Verbal, physical, and relational peer victimization: The role of immigrant status and gender

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Abstract

Background: Most studies suggest that immigrant youth are more likely to be victimized than their non-immigrant counterparts. In Italy, a country in which the number of foreign migrants has grown exponentially over recent decades, this line of research is particularly interesting. Thus, the main objective of the present study was to examine the relationship between peer victimization, gender, and immigrant status in a large sample of students. **Method:** The research used data from a cross-sectional Italian survey on the "Integration of Second Generations," which was administered to 68,127 students in grades 6 through 13 (49% female; 47% immigrant). Multinomial logistic regression analyses were used to examine the association between immigrant status and gender with verbal, physical, and relational victimization, after adjusting for socio-demographic variables. **Results:** Immigrant and male participants were more likely to be classified as frequently victimized. The significant interaction effect between immigrant status and gender revealed that male immigrant students were more likely to belong to the frequently relationally victimized category compared to their counterparts. **Conclusions:** The study highlights the importance of including immigrant status disparities in peer victimization research. Prevention efforts and intervention strategies should be implemented to create safe environments in Italy.

Keywords: Peer victimization, immigration, students, gender, intersection.

Resumen

Victimización verbal, física y relacional entre pares: el papel del estatus de inmigrante y el género. **Antecedentes:** la mayoría de estudios sugieren que los jóvenes inmigrantes tienen más probabilidades de ser víctimas que sus homólogos no inmigrantes. En Italia, esta línea de investigación es particularmente interesante debido al crecimiento exponencial de inmigrantes en las últimas décadas. El estudio buscó examinar la relación entre victimización de pares, género y estatus de inmigrante en estudiantes. **Método:** se utilizaron datos de una encuesta realizada en Italia sobre la "Integración de segundas generaciones", que se aplicó a 68.127 estudiantes en los grados 6 a 13 (49% mujeres; 47% inmigrantes). Se realizaron análisis de regresión logística multinomial para examinar la asociación entre género y estatus de inmigrante con victimización verbal, física y relacional, luego de ajustar variables sociodemográficas. **Resultados:** los participantes inmigrantes y de sexo masculino eran más propensos a ser frecuentemente victimizados. El efecto de interacción entre género y estatus de inmigrante reveló que los estudiantes inmigrantes hombres eran más propensos a ser frecuentemente victimizados relacionalmente, en comparación con sus homólogos. **Conclusiones:** el estudio destaca la importancia de incluir el estatus de inmigrante en la investigación de victimización entre compañeros. Deben implementarse esfuerzos de prevención y estrategias de intervención para crear entornos seguros en Italia.

Palabras clave: victimización de pares, inmigración, estudiantes, género, intersección.

Peer victimization is defined as the experience of being a target of peers' aggressive behaviors and negative actions with harmful intentions (Alivernini, Manganelli, Cavicchiolo, & Lucidi, 2019; Camodeca, Baiocco, & Posa, 2019; Olweus & Limber, 2010), such as verbal teasing, harassment, unjustified aggression, and social exclusion, repetitively and over time. Such victimization can fall into three categories: verbal (e.g., verbal teasing, name-calling), physical (e.g., physical aggression, attacks on personal property),

and relational (e.g., social exclusion, gossip). A growing number of studies suggest that immigrant youth are more likely to be victimized than their non-immigrant counterparts (Alivernini et al., 2019; Bayram Özdemir, Özdemir, & Stattin, 2016; Bjereld, Daneback, & Petzold, 2014; Messinger, Nieri, Villar, & Luengo, 2012), while other studies have found no differences between these groups (Eslea & Mukhtar, 2000; Fandrem, Strohmeier, & Roland, 2009; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002; Vitoroulis & Vaillancourt, 2015). McDonald, Navarrete, and Van Vugt (2012) argued that such disparities in victimization may be due to the tendency to favor members of one's own group (i.e., the in-group) over others (i.e., the out-group). Consequently, immigrant youth may be the target of more negative attitudes and behaviors because they are perceived as members of the out-group (Horowitz, 2010; Vitoroulis & Vaillancourt, 2015). The tendency to favor one's in-group and

exclude the out-group is particularly pronounced in multicultural societies, in which majority groups (i.e., non-immigrant youth) are more likely to condemn and hold negative attitudes toward minority groups (i.e., immigrant youth). Moreover, segmented assimilation theory proposes that immigrant youth gradually incorporate the dominant group's values, beliefs, and behaviors, both inside and outside of school (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006; Koo, Peguero, & Shekarkhar, 2012). However, this assimilation process is "segmented," because it can result in either educational progress or a "downward" path toward marginalization and failure (Cammarota, 2004).

