The Role of Ethnic Harassment on Violent Behavior Among Immigrant Youths

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Abstract

The present study aimed to: (1) examine whether experiencing ethnic harassment was related to violent behaviors among immigrant youths (2) identify the conditions that elevate ethnically harassed youth’s engagement in violent behaviors. Specifically, current study examined the moderating roles of youth’s ethnic identification, anger regulation, and impulsivity on the association between ethnic harassment and violent behaviors. Participants included 341 first- and second-generation immigrant youth ($M_{age} = 14.11, SD = .93$; 48 % girls) who were recruited from seven different schools in a mid-size Swedish city. Regression analyses was conducted to test whether ethnic harassment predicted violent behaviors over the course of one year after and whether youth’s ethnic identification, anger regulation and impulsive personality trait moderated the association between ethnic harassment and violent behaviors. Results showed that when immigrant youth were exposed to ethnic harassment, they were more likely to display violent behaviors one year later. In addition, the results suggested that immigrant youth who identified themselves with their heritage culture, i.e., high ethnic identification, were more at risk displaying violent behaviors in the case of ethnic harassment. Moreover, the results indicated that anger regulation and impulsive personality trait did not moderate the relationship between ethnic harassment and violence.

Keywords: Ethnic harassment, immigrants, violence, ethnic identification, anger regulation, impulsivity.
The Role of Ethnic Harassment on Violent Behavior Among Immigrant Youths

The number of people with different cultural and ethnic backgrounds has increased over the past ten years in Sweden. National statistics showed that people with foreign background living in Sweden (i.e., born outside Sweden or born in Sweden with both parents born outside Sweden) were more than 1.3 million in year 2002, and this number were over two millions in year 2013 (Statistics Sweden [SCB], 2014). Having positive experiences in multi-ethnic everyday life contexts is essential for the healthy functioning of both Swedes and immigrants. Through positive interactions, Swedish people may become more open to cultural differences while immigrants may be more positive integrated to the host society. Nevertheless, being immigrant in a country is not always an easy situation. It may become a challenging situation when immigrants need to cope with problems such as ethnic harassment and other disrespectful treatment due to their ethnicity.

Ethnic harassment is when someone treat another person negatively based on their ethnic background or their cultural identity (McKenney, Pepler, Craig, & Connolly, 2006). Example of ethnic harassment is when someone say something derogatory about another’s origin, treat someone differently or make fun of someone in a derogatory way because they come from another country (Bayram Özdemir & Stattin, 2013). Ethnic harassment is constituted of both direct and indirect forms of aggressive behavior such as being called insulting names, threatened by others, excluded from activities (Bellmore, Nishina, You, & Ma, 2011), treated negatively, teased and rejected (Stefanidi & Asendorpf, 2012) due to their ethnicity. A number of studies have shown that immigrants are exposed to harassment due to their ethnic background (Bayram-Özdemir & Stattin, 2013; Bellmore et al., 2011; Bunar, 2007; Carter & Forsyth, 2010; Hong & Espelage, 2012; Rodriguez-Hidalgo, Ortega-Ruiz, & Zych, 2014; Stefanidi & Asendorpf, 2012;
ETHNIC HARASSMENT AND VIOLENCE

Strohmeier, Karna, & Salmivalli, 2011; Tobler, Maldonado-Molina, Staras, O'Mara, Livingston, & Komro, 2013; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002) and that immigrants are exposed to harassment due to their ethnic background more than native youth (Bunar, 2007; Carter & Forsyth, 2010; Hong & Espelage, 2012; Rodriguez-Hidalgo et al., 2014; Strohmeier et al., 2011). For instance, a study in the Netherlands revealed that about 40% of children with non-Dutch background reported being victims of racist name-calling and about 30% of them had experienced exclusion based on their ethnicity. In contrast, 21% of the Dutch children reported that they had been victims of racist name-calling and 19% of them had experienced ethnic exclusion (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002). Similarly, a longitudinal study in Sweden found that 80% of the first-and-second generation immigrant youth (i.e., born outside Sweden or born in Sweden with both parents born outside Sweden) reported experiencing some type of harassment due to their ethnic background (e.g. being exposed to derogatory words and being made fun of) (Bayram-Özdemir & Stattin, 2013). Furthermore, national statistics in Sweden showed that reports of being victim of harassment including assault, threat, mugging, harassment, and fraud was almost twice as high for both people born outside Sweden (5.9%) and for people born in Sweden with both parents born outside Sweden (6.1%), than for people born in Sweden with one or both parents born in Sweden (3.6%) (Brå, 2012). Together, these findings indicate that immigrants are at risk of experience ethnic harassment and that it is a widespread occurrence.

