

# Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Risk Factors for Peer Victimization in Immigrant Youth in Finland

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This study (a) compared native Finns and immigrant children with respect to different forms of peer victimization and (b) tested whether intrapersonal (e.g., depression) and interpersonal (e.g., peer rejection) risk factors help to explain the association between immigrant status and peer victimization. The sample was drawn from the first phase of a large intervention evaluation project, KiVa, in Finland, composed of 4,957 native Finns (51% girls), 146 first-generation immigrants (48% girls), and 310 second-generation immigrants (53% girls) 9 to 12 years of age. The concurrent data included self- and peer reports collected via Internet-based questionnaires. Compared with native youth, first- and second-generation immigrants were more often targets of both peer- and self-reported victimization. Both immigrant groups experienced higher levels of physical, racist, and sexual victimization than natives. Furthermore, second-generation immigrants reported higher levels of property damage, threats, and cybervictimization than native Finns. Significant indirect effects were found between immigrant status and victimization. Interpersonal but not intrapersonal risk factors helped to explain these associations.

*Keywords:* immigrant youth, victimization, racist victimization, rejection, intrapersonal problems

There is ample evidence that a substantial number of youths are regularly harassed by their peers at school. Not all children have an equal risk for this plight, however. Research has identified intrapersonal (e.g., anxiety, low self-worth, depressive symptoms) as well as interpersonal (e.g., rejection and friendlessness) risk factors for peer victimization (e.g., Graham & Juvonen, 1998; Hawker & Boulton, 2000; Kärnä, Voeten, Poskiparta, & Salmivalli, 2010; Parker & Asher, 1993; Pellegrini, 1998; Pellegrini, Bartini, & Brooks, 1999; Perry, Kusel, & Perry, 1988; Salmivalli & Isaacs, 2005). Furthermore, some studies suggest that ethnic minority youth are more often targets of harassment than children with ethnic majority status (Graham & Juvonen, 2002).

Despite the rapid increase in immigration all over Europe and concerns expressed for the adjustment of immigrant children and youth, studies on peer victimization among them are scarce and their findings are controversial. The first aim of the present study was to investigate the level of peer victimization among immigrant youth in a representative sample from Finland, a country in which the number of immigrants is comparatively low. The second goal was to test whether the potential effect of immigrant status on victimization is direct or whether variance in intra- or interpersonal risk factors helps to explain the association. To test the possible impact of acculturation, we divided immigrants into first-generation (born abroad themselves) and second-generation (one or both of the parents born abroad) immigrants.

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## Levels of Peer Victimization in Immigrant Youth

Until now, only a few studies have compared levels of peer victimization in students belonging to different ethnic, cultural, or immigrant groups. It should be noted that by definition, belonging to an ethnic minority group and being an immigrant are different things (although they might co-occur). In Europe, the vast majority of immigrants are of Caucasian ethnicity but are culturally distinct and speak different first languages. Thus, in European studies immigrants have often been categorized regarding their cultural rather than their ethnic group (e.g., Motti-Stefanidi et al., 2008; Strohmeier, Spiel, & Gradinger, 2008; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002), whereas studies conducted in the United States have focused on ethnic minority youth (e.g., Graham & Juvonen, 2002; Hanish & Guerra, 2000). Besides these differences in group categorizations, victimization has also been operationalized in different ways

across studies. Although most of the studies have used general questions of victimization (e.g., Eslea & Mukhtar, 2000; Fandrem, Strohmeier, & Roland, 2009), some of them have focused on racist victimization by asking questions about racist remarks or racist exclusion (e.g., Jasinskaja-Lahti & Liebkind, 2001; Liebkind & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2000a; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002). Still others have assessed the victims' own attributions regarding the causes of victimization (e.g., Strohmeier, Atria, & Spiel, 2005b).

The studies considering victimization in general have produced varying findings. Most studies have found no differences between natives and immigrants (Boulton, 1995; Eslea & Mukhtar, 2000; Fandrem et al., 2009; McKenney, Pepler, Craig, & Connolly, 2006; Monks, Ortega-Ruiz, & Rodriguez-Hidalgo, 2008; Moran, Smith, Thompson, & Whitney, 1993). Some studies have found natives to be at a higher risk for being victimized (Hanish & Guerra, 2000; Strohmeier & Spiel, 2003; Strohmeier et al., 2008; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2006), whereas other studies have found ethnic minority or immigrant youth to be at a higher risk for victimization (Graham & Juvonen, 2002; von Grünigen, Perren, Nägele, & Alsaker, 2010). Thus, there is little empirical support for the view that immigrant status per se is a risk factor for victimization (see also, e.g., Graham, Taylor, & Ho, 2009).

On the contrary, studies focusing on racist victimization have consistently found that immigrant youth score higher than native youth (Jasinskaja-Lahti & Liebkind, 2001; Liebkind & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2000a; McKenney et al., 2006; Monks et al., 2008; Verkuyten, 2002; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002). However, this does not necessarily mean that the overall level of victimization is higher among immigrant youth: It is possible that they are not more likely to be targeted but are targeted differently (e.g., via racist remarks) or attribute the attacks to different reasons (e.g., to their immigrant status) than native children and youth. A native child who shares the cultural background with the majority of peers is rather unlikely to be victimized by racist remarks and to attribute negative actions from some peers to one's cultural background. It is therefore natural that immigrants as well as ethnic minorities score relatively high on such measures. To clarify this issue and to be able to accurately estimate the level of victimization in immigrant youth, it is important to distinguish between racist remarks and other forms of victimization. It is also advisable to use peer reports in addition to self-reports, as immigrants might be prone to interpret different acts as racist, especially if they are used to discrimination in their environment.