None of the aforementioned studies considered other socio-demographic and personal characteristics that may be associated with victimization. Peguero (2012) suggested that gender disparities may exist within each category of peer victimization, whereby females are more likely to experience verbal and relational forms of victimization than males (García & Ochotorena, 2017), and physical victimization is more frequently reported by males; however, the results that support this conclusion are controversial (Manna et al., 2019; Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017; Seals & Young, 2003). In addition, some studies have shown that geographical location and municipality size (Genta, Menesini, Fonzi, Costabile, & Smith, 1996; Manna, Calzone, Adinolfi, & Palumbo, 2019), age (Genta et al., 1996; Vitoroulis & Georgiades, 2017), and socio-economic status (Fu, Land, & Lamb, 2013; Tippett & Wolke, 2014) are important predictors of peer victimization.

Most of the results regarding differences in peer victimization between immigrant and non-immigrant youth have been obtained in Spain (Messinger et al., 2012), Canada (McKenney et al., 2006), Norway (Fandrem et al., 2009), other Nordic countries (Bjereld et al., 2014), and the US (Maynard, Vaughn, Salas-Wright, & Vaughn, 2016). However, as a recent meta-analysis suggested (Vitoroulis & Vaillancourt, 2015), immigrant status has not been the primary focus of the majority of these studies; thus, it is possible that the interpretability of the results may be limited. To our knowledge, immigrant status disparities have not yet been investigated in Italy with a statewide sample of pre-adolescents and adolescents, taking into account the frequency of peer victimization experiences (never, occasionally, or frequently) and examining the intersection of immigrant status and gender in relation to peer victimization. Indeed, immigration is a relatively new phenomenon in Italy, where the number of foreign migrants has grown exponentially in recent years (Alivernini et al., 2019). Research suggests that language barriers and concerns over continued immigration and social change may promote inequities associated with immigrant status (Alivernini & Manganelli, 2016; García & Ochotorena, 2017; Manna et al., 2019).

Although victimization is stratified by gender (Manna et al., 2019; Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017; Seals & Young, 2003), it remains unclear how the phenomenon relates to immigration and gender, given that most relevant studies have not considered the interplay of these variables (Alivernini et al., 2019; Vitoroulis & Vaillancourt, 2015). Thus, the main objective of the present study was to test the role of immigrant status and gender on verbal, physical, and relational peer victimization and the frequency of this victimization.

In line with the empirical research described above, it was hypothesized that: There would be differences between native and immigrant students in the frequencies with which they were victimized (Hypothesis 1). In particular, it was expected that immigrant students would be more likely to be *frequently victimized*

and less likely to be *never victimized*, relative to non-immigrant students (Alivernini et al., 2019; Bayram Özdemir et al., 2016; Bjereld et al., 2014; Messinger et al., 2012). It was also expected that female students would be more at risk of verbal and relational victimization than male students, while male students would be more at risk of physical victimization than female students (García & Ochotorena, 2017; Peguero, 2012; Hypothesis 2).

No specific hypothesis was advanced about the interaction between immigrant status and gender, due to the mixed results reported in the literature. In addition, given that some socio-demographic variables (e.g., geographical location, municipality size, school grade, socio-economic status) have been found to be important predictors of peer victimization (Genta et al., 1996; Land & Lamb, 2013; Tippett & Wolke, 2014; Vitoroulis & Georgiades, 2017), they were included as covariates in all multivariate analyses. Finally, the implication of understanding peer victimization within the increasing population of immigrant students is discussed.

