



# SYRIAN REFUGEES' ADJUSTMENT TO LIFE IN CANADA

**Colin Scott<sup>1,3</sup> & Dietlind Stolle<sup>2,3</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Concordia University

<sup>2</sup>McGill University

<sup>3</sup>Centre for the Study of Democratic Citizenship

## RESETTLEMENT OF SYRIAN REFUGEES IN CANADA – WHAT DO WE KNOW?

Between 2015 and 2020, Canadian government resettled 44,620 Syrian refugees:

- ❖ Government-assisted: 21,745 (49%)
- ❖ Private-sponsorship: 18,930 (42%)
- ❖ Blended program: 3,945 (9%)

- Research typically shows positive adjustment among Syrian refugees in Canada. However...
  - Significant numbers of individuals experience psychological distress (Sharif-Esfahani et al., 2022; Tong et al., 2021).
  - Especially older refugees and those with family challenges. (Ali-Hassan et al., 2021).
- Refugees settled under different programs have different needs
  - GARs are among the most vulnerable, reporting poorer mental and physical health, and report unmet health needs (Oda et al., 2019).
  - PSRs tend to have higher employment rates, connections to Syrians already in Canada (Hynie et al., 2019).



## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What is the prevalence of **adjustment difficulties** among Syrian refugees resettled to Canada since 2015?
- How are adjustment difficulties shaped by **migration experiences**?
- What role might **social connectedness** to Canadian society play in mitigating adjustment difficulties?

# THE TAJRIBATI SURVEY

- Sample: 1,975 Syrian refugees 20-54 years of age settling across Canada between 2015-2020.
- Survey fielded: May – December, 2020.
- Trilingual online ( $n = 1,801$ ; 91%) & phone ( $n = 174$ ,  $n = 9\%$ ) surveys.
- Measures of subjective well-being, settlement experiences; pre-arrival stressors and social connectedness with Canadians.

\* Part of a larger project with Thomas Soehl, Dietlind Stolle, and Ian Van Haren. With research assistance from Dominique Sherab, Nour Daoud, Najla Cheniouni, Reine Romhein, and Chloe Aboud

## RESPONDENTS IN TAJRIBATI SURVEY

- **Policy category:** 1,321 (67%) PSRs ; 493 (25%) GARs ; 161 BVORs (8%)
- **Age:** 37 years old (sd = 8.9 years)
- **Gender:** 63% male
- **Religion:** 56% Muslim, 38% Catholic
- **Years in Canada:** 3.6 years (sd = 1 year)
- **Unemployed:** 44%
- **Official language skills:** avg. 0.6 on scale from 0 (none) to 1 (fluent)

