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**The Subjective Adaptation of Syrian Emigrant Families in  
Algeria: A Case Study**

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**Abstract**

The current study explores the subjective adaptation level of Syrian emigrant families in Algeria according to the Montgomery model. The variables in this study, the elements of subjective adaptation, include salary, whether the emigrants' jobs utilises their skills, overall satisfaction, whether their jobs aid acculturation, job security, and current jobs versus expectations. We collected data using a structured questionnaire, which we gave to 49 Syrian emigrants living in Jijel and Algiers for a period of nine months in 2016. We analyzed the data using SPSS Windows 20. The study concludes by registering negative orientation toward the majority of the subjective adaptation elements, with positive orientations towards a few. Results of the emigrants' characteristics correlation display significant impact of their type of work, sex, year of arrival, language, and salary variables, respectively, on the emigrants' subjective adaptation levels.

**Key words:** Job, Salary, Skills, Acculturation, Job security.

**1- Introduction:**

Since March 2011, the international community has been facing the greatest global refugee crisis since the Second World War: namely, the Syrian refugee crisis. By the end of 2016, 4.8 million Syrians had fled to neighboring countries as well as to Europe, North Africa, North America, and Australia, due to escalating military conflict in Syria (IOM, 2016) Due to this, Algeria received over 43,000 Syrian emigrants in a short period (UNHCR, 2015- 2016) which puts them in front of the need to adapt with new social and economic conditions, especially with the absence of a legal framework regulating the government interventions to cope this new phenomenon. The current study may help to diagnose the subjective

adaptation of Syrian refugees living outside shelters in Algeria as an aspect of the general adaptation and shed the light on the factors that affect their level in order to improve their life conditions.

Migration research revealed the importance of looking at adaptation as a multidimensional phenomenon with different components and predictors (Montgomery, 1996). In addition, the studies present the importance of developing measures that take account of specific social and cultural considerations (Veronese and All, 2019). Montgomery (1996) shows the impact of subjective adaptation on refugees' life, and the need to uncover factors that push it to rise. In the same line of research, Zhang and Berry (2007) concluded that Chinese sojourners in Canada reported less subjective adaptation than non-Chinese Canadian or Chinese Canadian students. Furthermore, Tran and Wright (1986) revealed that the Vietnamese refugee's sense of wellbeing in the United States is influenced by family revenues. Correa-Velez, Gifford and McMichael also demonstrate that earlier education is a powerful indicator of refugee youth well-being in Australia.

This research is unique among the existing body of knowledge about migration for several reasons. First, it is conducted in a developing country with a lack of legislation and regulations that determine how to deal with this new phenomenon. The second is that the study was carried out on refugees that tend to stay outside government shelters and operate informally, placing them in unexpected circumstances. In addition, interviews of refugees who live lawfully in two main areas in the north of Algeria have been conducted. Little research has been done on the adaptation of Syrian immigrants in the social and economic context of Algeria. Third, by highlighting the factors that influence the level of subjective adaptation and the need to diagnose its degree of impact, the government can take effective action to address the barriers to subjective adaptation.

#### **1-1- Significance of the Study:**

The current study covers an important topic in literature on migration, which emphasizes the subjective adaptation of Syrians in Algeria based on their employment conditions. The research also seeks to investigate the level of subjective adaptation of Syrian migrants and the role of their personal and occupational characteristics in the Algerian context. In addition, the results will enable governments and policymakers to take effective interventions about the refugee's employment to improve their work conditions.

#### **1-2- Objectives of the study:**

Little research was carried out to examine the recent phenomenon of Syrian emigration in Algeria. This study deals with

the level of subjective adaptation of Syrian emigrants in line with their job satisfaction, salary satisfaction, job skills use, job acculturation, job security, job expectations and overall satisfaction (Montgomery, 1996). The study also aims to analyze the correlation between personal and occupational predictors and the level of subjective adaptation of Syrian emigrants in Algeria.

