

## **ADOLESCENT IMMIGRANTS' HOST SATISFACTION IN A RECENT IMMIGRATION RECEIVING COUNTRY**

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### **Abstract**

*Host country satisfaction, as an index of immigrants' psychological adaptation, has particular importance for immigrant communities in the destination country. We explain immigrant adolescents' satisfaction with their level of life in Spain by examining the contribution of sociodemographic variables, ethnic and mainstream identification, the perception of ethnic group discrimination, and the length of time lived in the host country. We examine a group of 347 Moroccans and Ecuadorians adolescent immigrants, two of the biggest immigrant communities in Spain that differ in their cultural distance (e.g., language, religion) to the mainstream culture. We provide empirical evidences that; first, Spanish language proficiency, mainstream (and not ethnic) identification, and time lived in Spain are positively related to host country satisfaction; second, immigrants' perception of ethnic discrimination is negatively associated with host country satisfaction; and third, cultural distance to the mainstream does not significantly moderate these associations (i.e. the relationships are similar for the two ethnic groups).*

*Considering these results, social policies aimed at promoting positive attitudes towards cultural diversity and supporting immigrants' participation in the host society should be encouraged.*

**Key Words:** *Ethnic minorities, Ethnic cultural orientation, Host country satisfaction, Mainstream cultural orientation, Perceived ethnic discrimination*

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Nowadays classrooms in Spain are generally exemplified by students from different countries and cultures, as a result of the recent and remarkable immigration to this country. The process of cultural and psychological change that follows intercultural contact (Berry, 2003), known as acculturation, has started to be vividly experienced by the ethnic groups and individuals settled in Spain.

Here our first objective is to examine the role of some principal predictors –cultural identity, time of residence and perceived ethnic discrimination- of the country host satisfaction in a sample of the two major immigrant groups settled in Spain: Moroccans and Ecuadorians. Our second objective is to analyze the moderating role of ethnicity between the predictor variables and the host country satisfaction, since the acculturation changes faced by immigrant adolescents could differ depending on the cultural distance between the origin and the host society and, the social valuation of their ethnic group in Spain.

### **1.1. Country host life satisfaction**

Life satisfaction has been studied as indicator of psychological adaptation in diverse studies on adolescents' acculturation (Berry, Phinney, San, & Vedder, 2006; Sam, 2000; Ward, 2006). Research has confirmed that individuals who are satisfied with their lives are in general well adjusted and free from psychopathology (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). The studies comparing the life satisfaction between the native adolescents and the immigrants usually showed differences in favor of native (Neto, 2001). In fact, Verkuyten (2008) showed that the members of ethnic minorities had lower general satisfaction than comparative majority group because they were less satisfied with their life in the country of settlement. Therefore, host country satisfaction, as a component of life satisfaction, seems to be very important in the psychological adaptation of adolescent immigrants because everyday life in the country of settlement is a central issue to them.

### **1.2. Acculturation variables related to host country satisfaction**

#### **1.2.1. Acculturation orientations**

Although identifying with the larger society and with the ethnic culture were previously viewed as opposite ends of a unidimensional construct, in recent years, researchers have suggested that they are two separate constructs and that it is possible to have high identification with both cultures (Phinney, 1990). Moreover, research has indicated that a strong identification with both cultural orientations' is associated with psychological well-being (Sam, 2000, Ward, 2006). However recent studies carried out with life satisfaction index showed a positive correlation between this variable and the mainstream identification in several ethnic groups, whereas the identification with the ethnic culture was unrelated to their life satisfaction in the host country (Neto, 2001). Consequently, it is hypothesized that the orientation towards the mainstream culture will be stronger positively associated with the host country satisfaction of immigrant adolescents than the ethnic culture orientation.

#### **1.2.2. Perceived ethnic discrimination**

The experience of ethnic discrimination is considered a unique ecological circumstance that differentiates the development of immigrant youth from their mainstream peers (García Coll et al., 1996) with negative consequences in their life satisfaction (e.g. Verkuyten, 2008). In this sense,

here it is expected that those immigrant adolescents who express higher distress in response to perceived ethnic discrimination will have lower scores in their host country life satisfaction.

### **1.2.3. Length of residence in the host country and Mastery in the host language**

The higher psychological discomfort is expected at the arrival in the host society, when the contact with the new culture is happening (Furnham & Bochner, 1982). During this stage, the people experience immediate vital changes and they likely may face it with less resources and social support. The course of time and the exposure to the new culture can influence host satisfaction, as suggested by assimilation theory (Alba & Nee, 1997), which posits that immigrants will progressively converge into the mainstream. Course of time make also possible to acquire skills in the host language, a particular central issue for immigrant adolescents since they are usually long-term migrants in the receiving country. Research in Spain (Navarro & Huguet, 2005, 2006) provided a clear evidence of the impact of the length of stay on the second language acquisition. Hence, it is hypothesized that those immigrant adolescents who have stayed for less time in Spain will show lower rates of satisfaction than those who had lived in the host country for longer time.

