Ethnic Victimization as a Potential Explanation for Poor School Adjustment among Immigrant Youth

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Abstract

The current study aimed to examine how ethnic victimization affects two aspects of school adjustment; school skipping and school liking. Further, we examined whether the link between ethnic victimization and poor school adjustment are moderated by ethnic identity and/or gender. The sample was drawn from a longitudinal study, consisting of immigrant adolescents living in Sweden (N = 365; M_{age} = 13.93, SD = .80; 45.5 % girls). Results revealed that experiences of ethnic victimization significantly predicted school maladjustment among immigrant youth. Interestingly, the study found no support for the moderating effect of ethnic identity and/or gender regarding the link between ethnic victimization and school adjustment. The findings highlight the detrimental role of ethnic victimization on school adjustment, as well as the importance of developing strategies for handling this problem.

Keywords: Immigrant youth · School adjustment · Ethnic harassment · Ethnic victimization · Gender · Ethnic identity
Introduction

The world is becoming more and more ethnically diverse. Due to aspects such as work opportunities, increased mobility and political conflicts, an increasing amount of countries comprise foreign-born people. The major part of migration occurs to what is considered as developed countries. In 2015, the number of foreign-born people in such nations reached 11.2%, compared to the global number of 3.3% (UN, 2015). In Europe, approximately 52 million of the EU population in 2012 were born abroad (OECD/EU, 2015). In Sweden, where the current study was conducted, 16.8% of the population was foreign-born as of 2015 (UN, 2015). This rate is likely to increase and according to SCB (2011), by 2060 the number of foreign-born people in Sweden is estimated to rise above 22%. Overall, a sizable proportion of the Swedish population is composed of residents and citizen with a foreign-origin. These demographic changes pose new challenges to the Swedish integration policy.

The challenges of integration are fairly similar across countries and includes aspects such as accommodation, health care, economic supply, civic engagement, social cohesion, and communication skills. According to a recent OECD/EU report (2015) a major challenge within European countries is unemployment. The report estimates that around 62% of immigrants living in EU are unemployed, and that unemployment is a problem even within highly educated groups. In addition, the report states that immigrants are twice as likely than natives to live below the country’s poverty threshold and in overcrowded accommodations. The same report also argues that unemployment is a source of social exclusion. Increasing the employment rates could enhance immigrants’ opportunities to establish in the host-society. Given the strong link between educational success and occupational outcomes, a key factor to promote integration, adjustment, and well-being of immigrants is probably investing in education of immigrant children and adolescents (Bayram Özdemir & Stattin, 2014).
School Adjustment among Immigrants

The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) show that immigrant students (both first- and second-generation) across 72 countries, tend to perform academically below their native counterparts (PISA, 2015). In several countries, the difference in school performance is considerable. In spite of these discrepancies, there are some exceptions. Several studies in North America showed that on a group level immigrants performed better than their native counterparts (e.g. Conger, Schwartz & Stiefel, 2007). This is referred to as the “immigrant paradox” (e.g., Crosnoe & Turley, 2011). However, a recent meta-analysis concluded that immigrant students in European countries generally hold several academic disadvantages compared to their native counterparts (Dimitrova, Chasiotis & Van de Vijver, 2016). In Europe, students with immigrant background also tend to drop out of school earlier (Weber, Appel & Kronberger, 2015). However, there are some immigrant groups who tend to perform better than the native population. Examples are adolescents of Indian and Chinese ancestry living in Britain (Heath Rothon & Kilpi, 2008). In Sweden, the difference in school performance is significantly larger than the average discrepancies across PISA countries. For example, in science, immigrant students score 70 points below their native counterparts (PISA, 2015). Despite the evidence suggesting that immigrants in Europe generally perform and qualify below students of native origin, current literature fails to give a comprehensive understanding of the issue. An explanation of why immigrant youth tend to follow these negative pattern remains unclear. To broaden the body of research, the current study looks into negative experiences in school and their possible impact on the academic adjustment of immigrants. An understanding of the mechanisms involved in the school adjustment is needed for developing the strategies that may improve academic success, and in turn the integration among immigrants.
Ethnic Victimization and School Adjustment

One hypothesis is that differences in school adjustment may be explained by experiences of peer victimization. Peer victimization refers to aggressive and/or negative behaviours that distress others. It includes both physical, verbal and/or social activities such as insults, threats, and exclusion (Olweus, 1991). Conceptually similar terms often used to explain the phenomenon includes peer harassment and peer bullying.

