

Distance to kin – On the importance of transnational and local ties in the social support network of refugees

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MOTIVATION

While the local social networks of refugees and the support they provide have become a powerful predictor for integrational success, little is known about the composition of refugees' networks that extend beyond immediate spatial proximity. What is the role of transnational ties in the social support network of refugees and what are dynamics of providing support? This study examines the familial ties in the social support network of recently arrived refugees by mapping both local and distant ties. It investigates whether distance to family members plays a role in the provision of emotional and instrumental support and how this relationship is moderated by Facebook, WhatsApp and Co.

STATE OF THE LITERATURE

- The personal life of recently arrived refugees is largely built around the immediate and extended family (Schweitzer et al., 2016)
- Social support networks are known to buffer post-migration stressors and provide guidance and a sense of belonging (Agneessens et al., 2006). They are characterized by high levels of inter-ethnic trust, common understanding, and collective problem-solving (Ager & Strang, 2008; Nakhaie, 2018).
- Simultaneously, these networks are often highly spatially fragmented with family members and friends being separated throughout the migration process (Löbel & Jacobsen, 2021).
- Research on migrants' networks show the importance of transnational ties (Herz, 2015; Viry, 2012).
- We see a gap in understanding the interaction of transnational and local family ties in the support networks of refugees.

DATA AND SAMPLE

IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees (Brücker et al., 2016)

- Monitors people in Germany seeking protection since 2016
- Sampling population: Refugees that arrived in Germany between 2013 and 2016
- Waves employed in analysis: 2017 and 2018
- N = 5,072
- Mean age 33.65 (sd=10.82), 40.81% female, Mean time since migration to Germany 2.21 years (sd=0.89), Main countries of origin Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq

Dependent variable of interest: Receiving social support

- Naming up to 5 role relations that provide two different types of social support (emotional and instrumental)
- Role-interpretor for 18 different role relations

Method

- Generalized linear models to estimate the probability to receive emotional or instrumental support from a certain family member dependent on the residential location of this member
- Testing the moderation effect of using online social networks on the relationship between support and distance to family members