### **Risk Factors for Peer Victimization in Immigrant Youth**

Theoretically, immigrant status might be considered as a risk factor for victimization. Immigrants may be perceived as different and therefore not fitting in with the peer group. Although evidence from descriptive studies to date (Boulton, 1995; Eslea & Mukhtar, 2000; Fandrem et al., in press; McKenney et al., 2006; Monks et al., 2008; Moran et al., 1993) does not provide support for the view that immigrant status per se is a risk factor for victimization, this might be the case in societies where racist attitudes are common (such as Finland; Jasinskaja-Lahti, Liebkind, & Perhoniemi, 2006; Liebkind & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2000b) or in schools in which ethnic or cultural diversity is low (Juvonen, Nishina, & Graham, 2006). In such contexts, mere immigrant status might be enough to invite

aggressive attitudes and attacks from peers. However, the effect could also be indirect: Immigrant status might be associated with intrapersonal and interpersonal problems, potentially increasing the risk for victimization. As both direct and indirect effects might be moderated by immigrant generational status, it is reasonable to examine the effects separately among first- and second-generation immigrants. First-generation immigrants are not born in the country of settlement but have migrated there from another country. Second-generation immigrants are born in the country of settlement while at least one of their parents is a first-generation immigrant. Just like native adolescents, both first- and second-generation immigrant youth have to cope with a set of developmental tasks such as academic achievement at school, social relationships with peers and family, psychological well-being, and identity formation (Strohmeier & Schmitt-Rodermund, 2008). In addition, immigrant adolescents are faced with the particular challenges of acculturation, which are either directly associated with the process of immigration (e.g., resettlement) or with the status of being an immigrant in a foreign country (e.g., discrimination, racist victimization). Because only first-generation immigrants have experienced the challenge of resettlement, it is reasonable to split immigrants regarding their generational status and to use generational status as a proxy variable to describe acculturation.

A study with a large cross-national sample of immigrant and native youths 13 to 18 years of age living in Finland, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, and Sweden showed that being a first-generation immigrant is associated with higher levels of intrapersonal problems like poor life satisfaction, depressive and somatic symptoms, anxiety, and low self-esteem compared with natives or second-generation immigrants (Sam, Vedder, Liebkind, Neto, & Virta, 2008). These higher levels of intrapersonal problems in first-generation immigrant youth are often explained within a stress and coping acculturation framework (Berry, 1997). This is because resettlement leads to intrapersonal problems when immigrants do not have appropriate skills and strategies to successfully cope with the stressors. Simultaneously, a huge body of evidence indicates that depression, generalized and social anxiety, and low global and social self-worth are related to peer victimization (e.g., Hawker & Boulton, 2000). Longitudinal studies support the idea that intrapersonal problems such as depression and anxiety are not only consequences but also potential vulnerabilities that invite peer victimization (Card & Hodges, 2008; Hodges & Perry, 1999; Sweeting, Young, West, & Der, 2006). This direction of effects is also supported by an 8-year longitudinal study on perceived ethnic discrimination in Finland of adult immigrants originating from the former Soviet Union (Jasinskaja-Lahti, Liebkind, & Solheim, 2009). Immigrants' well-being (e.g., anxiety and depression) at the first time point predicted perceived discrimination at the second time point, suggesting that initial high levels of psychological stress symptoms predisposed immigrants to experience more discrimination.

Having friends and being liked by peers are important protective factors against peer victimization (Hodges, Boivin, Vitaro, & Bukowski, 1999; Pellegrini et al., 1999; Perry et al., 1988). However, to make friends and to be accepted by peers are particular challenges for immigrant youth who are also acculturating into another culture (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006; Oppedal, 2006; Perry et al. 1988). For immigrant youth, peer relations provide a major context to cope with acculturative stress; indeed,

peer relations form one key dimension in acculturation models (Berry, 1997). Some authors have proposed acculturation stages in which immigrants are faced with stage-specific tasks, like language acquisition, behavioral participation, and identification with the new context (Birman, Trickett, & Vinokurov, 2002; Sluzki, 1979). Moreover, the likelihood of befriending native peers has been shown to increase as a function of length of stay in the country of settlement (Titzmann & Silbereisen, 2009). Thus, second-generation immigrants might be more likely to have friends than first-generation immigrants and consequently might be better protected against peer victimization.

To date, only a very few studies have investigated peer acceptance or number of friends in immigrant youth. In a study conducted in Austria among natives and immigrants 12 to 13 years of age, Turkish immigrant youth (99% were first generation) were less accepted by peers and had fewer friends in their school classes compared with native Austrians and immigrants stemming from other countries of origin (Strohmeier & Spiel, 2003). A study conducted in Greece found first-generation Albanian immigrant students to be less popular in the peer group compared with native Greek students, both 13 to 14 years of age (Motti-Stefanidi et al., 2008). Another study from Switzerland found immigrant kindergarten children around 6 years old to be less accepted by their peers compared with native children (Von Grünigen et al., 2010). Thus, at least some immigrant groups might have more interpersonal vulnerabilities than natives. Rejection is known to be one of the most important risk factors of victimization (Bukowski & Sippola, 2001; DeRosier & Thomas, 2003; Perry et al., 1988). In a 1-year longitudinal study comprising preadolescents 10 to 13 years of age, rejection was found to precede victimization (Salmivalli & Isaacs, 2005). Another 4-year longitudinal study annually assessing children between 5 and 10 years of age found stronger paths from peer rejection in Grade 1 to victimization in Grade 4 than vice versa (Ladd & Troop-Gordon, 2003). Thus, evidence suggests that rejection is more a cause than a consequence of peer victimization.

### The Present Study

In the present study, the sample was composed of preadolescents 9 to 12 years of age living in Finland. This age group was chosen because preadolescence is a period during which the formation of positive peer relations is an important developmental task for all youth (Hartup, 1996). Although close relations with the family are still important, the significance of peers in the lives of preadolescents is increasing. However, to establish peer relations might be especially challenging for immigrant youth of this age because of the challenges of acculturation (Berry, 1997).

