Chapter 3

The Psychological and Socio-cultural Adjustment of Ethnic Minority Children:
Evidence From Albanian and Serbian Immigrants to Italy

Abstract

This study compared levels of psychological (depressive symptoms) and socio-cultural adjustment (emotional instability, pro-social, and aggressive behavior) in immigrant children from two different cultures residing in Northeast Italy. The sample consisted of 263 immigrant children (95 Albanian and 85 Serbian) and 83 Italian non-immigrant children, aged 7 to 11 years. *Childhood Social Adjustment Capacity Indicators Questionnaire* (children’s and teachers’ reports) (Caprara et al., 1992) and *Children’s Depression Inventory* (Kovacs, 1988) were individually administered. Immigrant and non-immigrant group mean levels of adjustment differed significantly. Immigrant children showed higher levels of emotional instability, aggressive behavior, and depression, and lower levels of pro-social behavior than non-immigrant children did. There were no significant differences between the Albanian and Serbian children’s scores. These results highlight the difficulties immigrant children can experience in adjusting to new ethnic contexts.

3.1 Introduction

Adjustment following cross-cultural migration has been investigated in terms of the two main dimensions of psychological and socio-cultural outcomes. Psychological adjustment concerns mental health aspects such as depressive symptoms, mood disturbances, and general degree of well-being and satisfaction with life. Socio-cultural adjustment refers to the ability
to interact adequately in social contexts as a consequence of successful participation in a host society.

One important factor affecting psychological and socio-cultural outcomes is “group vitality”- a concept that refers to the dynamism, social status, and demographic distribution of an ethnic group throughout a specific geographic area. Bourhis, Moise, Perreault, & Senecal (1997) have developed a helpful frame of reference based on the premise that minorities presenting strong characteristics of ethnic vitality, family and social support can help its members deal with negative acculturation experiences in their host cultures. It has been found that strong minority networks reduce perceived levels of stress and positively affect coping strategies associated with minority status (Bochner, McLeod, & Lin, 1977). In fact, being able to share similar psychological experiences with members of one’s own minority group provides crucial social support network. Vital and supportive ethnic minorities therefore represent a source of constructive social relationships in new cultures and provide psychological safety nets that are positively linked to the well-being of individual minority group members (Ait Ouarasse & Van de Vijver, 2004).

The conceptual distinction between psychological and socio-cultural adjustment domains is based on Ward et al.’s framework (Ward & Kennedy, 1993; Searle & Ward, 1991; Stone, Feinstein & Ward, 1990). Their research has demonstrated strong associations between these two outcomes and has shown that the strength of these correlations is influenced by the degree of minority groups’ cultural distance from host cultures. Immigrant groups characterized by a high degree of cultural distance from a host society are at greater risk of incurring problematic psychological and socio-cultural consequences. For example, Chinese immigrants in Singapore experience fewer socio-cultural adaptation problems than Chinese immigrants residing in Europe, demonstrating thereby how close cultural similarity with a receiving society is associated with facilitated adjustment (Berry, 2003; Ward & Kennedy, 1999).

Hence, the psychological and socio-cultural adjustment model can be a useful tool for investigation and accounting for the psychological adaptation of immigrants to their new places of settlement. It has been found that immigrants and their children tend to suffer higher levels of psychological and socio-cultural stress than the native-born populations do. The prevalence of psychological distress in immigrant children has been documented in
various children’s ethnic groups: Puerto Rican (Achenbach et al. 1990; Canino, Early, & Rogler, 1980), Mexican (Roberts, Roberts, & Chen, 1995), Chinese (Chen, Rubin, & Li 1995), Hispanic (Twenge & Nolen-Hoeksema, 2002), Korean, Russian, and Western Armenian (Jaycox et al., 2002), Turkish (Bengi-Arslan, Verhurst, van der Ende, & Erol, 1997), and Bosnian-Serb (Papageorgiou et al., 2000). For instance, Papageorgiou et al. (2000) reported pathological levels of stress and depression in a sample of 95 Bosnian-Serb children (aged 8 to 13 years) who had immigrated to Greek Macedonia. The study also found that 47% of these children scored within clinical range on psychological and socio-cultural disturbance scales.