Peer victimization is a considerable problem for a substantial number of children (Juvonen, Nishina, & Graham, 2000), and studies estimate that as much as 10% of children are being severely, or repeatedly victimized, while many more are being victimized less intensely (Perry, Kusel, & Perry, 1988). Furthermore, peer victimization seems to predict a range of negative outcomes. These includes both internalizing problems such as; depression, loneliness, lower global self-esteem, and anxiety (Hawker & Boulton, 2000; Juvonen & Graham, 2001), as well as externalizing problems including hyperactivity, impulsiveness, and aggression (Hanish & Guerra, 2002; Hodges & Perry, 1999; Schwartz, McFadyen-Ketchum, Dodge, Pettit, & Bates, 1999). Peer victimization also has been related to school performance, and a growing body of research have shown that peer victimization predicts lower academic functioning (Lopez & DuBois, 2005; Thijs & Verkuyten, 2008), poorer attitude towards school, and greater aversion towards school (Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1996; Ladd, Kochenderfer, & Coleman, 1997). Overall, these findings show that peer victimization predicts various negative outcomes, and poses a threat to the school adjustment of adolescents.

One particular form of peer victimization is ethnic victimization. Ethnic victimization refers to victimization targeting one’s ethnic origin (McKenney, Pepler, Craig, & Connolly, 2006). Ethnic victimization is not exclusively connected to immigrants, but may also be an issue for natives. However, due to the fact that youth with immigrant origin more often belong to ethnic, cultural, and/or religious minorities, they may be more likely to experience this form
of peer victimization compared to native counterparts. Although ethnic victimization is relatively unexplored, research has shown that it is one of the main stressors among immigrant youths, both in Europe and in the U.S (Coll et al. 1996; Thijs & Verkuyten, 2008). Furthermore, a considerable number of immigrant adolescents are being ethnically victimized by peers and teachers, in a wide range of contexts. (Huynh & Fuligni, 2010; McKenney et. al., 2006; Thijs & Verkuyten, 2008). In Sweden, 80% of immigrant youths report experiences of ethnic victimization at least once in lifetime (Bayram Özdemir & Stattin, 2014). Immigrant students also have an increased risk of being isolated and rejected, compared to their Swedish counterparts (Plenty & Jonsson, 2017). Ethnic victimization seems to contribute to problems such as decreased self-esteem (Bayram Özdemir & Stattin, 2014), anxiety, depression, (McKenney et. al., 2006), and violent behaviour (Bayram Özdemir, Özdemir & Stattin, inpress). Ethnic victimization has also been connected to poor academic achievement (Thijs & Verkuyten, 2008), and seems to predict negative beliefs about school and academic competence (Bayram Özdemir & Stattin, 2014; Eccles et al. 2006; Wong, Eccles & Sameroff, 2003; Sellers, Copeland-Linder, Martin & Lewis, 2006) low cognitive performance in situations of learning and performance (Appel & Kronberger, 2012), low scores on standardized tests (Steele, Spencer & Aronsson, 2002), low motivation, low curiosity (Alfaro, Umana-Taylor, Gonzales-Backen, Bamaca & Zeiders, 2009; Smalls, White, Chavous & Sellers, 2007), low school satisfaction (Bayram Özdemir & Stattin, 2014) and school dropout (Martinez, DeGarmo & Eddy, 2004). In sum, both general and ethnic victimization seem to be a crucial problem for a substantial number of children, affecting their school adjustment.

Despite the evidence that victimization experiences have detrimental consequences for school adjustment outcomes of adolescents, the process in which this occur is not fully understood. Previous literature describes several theoretical ideas which attempt to explain the mechanisms which mediates the association between victimization and poor school adjustment.
One theoretical idea suggests that the relationship between victimization and school adjustment is mediated through emotional well-being. The hypothesis is that victimization negatively affects the emotional well-being of students, a factor that seems prerequisite for academic achievement (Boekaerts, 1993). Hence, victimized children are at greater risk for school maladjustment. The hypothesis corresponds with current literature. For example, Schwartz, Gorman, Nakamoto and Toblin (2005) suggested that peer victimization predicted academic difficulties through the mediating influence of depressive symptoms. A second theoretical idea suggests that the relationship between victimization and school adjustment is mediated through feelings of personal efficacy (Connell & Wellborn, 1991). The hypothesis is that victimized children constantly receive negative messages about themselves, which negatively affect their overall self-perception, including their academic self-efficacy. These negative beliefs about academic competence predicts poor academic performance. The hypothesis is in line with current literature. For example, Thijs and Verkuyten (2008) and Bayram Özdemir and Stattin (2014) supported that the link between victimization and achievement is mediated by perceived academic self-efficacy. In sum, current literature holds several explanations on why victimization is associated to school adjustment. However, the understanding of potential moderating factors is insufficient. Because of this imbalance in existing literature, the current study focuses on the understanding of potential moderating factors, rather than further examining the potential mediating ones. Regarding moderating factors, there is evidence that victimization may affect adolescents in different ways. However, the current research provides limited suggestions for which groups the effects of ethnic victimization may be more pronounced. To address this gap in literature, the current study includes two potential moderating factors; ethnic identity and gender. Examining the interplay between variables and ethnic victimization in predicting school adjustment may provide a more comprehensive understanding about the at risk groups. Furthermore, identifying groups that are at greater risk
of school maladjustment is crucial in the development of effective strategies. Strategies that might help improve the academic success and school adjustment among immigrants.