Finland is an interesting country for the study of peer victimization in immigrant youth, because the number of immigrants is exceptionally low compared to many other European countries. In 2007, only about 2% of the Finnish population were immigrants; now their proportion is approaching 3%. The biggest immigrant groups in Finland stem from neighboring countries like Russia, Estonia, and Sweden, and their main reason for immigration is labor. Adult immigrants living in Finland perceive high levels of discrimination (Liebkind & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2000b) and suffer from everyday racism (Jasinskaja-Lahti, Liebkind, & Perhoniemi,

2006). Until now, studies on peer victimization among immigrant children living in Finland have been lacking.

Furthermore, data of the present study are entirely concurrent. Therefore, the present study must be viewed as the first, preliminary test of the potential mediators of peer victimization in immigrant youth. It should be noted that we only tested mediation in the statistical sense, not in the temporal sense—that is, we tested whether the risk factors help to explain the association between immigration status and victimization.

First, we compared the levels of victimization among native Finns and first- and second-generation immigrants. There are both theoretical and empirical reasons to believe that immigrant youth have a heightened risk for peer victimization. So far, research findings on the topic have been mixed (Fandrem et al., 2009; Juvonen et al., 2006; Monks et al., 2008; Strohmeier, Spiel, & Gradinger, 2008; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002; Von Grünigen, Perren, Nägele, & Alsaker, in press), probably partly due to differences in the operationalization of victimization across studies (general questions vs. questions about racist remarks vs. questions about the target's own attributions regarding the causes of victimization). To overcome some of the limitations of previous studies, we included both a global question and questions regarding nine specific forms of victimization and used self-reports as well as peer reports of victimization. We expected higher levels of racist victimization (negative acts that are racist in nature, e.g., mean remarks about one's cultural background) among immigrant youth compared with native Finns. However, we hypothesized that negative attitudes against immigrants would be reflected in other forms of mean actions as well, and thus it was expected that immigrants would also experience higher levels of other forms of victimization compared with native Finns.

Second, we investigated whether intrapersonal and/or interpersonal risk factors help to explain the association between immigrant status and victimization. Although it was not possible to test the temporal sequence of the events with our concurrent data, we conceptualized intrapersonal and interpersonal problems as antecedents of peer victimization in our model. More specifically, we tested whether immigrant status predicts individual variation in intrapersonal problems such as social anxiety and depression and interpersonal problems of peer rejection and friendlessness, and whether either type of problems further increases the immigrants' risk for victimization. Considering the acculturative stress due to resettlement (Berry, 2006), we expected first-generation immigrants to be especially likely to face both types of problems, but we still tested the indirect effects among both immigrant groups. The initial model to be tested is presented in Figure 1. We included gender and age in the model to control for their potential effects because it is well known that they are both related to victimization (Olweus, 2009; Smith, Shu, & Madsen, 2001).

## Method

### Participants

The data used in the present study are the pretest data from the first phase of a large intervention evaluation project, KiVa, in Finland (Salmivalli, Kärnä, & Poskiparta, 2009). From among the 78 schools participating in the first phase of evaluation either as pilot or control schools, we chose the 66 Finnish-speaking schools

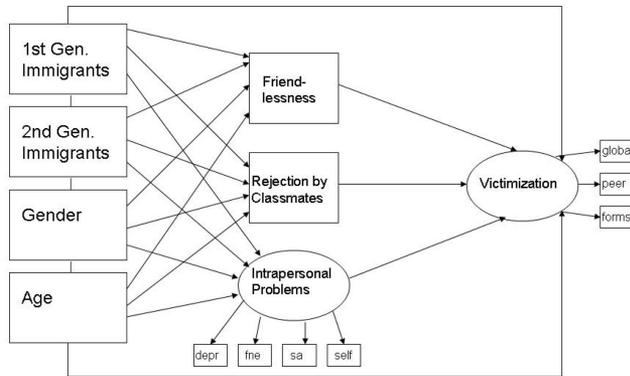


Figure 1. The initial model for predicting the direct and indirect effects of immigrant status on peer victimization. depr = depression; fne = fear of negative evaluation; sa = social avoidance and distress; self = self-esteem; global = global victimization (self-report); peer = peer-reported victimization; forms = the average of nine forms of victimization (self-report).

for the present study. The decision was based on the fact that there are very few immigrant students in the Swedish-speaking schools, most of them second-generation immigrants who have a Swedish mother or father. The situation of these children is very different from other immigrants, as they are living and studying in a Swedish-speaking environment together with Swedish-speaking Finns.

The schools in our sample represented all five provinces in mainland Finland, involving 375 classrooms and a total of 7,272 students in Grades 3–5 (the grade levels in which the students were at the beginning of the evaluation study). On average, they were approaching the age of 11 at the beginning of the data collection (the mean age being 10 years 11 months).

To recruit the children, parents or guardians were sent information letters including a consent form, both of which were sent to the schools and distributed to students. In addition to the official languages used in Finland (Finnish and Swedish), the letters were translated into 15 different languages that represented the most common immigrant groups in the participating schools. A total of 6,690 children (92% of the sample used in the present study) received active consent to participate. Children of immigrant parents were slightly underrepresented in receiving active consent to participate in the study. Some children ( $n = 168$ , 2.5% of the consented children) did not participate in the data collection for other reasons; therefore, self-report data were available for 6,522 children, whereas peer reports were available for all 7,272 children. Among the 6,522 children providing self-reports, 6.9% of them were either first- or second-generation immigrants ( $n = 456$ ; see “Immigrant status” below in the Measures section). Altogether, 77.2% of the participants reported living with both their parents, and this was as likely among first- and second-generation immigrants as among Finnish children,  $\chi^2(2) = 0.47$ , *ns*. No information on family socioeconomic status was obtained from the children.