Additionally, being exposed to ethnic harassment can have negative effects for psychological well-being and social functioning of minority and immigrant youth (Jasinkaja-Lahiti, Liebkind, & Perhoniemi, 2006; Sellers, Copeland-Linder, Martin, & Lewis, 2006; Stefanidi & Asendorpf, 2012). For instance, in their longitudinal study, Wong and colleagues (2003) showed that when minority youth in the U.S. experienced ethnic discrimination, they
were less likely to believe in their competence and reported low self-esteem over time. Similarly, in another longitudinal study on first and second-generation immigrants in Sweden, Bayram-Özdemir and Stattin (2013) reported that youth’s self-esteem decreased when they experienced ethnic harassment in school. Furthermore, in a study on African American adolescents in the United States, it was found that adolescents who were exposed to everyday racial hassles had more depressive symptoms and perceived more stress (Sellers et al., 2006). In line with this, a longitudinal study in Canada, on 7th to 11th grade students, showed that being target of ethnic victimization generated internalizing problems such depression, somatic complaints, and withdrawn behaviors. The same results were found one year later, suggesting that ethnic victimization may have negative health consequences over time (Mckenney, Pepler, Craig, & Connolly, 2006).

When immigrant youth are harassed due to their ethnic background, such experiences may not only generate internalizing problems but also aggressive and delinquent behaviors. For instance, McKenney and colleagues (2006) reported that 3% of the variation in aggressive and delinquent behaviors among immigrant youth was significantly explained by experiencing ethnic victimization (Mckenney et al., 2006). Similarly, ethnic harassment is linked to display of physical aggression (Hoglund & Hosan, 2012), frustration, outrage and anger (Carter & Forsyth, 2010) among youth. Even though being victim of harassment seems to be associated with aggressive and delinquent behaviors, the current literature has some limitations.

First, a majority of the studies is cross-sectional, that means that we can not be sure if those that are ethnically harassed are more violent because of this, or if those that are violent is more ethnically harassed because of this behavior. For example, a longitudinal study reported that children who showed more anger and aggressive behavior at a certain time were at greater
risk of being victimized later, suggesting that aggressive behavior is not only an outcome but also a risk factor (Hanish, Eisenberg, Fabes, Spinrad, Ryan, & Schmidt, 2004). Therefore, it is still not clear whether experiencing ethnic harassment leads to aggressive behaviors or displaying aggressive behaviors puts immigrant youth at risk of ethnic harassment. Second, there might be differences between youth on how they respond to harassment experiences. We argue that not all ethnically harassed youths’ engage in violent behaviors, and we need to identify what factors that generate these problem behaviors. Thus, the current study examined whether ethnic harassment predicted immigrant youth’s involvement in violent behaviors over time. Furthermore, we looked at whether youth’s ethnic identification with heritage culture, anger regulation, and impulsivity increase the risk of their engagement in violent behaviors due to the experience of being ethnically harassed.

**Ethnic Harassment and Violence**

A majority of the studies in the literature have assumed that when immigrant and minority youth experience ethnic harassment, they display psychological problems (Jasinkaja-Lahiti et al., 2006; Sellers et al., 2006; Stefanidi & Asendorpf, 2012) or aggressive and violent behaviors (Carter & Forsyth, 2010; Hanish et al., 2004; Hoglund & Hosan, 2012; Mckenney et al., 2006). For example, a cross-sectional study with adolescents in Chicago, examined the relation between racial/ethnic discrimination (e.g., “How often have you experienced any kind of discrimination due to your race/ethnicity?”) and violent behaviors such as kicking, hitting or beating up another person. The study indicated that violent behaviors were more common for those who occasionally or often were targets of racial/ethnic discrimination than for those who hardly ever experienced any discrimination. The authors conclude that ethnic discrimination can be a distressful experience and consequently generate aggressive behaviors (Tobler et al., 2012).
Furthermore, why ethnically harassed immigrant youths would engage violence could be understood in different ways. For example, an attempt to explain why people act aggressively can be found in the frustration-aggression theory. The explanation is that people who act out in an aggressive way are struggling with unpleasant feelings, such feelings can be sadness and frustration. According to this theory, it is those feelings that lead to aggressive behavior (Berkowitz, 1989). This theory explain one factor that may explain why ethnically harassed youth would engage in violence. Although, ecological-developmental perspective may provide a wider perspective. Hence, this perspective considers several factors in youth’s life that may cause violence behavior. For example, it highlights that youths live in a multifaceted world with factors that influence the youth simultaneously. For example, if youth do not develop positive peer relationship this may influence them into deviant behavior later in life, the same for other areas in the youth’s life (Fraser, 1996). Moreover, it is also of importance how immigrants are integrated with the host society to prevent deviant behavior. For example, if there is a strong and positive support in the society this could generate a positive adaption for immigrant youths (Paat, 2013). To conclude, there can be different reasons to explain why ethnic harassed immigrant youths act out.

