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**Prejudicial bullying involving ethnic groups in
school:
the role of environmental aspects and psychological
mechanisms**

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ABSTRACT

Globalization and worldwide waves of migration have led to an increase in ethnically mixed classrooms all over the world (IOM International Organization for Migration, 2022). However, the school context does not often constitute a place of inclusion and cooperation among students with ethnic background, but it can be a place of conflict and bullying. Nowadays, race, nationality, or skin color are the second most common reasons for bullying (UNESCO, 2019) and in the last years, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, the general incidence of discriminatory behaviors against people belonging to ethnic minorities has increased (Bhanot et al. 2021). Literature highlighted the long-term effects of being involved in this behavior (McKenney et al., 2006; Stone & Carlise, 2015) and how bullying at school could be alarming for the future society. Literature on bullying started more than 40 years ago (Olweus, 1973) but research on the role of race and ethnicity in school bullying is limited (Rivara & Menestrel, 2016).

Therefore, the main aim of the present dissertation was to shed light on the role of structural and psychological mechanisms explaining bullying in schools among native and students with immigrant backgrounds. Specifically, the present dissertation is composed of three studies covering: 1) a systematic review of the association between school and classrooms' ethnic diversity and bullying and victimization; 2) a study on the role of different operationalizations of ethnicity on ethnic bullying victimization; 3) a final study on the differential impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on victimization and emotional symptoms focusing on Italians and students with immigrant background.

In the first study (Chapter 1), we present a systematic review aimed to investigate the role of both classroom and school ethnic diversity, a structural aspect of interethnic

relationships, in relation to bullying and victimization. Several moderators of this association have been analyzed: country, area of data collection, how ethnicity was operationalized and computed, and participants' school level. The systematic review search was conducted in January 2021, following the PRISMA guidelines (Moher et al., 2009) across three databases (Scopus, Web of Science, and Eric databases). From the initial identification of 4496 articles, a final set of 20 papers have been selected. Almost half of the analyses did not find any significant association between bullying perpetration and ethnic diversity, while the other half found a positive one; few studies found a positive association between ethnic diversity and victimization. The operationalization of ethnicity and area of data collection play a role in both bullying perpetration and victimization. In North America, focusing on race, ethnic diversity has shown a protective role for victimization; in Europe, where the focus is on immigrant backgrounds, diversity may constitute a risk factor. About victimization, ethnic diversity represents a risk factor at younger ages and turns into a more protective factor in secondary schools.

Following this line of research, the aim of the second study (Chapter 2) was to analyze the effects of both social/legal (i.e., the Italian citizenship status) and perceptual aspects (i.e., perception of diversity by others) on ethnic bullying victimization, investigating the impact of diversity both at the individual and classroom level during the first year of high school. Participants were 960 students (52% females; $M_{age}=15.19$; $SD=.60$) from 58 classrooms belonging to 13 schools. Multilevel analyses showed the effect of the social/legal aspects on ethnic victimization at both individual and classroom levels. Not having Italian citizenship seems to act as a risk factor for ethnic victimization over and above the perceptual differences. No effects of both types of diversity have been found on bullying at the individual level nor the classroom level.

In the third study (Chapter 3), we examined the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on adolescents, through a three-waves longitudinal study. Specifically, the aim was to analyze trends over time in victimization and emotional symptoms (ES) looking for differences and similarities between natives and students from an immigrant background. Previous studies showed that the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures adopted to contain the virus' spread impacted adolescents' social interactions and mental health (Nocentini et al., 2021). However, to date, in literature, it is still unclear how the developmental trajectories of people at higher risks of social exclusion and victimization changed over time during this challenging period. 826 students (46.4% females; $M_{age}=15.22$; $SD=.63$; 18.5% students with an immigrant background) attending the first year of high school, were followed from the pre-pandemic period (T1-January 2020) to 12 months (T2-February 2021) and 15-months (T3-May 2021) after the outbreak. Results from Latent Growth Curve Analysis (LGCA) showed a decrease in victimization and an increase in emotional symptoms over time in both groups (i.e., natives and students from immigrant backgrounds). Furthermore, in the Italian group, we found a greater growth in emotional symptoms in students who started from low levels of victimization before the pandemic. This highlighted the strong and pervasive impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the general population.