## Procedure

The data were collected in May 2007 through Internet-based questionnaires that were completed during regular school hours in the

schools’ computer labs under the supervision of teachers. The teachers were supplied with detailed instructions concerning the procedure about 2 weeks prior to data collection. In addition, the teachers were provided with a possibility of getting support by phone or e-mail prior to and during the data collection if they had questions or concerns. The teachers received individual passwords for the students, and they distributed the passwords to the students, who used them to log into the questionnaire.

The order of the scales presented to students as well as the order of the items within the scales was counterbalanced, with the exception that the questions concerning background information and self-reported bullying and victimization (see below) always appeared first. That way we ensured that as many students as possible answered the questions regarding those topics. The questionnaire was provided in Finnish.

## Measures

**Immigrant status.** In the Internet-based questionnaire, the students were asked whether (a) they were themselves born abroad (yes/no), (b) their mother was born abroad (yes/no), or (c) their father was born abroad (yes/no). Those who answered “yes” to any of these questions were then asked to choose from a list the country of origin for themselves, for their mother, and/or for their father. The list consisted of the 15 most common countries of origin of Finnish immigrants, plus the option “other country.”

The students whose mother and/or father were born abroad, and who were themselves born abroad were classified as first-generation immigrants. The students whose mother and/or father were born abroad, but who were themselves born in Finland, were classified as second-generation immigrants. The students whose mother and father were born in Finland and who were themselves born in Finland were classified as native Finns. After excluding children who were not able to provide this information or who did not provide any self-reports, this classification resulted in 146 first-generation immigrants, 310 second-generation immigrants, and 4,957 native Finns. The most common countries of origin of the first-generation immigrants were Russia (32 children, 21.9% of the first-generation immigrants), Estonia (11 children, 7.5%), Sweden (11 children, 7.5%), and Germany (11 children, 7.5%), followed by Iraq (seven children, 4.8%) and Iran (seven children, 4.8%).

The most common countries of origin of the parents of second-generation immigrants were Sweden (12.9% and 13.9% of mothers and fathers, respectively), Russia (12.9% and 8.7%), Estonia (4.5% and 3.2%), and Somalia (3.9% and 4.2%).

**Victimization.** To assess victimization, both self- and peer reports were used. Self-reported victimization was measured with the Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire (Olweus, 1996), including both a global question regarding the frequency of victimization and nine specific items tapping different forms of victimization. The specific items were slightly modified from the original questionnaire items. Concretely, the word order was slightly changed in Items 4 and 9; Item 3 was simplified by leaving out “pushed” and “locked inside”; and some examples were added in Item 8. All items can be found in Appendix B. Before presenting the questions to the students, the meaning of bullying and being bullied was clarified to them. The teachers administrating the data collection read the definition out loud while the students could read the same

definition on their computer screens (see Appendix A). Additionally, a shortened version of the definition, "It is bullying, when a child is made feel bad *on purpose and repeatedly*," always appeared on the upper part of the computer screen while the students responded to questions related to victimization.

In the *global question*, the students were asked: "How often have you been bullied at school during the past couple of months?" The nine specific questions were similar to the global one, except that they described one form of being bullied at a time. The answers to all questions were given on a 5-point rating scale (0 = *not at all*, 1 = *once or twice*, 2 = *two or three times a month*, 3 = *about once a week*, 4 = *several times a week*). The different forms of victimization covered by the specific questions were physical victimization, verbal victimization, social exclusion, relational victimization, racist victimization, insults with sexual meaning, cyber-victimization, property damage, and threats. In our analyses, students' answers to the nine specific items were treated both separately and as a scale that was formed by averaging across the items ( $\alpha = .83$ ).

Peer-reported victimization was assessed by asking students to nominate which of their classmates are treated in the following ways: "He/she is being pushed around and hit," "He/she is called names and mocked," "Nasty rumors are spread about him/her" (Kärnä et al., 2010). The students were allowed to make an unlimited number of nominations, by choosing the name of the classmate(s) from the list presented on the computer screen, or to answer "no one." Peer nominations received by each child were totaled and divided by the number of classmates responding, resulting in a score ranging from 0.00 to 1.00 for each student on each item. These proportion scores were averaged across the three items to form the final score of peer-reported victimization.

**Depression.** We used a seven-item scale derived from the Beck Depression Inventory and previously applied to the Finnish population (Beck & Beck, 1972; Raitasalo, 1995) to assess depression. Participants responded on a 5-point Likert-type scale to the following items: "How do you feel about yourself?" "How do you find your appearance and looks?" "Do you have feelings of disappointment?" "How is your mood?" "How do you feel about the future?" "How happy or unhappy do you feel?" "How do you think your life has been going?" All questions concerned the last 2 weeks. The scores for the seven items formed a reliable scale and were averaged ( $\alpha = .86$ ).

**Self-esteem.** We used a 10-item scale to measure children's self-esteem in the peer context (Salmivalli & Isaacs, 2005; Salmivalli, Ojanen, Haanpää, & Peets, 2005). The items were derived from the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965), slightly adapted by instructing children to "report the way you feel about yourself when around peers," following Harter, Waters, and Whitesell (1998). Participants responded on a 5-point Likert-type scale (0 = *not true at all*, 4 = *exactly true*) to items such as "I feel that I have a number of good qualities" and "I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others." The scores for the 10 items formed a reliable scale and were averaged ( $\alpha = .81$ ).

**Social anxiety.** To assess social anxiety, we used nine items from two subscales developed by La Greca and Lopez (1998), to which the participants responded on a 5-point Likert-type scale (0 = *not at all*, 4 = *all the time*). The first scale, reflecting *fear of negative evaluation*, included five items: "I worry about what

others say about me"; "I worry that others don't like me"; "I'm afraid that others will not like me"; "I worry about what others think of me"; "If I get into an argument, I worry that the other person will not like me." The other scale, tapping *social avoidance and distress*, included four items: "It's hard for me to ask others to do things with me"; "I'm afraid to invite others to do things with me because they might say no"; "I am quiet when I'm with a group of people"; "I feel shy even with peers I know very well." Both scales turned out to be reliable and scores on the items were averaged ( $\alpha$ s = .89 and .76 for the fear of negative evaluation and social avoidance, respectively).