Moreover, the contextual stressors of ethnic harassment may not influence all youth similarly (Monks, Ortega-Ruiz, & Rodriguez-Hidalgo, 2008; Pequera & Williams, 2011; Rumbaut, 1994; Smokowski, Chapman, & Bacallao, 2007; Stefanidi & Asendorpf, 2012; Stoddard, Zimmerman, & Bauermeister, 2013; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2006). For instance, a four-year longitudinal study found that adolescents who were exposed to multiple risk factors at age 14 (e.g., affiliating with aggressive or delinquent peers, engaging in non-delinquent behaviors) displayed increased levels of violent behavior by the age of 18. By contrast, adolescents who
reported having high self-acceptance and peer and parent support exhibited a decrease in engaging in violent behaviors over time (Stoddard et al., 2013). In line with this findings, one can argue that there might be differences on how immigrant youth ethnically identify themselves and how well they regulate their emotions and behaviors. This may in turn play a role in their reactions to stressful event such as ethnic harassment. Thus, in the current study, we examined whether youth’s ethnic identification and their ability to control their anger and impulses play a role on how they react to ethnic harassment.

**The role of ethnic identification.** How immigrants interact with the mainstream society as well as how they identify themselves with their heritage culture may have an impact on their well-being, and may influence how they integrate into the new society. For example, individuals can choose not to take part in the large society by sticking strictly to their heritage, others might try to take part but the host society do not welcome them, either way, this can result in separation from the main society culture (Berry, 2005; Berry & Sabatier, 2010; Roberts & Ali, 2013). For example, a cross-sectional study in France showed that immigrants who were separated from the host society experienced more discrimination compared to others (Berry & Sabatier, 2010). In line with this, a cross sectional study in Australia found that children who were integrated in the larger society reported less victimization (Roberts & Ali, 2013). Concluding, a positive integration requires a mutual responsibility both from immigrants and the host society (Berry, 2005).

When immigrants feel a strong connection to their heritage culture and are proud of their ethnic background such ethnic identification can also decrease the negative effects of ethnic discrimination (Harris-Britt, Valrie, Kurtz-Costes, & Rowley, 2007; Rivas-Drake & Hughes, 2008; Sellers et al., 2006; Wong, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2003). For example, a longitudinal study
with African American adolescents, in grade 7th and in 8th in the United States, reported that adolescents who felt highly connected to their ethnic group reported lower levels of problem behaviors (e.g. involvement in gang fight) when they experienced ethnic discrimination than those who had low connection to their ethnic group (Wong et al., 2003). Similarly, a cross-sectional study found that African American adolescents, in the United States, in 8th grade who felt proud of their ethnicity (e.g., “Talked about being proud to be black”) also reported less negative self-esteem consequences (e.g., “I certainly feel useless at times”) from perceived discrimination (Harris-Britt et al., 2007). Moreover, when youths feel proud of their ethnicity it can also reduce depressive symptoms from being ethnically discriminated (Rivas-Drake & Hughes, 2008). Together, these results indicate that it may be positive when immigrants have a strong connection to their heritage culture. Although, there may also be a risk if that means that immigrants are excluded from the host country.

**Role of anger regulation.** When youths experience offensive treatment from others (e.g., victimization), they can feel anger due to this. Such feelings can be difficult to handle and emotional regulation skills may therefore be of interest whether youth act out those feelings or not (Garner & Hinton, 2010; Olson, Lopez-Duran, Lunkenheimer, Chang, & Sameroff, 2011; Spence, De Young, Toon, & Bond, 2009). For example, Garner and Hinton (2010) found through questionnaires with children, parents and after-school staff that both students that are bullies and victims of bullying had less emotion regulation skills than others did (Garner & Hinton, 2010). Furthermore, a longitudinal study on youths, in grade 6th and 8th, found that youths that have been victimized were those that had problem to regulate their emotions and showed aggressive behavior, such as threatened to hurt or beat up someone (Herts, McLaughlin, & Hatzenbuehler, 2012). Moreover, when youths have problem to regulate anger they are at
greater risk of being involved in deviant behavior such as stealing and destroying property (Silk, Steinberg, & Morris, 2003). These results indicate that emotion regulation may play a role whether youths’ engage in externalizing behavior or not. Thus, it seems that if youths do not manage to regulate their feelings, there is a risk that they may act out in an aggressive and violent way when they are exposed to stressful conditions.