The Role of Ethnic Identity

Ethnic identity has been generally defined as how an individual identify themselves in regard to their ethnic group (Phinney et al., 2001). The concept includes; “self-identification, feelings of belongingness and commitment to a group, a sense of shared values, and attitudes toward one’s own ethnic group” (Phinney et al., 2001, p. 496). Recent research suggest that ethnic identity may have a role on how ethnic victimization affect the individual. For example, Lee (2005) showed that a strong ethnic identity poses as a protective factor to ethnic discrimination, that moderated the effects on depressive symptoms and social connectedness. In another study, the authors found that a positive regard to one’s ethnic identity was positively correlated to higher self-esteem (Rivas-Drake, Hughes & Way, 2008). In current literature, there are two perspectives on how ethnic identity may affect a person’s experiences and reactions to ethnic victimization. One theoretical perspective describes how close ties to one’s ethnic identity may constitute as a protective resource. European and US studies on minority youth show that having a positive view on their ethnic group may have a buffering effect against internalizing ethnic victimization, and thus avoiding the negative consequences of these experiences (Weber et. al., 2015; Steele et. al. 2002). The second theoretical perspective on ethnic identification conceptualizes how ethnic identity may increase the negative impact of ethnic victimization. According to Mendoza-Denton and colleagues (2002) and based on the status-based rejection sensitivity model, the authors argue that a person being a member of a minority group, and also identifies themselves highly to their ethnic group, are more sensitive and prone to perceiving cues of rejection and internalize these ethnic victimization experiences. This is in line with previous research showing that the kind of victimization that targets stable and internal traits, such as cultural background and skin colour, will increase the likelihood of
the youth experiencing negative consequences (Graham & Juvonen, 1998). Youth that have a more integrated identity may not perceive the same threat to their self, nor internalize the ethnic victimization to the same extent, given that they don’t define themselves solely based on their ethnicity (Bayram Özdemir, Özdemir & Stattin, 2016). Immigrant youths identifying themselves strongly with their ethnic identity may suffer from ethnic victimization at a greater extent because their victimization experiences will postulate a direct threat to their self. In sum, prior studies provide evidence suggesting that ethnic identity may either buffer or exacerbate the negative consequences of ethnic victimization experiences. Thus, in the current study, we will explore if ethnic identity moderates the association between immigrant adolescents’ experiences of ethnic victimization and their school adjustment.

The Role of Gender

Another potential factor that may influence how ethnic victimization affect immigrant youth is gender. Previous research regarding general peer victimization has shown that gender plays a significant role in the likelihood of victimization and its consequences. For example, Hanish and Guerra (2000; 2002) showed that boys were at greater risk for experiencing more excessive, repetitive and stable peer victimization than girls. In addition, the effects of victimization tended to be more severe for boys, who exhibited higher levels of adjustment problems, including social problems, school problems and internalizing problems (Hanish & Guerra, 2002). Additionally, Schwartz and colleagues (1999), found that victimization among boys, compared to victimization among girls, had a stronger association to attention- and social problems. In another study by Rueger and Jenkins (2014) boys reported higher levels of verbal and physical victimization, whereas girls seemed to experience higher levels of relational victimization such as exclusion and/or threats of ending friendships. In addition, girls experienced more negative consequences such as academic- and psychological maladjustment including increased anxiety, lower grades and lower attendance. Overall prior studies suggest
presence of gender differences in the responses to general victimization. These gender differences may also apply for ethnic victimization. Thus, we will examine whether gender moderates the link between ethnic victimization and school adjustment outcomes of immigrant adolescents.

The Current Study

In an ethnically diverse society, educational success is a key factor for the integration and acculturation of immigrants. One major concern, which has implications for the school adjustment of immigrant youth is ethnic victimization. Current literature shows that experiences of ethnic victimization negatively influences both school performance and the well-being of immigrant youth. Research also shows that students, based on their gender and ethnic identification may respond differently to the negative experiences of ethnic victimization. However, current findings fail to give a comprehensive understanding of the moderating factors that are involved in the process. Thus, the present study is interested in examining whether school adjustment of immigrant adolescents change, i.e. that some well-adjusted students become poorly adjusted overtime if they experience ethnic victimization or the other way around. More specifically, the aim of the present study is to (1) examine how ethnic victimization influence school adjustment of immigrant adolescents living in Sweden, and (2) whether ethnic identification and gender acts as potential moderating factors of the link between ethnic victimization and school adjustment among immigrant youth.