### **1-3- Questions to address:**

This research examines the phenomenon of Syrian forced migration in Algeria. New economic and social conditions that shed light on the subjective adaptation aspect of migrants and explain factors that have an impact on their new lives. The study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of subjective adaptation of Syrian immigrants in Algeria?
2. Are there significant differences in the level of subjective adaptation for Syrian immigrants in Algeria due to their personal and professional characteristics?

### **1-4- Hypothesis of the study:**

In order to achieve the study objectives, which aim to examine the subjective adaptation of Syrian refugees from their perspective, two hypotheses are formulated. First, recent research has shown that Syrian refugees face a set of difficulties in accessing the labor market in Arab countries, and that the medium level of subjective adaptation is dominant. Algeria, with the lack of refugee law as most Arab countries, is also in line with the expectation of a medium level of subjective adaptation.

H1 The Syrian migrant has a medium level of subjective adaptation in Algeria.

Second, given the above predictions and the results of similar studies, researchers should expect to find a statistically significant difference in the impact of personal and professional characteristics on the subjective adaptation of Syrian refugees in Algeria.

H2 There is a significant difference in the correlation between the personal and professional characteristics and the subjective adaptation of Syrian refugees in Algeria.

## **2- The Subjective Adaptation Strategies for Syrian Emigrants in Neighboring countries and Algeria:**

Many policies have been adopted by receiving countries in terms of refugee employment. In Jordan, Syrian refugees must obtain a work permit to be employed, which is not available in many cases. As a consequence, the informal employment rate among Syrian employees in Jordan has reached 99% (Sevin and Solveig, 2015).

In Lebanon, access to the labour market requires a work permit, but this law is not respected (Akram, and all, 2015). As a result, the

vast majority of refugees in Lebanon are affiliated with the informal economy (Lewis, 2015). In Turkey, only Syrians who have proof of residence can obtain a work permit, which permits them to work formally according to new temporary protection measures. The procedures for obtaining proof of residence, however, are cumbersome; consequently, the majority of Syrians emigrant employment is informal (Ximena, 2015). Meanwhile, Algerian authorities continue to ban Syrian emigrants from any formal economic activity. Therefore, 56% of Syrian refugees in Algeria work informally, whether in daily, weekly, or seasonal jobs (Sevin, Op. cit, 2015).

### **2-1- Policy framework:**

In the last 10 years, immigrants to Algeria have mainly been from Syria and the African Sahel countries. These immigrants hold different ethnic, economic, social, and occupational backgrounds. On the one hand, Syrian emigrants can be characterized as well- educate, highly skilled, as originating mainly from rural regions, and as speaking Arabic as a main language. On the other hand, emigrants from the Sahel region speak French, come from Saharan regions, and have low skill levels and limited education.

Different policies have been adopted to deal with the world refugee crisis. Algeria, like the majority of Arab countries, does not have a special law that acknowledges refugee status, and it considers the new arrivals that have a visa (or any entry permit) to be emigrants under a temporary legal situation for 90 days (Ministry of Interior, 1971). In 2013, a presidential decree was settled as an exception, banning the deportation of Syrians under any condition, and it extends each Syrian's legal situation by two months. Finally, the rights to free proof of residence, shelter in government centers, children's education, and health care services in public establishments have been guaranteed. However, employment is still illegal.

The lack of a legal framework for refugees in Algeria bans Syrians from official documents that would permit them to access the labour market (Benyassad, 2012) and promotes their self-reliance (UNCR, 2015). Facing this situation, the majority of Syrian families decide to stay outside the government shelters and to provide for their needs by working informally. The economic conditions in local communities influence the areas and conditions of the Syrian refugees' employment. While most refugees move to the larger cities where they gain a better chance of employment, others prefer to stay in smaller communities. As a result, many families live in difficult conditions that affect their subjective adaptation.

Several efforts have been taken by emigrants to gain economic self- sufficiency. Working independently by contracting with the local

population has been the most common type of effort taken by vulnerable emigrants. In addition, partnering with Algerians allows emigrants from middle and higher classes to continue to manage their businesses. Although these activities are illegal, the Algerian authorities implicitly permit this type of employment and continue to control these activities.