The literature on the topic suggests that the greater psychological and socio-cultural distress of ethnic minority children might represent a complex response to an environment, defined in terms of neighborhood violence (Attar, Guerra, & Tolan, 1994; Crouch, Hanson, Saunders, Kilpatrick & Resnick, 2000; Fitzpatrick, 1993; Kataoka et al. 2003; Luthar, 1991; Martinez & Richers, 1993; Paxton, Robinson, Shah, & Schoeny, 2004), school difficulties (Brody, Dorsey, Forehand & Armistead, 2002; Edelson, Ialongo, Wertherham-Larsson, Crockett & Kellam, 1992; Kellam et al., 1991), and family stress factors, such as economic hardship and parental psychological dysfunction (Brody, Murry, Kim, & Brown, 2002; Dennis, Parke, Coltrane, Blacher, & Borthwick-Duffy, 2003; McLoyd & Wilson, 1991; Mistry, Vandewater, Huston, & McLoyd, 2002; Short & Johnson, 1997). In brief, these findings indicate that the psychological and socio-cultural adjustment problems in immigrant children are significantly associated with systematic exposure to violence, negative teacher evaluations, lower school achievement (see also Roebers & Schneider, 1999), economic difficulties, and lack of social support for ethnic minority families.

Other studies, however, have reported more similarities than differences between immigrant and non-immigrant children’s psychological and socio-cultural outcomes. Specifically, no differences were found in the following ethnic groups with respect to their majority counterparts: Kurdistanian and Swedish (Wahlstein, Ahmad, & von Knorring, 2002), Irish and American (Fitzpatrick & Deehan, 1993), Sami and Norwegian (Javo, Heyerdahl, & Ronning, 2000), Greek and American (MacDonald, Tsiantis, Achenbach, Motti-Stefanidi, & Richardson, 1995), and Bosnian and Slovenian (Slodnjak, Kos, & Yule, 2002). For example, Wahlsten et al. (2002) compared Kurdistanian immigrant children with
Swedish native-born children and observed no significant differences in self-reported psychological and socio-cultural problems. Yet, these authors maintained that these contrasting findings can most probably be linked to cultural variability, considered in terms of specific cultural context and individual experiences in a foreign country (Wahlsten et al., 2002).

Psychological and socio-cultural adjustment has also been observed to be a function of factors such as gender characteristics and the economic adaptation of a specific ethnic group. As to the influence of gender, research findings have consistently reported gender differences in the socio-cultural domain of aggressiveness, with boys showing more aggressiveness than girls typically show (Tallandini, 2004; Boxer et al., 2004). For instance, Boxer et al.’s (2004) study investigating relations among different forms of aggressive and prosocial behavior found that boys engage in higher levels of aggression than girls do. Moreover, and consistently with previous findings, the girls in the study reported engaging in higher levels of altruistic and prosocial behavior.

Successful minority economic adaptation is frequently considered an important source of support that can affect the psychological and socio-cultural outcomes of immigrants (who are typically more economically disadvantaged than native-born individuals are) and that socio-economic difficulties negatively affect individual well being (Parke et al., 2004). Moreover, the issue of economic hardship has been linked to a variety of psychological and socio-cultural problems in ethnic minority children of varying ages, in terms of depression (Brody et al., 2002), difficult peer relations, low self-esteem (Mistry et al., 2002), and social maladjustment (Parke et al., 2004). For instance, Dearing et al. (2006) reported that family income significantly predicts children's psychological and socio-cultural adjustment problems, in that higher levels of economic privation are associated with more problems in this domain. In fact the study showed that children with relatively high family incomes presented fewer problems than children with relatively low family incomes did. Moreover, the magnitude of these associations was greater for children from extremely economically disadvantaged families.
The present study was aimed at evaluating the influence of ethnicity, immigration experience, socioeconomic status, and gender characteristics on the developmental outcomes of minority immigrant children, as measured by psychological and socio-cultural variables. According to Ward et al.’s (1993; 1991; 1990) findings, adaptation during cross-cultural transition involves immigrants’ psychological aspects, defined in terms of depression or more global mood disturbances, and socio-cultural aspects referring to interactive and social abilities within the host culture (Ward & Kennedy, 1993; Searle & Ward, 1991; Stone, Feinstein & Ward, 1990).