**Friendlessness.** Friendlessness was assessed with two items, "I have good friends in my classroom" and "I have friends in my own class," to which the students responded on a 5-point Likert-type scale (0 = *totally disagree*, 4 = *totally agree*). Both items were reverse coded so that higher scores indicated lack of friends in own classroom. The items formed a reliable scale and were averaged ( $\alpha = .84$ ).

**Peer rejection.** A standard sociometric procedure was used to assess peer rejection. The students were asked to choose, from a list of their classmates appearing on the computer screen, three classmates they liked the least. The number of nominations received by each child was divided by the number of peers doing the evaluation, resulting in proportion scores ranging from 0.00 to 1.00.

## Results

### Descriptive Statistics

The means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations of the study variables are presented in Table 1. To test for the statistically significant differences between the three groups, analyses of variance were conducted. Both immigrant groups scored higher than native Finns on the average of nine forms of victimization, and first-generation immigrants scored higher than the other two groups on peer-reported victimization. Furthermore, both immigrant groups had significantly higher scores on social avoidance and distress than natives, and first-generation immigrants scored higher than the other two groups on peer rejection and friendlessness. However, the effect sizes of all mean level differences were very small.

The scores of the two immigrant groups and native Finns on the different forms of victimization are presented in Table 2. Immigrants seemed to have higher scores than natives across the different forms. Again, the statistical significances of the differences were tested with a series of analyses of variance. It was found that both first- and second-generation immigrants were more often physically harassed compared with native Finns. Moreover, both immigrant groups reported experiencing more racist and sexual victimization compared with native Finns. Furthermore, second-generation immigrants reported higher levels of property damage, threats, and cybervictimization than native Finns.

### Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Risk Factors for Victimization: Testing the Hypothesized Model

We investigated the associations between immigrant status, intrapersonal and interpersonal risk factors, and victimization with

Table 1  
Means, Standard Deviations, and Bivariate Correlations Between the Study Variables

Variable	Native Finns N = 4,957 M (SD)	1st Gen. immigrants N = 146 M (SD)	2nd Gen. immigrants N = 310 M (SD)	F(2, 5410)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Victimization (average)	0.25 <sub>a</sub> (0.41)	0.36 <sub>b</sub> (0.42)	0.36 <sub>b</sub> (0.54)	12.86**								
2. Victimization (global)	0.70 (1.05)	0.90 (1.18)	0.82 (1.18)	3.62*	.70							
3. Victimization (peer nomination)	0.06 <sub>a</sub> (0.09)	0.09 <sub>b</sub> (0.11)	0.07 <sub>a</sub> (0.10)	8.36**	.39	.42						
4. Depression	0.58 (0.59)	0.59 (0.72)	0.62 (0.59)	0.48	.36	.31	.17					
5. Self esteem	2.25 (0.44)	2.30 (0.63)	2.26 (0.63)	0.65	.06	.05	.05	-.06				
6. Fear of negative evaluation	1.05 (0.85)	1.21 (0.95)	1.14 (0.95)	3.30*	.27	.25	.17	.28	.10			
7. Social avoidance and distress	1.52 <sub>a</sub> (1.07)	1.70 <sub>b</sub> (1.20)	1.73 <sub>b</sub> (1.16)	6.80**	.38	.34	.20	.38	.17	.59		
8. Friendlessness	1.35 <sub>a</sub> (0.73)	1.58 <sub>b</sub> (1.05)	1.37 <sub>a</sub> (1.05)	5.27*	.29	.25	.22	.29	-.13	.29	.24	
9. Rejection	0.12 <sub>a</sub> (0.14)	0.18 <sub>b</sub> (0.18)	0.14 <sub>a</sub> (0.15)	16.53**	.25	.25	.49	.11	.02 <sup>ns</sup>	.12	.12	.19

Note. All bivariate correlations were statistically significant at  $p < .001$  level, except the one marked with <sup>ns</sup>. Column means with different subscripts were statistically significantly different ( $p < .05$ ). Post hoc tests for *Victimization (global)* and *Fear of negative evaluation* were not significant.  $\eta^2 = .000-.006$ .  
\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

a concurrent structural equation model. The modeling was done using Mplus 5.0 (Muthén & Muthén, 2007). We implemented maximum-likelihood estimation using the MLR estimator of Mplus, which provides standard errors and test statistics that are robust to nonnormality of the data and to nonindependence of observations. Three criteria were used in evaluating the model fit: the chi-square test, the comparative fit index (CFI; Bentler, 1990), and the root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA; Steiger, 1990). Nonsignificant chi-square values indicate good model fit. However, because the chi-square statistic is known to be sensitive to sample size, we used also CFI and RMSEA. CFI ranges from 0 to 1.00, where a value above .95 indicates good fit and a value above .90 indicates adequate fit. RMSEA ranges from 0 to  $\infty$ , where a value below .05 indicates good fit and a value below .08 indicates adequate fit.

**Measurement model.** In the first step, two latent variables were constructed: victimization and intrapersonal problems (see Figure 1). The latent factor victimization was built using three indicators: the global victimization score, the peer-rated victimiza-

tion score, and the average of nine different forms of victimization. The latent factor intrapersonal problems was constructed using four indicators: depression, social avoidance and distress, fear of negative evaluation, and self-esteem. In the confirmatory factor analysis, the two latent factors were allowed to correlate. The model fit was excellent,  $\chi^2(12) = 128.32$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $CFI = .99$ ,  $RMSEA = .036$ .