In the final chapter (Chapter 4), the main results of the three previous studies are discussed, their contributions to the literature are highlighted and related strengths and limitations are pointed out. Finally, implications for future studies and interventions are suggested and, policy and education practices are recommended.

Keywords: bullying; victimization; ethnic school diversity; ethnic classroom diversity; systematic review; ethnicity; citizenship status; social aspects; legal aspects; perceptual diversity; classroom; school; multilevel analysis; COVID-19 pandemic; emotional symptoms; immigrant background; adolescence; Latent Growth Curve Analysis (LGCA), longitudinal study.

Table of Content

Abstract.....	1
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE DISSERTATION	9
1. Globalization and Migration Flows	10
2. Prejudicial ethnic bullying: definition, prevalence rates, and consequences	11
3. The role of school context in society	13
4. Social interactions in multi-ethnic classrooms	14
5. DISSERTATION OVERVIEW	15
CHAPTER 1.....	17
Ethnic diversity and bullying in school: a systematic review	17
1.1. Introduction	17
1.1.2. The present study	24
1.2. Method.....	24
1.2.1. Identification.....	24
1.2.2. Screening	25
1.2.3. Eligibility.....	26
1.2.4. Quality assessment	26
1.3. Results	29
1.3.1. General characteristics of included studies	32
1.3.2. The association between ethnic diversity and bullying perpetration.....	33
1.3.3. The association between ethnic diversity and bullying victimization.....	37
1.4. Discussion.....	43
1.5. Conclusions and practical considerations.....	52
1.6. Limitations and future directions.....	53
CHAPTER 2.....	56
The association between social/legal and perceptual aspects of ethnicity and ethnic bullying and victimization	56
2.1. Introduction	56
2.2. Materials and methods.....	60

2.2.1. Participants	60
2.2.2. Measures	62
2.2.3. Plan of analysis	63
2.3. Results	64
2.3.1. Descriptive analysis	64
2.4. Discussion.....	68
CHAPTER 3.....	72
The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on victimization and its emotional symptoms: a longitudinal study on Italians and students from immigrant backgrounds.....	72
3.1. Introduction	72
3.1.1. The present study.....	76
3.2. Method.....	77
3.2.1. Participants and procedures	77
3.2.2. Measurements	80
3.2.3. Data analysis.....	80
3.3. Results	81
3.4. Discussion.....	85
3.5. Conclusion.....	90
3.6. Limitations and strengths of the present study	91
CHAPTER 4.....	93
General discussions and conclusions	93
4.1. Dissertation’s contribution to literature.....	95
4.2. Limitations and future research	100
4.3. Practical implications for educational and public policies	102
REFERENCES	104
APPENDIX 1	133
APPENDIX 2	135
APPENDIX 3	137

Table of Figures

Figure 1.1. - Flowchart of study identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion28

Figure 2.1. - Multilevel model on operationalizations of ethnicity and ethnic bullying and victimization67

Figure 3.1. - LGC model on victimization and emotional symptoms138

Index of Tables

Table 1.1. - General characteristics of included studies	31
Table 1.2. - Summary of main findings about the association between ethnic diversity and bullying perpetration	36
Table 1.3. - Summary of main findings about the association between ethnic diversity and bullying victimization	40
Table 1.4. - Quality assessment report	133
Table 2.1. - Bivariate correlation between the study variables	65
Table 2.2. - Multilevel model of ethnic bullying and victimization.....	135
Table 2.3. - Ethnic Bullying Scale.....	136
Table 2.4. - Ethnic Victimization Scale.....	136
Table 3.1. - Descriptive statistics: Mean, associated standard deviations, and Pearson's r bivariate correlations. Pearson's r bivariate correlations for Italian students are shown at the top of the diagonal, while Pearson's r bivariate correlations for students with immigrant background are presented at the bottom of the diagonal	82
Table 3.2. - LGC parameter estimates for victimization and emotional symptoms.....	84
Table 3.3. - Items of Victimization's subscale (Florence Bullying Victimization Scale; Palladino et al., 2016).....	137
Table 3.4. - Items of Emotional Symptoms' subscale (Strength and Difficulties Questionnaires; Goodman, 1997; 2001).....	137

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE DISSERTATION

“We came to the U.S. for a better life...but we found like people hate us for no reason...[,] we are normal people just like anybody else”.