**Role of impulsivity.** People that are impulsive have shown to be more involved in delinquency and deviant behavior e.g., violent and aggressive (Eisenberg, et al., 2009; Low & Espelage, 2014; Meier, Slutske, Arndt, & Cadoret, 2008). The self-control theory argues that the reason for this is that impulsive individuals act without thinking twice. They argue that people with low self-control do not consider the consequence of their behavior, and are therefore more engaged in crimes and deviant behaviors. Further, they argue that criminal acts are attractive and generate a thrill and excitement. Due to this, those who lack self-control cannot hold back the temptation to engage in such acts. They assume that impulsive persons will commit crimes as long as crimes are attractive. Further, they argue that society’s need to delinquency less attractive so impulsive individuals do not fall for the temptation. As well as the importance to teach children to control their impulses (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). Concluding, one could therefor assume that ethnically harassed immigrant youths would engage more in violence if they have an impulsive personality.

Taken together, ethnic identification, anger regulation and impulsivity are important factors to examine when try to better understand which immigrant youths engage in violent behaviors when they experience ethnic harassment. To our knowledge, there is until now no study that has considered these factors. In Sweden, there is also lack of studies that examine violent behavior due to ethnic harassment among immigrants youth.
The Current Study and Research Questions

I aimed to answer two questions using a two-year longitudinal data in the present study. The first goal of this study was to examine whether experiencing ethnic harassment was related to violent behaviors among immigrant youth. The second goal was to examine whether immigrant youth’s ethnic identification, their ability to regulate their anger and impulses play a role in the link between ethnic harassment and violence. We hypothesized that immigrant youth would display more violent behaviors when they experienced ethnic harassment. Furthermore, we hypothesized that ethnic identification would decrease violent behavior. We expected that youths who had problems to regulate their anger and those that had high impulsive personality traits would be more likely to be involved in violence when they were exposed to ethnic harassment.

Method

Participant

The data in this current study were drawn from a Swedish longitudinal study named Seven School Study. The original study examines students’ experiences inside and outside school as well as youths’ relationships with peers, teachers and parents. Seven schools with different socio-economic characteristics and with a wide range of both Swedish and immigrant youths were examined for the original study. In these schools, students from grade 7 to 9 were targeted and data were collected in the spring of every year during four years with start in year 2007. The target sample included 1654 adolescents. The current study used data from 7th and 8th grade students whose parents were born outside the Nordic countries. Thus, the sample of the current study included 341 students ($M_{age}$ = 14.11, $SD = .93$; 48 % girls). About 42 % of these adolescents were born outside of Sweden. Youths’ parents had migrated from 54 different countries around
the world, including Middle Eastern, East African, Asian, and South American countries, and parts of the former Yugoslavia. About 6% of the participants spoke Swedish at home, 30% of them spoke another language and 65% of them spoke both Swedish and other language. A majority of the youths had employed parents (i.e., 55% of the mothers and 72% of the fathers). Sixty-three percent of the adolescents reported that they perceived their economic condition as good as other families in their neighborhood.

**Measures**

**Ethnic harassment.** A six-item scale was used to measure immigrant youths’ experiences of ethnic harassment, which is the independent variable of this study (Bayram Özdemir & Stattin, 2013). The questions included: “Has anyone said anything derogatory about your origin, for example words like nigger, darky, damned immigrant, ink face, ching-chong or something else?” “Has anyone looked at you in a way that makes you certain they have a negative attitude towards you, just because you or your parents come from another country?” “Has anyone said that you are doing something wrong because you don’t do it like Swedish people do?” “Has anyone treated you very differently from Swedes, because you come from another country?” “Has anyone made fun of you in a derogatory way because you come from another country?” “Have you ever been blamed for something that isn’t true, only because you come from another country?” Youth responded each of these questions on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*daily*). The Cronbach’s alpha for ethnic harassment scale was .80.

**Ethnic identification.** Current study used the following statement to measure youth’s connection to their heritage culture: “I do not want to become Swedish but I would rather stick to
my own culture.” Youth were asked to report on how much they would agree with this statement on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (do not agree at all) to 4 (agree completely).

**Anger dysregulation.** A four-item scale what was used to measure how well youth regulate their anger (Eilot et al., 2007). In this scale, youth were first provided with a lead question (What happens when you get really angry with someone?). Then, they were presented the following 4 items: “Do things I don’t want to do,” “Feel I have no control over myself,” “Act aggressively, even though I don’t want to,” and “Do things I regret afterwards”. They were asked to report on how much they agree with each of these statements using the four-item scale ranging from 1 (don’t agree at all) and 4 (agree completely). The Cronbach’s alpha for the scale was .72.