**Structural model.** In the second step, we constructed the initial hypothesized model (Figure 1). The model had a good fit,  $\chi^2(40) = 1,893.92$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $CFI = .96$ ,  $RMSEA = .07$ , and it explained a substantial amount of variance in victimization ( $R^2 = .38$ ). The mediators were all allowed to correlate to avoid a seriously misspecified model. Statistically significant paths (standardized coefficients) are shown in Figure 2. Being a boy was positively related to being rejected and having no friends, while being a girl was positively related to intrapersonal problems. Being a boy was also directly positively related to victimization. There were no age effects. As predicted, both interpersonal and intrapersonal problems were substantially associated with victimization.

Table 2  
Levels of Different Forms of Victimization

Form of victimization	Native Finns N = 4,957	1st Gen. immigrants N = 146	2nd Gen. immigrants N = 310	F(2, 5410)
Global	0.70	0.90	0.82	3.62**
Verbal	0.50	0.61	0.61	2.73
Social exclusion	0.35	0.41	0.38	0.58
Physical	0.24 <sub>a</sub>	0.38 <sub>b</sub>	0.35 <sub>b</sub>	6.42**
Relational	0.28	0.32	0.34	1.02
Property damage	0.10 <sub>a</sub>	0.12	0.18 <sub>b</sub>	6.16**
Threats	0.13 <sub>a</sub>	0.19	0.20 <sub>b</sub>	3.61**
Racist	0.18 <sub>a</sub>	0.47 <sub>b</sub>	0.46 <sub>b</sub>	38.92**
Insults with sexual meaning	0.33 <sub>a</sub>	0.56 <sub>b</sub>	0.49 <sub>b</sub>	10.17**
Cyber	0.14 <sub>a</sub>	0.16	0.25 <sub>b</sub>	6.88**

Note. Means with different subscripts differ from each other at least at  $p < 0.05$  level.  $\eta^2 = .000-.015$ .  
\*\*  $p < .01$ .

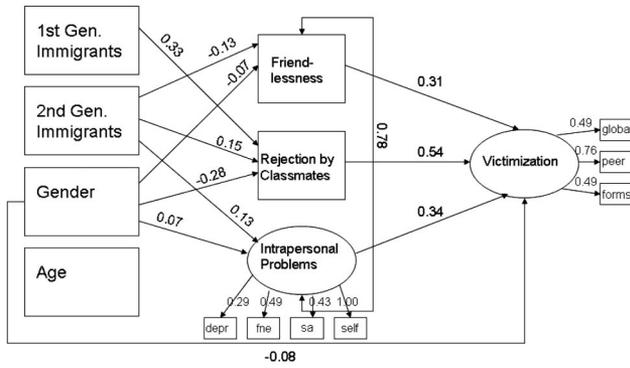


Figure 2. The final model displays standardized coefficients predicting the direct and indirect effects of immigrant status on peer victimization. depr = depression; fne = fear of negative evaluation; sa = social avoidance and distress; self = self-esteem; global = global victimization (self-report); peer = peer-reported victimization; forms = the average of nine forms of victimization (self-report); gender (1 = boy, 2 = girl).  $\chi^2(40) = 1,893.92, p < .01$ ;  $CFI = .96, RMSEA = .07, R^2 = .38$ .

Contrary to our expectation, being a first-generation immigrant was associated only with rejection but not with friendlessness and intrapersonal problems. Being a second-generation immigrant was positively associated with intrapersonal problems and peer rejection but negatively associated with (self-reported) friendlessness. With the mediators (i.e., the three risk factors) in the model, there were no direct associations between immigrant status (either first or second generation) and victimization. The residuals of the two mediators based on self-reports—*intrapersonal problems* and *friendlessness*—correlated with each other (see Figure 2). There were also significant residual correlations between fear of negative evaluation and depression ( $r = .31$ ), between social avoidance and fear of negative evaluation ( $r = .60$ ), between social avoidance and depression ( $r = .39$ ), and between global victimization and the average of the nine forms of victimization ( $r = .62$ ). The residuals of these variables were allowed to correlate because of shared method variance (they were all self-assessments).

**Testing indirect effects.** The hypothesized model suggests that high levels of intrapersonal and interpersonal problems ultimately explain peer victimization in immigrant youth. We found some evidence of such indirect effects, and we next tested their statistical significance using the Sobel test. Total indirect, specific indirect, and total effects were specified with Mplus (Muthén & Muthén, 2007). All indirect effects and the direct effect were included in the total effects. The total indirect effect from being a first-generation immigrant to victimization was substantial ( $\beta = .22, p < .001$ ). Looking at the specific indirect effects travelling through intrapersonal problems, rejection, and friendlessness, it turned out that only rejection was statistically significant ( $\beta = .18, p < .01$ ). The total indirect effect from being a second-generation immigrant to victimization was small ( $\beta = .09, p < .05$ ). Looking at the specific indirect effects travelling through intrapersonal problems, rejection, and friendlessness, it turned out that especially rejection ( $\beta = .08, p \leq .01$ ) was statistically significant.

To summarize, after taking into account the mediating variables, no direct effect of immigrant status on victimization was observed. This means that the heightened risk for victimization among first-

generation immigrants was fully explained by peer rejection. Also, among second-generation immigrants, rejection explained the increased risk for victimization, although to a lesser extent.

### Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Risk Factors as Moderators for Victimization: Testing an Alternative Model

As intra- and interpersonal risk factors could also be conceptualized as moderators of the link between immigrant status and victimization, we tested an alternative model in which victimization was regressed on gender, age, being a first-generation immigrant, being a second-generation immigrant, the three risk factors, and six interaction terms (First-Generation Immigrant  $\times$  Rejection, First-Generation Immigrant  $\times$  Intrapersonal Problems, First-Generation Immigrant  $\times$  Friendlessness, Second-Generation Immigrant  $\times$  Rejection, Second-Generation Immigrant  $\times$  Intrapersonal Problems, Second-Generation Immigrant  $\times$  Friendlessness). Although the fit of the model was satisfactory,  $\chi^2(42) = 5,291.10, p < .01, CFI = .908, RMSEA = .05$ , none of the effects of the six interaction terms were statistically significant. The results did not change when interaction terms were included in the model one by one. Thus, we felt confident with having conceptualized intrapersonal and interpersonal risk factors as mediators rather than moderators in our final model.

### Discussion

This study investigated the level of peer victimization in immigrant youth living in Finland, a country with low numbers of immigrants but a high level of racist attitudes and discrimination (Jasinskaja-Lahti et al., 2006; Liebkind & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2000b). In Finland, the vast majority of immigrants are of Caucasian ethnicity but culturally distinct, as they mostly migrated from neighboring countries such as Russia, Estonia, and Sweden.

The present study contributes to existing literature in important ways. First of all, instead of limiting our analysis to racist victimization, we compared the levels of nine different forms of peer victimization between first- and second-generation immigrant youth and native Finns. As predicted and in line with previous studies (Jasinskaja-Lahti & Liebkind, 2001; Liebkind & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2000a; McKenney et al., 2006; Monks et al., 2008; Verkuyten, 2002; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002), the immigrant youth were more often targets of racist victimization than the native youth. However, immigrant youth scored significantly higher than natives on several other forms of victimization as well. Furthermore, the heightened risk for victimization among first-generation immigrants was confirmed by peer reports. In the immigrant literature, racist victimization and general victimization are often considered to be distinct constructs. Consequently, racist victimization is often separately analyzed (e.g., Jasinskaja-Lahti et al., 2006; McKenney et al., 2006; Monks et al., 2008; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2006). Because we considered racist victimization to be a subtype of general victimization, which we found to be highly correlated with the eight other forms of victimization measured in the present study, we used a composite score for all further analyses. When looking at the nine forms of victimization simultaneously, both first- and second-generation immigrants were more often victimized by peers compared with

native youth. Thus, we can conclude that immigrant youth are at higher risk of being victimized by their peers in Finland. This is already an important result that we could not infer on the basis of the many inconsistent findings reported from other countries.

Second, we analyzed whether intrapersonal and interpersonal risk factors mediate the association between immigrant status and victimization. Based on the acculturative stress and coping framework and on previous studies, we expected first-generation immigrants to be most vulnerable for intrapersonal problems like anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem (Berry, 1997; Sam et al., 2008). Moreover, we expected that such problems might account for the increased risk of victimization in immigrant youth. However, this was not the case. Although we found a small positive association between being a second-generation immigrant and intrapersonal problems, there was no significant indirect effect from immigrant status (either as a first- or second-generation immigrant) to victimization via intrapersonal problems. As for the first-generation immigrant youth, this might be partly explained by the data collection procedure. Because the questionnaire was presented in the Finnish language only, we probably systematically excluded newly arrived first-generation immigrants who did not speak Finnish well enough to answer the questions. The participating first-generation immigrants probably had already developed satisfactory language skills, which might have facilitated successful coping with acculturative stress. As for second-generation immigrants, we think that other processes might explain their slightly higher risk for intrapersonal problems. Immigrant families face manifold challenges in Finland, such as discrimination and racism in many domains (Liebkind & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2000b). It is possible that these societal factors, which negatively affect the lives of adult immigrants, also negatively influence the psychological well-being of children born into immigrant families in Finland.

We also predicted immigrant status to be related to rejection and friendlessness and expected that rejection and friendlessness in turn would predict individual variation in victimization. Indeed, we found positive associations between immigrant status and rejection. Among both first- and second-generation immigrants, peer rejection (i.e., negative attitudes and affect from some of the classmates) helped to explain the heightened risk for victimization. Friendlessness did not help to explain these associations. This finding is in line with Salmivalli and Isaacs (2005), who found that rejection—and not self-reported friendlessness—was a predictor for the heightened risk for victimization in native Finns.

Thus, based on the present study, interpersonal rather than intrapersonal risk factors seem to be responsible for peer victimization in immigrant youth. Therefore, to consider and to deal with peer rejection seems to be of great importance to better understand and to prevent peer victimization in immigrant youth. In general, rejection is one of the most important risk factors of victimization (Bukowski & Sippola, 2001; DeRosier & Thomas, 2003; Perry et al., 1988), and longitudinal studies suggest that rejection is rather a precursor than a consequence for peer victimization (Ladd & Troop-Gordon, 2003; Salmivalli & Isaacs, 2005).

A study conducted with 1,193 third graders found that perceived behavioral atypicality was a predictor for both rejection and victimization (De Rosier & Mercer, 2009). Children who were perceived as behaving atypically at the beginning of the school year were more likely to be both rejected and victimized at the end of

the school year. Very similar results were found in an Austrian study asking immigrant students directly about the reasons for being victimized. The study involved 280 students (62% immigrants) around 12 years of age. The most prevalent reasons nominated by victims were their own behavior and their rejection by peers (Strohmeier, Atria, & Spiel, 2005a, 2005b). Another study conducted in Spain and England comprising 620 youths 11 to 16 years of age (15% immigrants) found that “being different” was the reason most often mentioned by targets of racist victimization (Monks, Ortega-Ruiz, & Rodríguez-Hidalgo, 2008). Thus, it is possible that immigrants are perceived to behave atypically which in turn makes them vulnerable for being rejected which in turn leads to victimization by peers. Some few immigrants might also be perceived as being visually different, or some might still have language difficulties leading to communication problems within the peer group. These potential causes for them being rejected, as well as the temporal relations of the phenomena, need to be tested in further longitudinal studies.