Method

Participants

The sample included 68,127 students in grades 6 through 13 in secondary public schools (49% female; 47% immigrant). Almost 13% of immigrant youth and 19% of non-immigrant youth reported an above average socio-economic status, whereas 78% and 76% reported an average socio-economic status (see Table 1 for descriptive statistics). In the present study, according to ISTAT methodology, immigrants were considered students living in Italy without Italian citizenship, whether they were born in Italy or born abroad from foreign-born parents.

Instruments

Peer victimization. Participants were asked to indicate the frequency with which they had experienced three forms of peer

Table 1
Descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) of socio-demographic characteristics (*n* = 68,127)

	Native (*n* = 36,440) *n* (%)	**Immigrant** (*n* = 31,687) *n* (%)	**Total sample** (*n* = 68,127) *n* (%)
Gender			
Male	18,740 (51%)	15,882 (50%)	34,622 (51%)
Female	17,700 (49%)	15,805 (50%)	33,505 (49%)
Geographical location (Italy)			
Northern	19,187 (53%)	16,758 (53%)	35,945 (53%)
Central	8,019 (22%)	6,689 (21%)	14,708 (22%)
Southern	9,234 (25%)	8,240 (26%)	17,474 (25%)
Cohort profile			
Pre-adolescent	17,649 (48%)	15,051 (48%)	32,700 (48%)
Adolescent	18,791 (52%)	16,636 (52%)	35,427 (52%)
Municipality size			
Small	27,302 (75%)	23,575 (74%)	50,877 (75%)
Big	9,138 (25%)	8,112 (26%)	17,250 (25%)
Socio-economic status			
Good	7,057 (19%)	4,053 (13%)	11,110 (16%)
Average	27,711 (76%)	24,917 (78%)	52,628 (77%)
Poor	1,672 (5%)	2,717 (9%)	4,389 (7%)

victimization over the prior year: verbal victimization (4 items; Cronbach's alpha = .83), physical victimization (5 items; Cronbach's alpha = .81), and relational victimization (5 items; Cronbach's alpha = .83). Example items were: "Have you ever been teased because of your physical appearance?" (verbal victimization); "Have you ever been hit, kicked, shoved, or punched?" (physical victimization); and "Have you ever been excluded from an outing, activity, or social situation by your peers?" (relational victimization). Participants could answer on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*daily*). Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) showed that the three-factor model presented a reasonably high goodness of fit ($\chi^2[6]$ = 2299.55, $p < .001$; *SRMR* = .02; *RMSEA* = .07 [90% CI: .06; .07]; *CFI* = .99; *NNFI* = .98).

Socio-demographic information. A socio-demographic information form was completed by all students and included data on immigrant status (native = 0; immigrant = 1), gender (female = 0; male = 1), geographical location (northern Italy = 0; central Italy = 1; southern Italy = 2), socio-economic status (good = 0; average = 1; poor = 2), and municipality size (small = 0, big = 1). Given that ISTAT did not provide ages for the population, one dichotomous variable was coded on the basis of whether students were attending the 6th through the 8th grade (i.e., middle school; cohort profile: preadolescents = 0), or the 9th through the 13th grade (i.e., high school; cohort profile: adolescents = 1).

Procedure

The study used data from a national Italian survey on the "Integration of Second Generations" conducted by the Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT, 2015; for detailed information, see https://www4.istat.it/it/archivio/209438) and commissioned by the European Integration Fund and the Italian Ministry of the Interior. The sample was not representative of the Italian population because the survey was designed to collect data on immigrant youth; thus, the ISTAT administrated the survey within middle and high schools with at least five immigrant students (the Italian Ministry of Education, Universities and Research provided access to a digital student registry that was used to identify students with immigrant background) and a similar number of native students to be treated as a control group. This procedure explain the high frequency of immigrant students in the ISTAT sample.

The database was provided to researchers under a Creative Commons license, which allowed the data to be used for research purposes. Participants (students) and their parents gave informed consent to participate; they were also assured of anonymity and given the option not to participate in the research (for detailed information regarding the survey methodology, please see Manna et al., 2019).