By the end of 2015, the Algerian government had reduced the public budget as a response to decreasing oil prices and had introduced a set of austerity measures as a new law of emigration that would permit emigrants to have the right to work in the construction, agriculture, and fishing sectors (<http://www.elbilad.net/article/detail?id=72366>). The changeable economic and political conditions in Algeria, as well as the changeable emigrants' strategies, does allow for the emergence of a clear strategy for Syrian refugee integration into the Algerian labour market. Consequently, more pressure is placed on Syrian subjective adaptation. Several questions arise: what are the suitable strategies for dealing with the Syrian emigrants' situation in Algeria? What sectors of activity and jobs are suitable for them? How should the government involve them in the labour market and thereby benefit from their competencies? Although the findings presented below are not designed to answer these questions, they are relevant to the concept of working informally as a part of subjective adaptation, from the perspective of the Montgomery model.

### **3- Method:**

This research was conducted in Jijel and Algiers in 2016 and is based on a sample of Syrian emigrant families. Most of the information was collected during work over a period of nine months and the sample includes emigrants who arrived in Algeria between three and four years prior to the beginning of the study.

We collected data from Syrian emigrants living in Algeria, who were working either informally, with both Algerian and Syrian entrepreneurs (26.5%), or independently (44.9 %) after making an oral agreement with the local population. Most emigrants had been affiliated with the labour market as blue collars since their arrival, working for an average of 58 hours a week and 11 months a year in construction, textile, and trade sectors.

A structured questionnaire was distributed during their work time, after they had given preliminary consent to participate in the study. The interviewees completed a questionnaire, in Arabic, of seven elements concerning their current job, on a qualitative five-point scale. The questionnaire covered emigrant satisfaction with 1) job conditions, 2) salary level, 3) job utilize skills that they got during their career, 4) overall job satisfaction, 5) the opportunity to

acculturate as provided by their job, 6) perceptions of job security in the near future, and 7) the value of their current job compared with what was expected.

The snowball method was used to contact and incentivize suitable families to collaborate in our research. The study involved 49 Syrian emigrants working in Jijel and Algiers, Algeria. Of the sample, 57.10% were male and 42.90% were female; 53% between 25 and 40 years old. Over half of them (51%) were married with one to three children, and the average level of education was 8 years. We analyzed data using means and t- tests to measure the satisfaction level of each confirmed element, and we used a multiple regression analysis to examine the association between predictor variables and subjective adaptation.

#### **4- Results and Discussion:**

Table (1) present findings on whether the elements of subjective adaptation differ in satisfaction level between Syrian emigrants in Algeria.

##### **4-1- Subjective adaptation level:**

Table (1): Mean, Standard deviation and t-test of the Subjective Adaptation.

Variable Name	M	SD	T	Sig
Job satisfaction	3.510	1.883	13.047	.000
Salary satisfaction	3.795	1.580	16.808	.000
Job Skills use	3.775	1.782	14.826	.000
Job acculturation	3.530	1.871	13.202	.000
Job security	3.836	1.806	14.865	.000
Job expectations	3.816	1.615	16.531	.000
Overall satisfaction	2.755	.854	22.563	.000
Subjective Adaptation	3.574	1.292	19.367	.000

The source (the authors)

##### **4-1-1- Job conditions satisfaction:**

The questionnaire results for working without an official contract reveal that the majority of Syrian emigrants have a low satisfaction level, with a medium score ( $M = 3.51$ .  $SD = 1.88$ ). These statistics reflect the emigrants' need for a written agreement which would allow them to access social security and thereby escape their disadvantaged positions at work. This intervention would permit them to defend any breakage of their financial agreements, and to avoid long working hours (the average of 58 hours, six days a week, eleven months a year). These long hours exhaust them and push them towards satisfactoriness even though they have a high possibility to find and change their job, the freedom to organize and manage agreements and any financial charges.