DESCRIPTIVE RESULTS

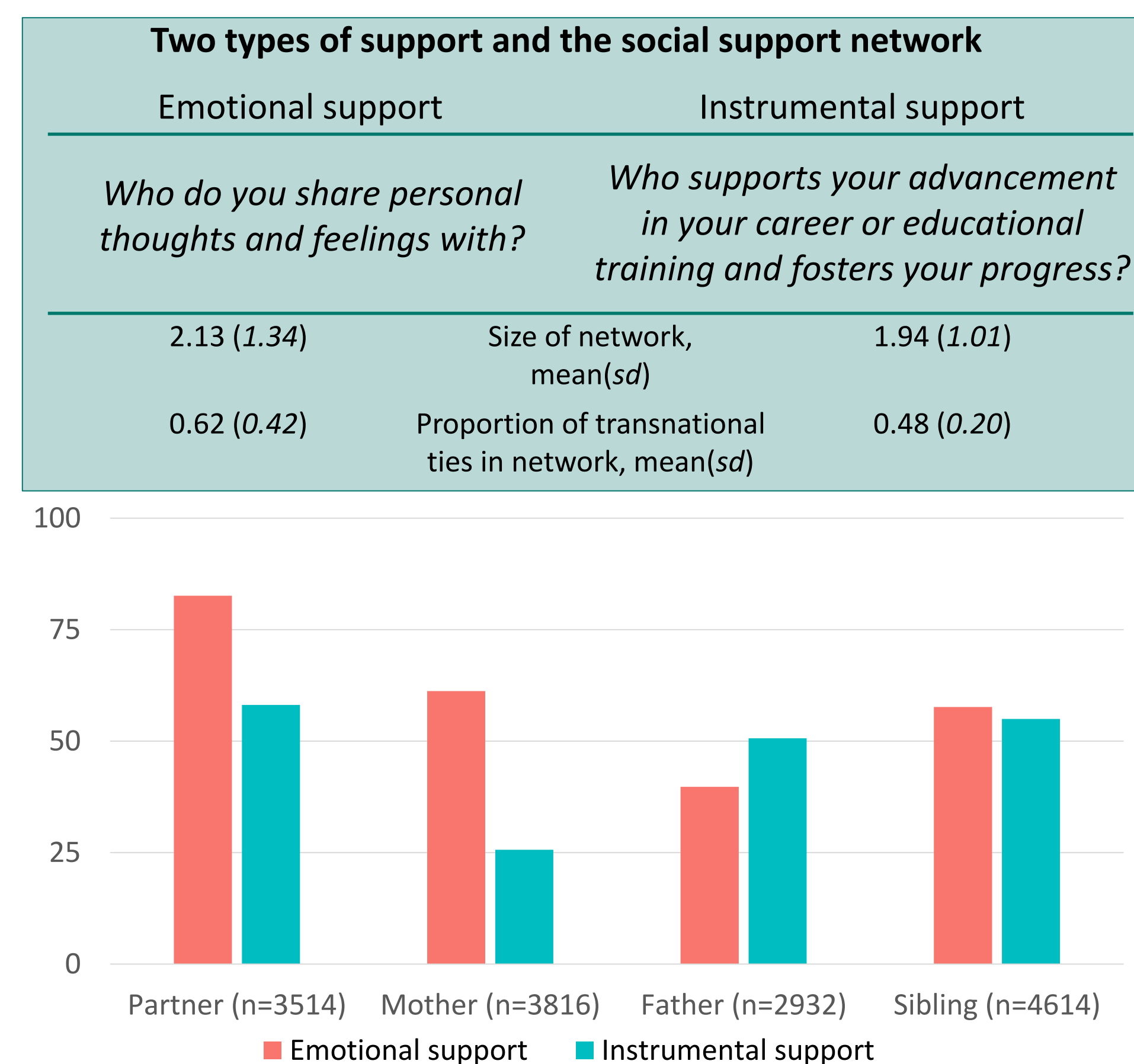


Figure 1. Percentage of respondents receiving support from a certain family member. Note: Constrained on existence of respective family member.

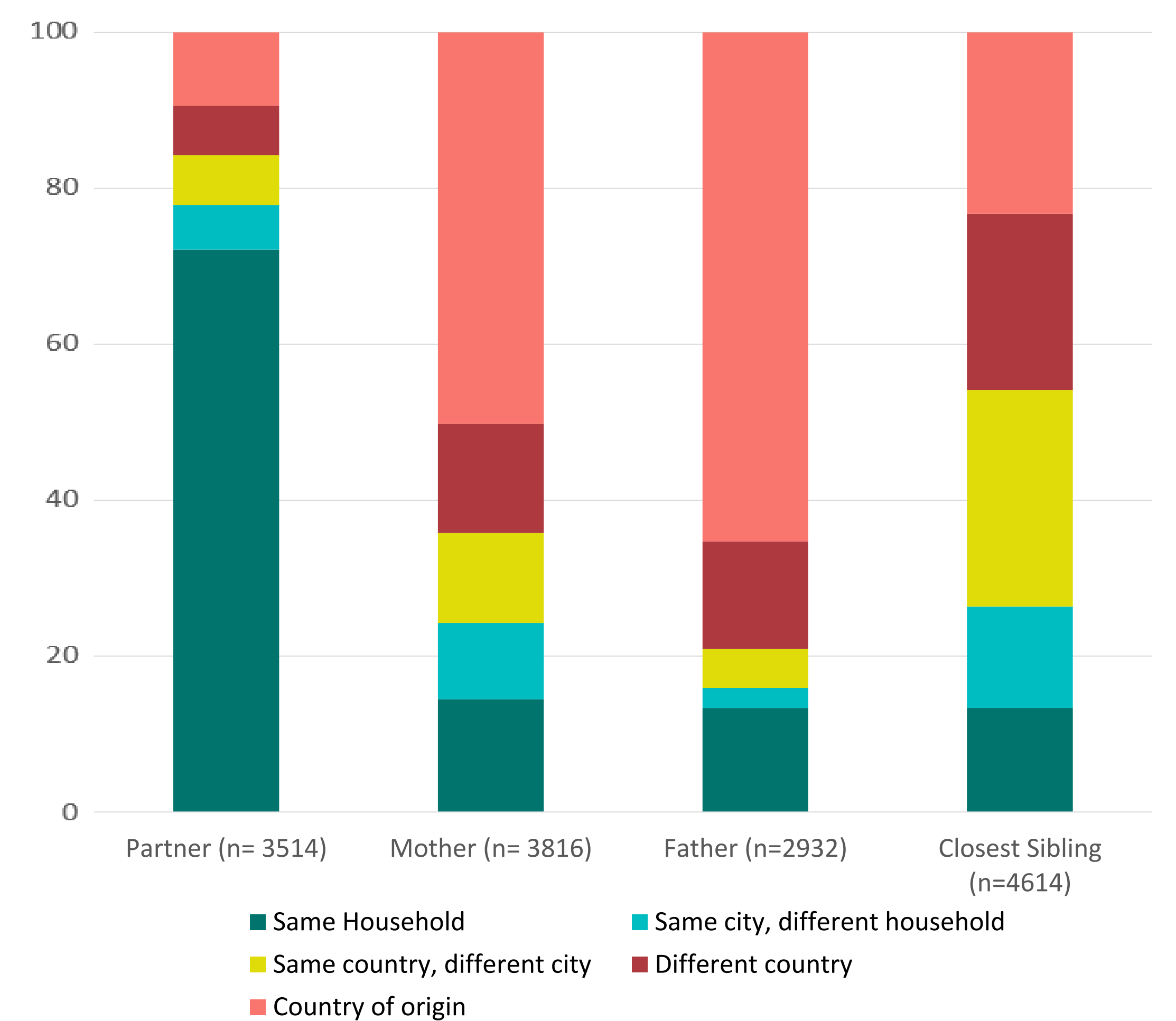


Figure 2. Residential location of family members. Note: Information on the location of siblings is only reported for the closest living sibling.