Based on these considerations, we expected to observe significant differences in immigrant children’s psychological and socio-cultural adjustment: a) in function of their specific ethnic group and b) as compared to native Italian control participants.

Specifically, given that the Serb community in Friuli-Venezia Giulia has many resources available locally to encourage its members to carry on the community’s historical traditions, it was thought that this factor might play a significant role in determining immigrant Serb children’s psychological outcomes. In fact, Stansfeld et al. (2004) conducted a study with the Bangladeshi community in London and found that the density of same ethnic group around an individual was an important protective factor against the development and maintenance of psychological distress.

As mentioned previously, a key concept in comparing the strengths and weaknesses in an immigrant population’s processes of adaptation to their host community relates to ethnic vitality, which refers to the specific distinctive ethnic group factors viewed as collective entities within the majority context, such as inter-ethnic social relationships and the sharing of common experiences. Immigrant groups characterized by low ethnic vitality tend to experience more stress and psychological difficulties that are linked to efforts to adapt to their new countries than populations with high or medium levels of vitality do (Bourhis et al., 1997). We therefore hypothesized that Serbian children would show better psychological and socio-cultural adjustment than the Albanian participants would, given that the second community is less solidly established and ethnically vital in the local territory.

Difficulties in the immigration process can critically influence children’s psychological and socio-cultural functioning (Papageorgiou et al., 2000). We therefore also hypothesized that the immigrant children would score lower on socio-cultural measures and
higher on depression than their native Italian peers would, due to their different social position and migration-related life experiences.

Moreover, we investigated gender and family socio-economic status (SES) effects on children’s psychological and socio-cultural adjustment. As to gender differences, previous findings showed a higher prevalence of psychological difficulties in boys than in girls, especially concerning social and cultural interaction (Guttmannova, 2005; Boxer, Tisak & Goldstein, 2004). With regard to SES influence, the previously described research demonstrated a strong relation between SES and psychological and socio-cultural problems in children, in that low SES was associated with higher levels of these problems and that these levels were higher for immigrant groups than they were for native-born participant groups (Dearing et al, 2006; Parke et al., 2004).

To summarize, our predictions were as follows:

1. Children from the group presenting higher levels of ethnic vitality (the Serbian community) would show fewer difficulties in the examined variables than the Albanian children would (Bourhis et al., 1997; Stansfeld et al. 2004);

2. Immigrant children would generally show higher levels of emotional instability and aggression and less prosocial behavior than non-immigrant children would (Papageorgiou et al., 2000);

3. Immigrant children would generally evince higher levels of depression symptoms than non-immigrant children would (Papageorgiou et al., 2000);

4. Children’s gender would varyingly influence their psychological and socio-cultural adjustment, especially on levels of emotional instability, prosocial behavior, and aggression, with boys manifesting more problems in these psychological components than girls would (Boxer, Tisak & Goldstein, 2004, Tallandini, 2004).