These results are in accordance with the results from the International Labour Organization report about the Syrian refugees living outside the Jordanian camps and inside the Zaatari camp. This report revealed that all Syrian emigrant workers are affiliated with the informal labour market, the majority of them being employed on the basis of oral contracts and only 10 % of them having a work permit (Ajlouni and Mary, 2014). Furthermore, 96% of Syrians living outside camps and 88% living inside Zaatari have no specified insurance agreement. Meanwhile, 56% and 36% of Syrian emigrants working outside the camps and inside Zaatari, respectively, work more than 48 hours per week, which is the maximum number of working hours allowed by Jordanian law (Sevin and Solveig, Op cit, 2015). These results are in agreement with Pedro and Gulsen's results, which have shown that in Turkey, Syrians work more than the maximum number of hours stipulated by Turkish law (Pedro, 2015). Women also work informally and in heavy working conditions (Gulsen and Ramazan, 2016).

#### **4-1-2- Salary satisfaction:**

Results on the distribution of Syrian emigrants by monthly incomes show that wages range between 300 and 780 USD. Nearly half of the emigrants earned between 240 and 500 USD in the month preceding the interviews; 30.6% had no salary; and 10.2 % and 12.2 %, respectively, earned more than 500 USD and had a changeable salary. The emigrants' views about this element indicate a low level of satisfaction ( $M = 3.79$ ,  $SD = 1.58$ ).

These findings are supported by the International Labour Organization, which has revealed that half of the Syrian workers in Jordanian communities make between 240 and 480 USD monthly, that about a third of them make more than 500 USD monthly, and that minimum wages doesn't not apply to informal jobs (Sevin and Solveig, Op.cit, 2015). Moreover, Syrian refugees in Turkey earn a monthly average of 230.9 USD (AFAD, 2013) and are employed as cheap labour (Gulsen and Ramazan, 2016). In addition, men earn more than women by around 15% (Ximena V. D. C, Wagner. Op.cit, 2016).

#### **4-1-3- Job utilizes skills satisfaction:**

A low level of Syrian emigrants registered satisfaction using their skills in their current jobs ( $M = 3.77$ ,  $SD = 1.78$ ). Even though more than 80% of them have maintained the job they previously had in Syria (mainly textile and restaurant jobs), the required job skills have been influenced by the specificities of local demand. Conversely, these results are not compatible with findings showing that Syrian refugees in Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Turkey have low skills levels that are not suited to the available jobs (May, 2016). In fact, most of

informal workers in Turkey are employed in sweatshops and in low-quality jobs (Kemal, 2014).

#### **4-1-4- Job helps acculturation:**

The current contribution of jobs to the Syrian emigrants' acculturation is low ( $M = 3.53$ ,  $SD = 1.87$ ) because they are working independently or within Syrian working teams. This result is compatible with other results, which have revealed that the majority of employees in the enterprises owned by Syrians in Istanbul are from Syria, and that Syrians help each other find work in Turkey under the influence due to co-ethnic ties (Pedro F.P.V. Op. cit, 2015). Also, the tendency to maintain relations with Syrians and to live inside a new Syrian community is the most common, which limits Syrian emigrants' social relations with Algerians.

#### **4 -1-5- Job security in few months:**

The attitude of Syrians toward continuing to work at their current job in the coming months is low ( $M = 3.83$ ,  $SD = 1.80$ ). More than half of the working emigrants (62.85%) think that they will change to another job, whether similar or different, located either in the place where they currently work or in another place.

#### **4 -1-6- Current job versus expectation:**

Findings reveal that Syrian emigrants expected higher job privileges than what they received ( $M = 3.81$ ,  $SD = 1.61$ ). Interviews showed that they were obliged to occupy their current jobs as a way to provide their families' needs, and that they could not adopt a suitable career that would permit them to develop their benefits.