In addition, empirical studies (Barker et al., 2001; Schildkraut, 2005) contend that a shared language is part of the fabric of national identity and that migrants who speak other languages (or cannot speak the language of the country or region in which they are settling) are considered a threat to national unity. Permutations among language, ethnicity, and cultural similarity, among other factors, affect the ease or difficulty associated with the acculturation process (Schwartz, Unger, Zamboanga, & Szapocznik, 2010: 240). Thus, here is hypothesized that higher Spanish language proficiency will be associated with higher scores of satisfaction with their life in Spain.

### **1.3. Ethnicity as moderator: The effect of belonging to a ethnic group**

In Spain, the Ecuadorean and Moroccan immigrant groups differ in terms of their cultural distance towards the Spanish society and their level of social acceptance. Ecuadoreans speak a Spanish dialect as their first language and they share a Catholic Christian background with the host country. In contrast, Moroccans speak Semitic languages and have an Islamic background. Furthermore, Moroccans are evaluated more negatively than Ecuadorians, and are actually the most devalued minority group in Spain (Briones, Tabernero, & Arenas, 2005; Cea D'Ancona & Valles, 2009). Hence, according to the literature on acculturation (e.g. Furnham & Bochner, 1982) it is hypothesized that the effects of length of stay and orientation towards the ethnic culture on host country satisfaction will be different for Moroccans than for Ecuadorians. In this sense, we expect that Ecuadorians will need less time to be satisfied with their life in Spain than Moroccans because of their culture is closer to the host society and they will likely face less discrimination than Moroccans since their ethnic group is more valued by host society. Moreover we expect that the orientation toward the heritage culture could be less crucial for Ecuadorians than for Moroccans, since the origin culture orientation could be used as a coping strategy for distant cultural groups to the mainstream society and for those who received ethnic prejudice and discrimination (e.g. Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999). On the other hand, the engagement in school and host community seems to promote the development of a wide range of life skills and competencies across the ethnic groups (Cooper & Cooper, 2008). Thus, it may be expected that mainstream cultural orientation play a positive and significant role for the host satisfaction of both groups. Regardless of the level of perceived discrimination by each ethnic group, it may be expected that this variable have a similar significant and negative effect on the host satisfaction for Ecuadorians and Moroccans (e.g. Verkuyten & Thijs, 2006).

## 2. METHOD

### 2.1. Sample

The sample consisted of 197 Moroccan and 240 Ecuadorian. The age of the participants ranged from 11 to 18 years old, and the average age was 14.47 ( $SD = 1.44$ ). The sample was almost evenly divided by sex, with 48.1% girls and 51.9% boys. The adolescent immigrant had been residing in Spain for an average of 3.92 years ( $SD = 2.36$ ). All the participants and their parents were first generation migrants and none of them were born in Spain. The mean age at arrival in Spain of the participants was 10.54 years old ( $SD = 2.85$ ). Ecuadorian adolescents speak Spanish language and Moroccans adolescents speak Arabic dialects at home.

### 2.2. Procedure

Data was collected from different secondary schools in which the percentage of immigrant adolescents was around 50% of the total students in order to guarantee the same level of intercultural contact with students from mainstream society. The neighbourhoods were located in two cities in which the Spanish is the only official language and were characterized by high concentrations of Ecuadorian and Moroccan migrant families of a medium – low social class. Surveys were administered in Spanish; then the answers given by adolescents who stated that their level of Spanish was poor (1) or very poor (2) were not taken into account. Only the secondary students with permission from their parents completed anonymously the questionnaires in classrooms and in school time.

### 2.3. Measures

Data were collected on age, gender, place of birth of themselves and their parents, their ethnicity, amount of time living in Spain, language usually speaking at home, and proficiency in Spanish. For the latter question, they responded using a scale ranged from 1 (very low proficiency level) to 5 (very high level).

*Acculturation orientations* was measured using the Vancouver Index of Acculturation (Ryder, Alder, & Paulhus, 2002). This instrument consists of 10 pairs of straightforward items tapping core aspects (values, relations, and adherence to traditions) of the orientation toward ethnic and mainstream cultures. Participants showed their level of agreement using a 7 scale, ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The internal consistency of the ethnic dimension reached 0.89 and 0.81, and of the mainstream dimension reached 0.81 and 0.87, in the Moroccan and Ecuadorian samples, respectively

*Perception of ethnic discrimination* was measured with the items of perceived discrimination factor from the SAFE scale (Mena, Padilla & Maldonado, 1987). A sample item includes “Because of my ethnic background, I feel that others often exclude me from participating in their activities”. Participant expressed how stressful they find the situations that they had experienced in a 5-point scale (endpoints: not at all stressful/extremely stressful). Cronbach alpha in the Moroccan sample was 0.74 and in the Ecuadorian sample was 0.79.