Data analysis. All analyses were conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences 25.0 and LISREL 8.8. CFA was performed to determine whether the victimization items intended to measure verbal, physical, and relational victimization. On the basis of previous research (Klomek et al., 2008), respondents were classified as *never victimized* for all forms of peer victimization (verbal, physical, and relational) when they responded "never" to all questions; *occasionally victimized* when they indicated being bullied "once or twice a year" or "every few months"; and *frequently victimized* when they reported being bullied "weekly" or "daily" on at least one item. A series of chi-square (Table 2)

and multivariable multinomial logistic regression analyses (see Table 3) were performed to determine the relationship between socio-demographic variables and verbal, physical, and relational victimization.

In hierarchical multinomial logistic regression analyses, the likelihood of students being occasionally or frequently victimized compared to students with no victimization experiences in the prior year was estimated. Two-way interactions were tested between immigrant status and gender on the three types of peer victimization and the frequency of victimization experiences. Simple slopes analyses were used to probe the nature of the interactions. Each model included geographical location, cohort profile, socio-economic status, and municipality size as controls. Ultimately, the models revealed the variables that are important in differentiating the frequency of peer victimization experiences (i.e., never, occasionally, frequently).

Results

A series of chi-square analyses (Table 2) were used to examine differences in socio-demographic characteristics in relation to the frequency of verbal, physical, and relational peer victimization. To interpret these associations, the cells with adjusted standardized residuals above 2 (i.e., observed frequency higher than expected) and below -2 (i.e., observed frequency lower than expected) were analyzed. Examination of the standardized residuals revealed that students were more likely to be classified as *frequently victimized* when they were: (a) immigrant students ($\chi^2_{verbal}[2]$ = 200.73, $p < .001$; $\chi^2_{physical}[2]$ = 167.42, $p < .001$; $\chi^2_{relational}[2]$ = 262.19, $p < .001$), (b) male ($\chi^2_{verbal}[2]$ = 325.56, $p < .001$; $\chi^2_{physical}[2]$ = 1,680.74, $p < .001$), (c) living in central or southern Italy ($\chi^2_{verbal}[4]$ = 377.217, $p < .001$; $\chi^2_{physical}[4]$ = 151.51, $p < .001$; $\chi^2_{relational}[4]$ = 367.66, $p < .001$), (d) pre-adolescent ($\chi^2_{verbal}[2]$ = 1527.53, $p < .001$; $\chi^2_{physical}[2]$ = 1,815.36, $p < .001$; $\chi^2_{relational}[2]$ = 1,265.31, $p < .001$), and (e) having good or poor socio-economic status ($\chi^2_{verbal}[4]$ = 384.25, $p < .001$; $\chi^2_{physical}[4]$ = 351.87, $p < .001$; $\chi^2_{relational}[4]$ = 471.55, $p < .001$).

No significant differences were found according to municipality size, except with respect to relational victimization ($\chi^2_{relational}[2]$ = 45.58, $p < .001$). Interestingly, immigrant students were less likely to be classified as *never victimized* (verbally, physically, and relationally) compared to native students.

In the first step of the hierarchical multinomial logistic regression analyses, participants' socio-demographic characteristics were entered; interaction terms were included in the last step (Table 3). The results showed that immigrant students were more likely to be frequent victims of verbal and physical victimization relative to native students (Hypothesis 1). Female students were less likely to be frequent victims of verbal and physical victimization (Hypothesis 2). In addition, the risk for verbal victimization was lower for pre-adolescent students, those living in northern Italy, those living in big municipalities, and those having a good socio-economic status; the risk for physical victimization was lower for younger students, those living in southern Italy, and those living in big municipalities. Regarding relational victimization, pre-adolescent students and those with good socio-economic status were less likely to be frequent victims (Table 3). For all of these results, the contrast category consisted of students who were *never victimized*.