## ADJUSTMENT TO LIFE IN CANADA

### (i) **Subjective well-being** ( $r = 0.56$ )

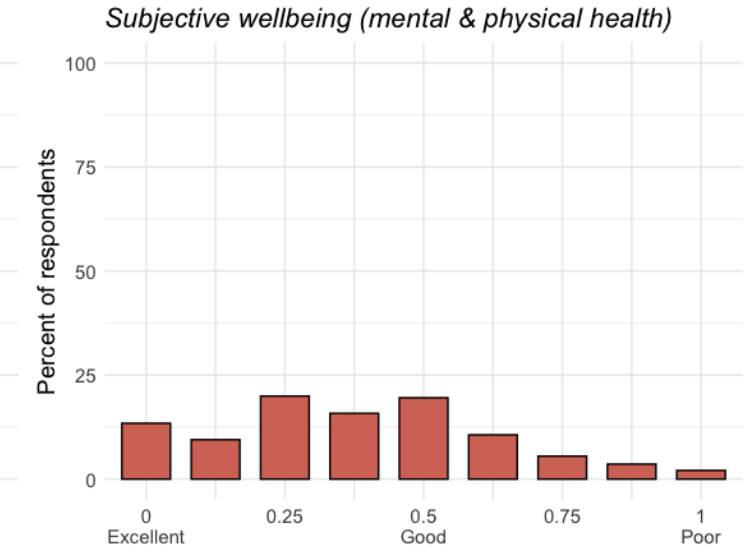
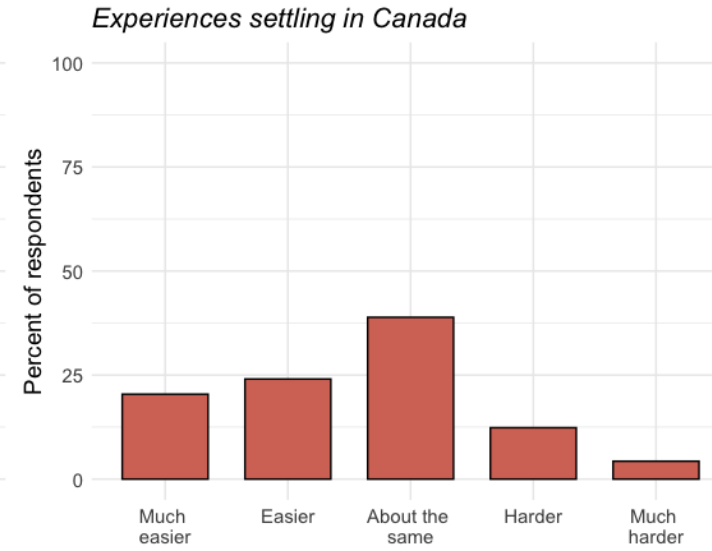
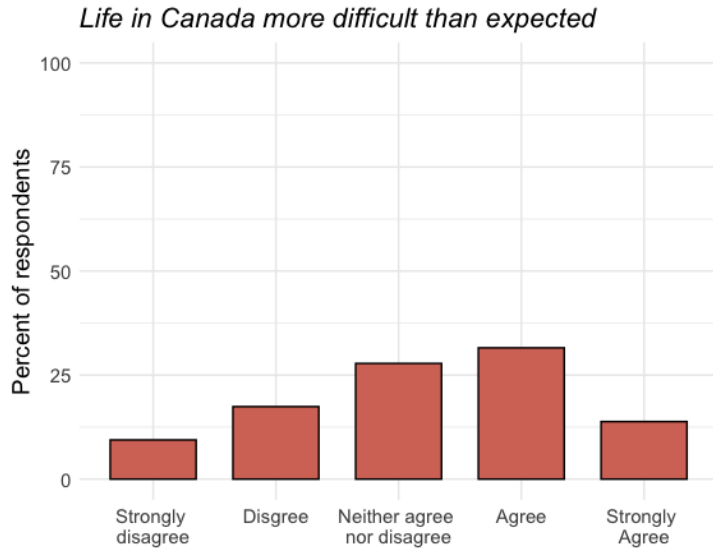
- Self-reported mental health
- Self-reported physical health

### (ii) **Settlement experiences** ( $r = 0.27$ )

- “Compared to other Syrians in Canada, how was your experience of settling here?”
- “Life in Canada is more difficult than I expected.”

Scores measured on 5-point scales, re-coded to range from 0 to 1.  
Higher scores indicate **adjustment difficulties**.