#### **4-1-7- Overall satisfaction:**

Results regarding satisfaction with living in Algeria ( $M = 2.75$ ,  $SD = 0.85$ ) demonstrate that, though they fled Algeria under the pressures of conflict, Syrian emigrant interviewees have a low level of satisfaction with their new conditions. Although they work informally, the free visa extension, children's education, and health care services incentivize them to stay in the country. Additionally, benefiting from a large space for displacement and many civic rights as Algerian permits them to have a feeling of equality. Finally, similarities in language, a positive vision of society, and living with many similar religious beliefs and traditions compels Syrian emigrants to promote their assimilation and adapt their children to the new environment. These results are partially supported by other research that demonstrates that the religious beliefs of the Syrian refugees in Turkey resemble both that of the Syrian and Turkish people (Kilis and Nursat, 2017). The general results demonstrate that a low level of subjective satisfaction was registered ( $M = 3.57$ ,  $SD = 1.29$ ).



### 5- Association of subjective adaptation with predictors:

Data in Table 2 indicate the important predictor variables which affect Syrian refugees' subjective adaptation.

Table (2): Linear Multiple Regression Results of Subjective Adaptation

Predictor variables	B	Std. Error	B	T	Sig. of T
Sex	.697	.261	.270	2.674	.011
Language	.681	.309	-.186	-2.201	.034
Arrival year	.179	.073	.183	2.437	.019
Type of work	.848	.154	.558	5.512	.000
Salary	.052	.024	.177	2.158	.037
Constant	1.057	.511	N.A.	2.070	.045

Number of steps to coverage = 5, Multiple R = .915; squared = .837; equation F = 22.19; p = .000.  
source (the authors)

These general findings demonstrate the importance of certain predictor variables in understanding refugee's subjective adaptation as it is mentioned in precedent studies. It is somewhat surprising that other variables show its significant impact.

Firstly, the type of work exerted is the most significant predictor of subjective adaptation, and refugees who work independently tend to score high on subjective adaptation. Then, in contradiction to the Montgomery study results, the present analysis reveals that sex is the second most important variable, as males are more adapted to working than their wives are due to having had multiple opportunities to work in the past. The regression results indicated that the year of arrival year to Algeria was the third most powerful predictor of subjective adaptation, and that ancient refugees who came in 2011 and 2012 were more satisfied than new those who came more recently. After that, the language of the Syrian emigrants is also shown to be a significant variable in achieving high subjective adaptation levels, and that refugees with an Arabic language background showed a better adaptation than their counterparts of other languages. Salary was the least powerful predictor, which proves its significant influence, and that higher wages achieve better subjective adaptation.

### 6- Conclusion:

This study dealt with the identification of subjective adaptation component levels among Syrian emigrant families, living outside the Algerian government shelters since September 2011. A structured questionnaire administered to 49 male and female emigrants to collect data, and analyses were made using the statistical package for social

sciences (Version 20). The results revealed a medium level of satisfaction on the part of emigrants for their new life within the Algerian social and economic context. The results also reveal that independent workers, males, and early arrivals to Algeria are better adapted than emigrants who have mastered the Arabic language and those who have a lower salary than they had in Syria.

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**التكيف الذاتي للعائلات السورية المهاجرة في الجزائر. دراسة حالة****الملخص:**

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى التعرف على مستوى التكيف الذاتي لعائلات المهاجرين السوريين في الجزائر اعتماد على نموذج "مونتغومري". تضم متغيرات الدراسة الراتب، استعمال المهارات في الوظيفة الحالية، الرضا العام، إسهام الوظيفة في الثقافة، الأمان الوظيفي والفرق بين ظروف الوظيفة الحالية والمتوقع منها كعناصر للتكيف الذاتي. تم جمع البيانات باستعمال مقابلات مع ٤٩ مهاجرا سوريا يعيشون في ولايتي جيجل والجزائر، لمدة تسعة أشهر سنة ٢٠١٦م ، خلّلت البيانات باستعمال الحزمة الإحصائية للعلوم الاجتماعية. توصلت الدراسة إلى وجود اتجاه سلبي نحو غالبية عناصر التكيف الذاتي، مع وجود بعض التوجهات الإيجابية. كما بينت النتائج كذلك وجود علاقة دالة بين نوع العمل الممارس، الجنس، سنة القدوم، اللغة، والأجر على التوالي مع مستوى التكيف الذاتي.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** التوظيف؛ الأجر؛ المهارات؛ الثقافة؛ الأمان الوظيفي