FINDINGS

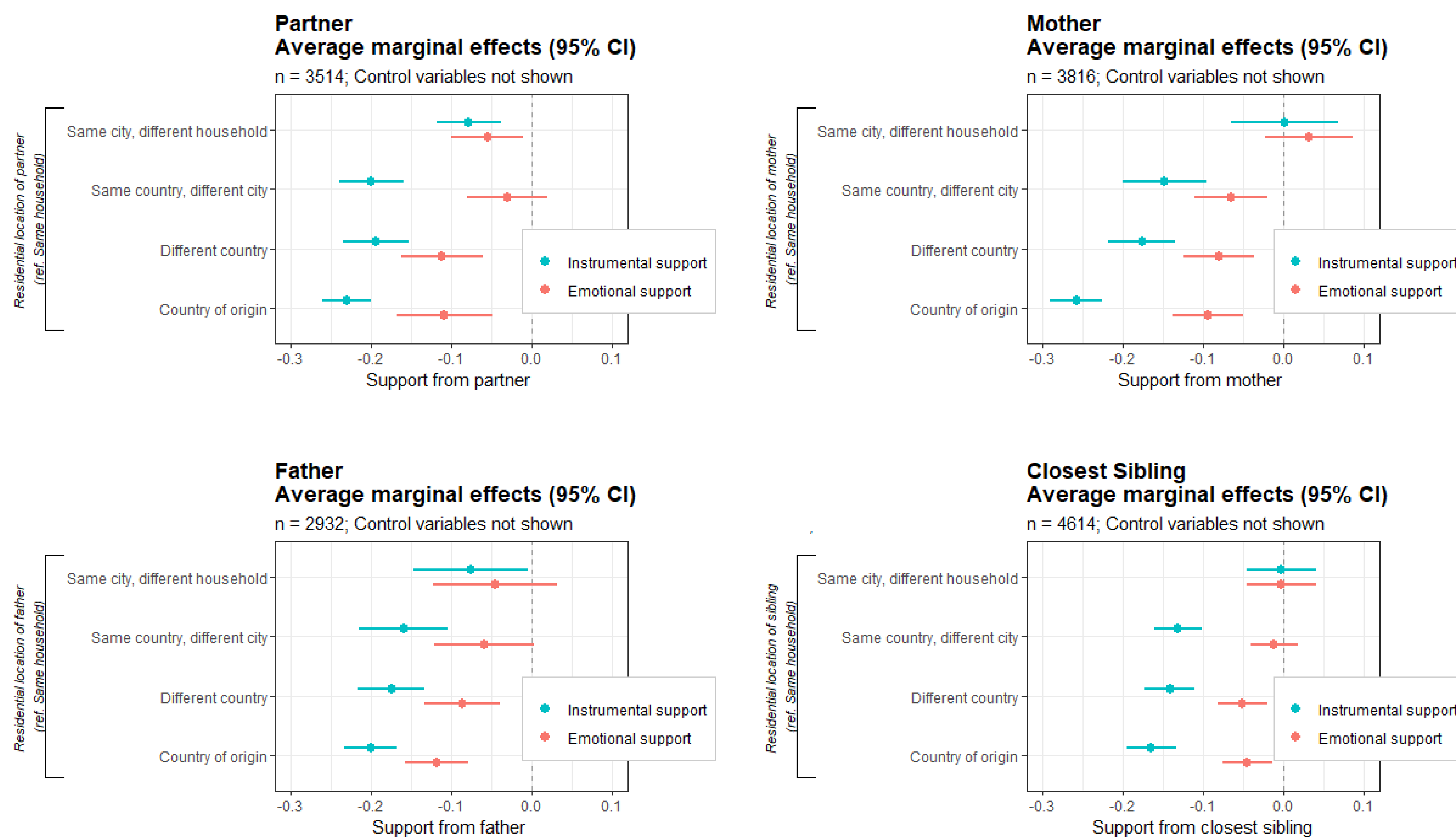
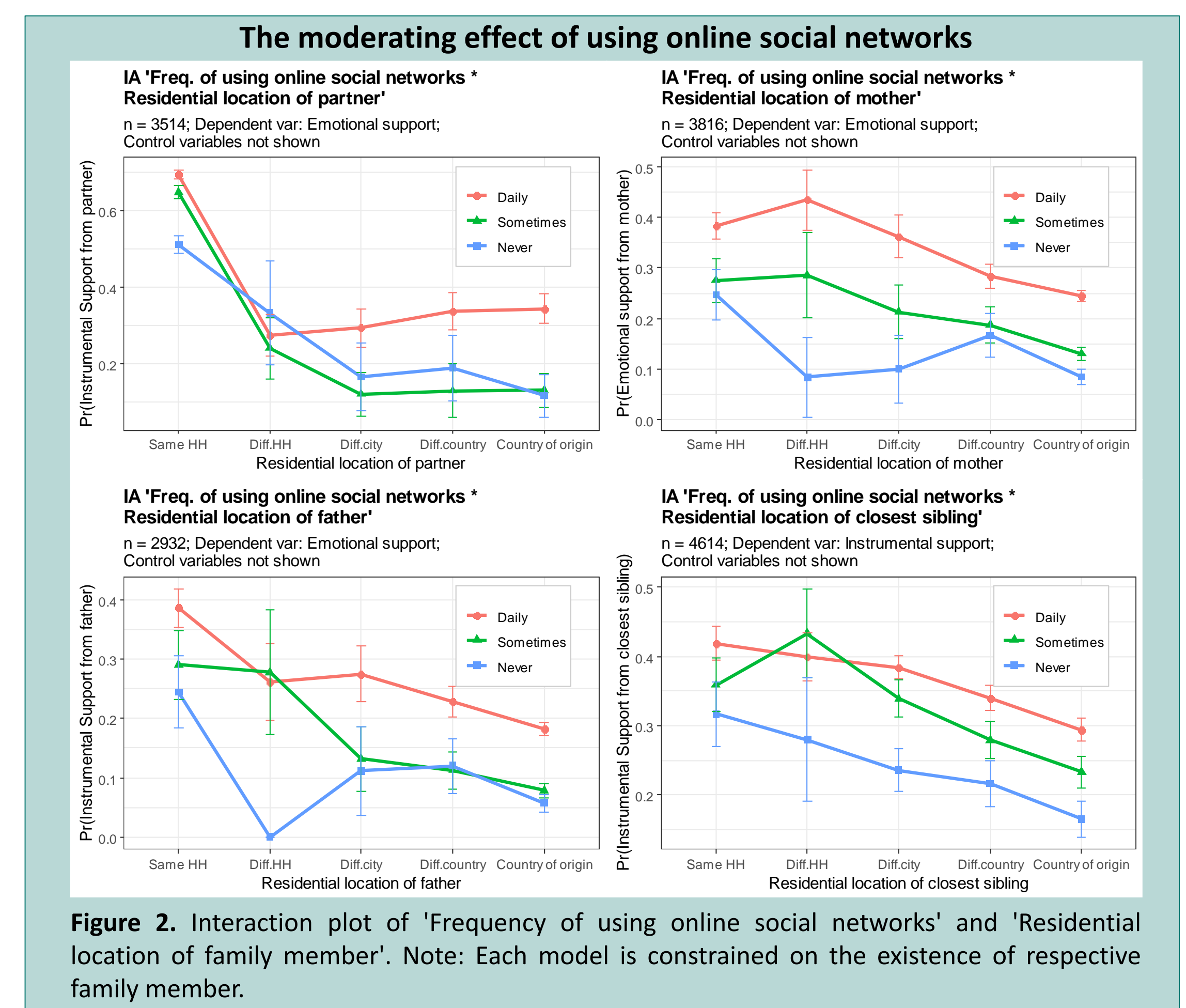


Figure 1. Probability to receive support by residential location of a family member. Note: Each model is constrained on the existence of a respective family member.



- Control variables in all reported models**
- Being in contact with respective family member
 - Frequency of using online social networks
 - Size of nuclear and extended family
 - Time since arrival in Germany
 - Legal status, Sex, Age, Employment, Region of origin

CONCLUSIONS

- The social support network of refugees is highly centered around role relations pertaining to the nuclear family, such as the partner, mother, father, and siblings
- The partner is the main provider of both emotional and instrumental support. Respondents receive instrumental support more often from the father than from the mother. This is exactly the opposite for emotional support
- Increasing distance is generally negatively associated with receiving support from family members
- We find differences between support types and role relations in the family:
 - Instrumental support is more constrained through increasing distance than emotional support
 - Emotional support is received even across great distances, whereas instrumental support, entailing location-bound aid, is not as easily transmittable
- Frequently using online social networks moderates the relationship with daily users reporting increased probability to receive support compared to respondents who never use online social networks. This finding is consistent across both support types and role relations

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