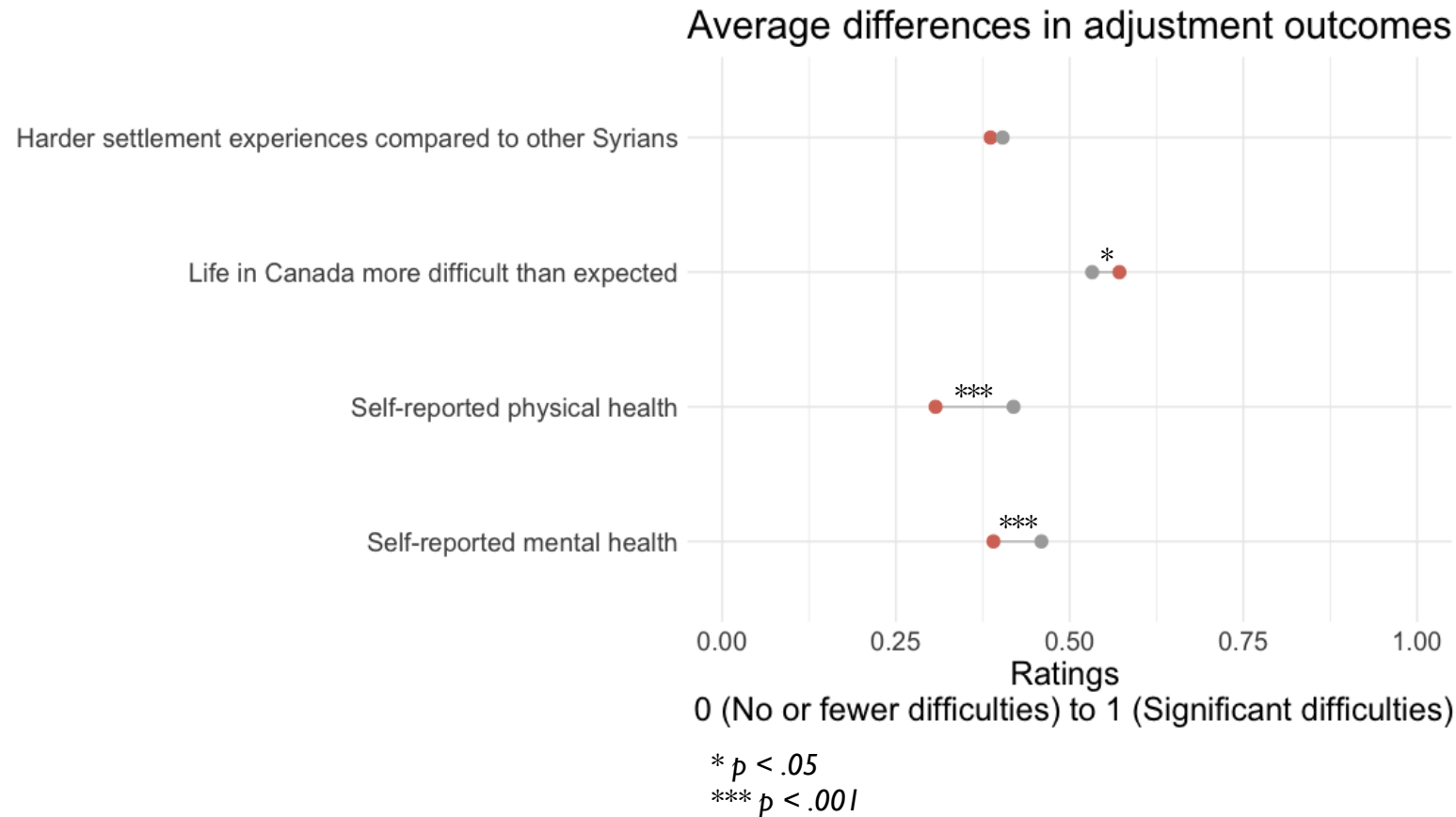




- **45%** Agree or strongly agree that life in Canada is more difficult than expected.
- **17%** Say personal experiences settling in Canada were “harder” or “much harder” than other Syrians.
- **22%** self-report a relatively low level of subjective wellbeing.