[Albdour et al., 2017]

“It does not work anymore, it reached the limit... you keep filling up the pot with water until it won't take any more”.

[Albdour et al., 2017]

“I just want to stop it and I do not want to hear these hurtful words anymore... and you like I cannot take it anymore”.

[Albdour et al., 2017]

“My dad asked me if I want to change my name and I was like no...I am not going to change who I am because of what other people think or want.”.

[Albdour et al., 2017]

These are testimonies of adolescents who have been victims of bullying, due to their ethnicity/origin. Nowadays, bullying is one of the biggest issues in schools (UNESCO, 2019) with great consequences on the psychological health of the actors involved (Russell, 2012; Smith, 2016). The increase in immigration (IOM International Organization for Migration, 2019; 2022) and, consequently, the more and more interethnic peer relationships at school have led, unfortunately, even to bullying behaviors among ethnic majority and minority groups (Vitoroulis et al., 2016). Given the

seriousness of the problem, the focus of the present dissertation is to analyze bullying among ethnic groups and the factors and mechanisms related to it.

1. Globalization and Migration Flows

Globalization is the process by which cultures affect one another and become more alike through commerce, immigration flows, and the exchange of information, innovations, and ideas (Arnett, 2002). It increased the movement of people from one country to another, thus promoting processes defined as migration. In 2020, there were around 281 million international migrants in the world, which is 3.6 percent of the global population (UN DESA, 2021). However, migration flows follow differential routes, depending on specific areas; America, especially the United States and Canada, are multicultural societies with a long history of immigration, opposite to Europe, which has witnessed a rising in incoming flows in recent years (IOM International Organization for Migration, 2019). In 2020, nearly 87 million international migrants lived in Europe, highlighting an increase of nearly 16 percent since 2015 (IOM International Organization for Migration, 2022). Even if the COVID-19 pandemic has radically changed mobility around the world, in 2020 there was also a growth of arrivals in both the Central and Western Mediterranean. Specifically, Spain and Italy were respectively the fifth and sixth most popular migrant destination in Europe in 2020 (IOM International Organization for Migration, 2022).

Despite the globalization has intensified in recent years, the world is a long way from being a homogeneous global culture (Arnett, 2022). Due to the increasing presence of immigrants, strong political and public debates have risen (IOM International Organization for Migration, 2019), and reactions to racist behaviors (e.g., Black Live

Matters Movement in the USA; Rickford, 2016). In European societies, there are growing cues of intolerance, racism, xenophobia, and discrimination that make citizens fearful and insecure, especially in times of social and economic changes (European Commission, 2019).

2. Prejudicial ethnic bullying: definition, prevalence rates, and consequences

Phenomena linked to immigration are deeply affecting school policy and education; for youths, school is a key context: it can support inclusion in ethnically mixed classrooms or conversely, become a negative environment characterized by conflict and bullying among students.

Bullying victimization is one of the main risks that students may face at school, and research on bullying has mainly taken place in the last 30 years (Menesini & Camodeca, 2008; Menesini et al., 1997; Menesini, Fonzi & Smith, 2002; Menesini, Modena & Tani, 2009; Menesini, Nocentini & Camodeca, 2013; Menesini, Nocentini & Palladino, 2012; Menesini, Palladino & Nocentini, 2015; Nocentini et al., 2019; Olweus, 1994; Olweus, 1997; Olweus & Pellegrini, 1996; Smith, 2016). Bullying is defined as a form of aggressive behavior designed to hurt another characterized by repetition, intentionality, and an imbalance of power (Olweus, 1999). Smith & Sharp (1994) also defined it as a “systematic abuse of power”.

Worldwide, one out of three students is a victim of bullying (UNESCO, 2019). The percentage of students who claim to have been a victim of bullying is highest in sub-Saharan Africa (48.2%), North Africa (42.7%), and the Middle East (41.1%). It is lower in Europe (25%), the Caribbean (25%), and Central America (22.8%) (UNESCO, 2019).

Students from immigrant backgrounds are more likely to be bullied than their peers (UNESCO, 2019). Among possible forms of bullying and discrimination, there is Prejudicial Ethnic Bullying (PEB), which is a form of discriminatory bias-based bullying perpetrated towards individuals who belong to groups that differ in ethnicity, race, or religion (Russell et al., 2012). As a subtype of traditional bullying, it could be direct (i.e., physical or verbal) or indirect (i.e., exclusion, defamation, by non-verbal gestures) (Elamé, 2013).