**Impulsive personality trait.** The Youth Psychopathic Traits Inventory (Andershed et al., 2002) was used to measure youth’s impulsive personality trait. The YPI includes 44 items, and four of these items measure impulsivity among youth. The items included: “I often speak first and think later,” “I often do things without thinking ahead,” “If I get the chance to do something fun I’ll do it, regardless of what I’m doing at the time,” and “I see myself as a rather impulsive person.” The response option of this scale ranged from 1 (don’t agree at all) to 5 (agree completely). The Cronbach’s alpha for the impulsive personality scale was .62.

**Violent behaviors.** Youth were asked to report on how often they were involved in violent behaviors (Andershed et al., 2001). In this study violent behavior is the dependent variable. The following questions were asked to measure this: “Have you, purposely, destroyed or participated in destroying objects such as windows, street lights, phone booths, benches, and gardens during the last year?” “Have you threatened or forced someone to give you money, cigarettes, or anything else during the last year?” “Have you participated in a street fight in town
during the last year?” “Have you carried weapons (e.g., brass knuckles, bat, knife, switchblade, or other weapons) at school or in town during the last year?” “Have you participated in beating up someone, believing or knowing that he/she needed hospital treatment afterwards during the last year?” They answered each question on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (no, it has not happened) to 5 (more than 10 times). The Cronbach’s alphas for violence scale were .77 at T1 and .87 at T2.

**Procedure**

The original data were collected during class hours, and trained research assistant oversaw the data collection process. Students were able to complete the questionnaires within 90 minutes on average. Students were informed about the time it would take to complete the questionnaires and the purpose of the study. They were also assured that the participation was voluntary, and their responses would be confidential and would not be shared with anyone. Regional Ethics Review Board approved the study procedures.

**Data Analysis**

To answer the first research question (i.e., Does ethnic harassment predict engagement in violent behavior over time among immigrant youth?) a regression model was estimated. In this model, we regressed youth’s engagement in violence at T2 from being ethnic harassed at T1, and controlled for violence at T1 to estimate the changes over time. Current study did also conduct a series of moderated-regression analyses to examine whether youth’s ethnic identification, anger dysregulation and impulsivity moderate the association between ethnic harassment and violent behaviors (Aiken & West, 1991).
Results

Preliminary Analyses and Descriptive Statistics

The means, standard deviations and ranges for all variables are presented in Table 1, and percentage for all ethnic harassment items are in Table 2. Eighty-five percent of the immigrant youth reported that they experienced at least one type of harassment due to their ethnic background during the past year. The most common ethnic harassment type was “Being called with derogatory words” (see Table 2). More than half of the youths’ (66%) reported that they experienced this. There were no significant differences across boys and girls in their experience of ethnic harassment $t(324) = 1.80 \ p > .05$. In addition, first-and second-generation immigrant youths did not significantly differ from each other, $t(335) = .65 \ p > .05$. All the study variables were correlated with ethnic harassment (see Table 1). Specifically, experience of ethnic harassment T1 was positively associated with violence at T2 ($r = .39, p < .001$) and violence at T1 ($r = .30, p < .001$). Furthermore, impulsivity and anger dysregulation were also positively correlated with each other ($r = .37, p < .001$).
Table 1

Mean, Standard deviations, Correlations and Inter-item Correlations among the Study Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Ethnic harassment scale score at T1</td>
<td>0.80</td>
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<td>2. Ethnic identification</td>
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<td>3. Anger dysregulation</td>
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<td>4. Impulsivity</td>
<td>.10*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.37***</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Violence at T1</td>
<td>.30***</td>
<td></td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Violence at T2</td>
<td>.39***</td>
<td>.15*</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.32***</td>
<td>.87</td>
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Means

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1.64</th>
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Standard deviations

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Minimum

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Maximum

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<th>4</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>4.4</th>
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</table>

Note: Values on the diagonal for the measures (except Ethnic pride) are Cronbach’s alpha values.

*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001
Table 2

*Percentage for Participants Experience Ethnic Harassment Once or More*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1: Has anyone said anything derogatory about your origin, for example words like nigger, darky, damned immigrant, ink face, ching-chong or something else?</td>
<td>67.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: Has anyone looked at you in a way that makes you certain they have a negative attitude towards you, just because you or your parents come from another country?</td>
<td>51.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3: Has anyone said that you are doing something wrong because you don’t do it like Swedish people do</td>
<td>33.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4: Has anyone treated you very differently from Swedes, because you come from another country?</td>
<td>40.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5: Has anyone made fun of you in a derogatory way because you come from another country?</td>
<td>56.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6: Have you ever been blamed for something that isn’t true, only because you come from another country?</td>
<td>37.6</td>
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</table>
Do Youth Show Violent Behaviors When They Experience Ethnic Harassment?