The current study used a longitudinal research design, using data from adolescents with immigrant background, who were followed over two years. Examining the school adjustment of adolescents is important. Previous research argue that school performance generally decreases between childhood and adolescence and that interventions during adolescence may help students to stay positively adjusted to school over time (e.g. Eccles et. al., 1993). Additionally, in Sweden as well as in other countries, a major school transition from the
compulsory education to either academic or occupational track happens during this period. According to a Swedish government bill (2004/05:2) completing the non-compulsory upper secondary school/high school is crucial for future employment. The same government bill also argues that people who have completed this additional education earn 30-40% more, than people who have not. Due to the link between age and school adjustment, the current study controls for this variable. Additionally, there seem to be a link between immigrant generational status (first- versus second- generation) and school adjustment. For example, Grönqvist (2006) found that first-generation immigrants living in Sweden, earned about 15% less than second-generation immigrants, and completed university in a minor extent than second-generation immigrants. Because of these differences between first- and second-generation immigrants, we also controlled for the potential effects of generational status in our analyses.

Method

Participants

The sample of the present study was drawn from a longitudinal study, The Seven School Study, targeting youths’ experiences inside and outside school, as well as their relationships with parents, peers, and teachers. Data was collected twice, with a 1-year time interval between Time 1 (T1) and Time 2 (T2). The study was conducted in Örebro, the 7th largest city in Sweden. Örebro has an ethnically diverse population, and in 2016 23.6% of the population were first- or second-generation immigrants, matching the characteristics of the Swedish population (http://www.scb.se). Data was derived from seven public schools located in different neighbourhoods, hence it matched the general socio-demographic characteristics of the city. The target sample included 1 121 adolescents from 7th to 8th grade. The sample of the current study included 365 adolescents, all with immigrant background ($M_{age} = 13.93$, $SD = .80$). Forty-five and a half percent of the adolescents were girls and 55.5% were boys. The participating adolescents were all first- and second-generation immigrants, 63% percent were
born in Sweden or in a Nordic country, whereas 36% were born outside of Sweden. Twenty-six percent of the adolescents reported having divorced parents, and 79% perceived the financial situation of their family as good as, or better than other families in their neighbourhood.

Chi-square test showed no significant association between gender and the language they use at home (i.e., Swedish, both Swedish and another language, or another language), $\chi^2 (2) = 4.71, p = .095$. However, there was a significant association between gender and immigrant generational status $\chi^2 (1) = 4.52, p < .05$. Furthermore, chi-square test showed a significant association between the language they use at home and generational status, $\chi^2 (2) = 25.64, p < .001$.

**Measures**

**Ethnic victimization.** To measure immigrant youth’s experiences of ethnic victimization a 7-item scale of ethnic victimization was used (Bayram Özdemir & Stattin, 2014). Questions targeted the youth’s experiences of victimization during the school semester, and were responded to by using a 5-point scale (1=never, 2=sometimes, 3=every month, 4= every week, 5= daily). Example items were “Has someone said anything derogatory about your origin, for example words like nigger, darky, damned immigrant, damned Yugoslav/Bosnian, inkface, ching-chong, or something else?”, “Has someone said that you are doing something wrong because you don’t do it like Swedish people do it?” and “Has someone treated you very different than/compared to Swedes, because you come from another country?”. The scale has previously been used to measure ethnic victimization among immigrant youth in Sweden, and provides strong predictive validity and reliability (Bayram Özdemir & Stattin, 2014). The inter-item reliability for the scale was strong ($\alpha = 0.83$) in the current study.

**Ethnic identity.** As a measure of ethnic identity, we assessed to what extend the youth feel like an immigrant and want to be identified with his/her own ethnic background. The
participants rated these two items: “I feel like an immigrant” and “I do not want to become too “Swedish”, but would rather stick to my own culture”. The correlation between the items were \( r = .55, p < .001 \). That is, high scores on one item are associated with high scores on the other item. The youths were asked to respond each statement using a 4-point scale (1= don’t agree at all, 2= don’t particularly agree, 3= agree pretty well, 4= agree completely). In the analysis, an average of the two items were computed.

**School Liking.** School liking was assessed using the following items; “How do you like school?”, “Do you do your best in school?”, “Does school feel like a constraint?”, “How would you describe the relationship between yourself and school?” and “Are you satisfied with your school work?”. Participants rated the items on a 5-point Likert scales. Response formats varied between questions. The first response format ranged from “very much” to “not at all”, the second from “most often” to “almost never”, the third from “very often” to “almost never”, and the last from “as best friends” to “as enemies”. The scale had an adequate inter-item reliability (\( \alpha = .77 \)).

