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## Conflict, solidarity, and acculturation

### Adolescents' adaptation and perceptions of intergenerational relations after immigration

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*Most of us have an experience of being someone's child. Relationships towards one's parents are often at the same time self-evident and complicated. We may feel a deep connection to our parents, no matter how they are. We may feel loyalty to our parents and are willing to support and help them. Simultaneously, our parents may irritate us, and we may disagree and argue with them without wanting to abandon them.*

*In psychological studies, the relationship between adolescents and parents has been recognized as a crucial social environment for adolescents' adaptation and development. Family relations form a central adaptation environment also for immigrant adolescents.*

*From the ecological perspective, the family environment interacts with other social environments, such as school and transnational relationships, creating a complex space for adolescents' development and adaptation. There are also individual level characteristics and societal level values and ideologies that play important roles in adolescents' adaptation.*

#### Intergenerational relations and immigrant adolescents' adaptation

The number of children and adolescents with an immigrant background has doubled in Finland during the last decade. In Greater

Helsinki, one in four under school-age children are of foreign background. There is a great diversity in immigrants' backgrounds. In Helsinki region, there were 141 registered mother tongues in 2019. In the whole country, the five most commonly registered languages other than our official languages Finnish and Swedish, are Russian, Estonian, Arabic, Somali, and English, in that order.

In my dissertation, I have explored how immigrant youth navigate in intergenerational relations after immigration. In other words, I have studied how adolescents manage acculturation gaps. Acculturation is a term that was introduced already in the 1930's by anthropologists. It refers to changes that take place as a result of intercultural encounters. According to John Berry, these changes happen both at the cultural and at the psychological level. Within families, these changes happen to each family member in their own way and at their own pace. This phenomenon, acculturation differences between immigrant parents and their children, is called an acculturation gap. The varying pace of language acquisition and gaining other cultural competencies among family members often results in adolescents' increased autonomy and responsibilities within their families. From the adolescents' perspective,

the changes in family roles can be rewarding and beneficial, but also a burden.

In this study, I have also asked how adolescents' perceptions of intergenerational relations relate to their adaptation. Adaptation is understood in this study widely as psychological and emotional well-being and as socio-cultural adaptation. In the case of adolescents, socio-cultural adaptation refers to, for example, enjoyment and achievement at school.

Adaptation means basically the same things for migrant and non-migrant teenagers. We know that adolescents with immigrant background in Finland get lower grades at school, have fewer close friends, experience more discrimination, and have more difficulties in communication with their parents compared to their non-migrant peers. On the other hand, many immigrant youth are doing well, and have supportive family and friend networks. It is also important to note that the school attainment of adolescents with a migrant background is dependent on the family's socioeconomic position and parental work status. Along with the growing ethnic and cultural diversity in Finland, there's an increasing need to gain more information on how immigrant adolescents are doing, and what could be done to improve their adaptation.

### Adolescents' autonomy in intergenerational relations becomes increasingly negotiated after migration

It is sometimes difficult to tell, what makes the relationships in immigrant families different from those within any other families with teenagers. Expectations in adolescent-parent relationships are culturally varied, both on a family level, and on a wider cultural level. For example, family obligations and responsibilities are considered to be more demanding among families living in countries where so-called collectivistic values are cherished. Collectivism, as opposed to individualism, emphasizes the importance of a group and relationships over individuals and their aims. On a global scale, Finland may be considered to be among the most individualistic societies. This means that the majority of immigrant families in Finland have arrived from a culture that emphasizes collectivistic values more than is the case in Finland.

The nature of family ties in immigrant families, however, cannot be explained only by cultural values. First of all, migration as such changes family relationships. Second, there is a great variation on how cultural values take place in individual families depending, for example, on parents' personal values,

socioeconomic backgrounds, and family-level traditions. Third, we cannot assume that individual aims would be frowned upon in families that emphasize family responsibilities or, on the other hand, that family members would be neglected in Finnish families.

Previous research has shown that intergenerational conflicts in immigrant families often entail deeper contradictions between values and identities when compared to conflicts in non-migrant families. It has also been argued that contradictions in immigrant families are more likely to continue beyond adolescents' teenage years.

The tension between autonomy and relatedness is considered to be a central issue in intergenerational relations during adolescence. In the context of migration, the issues concerning the proper amount of autonomy for adolescents, become even more pronounced. Empirical and theoretical efforts have been made to describe how acculturation mismatch between immigrant parents and their children often leads to conflicts between generations. Whether and what kind of conflicts are harmful for immigrant adolescents' adaptation continues to be debated.

If and when acculturation is understood as a *process* and as something that increases the need to *renegotiate* family relationships, a qualitative methodology is needed. It is also necessary to conduct different levels of analysis and to utilize theorizing from different scientific fields. This study combines theoretical perspectives from three sub-fields of psychology: developmental, acculturation, and cultural psychology. In addition, psychological and sociological family research and theorizing are utilized.