*Host satisfaction* was measured using one item selected from the scale developed by Diener et al. (1985). This item measures immigrant adolescents’ general life satisfaction achieved in Spain. The participants rated their answer on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (not satisfied) to 5 (totally satisfied). The statistics of this item in both Moroccan ( $M = 3.41$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ , Skewness = -0.11,

Kurtosis = -0.68) and Ecuadorian groups ( $M = 3.55$ ,  $SD = 1.05$ , Skewness = -0.24, Kurtosis = -0.91) inform of a reasonable normal distribution of the scores.

### 3. RESULTS

Independent-samples  $t$  test for all the variables studied revealed differences between the ethnics groups in the respondents' length of time living in Spain ( $t(434) = -3.49$ ,  $p < .01$ ), Spanish language proficiency ( $t(427) = 12.70$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and the perception of discrimination ( $t(399) = -5.10$ ,  $p < .001$ ; means and standard deviation can be seen in Table 1).

**Table 1. Means and standard deviations according to ethnic group.**

	Moroccan		Ecuadorian	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
1 Spanish language proficiency	3.71	0.76	4.56	0.63
2 Length of residence in Spain	4.36	2.98	3.57	1.62
3 Perceived discrimination	2.14	1.14	1.56	1.11
4 Mainstream cultural orientation	4.92	1.11	4.71	1.62
5 Ethnic cultural orientation	5.93	1.07	5.83	0.81
6 Host satisfaction	3.42	1.04	3.55	1.05

We conducted regression analysis to predict host country life satisfaction; the results are shown in Table 2. Step 1 shows that adolescents who perceived oneself more competent in Spanish language have higher host country life satisfaction. The variables in Step 2 explained an additional 13% of the variance in host country life satisfaction. Ethnic cultural orientation had no independent effect whereas length of residence, perceived discrimination, and mainstream cultural orientation had the expected effect. The results in Step 3 indicated that the ethnic group had not any moderator effect in the variable studied here.

**Table 2: Hierarchical Regression on Host Satisfaction**

<i>Predictors</i>	Host country life satisfaction		
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Gender (1-Boy, 2-Girl)	-.10	-.08	-.08
Age	-.07	-.09	-.08
Spanish language proficiency	.21***	.14*	.14*
Ethnic Group (0: Ecuadorian, 1: Moroccan)	.06	.01	-.06
Length of residence in Spain		.11*	.06
Perceived Discrimination		-.11*	-.16*
Mainstream cultural orientation		.32***	.34***
Ethnic cultural orientation		-.09	-.08
Ethnic group * Length of residence in Spain			.10
Ethnic group * Perceived Discrimination			.08
Ethnic group * Mainstream Identity			-.03
Ethnic group * Ethnic Identity			-.00
$R^2$	.05	.17	.18
$R^2$ Change	.05**	.13***	.00

Note: Standardized Coefficients (Beta) \*\*\* $p < .001$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

This research presents evidences that immigrant adolescents are moderately satisfied with their lives in Spain, as several researches showed for adolescent immigrants settled in other countries (Neto, 1995; Sam, 1998). In this sense, we show that Moroccans and Ecuadorian score one point above the mid-point of the host satisfaction scale.

What it seems even more interesting is to know the characteristics of the immigrant adolescents that are more satisfied with their life because it can provide important clues to design appropriate measures to improve their psychosocial development. Our research contributes to this aim by detecting some of the variables that are strongly associated with adolescent immigrants' satisfaction in Spain. Among them, their orientation towards Spanish culture and practices shows the strongest association with host country satisfaction. Next, we find the effect of Spanish language' proficiency. Thus, immigrant adolescents who perceive themselves more competent in Spanish and also who participate and enjoy more the Spanish culture have the highest score in their live satisfaction in Spain. Those results supported the youth development approach (Cooper & Cooper, 2008) that assumed that an orientation on and engagement with school and the wider society are critical for the psychosocial development of adolescent migrants. In addition, as expected, length of residence has a positive contribution in their host satisfaction. Luckily, a gradual knowledge of cultural codes, language and, in short, the adaptation to the new environment has a positive influence on psychological well-being of immigrant adolescents (Ward, Okura, Kennedy & Kojima, 1998).

On the other hand, we could not find a moderating role of the ethnicity of adolescent immigrants. This means that the acculturation variables considered in this study have a similar role on the host satisfaction of Ecuadorian and Moroccan adolescents. The ethnicity only has a significant effect in the level of perceived ethnic discrimination. Moroccan adolescents suffered from more ethnic discrimination than Ecuadorians. Host society probably perceives them as a threat to Spanish society since they speak a different language (Schwartz et al., 2010) and they profess a different religion. However, for both cultural groups perceived discrimination hampers their host satisfaction.

All those findings provide suggestions to design interventions to promote life satisfaction of immigrant adolescents. Hence, interventions to promote positive attitude towards cultural diversity, as well as plans to foster immigrant adolescents participation in the host activities and their learning of the host language should be policy and economically supported.

Further research could consider examining these results using other indices of psychological well-being. In spite of host country satisfaction being considered an appropriated index, a more complex indicator could shed light about the role played by the ethnic culture orientation in the adaptation to the host country.

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