5. Family SES would be associated with different levels of psychological and socio-cultural problems, which would be higher in children from low SES families than they would be in children from middle SES families (Dearing et al, 2006; Parke et al., 2004).
3.2 Method

3.2.1 Participants

Our sample consisted of 263 children, aged 7 to 11 years--180 immigrant children (IC: 98 boys and 82 girls) and 83 non-immigrant children (NI-C: 41 boys and 42 girls). All participants were attending five different elementary schools located in the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region, and all immigrant children had been living in Italy for a minimum of 1 year to a maximum of 3 years: 28 had been residing in Italy for 1 year; 91, for 2 years; and 61, for 3 years. Most of the Albanian children had been residing in Italy for 2 years ($n = 45$); 33, for 3 years; and 17, for 1 year. The Serbian group presented 11 children who had been living in Italy for 1 year; the other Serbian participants had been residing there for longer periods: 2 years ($n = 46$) and 3 years ($n = 28$), respectively. All the IC participants had acquired basic Italian language skills, as measured by teacher evaluations, and had been placed in classes based on their academic achievement.

We used school records to obtain information about the participants’ family socio-economic status (SES). The data were collected by classifying the children’s families into two categories: working-class (low SES) and middle class (middle SES). SES levels were determined based on the Italian National Statistic Institute occupational classifications (Scarnera, 2001). In the IC group, 72 Albanian and 60 Serbian children’s families presented a low SES, 23 Albanian and 25 Serb children were from middle class families. In the non-immigrant group, 31 children’s families presented a low SES, and 52 children were from middle class families. We also collected data on children’s academic performance, based on school grades, which ranged from sufficient (1), good (2), to excellent (3). Twenty-seven Albanian and 15 Serbian students in the immigrant group had been classified in the first category, 42 and 57 in the second, 26 and 13 in the third, respectively. Twelve of the non-immigrant students had sufficient school achievement; 43 had good achievement; and 28 had excellent school achievement. Ethnic group differences in family SES and academic achievement levels were examined using analyses of variance that included socio-economic
status, school grades, and their interactions. Within the entire sample, Albanian, Serbian, and Italian children did not differ on socio-economic and school indicators, in the sense that ethnic variations in SES and academic achievement did not reach statistical significance.

### 3.2.2 Measures

One problem in assessing psychological outcomes in children from multicultural settings is the need to select culturally sensitive and valid measures in function of varying different linguistic and ethnic contexts. A frequent criticism in this domain is that standardized instruments, which may have a high degree of validity in the culture in which they were originally developed, are administered to an ethnic sample, with no previous verification, however, as to whether the measures have been tested in that sample’s country of origin. In an effort to avoid this potential limitation, we first conducted a semi-structured interview and informal discussions with the teachers and cultural mediators in all the schools involved; we then selected the dimensions to be examined in the study. The aim was to choose the most appropriate measures in relation to immigrant children’s most frequently manifested problems. The main aspects emerging from this preliminary qualitative inspection concerned aggressive and inappropriate social behavior towards teachers and peers, anxiety, negative thoughts, and psychological difficulties linked to depression.

We used the *Childhood Social Adjustment Capacity Indicators Questionnaire* (*CSACIQ-C*, children’s self-reports), by Caprara, Pastorelli, Barbaranelli, and Vallone (1992) to measure the participants’ socio-cultural adjustment. The questionnaire consists of three subscales representing three indicators of a child’s ability to adequately interact in social contexts: 1) the emotional instability scale (IE) measures a child’s tendency to experience state disorder and vulnerability as an expression of poor emotional and behavioral self-control (e.g., spitting, rudeness); 2) the prosocial behavior scale (PB) assesses helpful behavior, social involvement, and tendency to share objects or experiences with others (e.g., enjoying being in the company of friends and classmates, helping others do their homework); and 3) the aggressive behavior subscale (A) evaluates a child’s tendency to harm peers or friends physically or verbally (e.g., fighting with others, saying bad words). Higher emotional instability and aggression scores and lower prosocial behavior scores indicate
difficulties in children’s social adjustment. The emotional instability (EI), prosocial behavior (PB) and aggression (A) subscales have been shown to be highly reliable, yielding Cronbach alpha’s of .84, .60, and .79 respectively. Moreover, other studies have confirmed the good internal consistencies of the subscales (EI .82; PB .77; and A .86) and concurrent validity values of .28, .25 and .48 , respectively (Caprara & Pastorelli, 1993; Caprara, Barbaranelli, Pastorelli, Bandura & Zimbardo, 2000; Caprara, Barbaranelli, Pastorelli, Cermak & Rosza, 2001).