**Skipping School.** Skipping school was assessed through a single item which asked: “Have you cut class this semester (i.e, been away from school for an entire day)?”. The item was answered with a 5-point Likert scale (1=No, has not happened, 2=Once, 3=two-three times, 4= four-ten times, 5=more than 10 times).

**Missing Data Analysis**

As many as 16% of the participants did not participate in the second wave of data collection, and less than 5% of the cases had missing values up to 3 variables within each time point. Expectation Maximization method was used to estimate the missing values. Little’s MCAR test yielded non-significant test statistics (\( \chi^2 (134) = 153.879, p = .115 \)) suggesting that the missing data pattern was not systematic and EM algorithm could be used to estimate missing data.
Results

Descriptive Analysis

Table 1 summarizes the bivariate correlations, means and standard deviations of the study. Ethnic victimization was negatively correlated with school liking, and positively correlated with school skipping. Ethnic victimization did significantly correlate with ethnic identity. The demographic characteristics of age, and generational status were not correlated to school adjustment outcomes.

Cluster Analysis of School Adjustment

Regarding the variables school skipping and school liking we used cluster analysis to identify naturally occurring groups of adolescents in the data. In that way, we were able to examine if school adjustment among immigrant adolescents changed in a way that well-adjusted students become poorly adjusted overtime due to ethnic victimization and vice versa. We used both the first and second assessments of the school adjustment outcomes in the cluster analysis. This approach allowed us to identify the groups based on their levels of school adjustment as well as those who change in their levels from the first assessment to the second assessment. We standardized the scores using z-transformation. The mean of the transformed scores became 0 and standard deviation became 1. In identifying the clusters, we used hierarchical cluster analysis with Ward’s method and Squared Euclidean Distance.

School Liking. Hierarchical cluster analysis revealed three distinct clusters, explaining 70% of the variance in school liking (see Figure 1). The first cluster (n = 89) had a mean score of -1.24 at T1, and -.94 at T2. Correspondingly, cluster one was labelled as “low school liking”. The second cluster (n = 122) had a mean score of .07 at T1 and -.36 at T2, the cluster was
labelled “moderate school liking”. The third and final cluster (n = 154) had a mean of .69 at T1, and .85 at T2. This cluster was labelled as “high school liking”.

One-way ANOVA showed that there was a significant difference across the three clusters in school liking at T1, $F(2, 362)=298.69, p<.001$. The clusters also significantly differed at T2, $F(2,362)=266.58, p<.001$ (see table 2).

Skipping school. Regarding school skipping hierarchical cluster analysis revealed three distinct clusters, explaining for 75% of the variance (see Figure 2). The first cluster (n=185) had a mean score of -.63 at T1, and -.67 at T2. This cluster was labelled as “low school skipping”. The second cluster (n=115) had a mean score of .03 at T1 and .42 at T2, this cluster was labelled as “moderate school skipping”. The third and final cluster (n=65) had a mean of 1.61 at T1, and 1.11 at T2. This cluster was labelled as “high school skipping”.

One-way ANOVA showed that there was a significant difference across the three clusters in school skipping at T1, $F(2,362)=612.59, p<.001$, and T2, $F(2,362)=200.17, p<.001$.

We examined if the cluster memberships across the school liking and school skipping were consistent. Overall, 66.3% of the youth who were in the high school liking cluster were also in the low levels of the school skipping cluster. Whereas, only 7.8% of the youth who were in the high school liking cluster were also in the high levels of the school skipping cluster. Furthermore, 30.3% of the youth who were in the low school liking cluster were also in the low levels of school skipping cluster. Whereas, 29.2% of the youth who were in the low school liking cluster were also in the high levels of school skipping cluster. In addition, we estimated the contingency coefficient and found that the cluster memberships across these two variables were significantly related, contingency coefficient $C=.30, p < .001$ (see table 3).
Does ethnic harassment predict school adjustment?

**School Liking.** Multinomial logistic regression analysis was used to evaluate whether school liking was predicted by the following variables; age, gender, perceived SES, immigrant generational status, ethnic identity and ethnic victimization. The reference group in the analysis was the cluster labelled as “high school liking”, i.e. the group who liked school consistently across T1 and T2. Table 4 summarizes the statistical estimates from this analysis. Findings showed that adolescents who were ethnically victimized were significantly more likely to be in the moderate school liking cluster \((B=1.203, \text{Wald} = 16.41, p<.001)\) or low school liking cluster \((B= 1.738, \text{Wald} = 29.78, p<.001)\) than the high school liking cluster. Specifically, for every unit increase in ethnic victimization, immigrant adolescents were 3.33 times more likely to be in the moderate school liking, and 5.67 times more likely to be in the low school liking cluster. Age, gender, perceived SES, generational immigrant status and ethnic identity did not significantly predict cluster membership.