### Sub-studies and their results: Adolescents' perceptions of intergenerational relations

The study based mainly on 80 interviews of immigrant adolescents aged 13 to 18. The interviews were conducted in Helsinki metropolitan area in 2012. All of the interviewed adolescents had migrated to Finland with their families including at least one parent. The adolescents' countries of birth represent 20 different countries and they had stayed in Finland for less than eight years, five years on average.

In addition to adolescents' interview data, interview data of school personnel and immigrant parents, and School Health Promotion Survey data 2013 (i.e., data concerning 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> graders with foreign background,  $N = 2\ 697$ ) are analyzed in the study. The School Health Promotion survey comprises a com-

plete sample of the age group. It is collected every other year by the Finnish National Institute for Health and Welfare. Both the interview data and the survey data cover adolescents from the biggest immigrant groups in Finland.

Adolescents' perceptions and negotiations in intergenerational relations were approached in this study through four themes. The first sub-study examined how adolescents negotiate autonomy-related conflicts with their parents. The results show how both day-to-day interaction with family members and peers, as well as wider transnational family ties contribute to adolescents' ideas of proper autonomy.

The second sub-study looked at the emotions of gratitude and indebtedness in intergenerational relations and aims to increase understanding on how these emotions shape adolescent-parent relationships and relate to adolescents' adaptation. My thesis starts with a quote from a 16-year-old boy who had stayed for seven years in Finland when I interviewed him. His statement about how the biggest reason for migration was his future, and nothing else, and how his father gave up his good job for this decision, captures one of the main findings of this thesis. Adolescents are grateful but also feel indebted to their parents because of their migration-related sacrifices. The study shows how this narrative was commonly used by adolescents from different countries, with different family backgrounds, and how an experience of these emotions has consequences for intergenerational relationships.

Sub-study three expanded the analysis of intergenerational relationships to the school context and analyzed information sharing between immigrant homes and schools. The study shows how adolescents are often in a gatekeepers' role in home-school communication. The study also addresses the power imbalance between school personnel and immigrant parents which may reduce immigrant parents' willingness to participate in school activities.

Finally, in the fourth sub-study, a comparative analysis was conducted on how perceived parental knowledge is associated with adolescents' adaptation depending on their immigrant generation, immigration background, gender, and family's socioeconomic status. The study shows that parental knowledge is related to better school grades and less anxiety among both immigrant adolescents and second-generation youth. Generational differences in the role of parental knowledge on adolescents' adaptation were found among refugee youth. In this group,

first generation adolescents' school achievement was not dependent on the level of parental knowledge unlike in other groups and among second generation adolescents with refugee background. The result supports previous studies showing the resilience and high achievement motivation among refugee youth.

### More support for adolescents' navigation between cultures

There are many important aspects that affect relationships between immigrant parents and children that are only briefly touched upon in this research. For example, issues related to gender and religious practices and beliefs are often crucial elements in adolescent-parent relationships and in the acculturation process of family members. Also, it came out in the interviews with the adolescents that there were a lot of changes in family relationships that had *preceded* migration. These changes, such as a divorce or the death of a family member, may contribute to a family's decision to move and affect family relationships also after migration.

This study shows how intertwined acculturative and developmental changes are managed by immigrant adolescents. The study suggests that while adolescents are skilful in navigating in their multiple social environments, their balancing efforts could be better supported and recognized at homes and in schools.

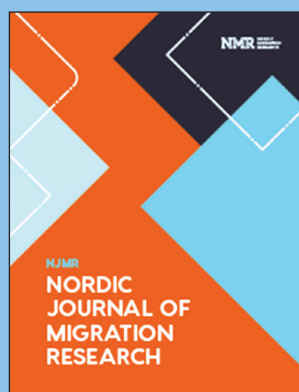
A successful adaptation relates to adolescents' ability to build bi-cultural or multicultural identities and to be competent in two or more cultures. One thing that hampers adolescents' adaptation in Finland is that their attempts to belong to this society get often questioned or rejected. Barriers of belonging and stereotypical thinking should be recognized better in the Finnish schools that are only taking the first steps to implement anti-racist education in the classrooms.

This study shows that open communication between adolescents and their parents benefits adolescents' adaptation. However, adolescents' openness may also be in conflict with their autonomy seeking and well-being. In other words, adolescents' strategies in autonomy negotiations are contextual and may support their well-being and adaptation on some dimension, while harming adaptation on another dimension. For example, hiding one's dating can both support adolescents' well-being and social relationships, and harm family relationships by decreasing open communication and trust between adolescents and their parents.

The results of this study also encourage schools to work on a better dialogue between immigrant parents and schools. By increasing awareness of adolescents' multiple perceptions of intergenerational relationships after immigration, this study can hopefully help to support immigrant adolescents' adaptation.

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