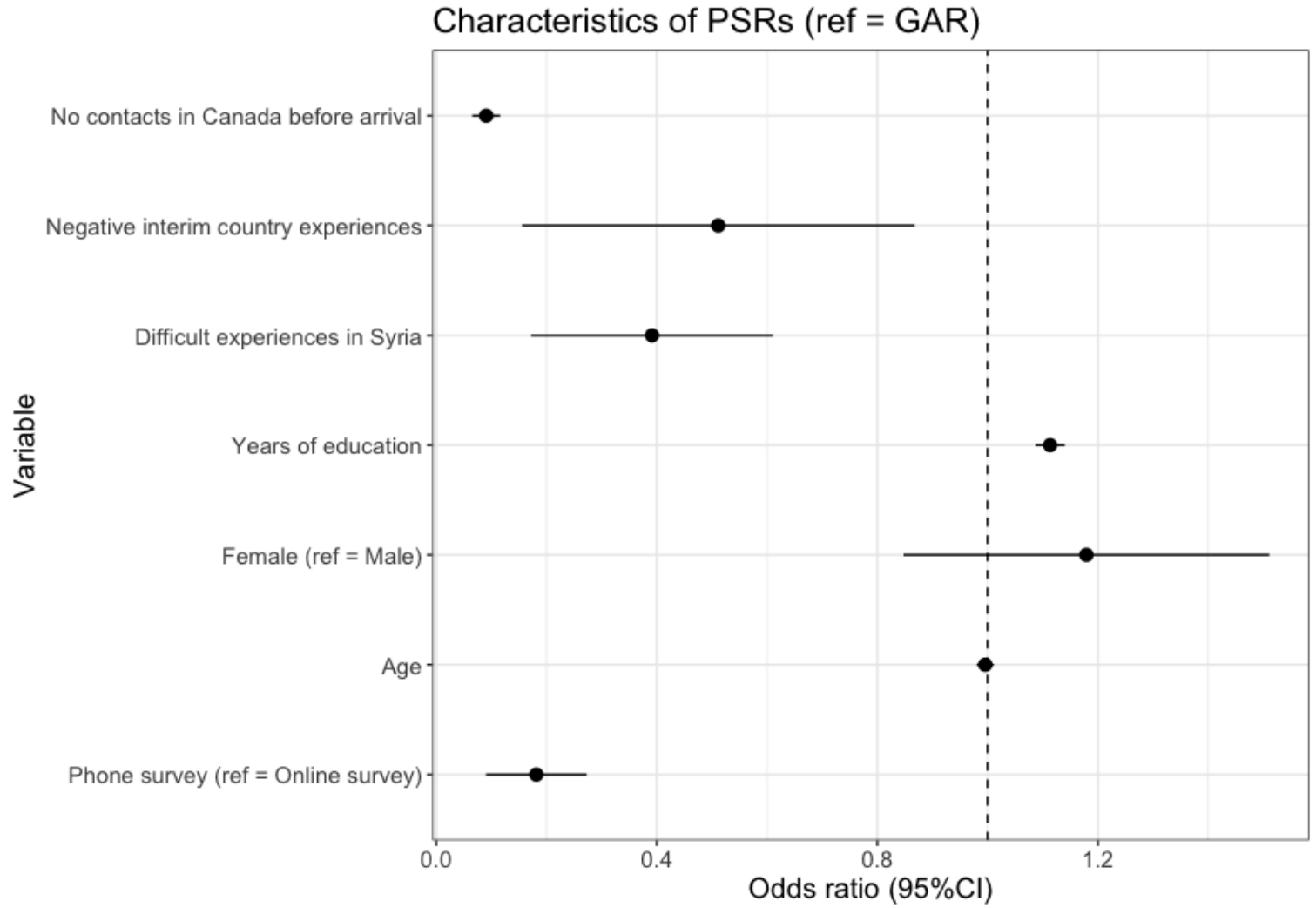
## ADJUSTMENT EXPERIENCES OF PSR VS GAR

- Unexpected difficulties in Canada are 7% higher among PSRs than GARs.
- Reported physical health difficulties are 28% higher among GARs than among PSRs.
- Reported mental health difficulties are 18% higher among GARs than among PSRs.