The children’s teachers were asked to evaluate the same variables using the *Childhood Social Adjustment Capacity Indicators Questionnaire* (*CSACIQ-T*, teachers’ evaluations), (Caprara et al., 1992). They used a 3-point Likert scale to indicate how frequently a given child 1) disturbed others in the classroom, 2) helped peers, 3) enjoyed being in the company of others, 4) said bad words, 5) was violent with peers, and 6) played dangerous games.

Our rationale for using a two-version form (one self-evaluating and one hetero-evaluating scale) was to more accurately evaluate children’s social behavior by assessing the same adjustment dimensions and then verify degree of correspondence for each pair of evaluations. The questionnaire manual reports normative data on a representative sample of 521 Italian children, and confirmatory factor analysis has revealed good construct validity for emotional instability (.94), prosocial behavior (.91), and aggression (.93) (Caprara & Pastorelli, 1993).

The children were administered the *Children’s Depression Inventory* (*CDI*, Kovacs, 1988) to identify any depressive problems they might have been experiencing. The CDI was designed to assess depressive symptoms in emotional, cognitive, psychomotor, and motivational domains by presenting children with sentences describing various levels of depression. The instrument is typically used to study child depression in relation to social maladjustment (Aluja & Blanch, 2002; Chen et al., 1995; Cole, Martin, Powers, & Truglio, 1996). Children are asked to indicate the sentences that best describe the way they have been feeling over the past two weeks. Each item can be scored from 0 to 2, ranging from the “very seldom” to the “very frequent” presence of a given feeling. The total score varies from a minimum of 0 to a maximum of 54 points, with higher scores indicating poorer adjustment, and thus, a greater degree of depressive symptoms. The author recommended considering scores of 12/13 or more as indicative of depression in a clinical population and scores of
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19/20 or more, as indicators of depression in clinically non-referred groups. The CDI has shown good test-retest reliability, internal consistency, and cross-cultural validity (Charman & Pervova, 1996; Dong, Yang, & Ollendick, 1994; Erkolahti, Ilonen, Saarijarvi, & Terho, 2003; Ghareeb & Beshai, 1989; Slodnjak et al., 2002; Twenge & Nolen-Hoeksema, 2002; Yih-Lan, 2003). Moreover, a recent study examined the CDI’s psychometric properties in an Italian sample of 284 children, aged 8 years, and reported adequate internal consistency (Cronbach’s alpha: .80) and item total product correlations ranging between .25 to .59, all of which were significant at the \( p < .05 \) level (Frigerio, Pesenti, Molteni, Snider, & Battaglia, 2001).

3.2.3 Procedure

All children filled out the questionnaires individually, in the presence of a research assistant (RD) who had long-term experience in working with the region’s ethnic minority students. All immigrant children filled out the CSACIQ-C (Caprara et al., 1992) and the CDI (Kovacs, 1988). Teachers concurrently evaluated the immigrant and non-immigrant children with the CSACIQ-T (Caprara et al., 1992).

3.2.4 Data analysis

We first examined degree of evaluation convergence by calculating linear correlations between teacher and child scores on the CSACIQ-C and the CSACIQ-T (Caprara et al., 1992) to verify the presence of differences between teacher- and child-assessed socio-cultural adjustment ratings.

