**Table 3: Cross-tabulation of the Ability to Adapt to Arab Culture based on Age**

			Age Categories					Total
			Under 31	31-40	41-50	51-60	61 or Above	
ability of adapting to Arab culture	Very Low	Count	1	0	1	0	0	2
		Expected Count	.3	.5	.5	.6	.1	2.0
		Residual	.7	-.5	.5	-.6	-.1	
		Std. Residual	1.3	-.7	.7	-.8	-.3	
	Low	Count	0	2	2	1	0	5
		Expected Count	.7	1.1	1.3	1.6	.3	5.0
		Residual	-.7	.9	.7	-.6	-.3	
		Std. Residual	-.9	.8	.7	-.4	-.5	
	High	Count	8	11	11	13	2	45
		Expected Count	6.7	10.3	11.4	14.0	2.6	45.0
		Residual	1.3	.7	-.4	-1.0	-.6	
		Std. Residual	.5	.2	-.1	-.3	-.4	
	Very High	Count	4	7	8	13	3	35
		Expected Count	5.2	8.0	8.9	10.9	2.0	35.0
		Residual	-1.2	-1.0	-.9	2.1	1.0	
		Std. Residual	-.5	-.4	-.3	.6	.7	
Total	Count	13	20	22	27	5	87	
	Expected Count	13.0	20.0	22.0	27.0	5.0	87.0	

As the responses were rated on a scale from 1 = Very Low to 4 = Very High, the average adaptability of respondents who are less than 31 years old is 3.15 (SD= 0.800), and it is 3.25 (DS= .638) for those who are between 31 and 40 years old. The average adaptability of respondents between 41 and 50 years old is 3.18 (SD= 0.795), it is 3.44 (SD= 0.577) between 51 and 60 years old, and it is 3.60 (SD= 0.547) for those who are 61 years old or elder. This result indicates that age factor predicts the ability to adapt favorably. The median ability to adapt to Arab culture is 3, and it is the same for all age categories. Table 4 provides the adaptability scores of all age categories' study participants.

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**Table 4: Standard Deviation of the Ability to Adapt to Arab Culture**

Sex of Participant	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Under 31	13	3.1538	.80064
31-40	20	3.25	.63867
41-50	22	3.1818	.79501
51-60	27	3.4444	.57735
61 or Above	5	3.6000	.54772
Total	87	3.326	.67187

The results indicate that the European expatriates' age strongly predicts their ability to adapt to Arab culture and, therefore, Hypothesis 1 is supported.

## 7. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to fill the knowledge gap related to the impact of age on European expatriates' adaptability to Arab culture. The main purpose of this research paper is to provide international HR managers with an understanding of the impact of their selection criteria of European expatriates who are expected to work in an Arab culture on their assignment success. As a result of surveying 87 European expatriates who are currently working in Jordan and of different age categories, age impact on adaptability to Arab culture was examined. From the above-mentioned results, it could be concluded that age of European expatriates plays a significant factor on their level of adaptability to Arab culture because the Standard deviation scores for all age categories ranged from .48 to .80. This point clearly indicates the significant influence of age on adaptability to Arab culture. This finding supports and confirms previous research and study of Selmer et al. (2009). Moreover, the study findings are different than other studies by identifying the age range of expatriates that might adapt to Arab culture smoother than other age categories. Based on these findings, Hypothesis 1 of "Age of European expatriates significantly influence their adaptability to Arab culture" is supported. This study found a difference in the level of adaptability between age categories of European expatriates to Arab culture. It was found that European expatriates who are 51 or elder might adapt to Arab culture more significantly that those who are 50 years old or less. While the sample size for this study meets the minimum size required, it can be considered as a limitation of this study. Hence, generalizing this finding to all other Arab markets may is a limitation because this study was conducted on European expatriates who are currently working in Jordan only. It is recommended for other researchers who are interested in this field of research to adapt this study and expand it to larger sample size which is widely distributed across all Arab markets.

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