Only a two-way interaction between immigration status and gender was significant for relational victimization. The likelihood

	Verbal victimization			Physical victimization			Relational victimization		
	Never *n* (%)	Occasionally *n* (%)	Frequently *n* (%)	Never *n* (%)	Occasionally *n* (%)	Frequently *n* (%)	Never *n* (%)	Occasionally *n* (%)	Frequently *n* (%)
Gender									
Male	12,590 (36%)[b]	13,055 (38%)[b]	8,977 (26%)[a]	18,571 (54%)[b]	10,599 (31%)[a]	5,452 (16%)[a]	14,951 (43%)[a]	13,697 (40%)[b]	5,974 (17%)
Female	13,111 (39%)[a]	13,658 (41%)[a]	6,736 (20%)[b]	22,916 (68%)[a]	7,691 (23%)[b]	2,898 (9%)[b]	12,413 (37%)[b]	15,569 (47%)[a]	5,523 (17%)
Immigrant status									
Native	14,337 (39%)[a]	14,445 (40%)	7,658 (21%)[b]	22,880 (63%)[a]	9,576 (26%)[b]	3,984 (11%)[b]	15,100 (41%)[a]	15,977 (44%)[a]	5,363 (15%)[b]
Immigrant	11,364 (36%)[b]	12,268 (39%)	8,055 (25%)[a]	18,607 (59%)[b]	8,714 (28%)[a]	4,366 (14%)[a]	12,264 (39%)[b]	13,289 (42%)[b]	6,134 (19%)[a]
Geographical location (Italy)									
Northern	12,874 (36%)[b]	15,192 (42%)[a]	7,879 (22%)[b]	21,728 (60%)	10,166 (28%)[a]	4,051 (11%)[b]	13,835 (39%)[b]	16,489 (46%)[a]	5,621 (16%)[b]
Central	5,551 (38%)	5,641 (38%)	3,516 (24%)[a]	8,860 (60%)	3,930 (27%)	1,918 (13%)[a]	5,874 (40%)	6,270 (43%)	2,564 (17%)
Southern	7,276 (42%)[a]	5,880 (34%)[b]	4,318 (25%)[a]	10,899 (62%)[a]	4,194 (24%)[b]	2,381 (14%)[a]	7,655 (44%)[a]	6,507 (37%)[b]	3,312 (19%)[a]
Cohort profile									
Pre-adolescent	11,190 (34%)[b]	11,823 (36%)[b]	9,687 (30%)[a]	17,527 (54%)[b]	9,652 (30%)[a]	5,521 (17%)[a]	12,235 (37%)[b]	13,210 (40%)[b]	7,255 (22%)[a]
Adolescent	14,511 (41%)[a]	14,890 (42%)[a]	6,026 (17%)[b]	23,960 (68%)[a]	8,638 (24%)[b]	2,829 (8%)[b]	15,129 (43%)[a]	16,056 (45%)[a]	4,242 (12%)[b]
Municipality size									
Small	19,513 (38%)[a]	19,564 (39%)[b]	11,800 (23%)	30,945 (61%)	13,569 (26%)	6,363 (13%)	20,577 (40%)	21,507 (42%)[b]	8,793 (17%)[a]
Big	6,188 (36%)[b]	7,149 (41%)[a]	3,913 (23%)	10,542 (61%)	4,721 (27%)	1,987 (12%)[b]	6,787 (39%)	7,759 (45%)[a]	2,704 (16%)[b]
Socio-economic status									
Good	4,550 (41%)[a]	3,847 (35%)[b]	2,713 (24%)[a]	6,591 (59%)[b]	2,737 (25%)[b]	1,782 (16%)[a]	4,800 (43%)[a]	4,194 (38%)[b]	2,116 (19%)[a]
Average	19,911 (38%)	21,113 (40%)[a]	11,604 (22%)[b]	32,526 (62%)[a]	14,286 (27%)	5,816 (11%)[b]	21,226 (40%)	23,133 (44%)[a]	8,269 (16%)[b]
Poor	1,240 (28%)[b]	1,753 (40%)	1,396 (32%)[a]	2,370 (54%)[b]	1,267 (29%)[a]	752 (17%)[a]	1,338 (31%)[b]	1,939 (44%)	1,112 (25%)[a]

Table 2
Group differences on verbal, physical, and relational victimization (*n* = 68,127)