The study design included four measures of child psychological and socio-cultural adjustment as dependant variables (depression, emotional instability, prosocial behavior, and aggression) and ethnic group, gender, and SES as independent variables. A general linear model was applied using the variables of ethnic subgroup, gender, and SES interactions with emotional instability, prosocial behavior, aggression, and depression. We opted to run separate ANOVAs for two main reasons: 1) because our dependant variables of depression, emotional instability, prosocial behavior and aggression were independent
measures and therefore, not highly correlated; and 2) this method is assumed to be more appropriate and precise for comparing between-group questionnaire data differences with subtest scores, classifying respondent’s in terms of sub-group (IC-Serbian; IC-Albanian; N-IC (Italian)), gender, and social class (Wilcox, 2002). We tested for subgroup, SES, and gender differences by subsequently running four separate series of univariate ANOVAs (3 x 2 x 2 x 1), with the independent variables of ethnic group (Albanian, Serbian, and Italian), SES (low/middle), and gender (boys/girls), and the dependent variables of emotional instability, prosocial behavior, aggression, and depression. In an effort to better parse out these interactions, we also conducted post-hoc contrast comparisons with parameter estimates, accounting for ethnic group differences at each level of our independent and dependent variables.

3.3 Results

As described in the previous section, we first checked for any teacher-child response divergences by calculating linear correlations on their evaluations. Statistical significance was reached for all three adjustment indicators: Emotional Instability ($r = .30; p < 0.01$), Prosocial Behavior ($r = .24; p < 0.01$), and Aggression ($r = .22; p < 0.01$), as reported in other studies performing the same analyses (Caprara & Pastorelli, 1993), indicating a good level of agreement thereby. We therefore proceeded to analyze the children’s self-evaluations.

The separate between-participant ANOVAs run to compare Albanian and Serbian immigrant (IC) subgroups with the Italian (N-IC) subgroup yielded statistically significant group differences. The contrast results matrix showed ethnic group differences for all the dependant variables. In particular, the Albanian and Serb IC scored higher than the Italian N-IC children on Emotional Instability, $F(1, 262) = 2.96, p < 0.05$; Albanian IC: $M = 18.07, SD = 4.47$; Serbian IC: $M = 18.15, SD = 3.52$; Italian N-IC: $M = 16.95, SD = 4.72$) and on Aggression, $F(1, 262) = 2.77, p < 0.05$; Albanian IC: $M = 13.56, SD = 4.32$; Serbian IC: $M = 13.61, SD = 4.48$; Italian N-IC: $M = 12.27, SD = 3.53$) and scored lower on Prosocial Behavior, $F(1, 262) = 2.93, p < 0.05$; Albanian IC: $M = 18.68, SD = 4.39$; Serbian IC: $M = 17.99, SD = 4.78$; Italian N-IC: $M = 19.63; SD = 3.68$ (Figure 1).
Depressive symptoms also significantly differed for the immigrant and non-immigrant groups, showing a higher level of depression in immigrant children $F(1, 262) = 7.67, p < 0.01$; Albanian IC: $M = 12.17, SD = 4.28$; Serbian IC: $M = 12.04, SD = 3.24$ vs. Italian N-IC: $M = 9.47, SD = 4.66$ (see Figure 2).
An ethnic group comparison of the two sub-samples of Serbian (47%) and Albanian children (53%) yielded only a slight difference in psychological and socio-cultural adjustment rates. In fact, the contrast post-hoc test results comparing the levels of psychological and socio-cultural adjustment variables in the Serb vs. Albanian group revealed no significant differences. Hence, similarly to the finding reported in the previous section, no significant ethnic group differences emerged for Serbian and Albanian children on the variables of emotional instability, prosocial behavior, aggression, and depression.

Results of the gender comparison in the IC group revealed significant differences between Albanian and Serbian boys considered together, as compared to Albanian and Serbian girls, for Aggression, $F(1, 262) = 2.46, p < 0.05$; Albanian boys: $M = 15.90, SD = 4.37$; Serbian boys: $M = 15.10, SD = 5.01$ vs. Albanian girls: $M = 10.96, SD = 2.34$; Serbian girls: $M = 11.68, SD = 2.71$ showing that immigrant boys behaved more aggressively than immigrant girls did.