**Skipping school.** Multinomial logistic regression analysis evaluated whether skipping school was predicted by the variables; age, gender, perceived SES, generational immigrant status, ethnic identity and ethnic victimization. The reference group in the analysis was cluster 3, i.e., the group who reported low school skipping consistently across T1 and T2. The data from the analysis is summarized in Table 5. Findings showed that adolescents who were ethnically victimized were significantly more likely to be in the moderate school skipping cluster \((B=.521, \text{Wald} = 4.29, p<.001)\) or high school skipping cluster \((B=1.250, \text{Wald} = 21.11, p<.001)\) than the low school skipping cluster. Specifically, for every unit increase in ethnic victimization, immigrant adolescents were 1.68 times more likely to be in the moderate school skipping, and 3.49 times more likely to be in the high school skipping cluster. Further, results showed that boys were significantly more likely to be in the moderate school skipping cluster.
(B= -.545, Wald = 4.64, p<.001) or high school skipping cluster (B= -1.035, Wald = 10.42, p<.001) than girls. Age, perceived SES, generational immigrant status and ethnic identity did not significantly predict cluster membership.

The Moderating Role of Ethnic Identity

Before testing potential interaction effects, ethnic victimization and ethnic identity variables were centered. Multinomial regression analysis showed no support for the moderating effect of ethnic identity on the link between ethnic victimization and school liking. Adolescents who identified themselves as immigrant were not more likely to be in the low school liking cluster (B=.139, Wald=.17, p=.681) or moderate school liking cluster (B=.051, Wald=.03, p=.875), than the high school liking cluster. That is, regardless of how strongly one identifies as an immigrant, the effects of ethnic victimization on school adjustment is equally detrimental. Further, multinomial regression analysis showed no support for the moderating effect of ethnic identity on the link between ethnic victimization and school skipping. Adolescents who identified themselves as immigrant were not more likely to be in the moderate school skipping cluster (B=.467, Wald=2.60, p=.107) or high school skipping cluster (B=.013, Wald=.00, p=.962), than the low school skipping cluster.

The Moderating Role of Gender

Multinomial regression analysis showed no moderating effect of gender on the link between ethnic harassment and school liking. Again, boys and girls were equally likely to be in the low school liking cluster (B=-.120, Wald=.04, p=.851), or moderate school liking cluster (B=.193, Wald=.1, p<.753), than the high school liking cluster. That is, regardless of gender, ethnic victimization has an equal effect on school adjustment. Further, multinomial regression analysis showed no support for the moderating effect of gender on the link between ethnic victimization and school skipping. Boys and girls were equally likely to be in the moderate
school skipping cluster (B = .433, Wald = .66, p = .417) or high school skipping cluster (B = .383, Wald = .45, p = .501) than the low school skipping cluster.

**Discussion**

The world is becoming more ethnically diverse, and a growing proportion of the European population, including the Swedish population, is composed of residents and citizen with a foreign-origin. These demographic changes pose new challenges to the integration policy. A major challenge is that of unemployment, a factor prerequisite for establishing in the host-society. Given the strong link between educational success and occupational opportunities, a key factor to promote integration is school adjustment among immigrant youth (Bayram Özdemir & Stattin, 2014). Currently, immigrant youth living in Europe tend to perform academically below their native counterparts. One potential explanation to this pattern is the fact that a substantial number of immigrant youths face victimization due to their ethnic origin (e.g. Huynh & Fuligni, 2010). Previous studies suggest that such experiences are connected to internal and external problems, including poor academic achievement (e.g. Thijs & Verkuyten, 2008). Yet, the factors that moderate the link between ethnic victimization and school maladjustment are less understood. In the present study, we aimed to address this gap in knowledge.

The ambition of the present study, was to understand how ethnic victimization affects two aspects of school adjustment; school skipping and school liking. Furthermore, we aimed to understand for which groups the effects of ethnic victimization are more pronounced. Specifically, we looked into two potential moderating factors; ethnic identity and gender. Previous research has shown conflicting results regarding the impact of these factors. There is evidence that ethnic identity may either buffer or exacerbate the negative consequences of ethnic harassment experiences. Additionally, there is evidence of gender differences regarding
the negative consequences of victimization. Some suggesting that the effects are more severe for girls, whereas some suggests that the effects are more severe for boys.