### Strengths and Limitations

The study investigated an exceptionally wide variety of different forms of victimization among first- and second-generation immigrants and provided the first preliminary test of variables potentially explaining peer victimization in children with immigrant background 9 to 12 years of age.

The sample for the present study was drawn from pretest data from a research project evaluating the effectiveness of a national antibullying program, KiVa (Kärnä, Voeten, Little, et al., in press; Salmivalli et al., 2009), and can be regarded as highly representative. The children were recruited from schools located in all five provinces of mainland Finland. Although this research was not primarily designed to study immigrant youth in Finland, the large data set allowed the study of a sufficient number of immigrant youth. In total, 146 first-generation and 310 second-generation immigrant youths were included in the present analyses. Both the low proportion and the cultural backgrounds of the immigrants in our sample reflected the situation in Finland at the time of the data collection. An obvious limitation of the present study is the cross-sectional design, which precludes any causal inferences. Contrary to what was suggested by our model, immigrants might have increasing levels of intra- and interpersonal problems over time because of their high levels of victimization. The effects might also be bidirectional rather than unidirectional. Longitudinal data would be necessary to shed light on these issues. Although longitudinal data has been collected in the KiVa project, we did not use it in the present study. To do so would have meant using only the control schools, which would have made our sample 50% smaller. This was not feasible, as the number of immigrant children was small to begin with. Furthermore, there was more attrition in the control schools than in the intervention schools and still more among immigrants than among native Finns (perhaps a larger proportion of immigrants were transferred to new school classes during the follow-up period). Finally, we had all three variables assessed at two time points only, whereas three assessment points would be needed to test mediation longitudinally. Thus, our data do not allow us to test mediation in a temporal sense (immigrant status leading to increasing intra- or interpersonal problems, which in turn lead to increasing victimization over time), but it does allow

us to test mediation in a statistical sense, which can be considered as the first step toward examining mediation. Further research is needed to replicate our findings in a longitudinal sample.

Another limitation is that the questionnaire was provided in the Finnish language, and therefore the immigrant sample is biased. The results cannot be generalized to recently arrived first-generation immigrants with very poor proficiency in Finnish.

The immigrants in our sample were divided into two groups according to their generational status, which was used as a proxy variable to describe their level of acculturation. Although this approach is a reasonable strategy, it is a limitation of the present study that acculturation was not measured directly. Because the immigrants were drawn from a representative sample and thus their number was small, it was not possible to further split them according to other potentially relevant variables, such as the country of origin. Moreover, no individual information was available on socioeconomic status. Therefore, we could not find out whether these variables would have moderated the present findings.

### Recommendations for Future Research

The present findings raise many important questions that remain to be resolved in future studies. For instance, the small effect sizes indicate that not all immigrant children are victimized by their peers. Factors that might protect immigrants against peer victimization should be examined. These factors might operate at the individual, the dyadic (e.g., having protective friends), the class, or the school level. In other words, it is possible that the risk of immigrant children and youth to be victimized by peers varies across classes and schools. Studies on peer victimization among ethnic minorities have found that a high degree of ethnic diversity in classrooms is a protective factor for peer victimization at the individual level (Juvonen et al., 2006). Therefore, it might make a difference whether an immigrant child is the only immigrant in the class or is together with a group of other immigrants in a more diverse context. Second, as immigrants are more likely to be victimized than natives, it would be worth investigating by whom they are harassed. Dyadic data gathered by asking children by whom they are victimized (Rodkin & Berger, 2008; Veenstra et al., 2007) is becoming more common in research on victimization. Such data are available in the KiVa project as well and will enable us to investigate who are the perpetrators of the immigrant children and youth in future analyses.

Still, many questions remain to be answered to better understand the peer relations of immigrant youth. However, on the basis of our results, we think that it is important to foster perceived similarity instead of perceived atypicality and to deal with cultural diversity in a positive way. This creates opportunities both for fostering friendships between native children and immigrants and for preventing victimization in immigrant youth in the long run.

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## Appendix A

### Definition of Bullying

It is bullying, when another student makes a child feel bad *on purpose and repeatedly*. The child being bullied finds it *difficult to defend himself/herself*.

A student is being bullied when one or more other students

- say mean or hurtful things, make fun of him/her, or call him/her mean and hurtful names;
- completely ignore him/her, exclude him/her from their group of friends, or leave him/her out of things on purpose;
- hit, kick, shove, or order him/her about, or lock him/her inside a room;

- try to make other students dislike him/her by spreading lies about him/her or by sending mean notes;
- do other hurtful things like those above.

Also, it is bullying when a student is teased repeatedly in a mean and hurtful way. Friendly and playful teasing *is not bullying*. *Neither is it bullying* when two more or less equally strong students argue or fight. Please keep this explanation of bullying in mind when you answer the following questions.

When you answer the following questions about bullying, do not concentrate on how things are right now. Instead, think about the time after the winter break.

## Appendix B

### Victimization Items

#### Global Question

How many times have you been bullied at school during the last couple of months?

#### Specific Questions (Different Forms of Victimization)

Have you been bullied at school during the past couple of months in this way?

1. I was called mean names, was made fun of or teased in a hurtful way.
2. Other students ignored me completely or excluded me from things or from their group of friends.
3. I was hit, kicked, or shoved.
4. Other students tried to make others dislike me by spreading lies about me.
5. Somebody took money or other things from me or damaged my things.
6. I was threatened or forced to do things I would not have wanted to do.
7. I was bullied by calling me names, making remarks or gestures about my ethnicity or skin color. Such a name can be, for example, *nigger*.
8. I was bullied by sexual name calling, gestures, or actions. Such a name can be, for example, *slut*, *gay*, and *lesbo*.
9. I was bullied by cell phone or through the Internet: I received mean or hurtful messages, calls, or pictures. Please also report any other ways of bullying by means of a cell phone or a computer.

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