In order to examine whether youth’s experiences of ethnic harassment at T1 predicted their engagement in violent behaviors at T2, a regression analysis was conducted. In this analysis, we controlled for the assessment of violent behaviors at T1 to predict the change over time in violent behaviors. The results showed that when youth were exposed to harassment due to their ethnic background, they reported engaging in more violent behaviors over time ($\beta = .331$, $p < .001$). This finding suggested that experience ethnic harassment increased the risk of engaging in violent behaviors among immigrant youths over time.

Under What Conditions Are Ethnically Harassed Youth More Vulnerable For Engaging in Violent Behaviors?

We estimated a series of moderated-regression analyses to test whether immigrant youth’s connection to their heritage culture (i.e., ethnic identification) and their anger dysregulation and impulsive traits acted as a protective (ethnic identification) or risk factor (anger dysregulation and impulsivity) for their engagement in violent behaviors when they experienced ethnic harassment. Simple slope tests were conducted to aid the interpretation of the moderation effects.

Moderating Role of Ethnic identification: The results of the moderation analysis showed that the main effect of ethnic harassment on youth’s engagement in violent behaviors, were statistically significant, $\beta = .26$, $p < .001$, whereas there was no significant main effect of ethnic identification on violent behaviors $\beta = .11$, $p > .05$. In supporting our expectation, ethnic identification significantly moderated the association between youth’s experience of ethnic harassment and their engagement in violent behaviors, $\beta = .14$, $p < .05$ (see Table 3). The simple slope tests showed that when immigrant youths reported high levels of ethnic identification, they
were more likely to display violent behaviors in response to ethnic harassment, $\beta = .40$ $p < .001$.

At low levels of ethnic identification, such association was not observed (see Figure 1).

Together, these findings suggested that immigrant youth who wanted to stick with their own heritage culture rather than Swedish culture were more at risk for displaying violent behaviors in the case of ethnic harassment.

*Figure 1. The Moderation Role of Ethnic Identification on the Effect of Ethnic Harassment and Violent Behaviors*
Table 3

The Moderating Role of Ethnic Identification in the Association between Ethnic Harassment and Youth’s Engagement in Violent Behaviors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Violent behaviors at T2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Violent behaviors at T1</td>
<td>.21**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic harassment</td>
<td>.26***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic identification</td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic harassment X Ethnic identification</td>
<td>.14*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total R²</td>
<td>.23***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

Moderating Role of Anger Dysregulation. The results of the moderation analysis showed that the main effect of ethnic harassment on youth’s engagement in violent behaviors were statistically significant, $\beta = .33, p < .001$, whereas there was no significant main effect of anger dysregulation on violence, $\beta = -.03, p > .05$. Furthermore, anger regulation did not significantly moderate the association between youth’s experience of ethnic harassment and engagement in violent behaviors, $\beta = .08, p > .05$ (see Table 4). To conclude, youth’s inability to regulate their anger does not seem to elevate the association between ethnic harassment and engaging in violent behaviors. Ethnically harassed youth do not seem to be particularly at a greater risk for engaging in violent behaviors when they had difficulties in regulation their emotions.
Table 4

*The Moderating Role of Anger Dysregulation in the Association between Ethnic Harassment and Youth’s Engagement in Violent Behaviors*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Violent behaviors at T2</th>
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<tr>
<td>Violent behaviors at T1</td>
<td>.24***</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethnic harassment</td>
<td>.33***</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anger dysregulation</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic harassment X Anger dysregulation</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total R²</td>
<td>.21***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

**Moderating Role of Impulsive Personality Trait.** The results of the moderation analysis showed that the main effect of ethnic harassment on violence at T2 were significant, $\beta = .25$, $p < .001$. Although, impulsivity did not have significant effect on youths’ violent behavior, $\beta = .07$, $p > .05$. Moreover, impulsivity did not significantly moderate the association between youth’s experience of ethnic harassment and engagement in violent behaviors, $\beta = .12$, $p > .05$ (see Table 5). To conclude, youth’s impulsive personality trait does not seem to elevate the association between ethnic harassment and engaging in violent behaviors. Immigrant youths who are ethnically harassed, does seem to be at greater risk of engaging in violent behaviors when they are impulsive.
Table 5

The Moderating Role of Impulsive Personality Trait in the Association between Ethnic Harassment and Youth’s Engagement in Violent Behaviors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Violent behaviors at T2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Violent behaviors at T1</td>
<td>.25***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic harassment</td>
<td>.25***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impulsivity</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic harassment X Impulsivity</td>
<td>.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total R²</td>
<td>.22***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