Note: All chi-square analyses were significant at *p* < .01
[a] standardized residual for cell was significantly greater than expected by chance (*p* < .05)
[b] standardized residual for cell was significantly less than expected by chance (*p* < .05)

ratio test after the inclusion of the interaction term resulted in a significant increase in explicative power compared to the model that included only the main effects ($\chi^2_{relational}[14] = 2,411.39$, $p < .001$). An examination of simple slope (Figure 1) coefficients revealed that male immigrant students were more likely to belong to the *frequently victimized* category compared to male Italian students ($\beta_{relational} = .43$, $p < .001$; $OR = 1.54$, 95% CI: 1.45, 1.63) and female Italian students ($\beta_{relational} = .23$, $p < .001$; $OR = 1.26$, 95% CI: 1.19, 1.34). The same association was not significant for female immigrant students on relational victimization ($\beta_{relational} = .01$, $p = .77$; $OR = .99$, 95% CI: .93, 1.05). To conclude, the results suggest that male immigrant youth were more likely to be *relationally victimized* compared to their native counterparts.

Discussion

Using a large sample of students in grades 6 through 13, the present study documented the role of immigrant status and gender on different forms and frequencies of victimization. To our knowledge, only one Italian study has investigated differences in victimization on the basis of immigrant status and gender (Manna et al., 2019). However, this study did not consider the frequency of victimization and the interaction effects between immigrant status and gender. The present study also addressed a gap in the Italian literature by accounting for potential confounders related to victimization, such as geographical location and socio-economic status.

Table 3
Multinomial logistic regressions predicting verbal, physical, and relational victimization (*n* = 68,127)

	Verbal victimization			Physical victimization			Relational victimization		
	Occasionally vs. Never OR (95% CI)	Frequently vs. Never OR (95% CI)	B(SE)	Occasionally vs. Never OR (95% CI)	Frequently vs. Never OR (95% CI)	B(SE)	Occasionally vs. Never OR (95% CI)	Frequently vs. Never OR (95% CI)	B(SE)
Gender (female)	.99 (.96, 1.03)	.72 (.69, .75)***	-.34(.02)	.58 (.56, .60)***	.43 (.41, .45)***	-.85(.03)	1.36 (1.24, 1.37)***	1.05 (.99, 1.12)	.05(.03)
Immigrant status (native)	.96 (.92, .98)*	.76 (.73, .80)***	-.27(.02)	.89 (.86, .92)***	.73 (.70, .76)***	-.32(.03)	.97 (.92, 1.02)	.68 (.64, .72)***	-.39(.03)
Interaction effect									
Gender X Immigrant status	.97 (.90, 1.04)	.98 (.91, 1.07)	-60(.03)	.93 (.87, 1.00)	.94 (.85, 1.04)	-.06(.05)	1.08 (1.02, 1.16)*	1.13 (1.04,1 .24)**	.13(.25)
Covariates									
Geographical location	.83 (.81, .85)***	.97 (.94, .99)**	-.04(.02)	.89 (.87, .91)***	1.05 (1.02, 1.08)**	.05(.02)	.85 (.83, .86)***	1.01 (.97, 1.03)	.01(.01)
Cohort profile	.92 (.89, .95)***	.46 (.44, .48)***	-.78(.02)	.63 (.61, .65)***	.37 (.35, .39)***	-.99(.3)	.93 (.90, .96)***	.46 (.44, .48)***	-.78(.02)
Municipality size	1.05 (1.01, 1.10)*	1.14 (1.08, 1.19)***	.13(.03)	1.04 (.99, 1.08)	1.09 (1.03, 1.16)**	.09(.03)	1.00 (.96, 1.04)	1.03 (.97, 1.08)	.02(.03)
Socio-economic status	1.27 (1.23, 1.32)***	1.33 (1.27, 1.39)***	.29(.02)	1.18 (1.14, 1.22)***	1.01 (.97, 1.07)	.02(.03)	1.26 (1.21, 1.30)***	1.26 (1.20, 1.33)***	.23(.02)
R^2 (Nagelkerke)	.05			.07			.05		
log likelihood(df)	2,279.46(14)			2,183.98(14)			2,335.19(14)		