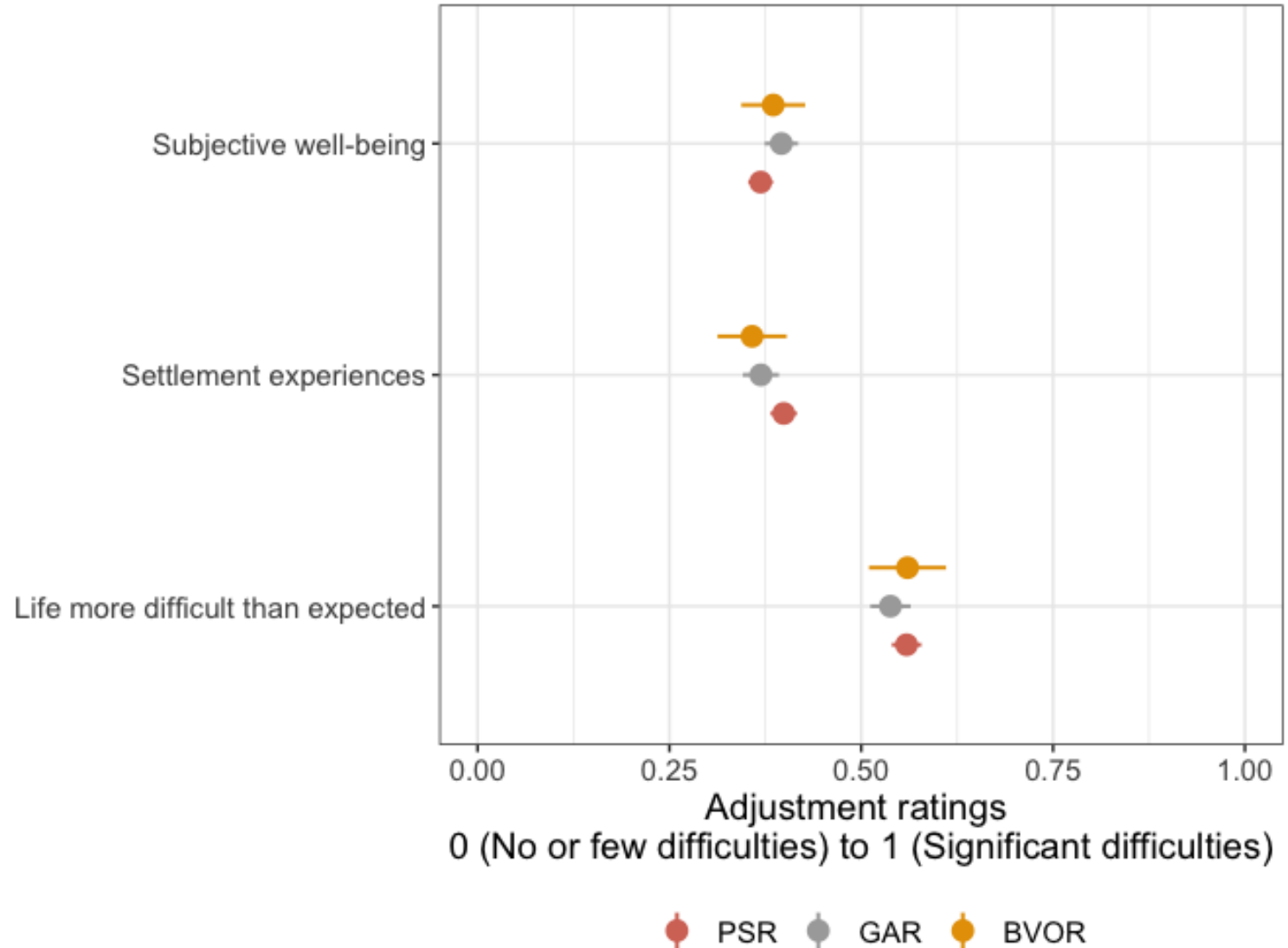


# PRE-ARRIVAL EXPERIENCES OF PSR VS GAR

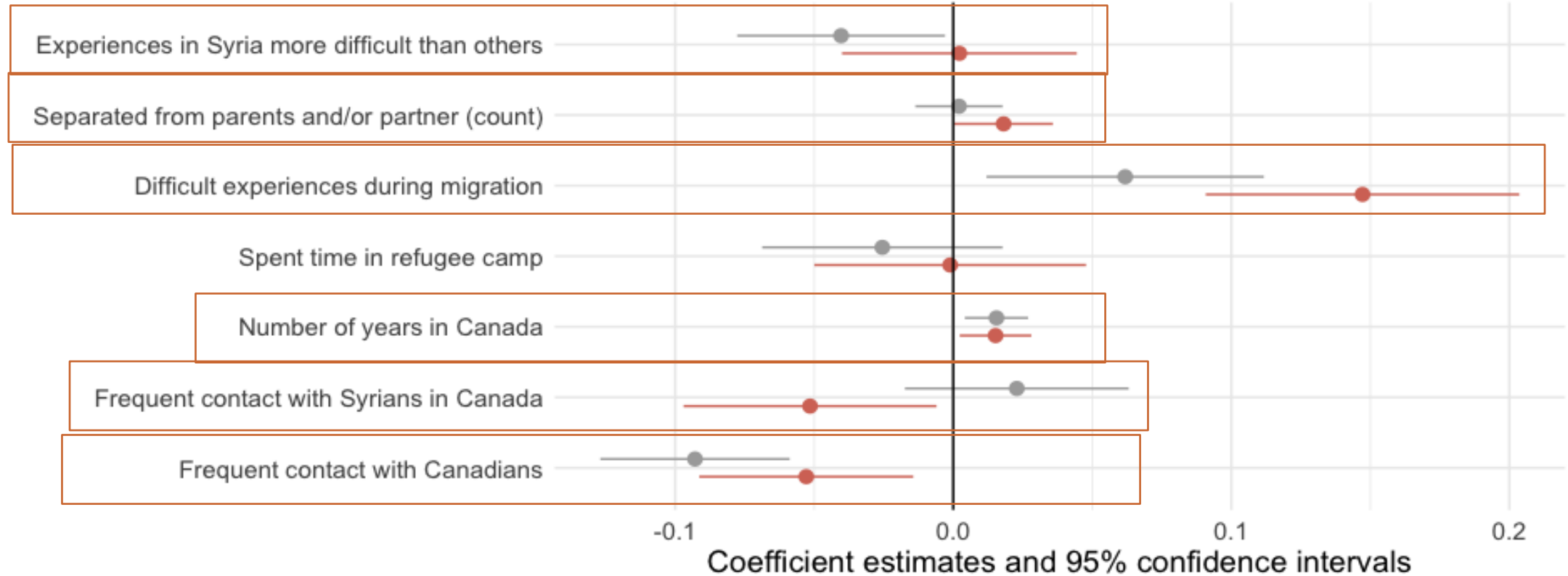


*Estimated adjustment experiences, controlling for pre-arrival stressors:*

ADJUSTMENT  
OUTCOMES:  
  