** $p < .001$
Moreover, the parameter estimates for gender effects in the IC group revealed that Albanian and Serbian boys examined together scored lower on *Prosocial Behavior*, $F(1, 262) = 2.93, p < 0.05$; Albanian boys: $M = 16.76, SD = 4.66$; Serbian boys: $M = 16.73, SD = 5.16$) than Albanian girls ($M = 20.82, SD = 2.85$) and Serbian girls did ($M = 19.62, SD = 3.70$), with girls being significantly more pro-socially oriented than boys were. Conversely, the IC group yielded no significant differences between boys and girls for *Emotional Instability* (Albanian boys: $M = 20.20, SD = 4.52$, Serbian boys: $M = 19.00, SD = 3.64$ vs. Albanian girls: $M = 15.91, SD = 3.28$ and Serbian girls: $M = 17.05, SD = 3.07$).

Similarly, there were no statistically significant differences for depression in Albanian boys ($M = 12.18, SD = 4.23$) and Serbian boys ($M = 11.88, SD = 2.83$) vs. Albanian girls ($M = 12.16, SD = 4.37$) and Serbian girls ($M = 12.24, SD = 3.73$).

The within N-IC group analysis yielded one statistically significant gender difference: boys and girls differed on *Aggression*, $F(1, 262) = 3.21, p < 0.05$; boys: $M = 13.41; SD = 3.97$ vs. girls: $M = 11.14; SD = 2.63$), showing that boys were more aggressive. No gender effects emerged for either *Emotional Instability* (boys: $M = 17.80, SD = 4.97$ vs. girls: $M = 16.12, SD = 4.37$), *Prosocial Behavior* (boys: $M = 20.05, SD = 3.34$ vs. girls: $M = 19.21, SD = 3.97$), or *Depression* (boys: $M = 9.02; SD = 5.37$ vs. girls: $M = 9.90; SD = 5.96$).

As to SES influence on children’s psychological and socio-cultural adjustment, the analysis of interaction parameters revealed significant differences within both the Albanian and Serbian children’s groups for the dependant variables of emotional instability, prosocial behavior, and aggression. In particular, low SES Albanian children scored higher than middle SES Albanian children on *Emotional Instability*, $F(1, 262) = 3.83, p < 0.05$; Albanian low SES: $M = 18.14, SD = 4.72$ vs. Albanian middle SES: $M = 17.87; SD = 3.63$) and *Aggression*, $F(1, 262) = 2.07, p < 0.05$; Albanian low SES: $M = 13.67, SD = 4.54$ vs. Albanian middle SES: $M = 12.22; SD = 3.60$).

Similarly, Serbian children from low SES families scored higher than their middle SES counterparts on *Emotional Instability*, $F(1, 262) = 4.70, p < 0.05$; Serbian low SES: $M = 18.63, SD = 3.47$ vs. Serbian middle SES: $M = 17.00; SD = 3.44$) and *Aggression*, $F(1, 262) = 2.23, p$
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< 0.05; Serbian low SES: $M = 14.23$, $SD = 4.88$ vs. Serbian middle SES: $M = 12.12$; $SD = 2.93$).

Only the Serbian group showed a significant SES difference for prosocial behavior. Specifically, Serbian children from low SES families scored lower than middle SES Serbian children on Prosocial Behavior, $F(1, 262) = 2.16, p < 0.05$; Serbian low SES: $M = 17.47$, $SD = 5.10$ vs. Serbian middle SES: $M = 19.24$; $SD = 3.10$. The SES influence on prosocial behavior was not observed in the Albanian children with low SES: $M = 18.54$, $SD = 4.50$ vs. middle SES: $M = 19.13$; $SD = 4.10$.