Our findings suggest that experiences of ethnic victimization significantly predicted school maladjustment among immigrant youth. Specifically, immigrant youth who was victimized due to ethnic origin tended to report lower school liking, as well as higher school skipping rates over two years. These results are in line with previous research, showing that ethnic victimization is connected to low school satisfaction (Bayram Özdemir & Stattin, 2014) and high school dropout (Martinez et al. 2004). The link between ethnic victimization and school maladjustment among immigrant youth may be related to emotional well-being. As Thijs and Verkuyten (2008) emphasized, ethnic victimization is one of the main stressors among immigrant youth. Hence, ethnic victimization may predict internal problems such as depression which may have negative implications for school adjustment (e.g. Schwartz et al. 2005). This association may also be related to feelings of personal efficacy. As Connell and Wellborn (1991) suggested, victimized children constantly receive negative messages about themselves. Consequently, ethnic victimization may negatively affect youths’ beliefs about themselves as well as their academic competence, predicting poor academic performance (Bayram Özdemir & Stattin, 2014; Thijs & Verkuyten, 2008).

Interestingly, the current study found no support for the moderating effect of ethnic identity regarding the link between ethnic victimization and school adjustment. It seems that ethnic victimization affects youths in the same way, regardless of how strong their ethnic identity is. These findings may be related to the assessment of victimization using solely self-reports. According to Operario and Fiske (2001), individuals who strongly identify with their ethnic group are more likely to perceive negative interactions as racially discriminating. This means that youth having a strong ethnic identity might have reported higher levels of ethnic victimization, compared to individuals who do not have a strong affiliation with their ethnic
group. Consequently, inferential analysis may not indicate an actual moderating effect of ethnic identity on the association between ethnic victimization and school maladjustment. Furthermore, our findings may be explained by differences regarding the effects ethnic identity has on the consequences of ethnic victimization. Specifically, it seems that ethnic identity may either buffer or exacerbate the negative consequences of ethnic victimization experiences. According to Mendoza-Denton and colleagues (2002) and based on the status-based rejection sensitivity model, immigrant youths identifying themselves strongly with their ethnic identity may suffer from ethnic victimization at a greater extent. Thus, their victimization experiences will postulate a direct threat to their self. Others suggest that identifying with one's ethnic minority group may constitute as a protective resource and have a buffering effect against internalizing ethnic victimization (e.g. Weber et. al., 2015). These different effects are also evident in previous studies, showing evidence for both theories. It could be that ethnic identity affects immigrant youth in different ways, cancelling out a statistically significant effect.

The present study found no support for the moderating effect of gender on the link between ethnic victimization and school adjustment. Specifically, the effects of ethnic victimization seem to be equally detrimental among girls and boys. These results differ from previous studies regarding gender differences within general victimization. For example, Schwartz and colleagues (1999) showed a moderating effect of gender on the link between general victimization and attentional, as well as social problems. A potential explanation for our results could be that ethnic victimization is not directly targeting any specific gender-related cues. That is, ethnic victimization primarily focuses on targeting the victims’ ethnic origin, and may therefore have relatively equal consequences for both girls and boys.

Alternatively, not observing any moderating role of gender may be due to the method of assessing victimization. In the present study, ethnic victimization was conceptualized and assessed by using items that are exclusively focusing on verbal victimization. This is in contrary
to previous research which used measures which included both physical and relational victimization. In fact, girls and boys seem to be affected by these forms of victimization in different ways. For example, Rueger and Jenkins (2014) showed that boys reported more physical- and verbal-, as well as less relational victimization than girls. To address this issue, the current study would have benefited from examining whether more verbal forms of ethnic victimization has turned into physical and/or more aggressive and severe forms of punishment, such as being rejected, neglected etc. Examples of items included could be “Has comments (i.e. has someone said anything derogatory about your origin, for example words like nigger, darky, damned immigrant, damned Yugoslav/Bosnian, inkface, ching-chong, or something else) been accompanied by physical aspects, for example kicking, spitting, slapping, hair-pulling, tripping or something else?”, or “Has comments (i.e. has someone said anything derogatory about your origin, for example words like nigger, darky, damned immigrant, damned Yugoslav/Bosnian, inkface, ching-chong, or something else) been accompanied by rejection, for example ignoring, not being allowed to sit along during lunch, not being included in games or something else?”.

Since previous studies only seem to contain evidence regarding gender differences on general victimization, our finding adds to current literature examining the moderating role of gender between the link of ethnic victimization and school adjustment.

The results of the present study highlight the detrimental role of ethnic victimization on school adjustment. Based on our findings it seems that ethnic victimization equally affects boys and girls, regardless of how strongly they identify themselves as being immigrant. That is, the present study found no characteristics protective of the negative effects of ethnic victimization. In sum, our results suggest that immigrant youth are at equal risk of experiencing the negative effects of ethnic victimization. Knowing that a substantial number of immigrant youths face ethnic victimization, developing strategies for handling this problem is crucial. Such strategies
could improve the educational success among immigrant youth and help them increase their chances to establish into the host-society.

**Limitations and Strengths**

Several limitations to the present study need to be acknowledged. First, we examined and conceptualized school adjustment through school liking and school skipping, which constitutes only two aspects of school adjustment. Although there is evidence that these factors are predictive of achievement (e.g. Ladd, Buhs & Seid, 2000) they do not provide actual information regarding students accomplishments. More exact information regarding the achievement would be the final school grades, which have stronger implications for occupational opportunities. We suggest future studies to include grades as an additional outcome variable.