*Note: * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001; ^ Reference category; 95% CI = confidence interval; OR = odds ratio; B = parameter estimate (in logits); SE = standard error. The B(SE) referred to the *frequently victimized* categories. The reference group was comprised of the *never victimized* respondents. The covariates included were: geographic location (0 = northern Italy, 1 = Central Italy, 2 = southern Italy); cohort profile (0 = pre-adolescent, 1 = adolescent); municipality size (0 = small, 1 = big); socio-economic status (0 = good, 1 = average, 2 = poor). The tabled values for relational victimization refer to the model containing the interaction terms and the covariates, while for verbal and physical victimization only the covariates were included because the interaction terms were non-significant*
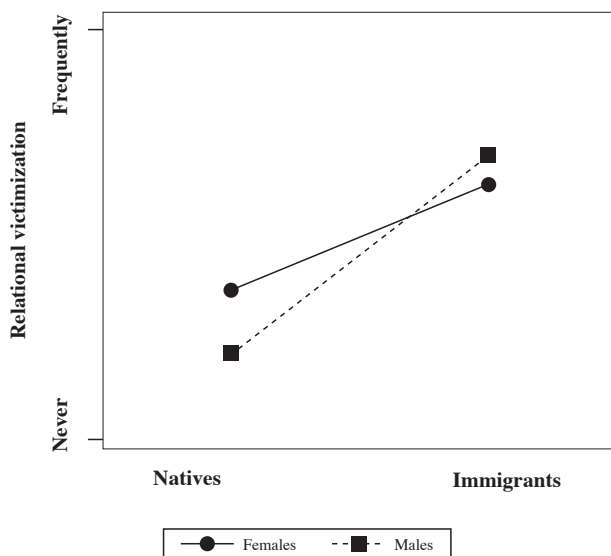

Figure 1. Gender as a moderator of relational victimization and immigrant status

First and foremost, the results confirmed the first hypothesis, showing significant differences between native and immigrant students on experiences of peer victimization (Alivernini et al., 2019; Bjereld et al., 2014; Messinger et al., 2012): immigrant youth were more likely to be classified as *frequently victimized* compared to their non-immigrant peers, with respect to verbal, physical, and relational victimization. Some scholars (Horowitz, 2010; McDonald et al., 2012) have suggested that this disparity may relate to the perception that immigrants are members of the

out-group who therefore pose a potential threat to one's own in-group. In addition, this result is aligned with previous research (Alivernini et al., 2019; Cammarota, 2004; Koo et al., 2012) suggesting that immigrant youth often perceive themselves to be the target of distinct and hostile treatment by their peer group. The data also showed a higher frequency of victimization among male students (Hypothesis 2). These findings partially confirm the first hypothesis. However, they are also consistent with previous research (Manna et al., 2019; Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017; Seals & Young, 2003) suggesting that male students are especially at risk for verbal and physical victimization, relative to female students.

Interestingly, multinomial logistic regression revealed a significant interaction between immigrant status and gender for relational victimization: male immigrant students were more likely to belong to the *frequently victimized* category compared to their native counterparts (Table 3). While there was no specific hypothesis on the association between these groups, the result is in line with previous research finding that immigrants (Alivernini et al., 2019; Bjereld et al., 2014; Messinger et al., 2012) and males (Manna et al., 2019; Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017; Seals & Young, 2003) are more likely to be victimized than their counterparts.

The high cultural concerns about immigration (Horowitz, 2010) and the prevalence of victimization among males in the Italian context (Baiocco, Pistella, Salvati, Ioverno, & Lucidi, 2018) may explain this association and the higher occurrence of relational peer victimization among male immigrant youth. Indeed, research has observed that, in countries with increasing immigration (such as Italy), there is often a decline in support for integration (Barbulescu & Beaudonnet, 2014; Navas, García, Rojas, Pumares, & Cuadrado, 2006). Moreover, in Italy, traditional gender norms are widespread and related to the concept of *machismo*, which can be considered over-conformity to the traditional male gender role (Baiocco et al.,

2018; Camodeca et al., 2019). It may be the case that male immigrant students, in an attempt to assimilate Italian traditional values related to machismo and masculinity, face relational marginalization and discrimination, rather than assimilation (Berry et al., 2006; Cammarota, 2004; Fu et al., 2013; Koo et al., 2012).