DIFFERENCES  
LARGELY  
ACCOUNTED FOR BY  
PRE-ARRIVAL  
EXPERIENCES



## Correlates of poor subjective wellbeing & settlement difficulties

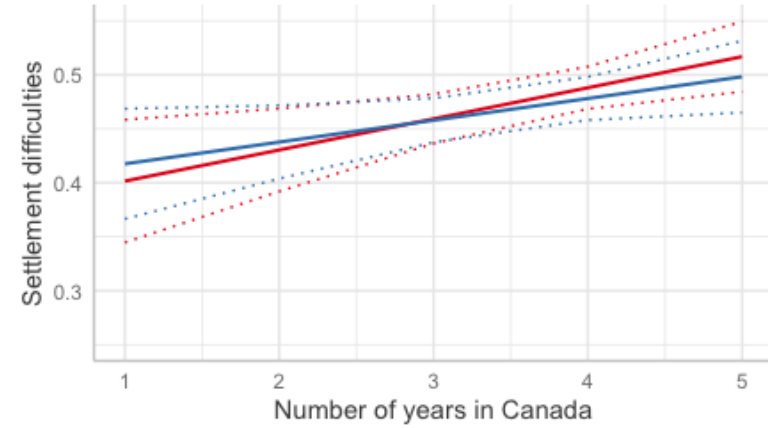
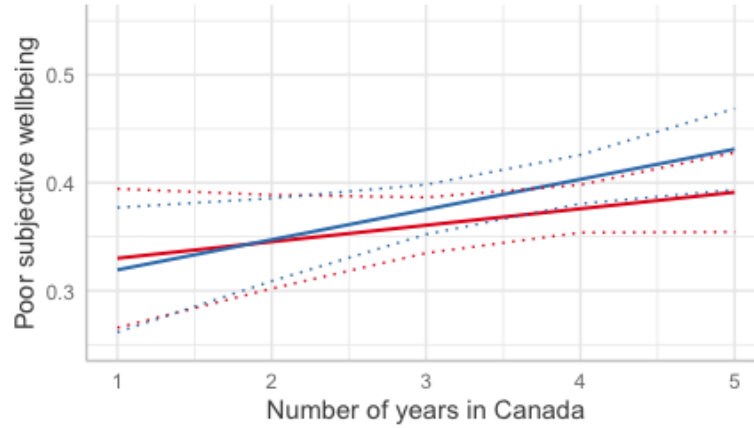
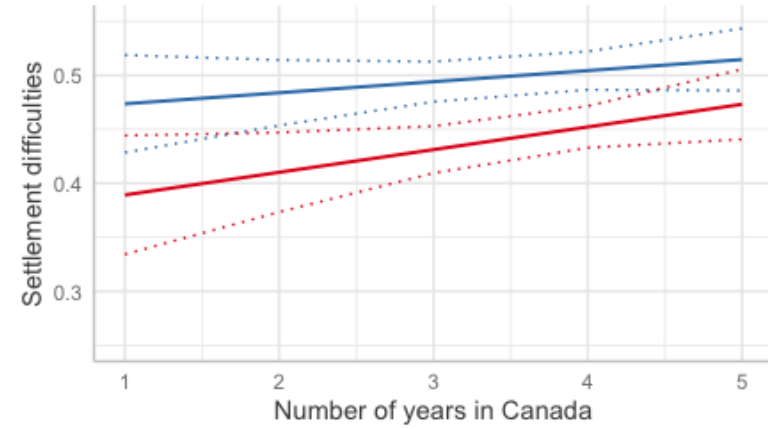
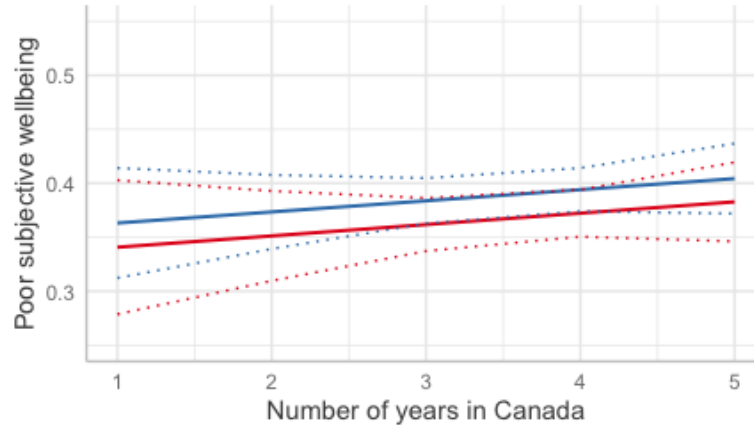


● Subjective wellbeing ● Settlement experiences

OLS coefficients ( $N = 1,975$ ).

Controls for socio-demographic variables, survey mode, arrival category, citizenship status, & language skills (not shown).

# DO SOCIAL CONNECTIONS MODERATE ADJUSTMENT EXPERIENCES?



## HIGHLIGHTS

### Questions? Comments?

- [colin.scott@concordia.ca](mailto:colin.scott@concordia.ca)

Thank you to our partners and colleagues:

- IRCC
- SSHRC
- Centre for the Study of Democratic Citizenship

But particular thanks to those who took the time to share their thoughts and experiences with us.

- Respondents **generally reported positive adjustment experiences**. However, there is a sizable group that struggles.
- Adjustment **difficulties grew more pronounced** the longer respondents were in Canada.
- Net of pre-arrival experiences and social connectedness, **negligible differences across arrival categories**.
- **Pre-arrival stressors persist as a significant risk factor** for adjustment difficulties, even after several years in the country.
- **Limited evidence** social connectedness may help mitigate some settlement difficulties.