Discussion

Immigrants can unfortunately be treated disrespectfully due to their ethnic background (Bayram-Özdemir & Statin, 2013; Bellmore et al., 2011; Bunar, 2007; Carter & Forsyth, 2010; Hidalgo et al., 2014; Hong & Espelage, 2012; Stefanidi & Asendorpf, 2012; Strohmeier et al., 2011; Tobler et al., 2013; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002). Consistent with previous research, the current study showed that ethnic harassment is a common experience, since eighty-five percent of the immigrant youths had experienced ethnic harassment at least once in the past year. This experience can be stressful and harmful for their psychological health (e.g., Jasinkaja-Lahiti et al., 2006; Sellers et al., 2006; Stefanidi & Asendorpf, 2012) and it can lead to aggressive and violent behavior (Carter & Forsyth, 2010; Hanish et al., 2004; Hoglund & Hosan, 2012; Mckenney et al., 2006; Tobler et al., 2013). Although, ethnic harassment, and violent behavior due to this, is as far as we know not studied in immigrants in Sweden. This study extends the
literature by examining whether ethnically harassed immigrant youths in Sweden engage in violent behavior over time and whether ethnic identification, anger dysregulation and impulsive personality traits increase or decrease such behavior.

The results showed that immigrant youths engaged in more violent behaviors over time if they were exposed to ethnic harassment. This finding is in line with previous research suggesting that ethnically harassed youths are more vulnerable to engage in violence (Carter & Forsyth, 2010; Hanish et al., 2004; Hoglund & Hosan, 2012; Mckenney et al., 2006; Tobler et al., 2012). Although, majority of the studies is cross-sectional, this study extends the literature with results that showed an increase in violent behavior over time. The results indicate that ethnic harassment may be a risk factor as it increases violent behavior. Given that, Sweden is becoming a more multicultural society (Statistics Sweden [SCB], 2014), these results highlight the severe consequences of ethnic harassment. Hence, if people treat each other with respect and see ethnical and cultural differences as something positive, it may not only decrease the act of ethnic harassment but also violent behavior due to this. Although, consider the ecological-developmental perspective (Fraser, 1996), current study highlights that we cannot see ethnic harassment as the one and only reason for violent behavior. Thus, when immigrant youths act in a violent way we need to understand the contextual life of youths. The ecological-developmental perspective provides this wide perspective considering how youths perceive their overall life situation may also influence their behavior (Fraser, 1996).

To better understand the reasons for violent behavior, factors that might effect ethnically harassed youth’s engagement in violent behaviors was considered in current study. Specifically, youth’s ethnic identification, anger dysregulation and impulsivity was tested to see if they would moderate the relations between ethnic harassment and violence. The results revealed that
immigrant youths’ ethnic identification influence how likely they will be engaged in violence when they experienced ethnic harassment. Specifically, it was found that those ethnically harassed youths engaged more in violent behavior if they reported high identification with their heritage culture (see Figure 1). This finding was contradictory with findings of previous research, which showed that high connection to an ethnic group could work as a buffering effect by reducing the negative outcomes of ethnic harassment (Harris-Britt et al., 2007; Rivas-Drake & Hughes, 2008; Sellers et al., 2006; Wong et al., 2003). Results of the current study, instead indicated that when immigrant youths stick to their own culture the risk of engage in violent behavior increases. This finding should be investigated more as the current study only examined ethnic identification with one question. Future research should extend the knowledge about ethnic identification through more questions to get a wider understanding what it means for immigrants and what drives them to stick to their own heritage culture. Current study suggest several aspect for future research to investigate the role of ethnic identification further. First, violent behavior could be a way to defend your heritage culture when being target of ethnic harassment. Hence, those that feel strongly connected to their heritage culture may also be those that feel that they need to protect this belonging more then others. This may be an explanation why results of current study showed increased violent behavior for this individuals. Second, future research could also consider violence in domestic settings and examine if this have an impact on youths violence behavior due to ethnic harassment. Could it be the case that violence is accepted in home settings for those that rather stick to their own culture, and this in turn are why those also act out more than others? Third, the literature showed that when immigrant youth rather stick to their own heritage culture, this is a risk factor for being ethnic harassed (Berry & Sabatier, 2010). One could argue that those youths that stick to their own culture may not be
integrated in the society and this in turn leads to negative consequences. Suggesting, that a mutual integration, where individuals respect each other and embrace differences, is more positive for individuals well-being (Berry, 2005). To conclude, the results of current study showed that ethnic identification play a role as it increases violent behavior when being ethnically harassed. Although, we cannot be sure why this seems to be the case and future research should examine ethnic identification further. More questions have been raised, and future research could investigate e.g., why youths rather stick to their own culture and how this is associated with violence due to ethnic harassment. An interdisciplinary approach is suggested to investigate this further, using both quantitative and qualitative methods. To both see the bigger picture and associations, but also to get detailed information about thoughts and intentions of immigrant youths.