Second, we did not control for general peer victimization. By assessing this variable we would be able to fully distinguish the effects of ethnic victimization from victimization of other character, additionally allowing us to make more precise suggestions about ethnic victimization.

Third, our data consists of self-reports. This could be problematic, since there is evidence that some variables may be better assessed using other or complementary measurements (Nakamoto & Schwartz, 2010). For example, individuals strongly identifying with their ethnic origin may perceive general victimization as ethnic victimization, resulting in biased reports of ethnic victimization experiences (Operario & Fiske, 2001). No other measurement than self-report could provide more accurate data than the individual itself, however complementary assessment such as peer nominations could provide a more comprehensive understanding regarding the role of ethnic identity. Future research should focus on further exploring what seems to moderate the negative effects of ethnic victimization, in order to more successfully be able to target it.
Despite its limitations, several strengths of the study should be acknowledged. The primary strength is the longitudinal design, allowing us to identify subgroups of adolescents who might follow different change patterns over time in school adjustment. Another strength of the present study is the person-centred approach. Most studies in the field use variable oriented approach which provides information about the overlapping variations between a set of predictors and an outcome variable. However, this study identified the naturally occurring groups of youths based on how they like school over time and how much truancy they display. We also aimed to predict these groups. Hence, the present study provides information interpretable at an individual level.

Conclusion

The present study shows that experiences of ethnic victimization significantly predict school maladjustment among immigrant youths over time. Specifically, immigrant youth who experience victimization due to their ethnic origin tend to report lower levels of school liking and higher levels of school skipping. Furthermore, the effects of ethnic victimizations seem to be equally detrimental to immigrant youths regardless of their gender, and regardless of how strong their ethnic identity is.

Our findings show that ethnic victimization experiences are an important issue for immigrant adolescents. These experiences are one of the factors that differentiate students who has average or low levels of school adjustment (both school liking and truancy) from those who are well-adjusted. That is, ethnic harassment constitutes an important risk for immigrant youth. These findings emphasize the importance for schools to develop strategies to reduce ethnic victimization, and its negative consequences for immigrant youth. Based on previous research, such strategies might include information as well as practical implications for creating a school context that is inclusive, supportive and democratic. According to Bayram Özdemir and Stattin (2014) a supportive and democratic school environment may
reduce the negative consequences of ethnic victimization on immigrant youths’ self-esteem, and consequently their school adjustment. According to Bayram Özdemir and Stattin (2014) such school environment could be achieved by fostering decision-making processes in which all students may participate, as well as positive relationships between teachers and students. Verkuyten and Thijs (2002) showed that children reported less ethnic victimization if they perceived that they could tell their teachers about it. This suggests that the informal contact between students and teachers is an important factor to reduce the experiences of victimization. Furthermore, if teachers and school reacted to incidents such as racist name-calling or ethnic exclusion, the children reported less experiences of ethnic victimization. This implies that teachers having a standpoint of reacting to ethnic victimization may lead as an example to students about what is acceptable and not (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002).

Additionally, Dovidio and colleagues (1997) suggest that fostering collaboration between immigrants and their native counterpart may enhance feelings of belongingness, and reduce the prevalence of ethnic victimization. Adopting the suggestions above may reduce the prevalence of ethnic victimization and its negative consequences on school adjustment among immigrant youth.
Table 1

**Descriptive Statistics and Preliminary Analysis**

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*Notes.  * *p < .05,  ** * *p < .01,  *** * *p < .001*
Figure 1 Clusters of School Liking over Two-year

Figure 2 Clusters of School Skipping over Two-years
Table 2

*Differences in School Liking among Youth at T1 and T2*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clusters</th>
<th>Low School Liking</th>
<th>Moderate School Liking</th>
<th>High School Liking</th>
<th>F (2, 362)</th>
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### Table 3

*Differences in School Skipping among Youth at T1 and T2*

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<td>M = .42 SD = .05</td>
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Table 4

*Multinomial Logistic Regression Analysis of School Liking*

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<th>p</th>
<th>Exp(B)</th>
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*Note:* The reference category was high levels of school liking. Nagelkerke $R^2 = .16$. 
Table 5

*Multinomial Logistic Regression Analysis of School Skipping*

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<tr>
<th></th>
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<th>Wald</th>
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</table>

*Note:* The reference category was low levels of school skipping. Nagelkerke $R^2 = .122$
School adjustment

References


School adjustment


School adjustment


School adjustment


School adjustment


School adjustment


School adjustment

School adjustment
School adjustment
School adjustment
School adjustment
School adjustment