While the present study found a significant difference between immigrant and native students on the three forms of victimization, some previous studies have not replicated these differences (Eslea & Mukhtar, 2000; Fandrem et al., 2009; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002). A possible explanation for this could be that Italy, similar to other conservative nations (Bae, Choo, & Lim, 2018; Camodeca et al., 2019; Pistella, Ioverno, & Russell, 2019), may present persistently negative attitudes and behaviors toward immigrants; in contrast, other countries (Eslea & Mukhtar, 2000; Fandrem et al., 2009; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002) may provide more inclusive environments and present more positive attitudes toward immigrant youth. However, although the present findings were statistically significant, the large sample size and small effect sizes suggest that the results should be interpreted cautiously.

Considering the remainder of the covariates, the final model (see Table 3 for more detail) showed that verbal, physical, and relational victimization were significantly associated with geographical location (Genta et al., 1996), municipality size (Manna et al., 2019), cohort profile (Genta et al., 1996; Vitoroulis & Georgiades, 2017), and socio-economic status (Fu et al., 2013; Tippett & Wolke, 2014). Future research on these topics should account for these covariates.

Limitations of the Study and Future Research

Although this research exhibited various strengths—such as its contribution to deepening our understanding of peer victimization in the Italian context—it nonetheless had several limitations. First, only self-report instruments were used, with no measures of social desirability; future research should apply longitudinal methods to better recognize correlates of victimization over time. Second, the study was conducted in Italy, and the findings may not apply to people living in other countries. Therefore, generalization of the results should be done with caution and in the context of future studies. Third, the survey did not consider other variables that might have affected peer victimization, such as sexual orientation, sexism, and personality characteristics. Fourth, the survey did not include questions about students' ethnic background (Vitoroulis, Brittain, & Vaillancourt, 2016) or details relating to the school (e.g., percentage of students with free and reduced-priced meals, school enrollment). Finally, the ISTAT data did not distinguish between first- and second-generation immigrants or the different countries of birth of immigrant students (Alivernini et al., 2019; Rodríguez-Hidalgo, Solera, & Calmaestra, 2018); future research should deepen these comparisons.

In addition, the study was limited to a dichotomous measure of gender (female/male), and future studies should discern sex according to gender identity, including contemporary identities such as genderqueer, transgender, and gender non-conforming. Finally, bullying victimization measures were derived from secondary data by ISTAT (2015), and standardized instruments were not used to assess the variables of interest. However, the three forms of peer victimization (i.e., verbal, physical, relational) showed satisfying internal consistency and all items were similar to those of existing measures. Future studies could extend the present investigation by examining additional variables that might predict or mediate the risk of victimization in immigrant students, as well as in all youth. A serious effort to understand the process of assimilation and its consequences is needed, taking into account the community context of immigration (e.g., social and political influences) in relation to school experiences and peer victimization (Navas et al., 2006).

This study has important implications for immigration and school contexts (López-Castedo, Álvarez García, Domínguez Alonso, & Álvarez Roales, 2018). Peer victimization toward minority groups is a serious public health concern and studies have only recently begun to consider immigrant status disparities on these topics. Indeed, given that Italian society is engaging in a heated debate over immigration policy—generating increased societal stigma and ideology that villainizes immigrants and their offspring—prevention efforts and intervention strategies are needed to improve school safety for immigrant students (as well as all students) and to reduce immigration status disparities in peer victimization (Hong & Espelage, 2012).

Specifically, the data confirmed that Italian schools should include school-based anti-victimization programs to prevent victimization and create a network of social support for immigrant students; such programs have already been successfully implemented in other countries (e.g., the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program; Olweus & Limber, 2010; Teglasi & Rothman, 2001). These programs should aim at changing negative attitudes toward diversity and minority groups. Likewise, other programs could focus on self-esteem and prosocial skills, which are considered protective factors against developing problematic and aggressive behaviors. An interesting prevention program could involve peer mentoring, which has proven to be quite effective in increasing students' sense of connection to their school and reducing aggressive behaviors (Vreeman & Carroll, 2007).

Acknowledgments

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