The present study also examined how well immigrant youths regulate their anger played a role in the association between ethnic harassment and violence. Contrary, to the expectations, anger regulation did not significant correlate with violence neither as predictor nor as moderator. Meaning that ethnically harassed youths that have problems to regulate their anger are not more likely to engage in violence. This finding was also contrary to the literature, which suggests that youths who have problems to regulate emotions are more likely to engage in violent behavior (Garner & Hinton, 2010; Gottfredson & Hirsch, 1990; Olson et al., 2011; Spence, et a., 2011). The results of this study tell us that this is a complex area. People that have problems to regulate anger are not those that are the most violent due to ethnic harassment. Neither can we say that those show less violent behavior. The results suggest that youths that have problem to regulate anger are different from each other, as they do not show the same levels of violent behavior. Concluding, we cannot understand all immigrant youths’ violent behaviors by looking at their
ability to regulate anger. Even though it could be so for some individuals, emotion regulation does not seem to be a common factor for ethnically harassed youths to engage in violence.

Furthermore, we hypothesized that youths that are impulsive would report more violent behaviors when experiencing ethnic harassment. This hypothesis was not supported by the data. This finding was also contradictory with previous research that suggests that violent behavior is more common for people with impulsive personality trait than others (Garner & Hinton, 2010; Gottfredson & Hirsch, 1990; Olson et al., 2011; Spence, et a., 2011). These results challenge the self-control theory, who argues that impulsive people i.e., have low self-control, do not think twice about their actions and therefore are those that are involved in delinquency and commit crimes (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). The result does not confirm this theory, as the results do not show that impulsive youths are more engaged in violence. The current study also indicates that delinquency is more complex than what self-control theory argues. That is, delinquency is not simply a way to feel thrill and excitement that impulsive individuals cannot abstain. Instead, current study shows that we need to consider more than only impulsive personality traits to understand why youths engage in violence. Thus, not all individuals with high impulsive personalities reported the same engagement in violence. Concluding, for some individuals their impulsive personality can make them more engaged in violence but for the next individual it does not. The results have too much of those differences and we cannot conclude that impulsivity is a common factor why ethnically harassed immigrant youths engage in violence.

Altogether, current study emphasize that when try to understand ethnically harassed youths engagement in violence we need to consider the multifaceted life of immigrants. Therefore, this study highlights an approach similar to ecological-developmental perspective to understand this, because there can be many reasons simultaneously that affect youths
engagement in violent behavior. Although, the ecological-developmental perspective is just one example and there may be other perspective that also can be useful. Even though we argue to see many different factors that may play a role in immigrants youths engagement in violence, this study can conclude that ethnic harassment and ethnic identification seems to affect this behavior. However, this does not mean that ethnic harassment and ethnic identification is exclusive as other factors may also affect immigrant youth’s violent behavior. Current study have identified ethnic identification as a important factor to be investigated further.

**Limitations and Strengths**

This study have looked at immigrants as a homogeneous group, which we argue that they are not. We cannot say that these results represent immigrants in general. Future research should examine immigrants in other cities, countries and circumstances.

This study used self-report questionnaires which can be a limitation because the questions can be interpret and understand in different way by the participants. There is also a risk that the participant wants to answer the questions in a “right way” and therefore do not answer truthfully.

Moreover, the question of ethnic identification in this study is limited due to only one question. This could have affected how the question and results were interpreted. This leaves some questions unanswered and more knowledge is needed to understand why youths rather stick to their own heritage culture. Future research should examine the role of ethnic identification by asking more questions with a multifaceted and interdisciplinary approach.

Although, current study have several strength. The longitudinal design contributes to examine ethnic harassment and change in violence over time. The study also extends the
literature by highlight immigrant’s experiences and consequences of ethnic harassment in Sweden.

**Conclusion**

This study extends the knowledge that ethnic harassment is harmful for immigrant youths. Specifically, ethnically harassed immigrants are more likely to engage in violent behavior later on in life. Moreover, when people rather stick to their own culture they seem to be more violent due to the experience of ethnic harassment. Anger regulation and impulsive personality traits do not seem to affect ethnically harassed youth’s engagement on violence. These results acknowledge the severe consequences of ethnic harassment. Thus, when youth show violent behavior, the experience of ethnic harassment could be one part of the reason - but not the only one. The current study emphasizes an approach that considers the contextual lives of immigrant youth - to better understand and in turn to promote a positive and healthy development for individuals with different ethnicity.
References