No SES effects emerged in either of the Albanian and Serbian groups for depressive symptoms—i.e., there were no differences in depression between Albanian low SES ($M = 12.42$, $SD = 4.12$) and Albanian middle SES children ($M = 11.39$; $SD = 4.75$), nor between Serbian low SES ($M = 12.15$, $SD = 3.42$) and Serbian middle SES children ($M = 11.76$; $SD = 3.83$).

The N-IC group yielded no statistically significant differences due to SES regarding emotional instability, prosocial behavior, aggression, or depressive symptoms.

3.4 Discussion

Consistently with prior evidence showing a strong relation between child and adult reports (Bell-Dolan, Reaven & Peterson, 1993; Caprara et al., 1992), we found a significant association between the participants’ self-reports and their teachers’ evaluations of their socio-cultural adjustment. Also in agreement with the literature (Papageorgiou et al., 2000), our results showed a much higher incidence of self-reported psychological and socio-cultural problems in immigrant children than in their non-immigrant peers. Yet, contrary to our expectations, we found no empirical support for the hypothesized ethnic group differences between the Serbian and Albanian sub-samples. In fact, it was interesting to observe more similarities than differences in Serbian and Albanian children’s self-ratings of their psychological and socio-cultural behavior. Surprisingly, the Serbian children’s ratings did not conform to our prediction concerning the role of ethnically related protective influences, such as a well-established cultural community, and support and dynamism due to ethnic vitality.
As described in the Introduction, research conducted in different cultures has shown a higher incidence of psychological and socio-cultural problems in children exposed to the risks of immigration (Jaycox et al., 2002; Papageorgiou et al., 2000). These findings suggest that immigrant groups are at greater risk for mental health problems, as a result of stress-related factors and the various consequences that accompany migration, family separation, and problems in adapting to a new socio-cultural context. The results of the current study extended these results as well as those from a pilot studies examining the experience of immigration and its relation with children’s well-being (Bengi-Arslan, et al., 1997; Papageorgiou et al., 2000), showing that such experience can interfere with a child’s psychological and socio-cultural adjustment.

The gender comparisons conducted showed that boys in all groups (IC and N-IC) mentioned and boys were reported as engaging in more aggressive acts than girls did. In fact, boys generally exhibit more aggressive behavior than girls do (Boxer, Tisak & Goldstein, 2004; Tisak, Nucci, & Jankowski, 1996), and girls tend to respond more pro-socially than boys do (Delveaux & Daniels, 2000; Fabes, Carlo, Kupanoff, & Laible, 1999; Pakaslahti & Keltikangaas-Jarvien, 2001; Tallandini, 2004).

Concerning family SES influence on children’s developmental outcomes, we found specific SES differences within the immigrant children sub-groups (Serbian and Albanian). These significant results were related to the impact of SES in terms of an immigrant group’s socio-cultural adjustment: immigrant children with a low family SES were more emotionally unstable, more aggressive, and less pro-socially oriented than the ones with a higher family SES.

We underscore that our study presents some important limitations, however. For instance, although the data support current research on ethnic minority populations as they adapt to their new countries, our results should be viewed in terms of the specific geographical and cultural context in which the study was conducted (Italy’s Friuli-Venezia-Giulia region).

Another important consideration regarding psychological and socio-cultural assessment outcomes in multiethnic samples concerns the concept of acculturation, which implies individual change when different ethnic groups come into contact with each other (Rogler, Cortes & Malgady, 1991). Further research should include measures to assess level of acculturation as a moderator variable.
The results of our study replicate and extend previous findings on negative migration effects by applying them to a sample of immigrant school-aged children in the North-eastern Italian immigration context. In fact, our results revealed dramatic differences between immigrant and non-immigrant children in terms of psychological well-being and socio-cultural behavior: The first variable is essential for experiencing a sense of personal stability in individual interaction; the second is crucial for constructing sound social relationships with peers. The marked differences we observed underscore the difficulties immigrant children can experience in adjusting to new ethnic contexts - difficulties that portend even more serious psychological problems for immigrant groups during adolescence (Slodnjak et al., 2002).