Worldwide, race, nationality, or skin color are the second most common reason for bullying (UNESCO, 2019). A study carried out by the British Council in collaboration with the Italian Ministry of Education showed that in Italian schools there is a probability of 43% of being mocked for skin color and 41% for cultural origin. Additionally, compared to the other countries involved in the study, Italy was the most likely country where the ethnic issue can be a motive for “banter” (Elamé, 2013).

Ethnic bullying has a negative impact on youth’s adjustment (e.g., internalizing and externalizing difficulties) and it leads victims to think that their ethnic background and social identity are the cause of victimization with consequent self-blaming and feelings of inadequacy (McKenney et al., 2006). Being victimized because of one’s ethnicity could lead victims to feel the cause of their own failure (Graham et al., 2009). These self-attributions might contribute to vulnerability to mental health problems (Xu et al., 2020).

Additionally, being a victim of bullying because of own ethnicity is associated with psychological problems and abuse of drugs (Cardoso et al., 2018), alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana (Hong et al., 2021). Finally, a meta-analysis (Bardol, 2020) showed a positive

association between perceived ethnic discrimination and psychotic symptoms among ethnic minority groups.

On the other side, the literature showed negative consequences not only on those who suffer from being the victims but also on those who perpetrate it. Racial bully perpetrators were most likely to have problems of addiction such as cigarettes, alcohol, and marijuana use than other uninvolved adolescents, even more than victims, and bully/victims (Stone & Carlise, 2017).

3. The role of the school context

Nowadays, one out of every seven international migrants is below the age of 20 years (United Nations, 2019). It should be in the best interest of receiving nations to have well integrated immigrant population, so they can contribute to the development and prosperity of the country. According to an OECD report (2012), the defining test to analyze and understand the levels of integration of immigrants into a receiving society is to assess how well their children are doing. So, promoting immigrant youth's adaptation may mean a future society of well-being and success (Motti Stefanidi, 2018). For this reason, school becomes a key context that a government cannot ignore to guarantee a successful integration between native and students with immigrant backgrounds.

Additionally, the school population could represent the best group to work with to promote intercultural interactions and dialogue with people from other backgrounds, thus fighting discriminatory attitudes and bullying and promoting equity and inclusion in the entire society. Indeed, following Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979), working on the microsystem, as the school setting is, means indirectly influencing all the other systems (i.e., the mesosystem, the exosystem, the macrosystem, and the

chronosystem). In Italy, in 2019, 2713.373 students attended primary school; of these, 11.54% had an immigrant background; 1725.037 students attended middle schools; of these, 10.45% had an immigrant background; 2690.676 students attended secondary schools, of these, 9,99% had an immigrant background (Centro Studi e Ricerche IDOS, 2020). Consequently, promoting inclusion and preventing ethnic bullying at school may influence positively their families, their peers, and the whole of society.

4. Social interactions in multi-ethnic classrooms

The growing increase of multi-ethnic classrooms in schools leads to questions relating to the role of the school and classroom ethnic composition in bullying behaviors engagement, that is to say, if a classroom with a low or high diversity favors a climate of cooperation or, conversely, of bullying. Scientific literature presents a gap about this topic since studies are mixed and controversial. Following the Intergroup Conflict Theory (Turner, Brown & Tajfel, 1979), the Social Dominance Theory (Sidanius et al., 1994), and the Integrative Threats Theory (Stephan & Stephan, 2000), the perception of the presence of two distinct groups (e.g., ethnic minority and majority) constitutes a sufficient condition to trigger behaviors of preference towards the ingroup and discrimination towards the outgroup. Therefore, highly mixed classrooms present a risk condition for bullying behaviors. By contrast, the Contact Hypothesis (Allport, 1954) showed that, under certain conditions, different groups could cooperate to achieve a common goal. Consequently, a class with high ethnic diversity can also be a protective factor against bullying. Given the rise of ethnic groups in schools, these theoretical differences provided a debate about the ethnic composition of classrooms and schools in each country.

5. DISSERTATION OVERVIEW¹

Building upon these considerations, the main aim of the present dissertation was to shed light on structural and psychological mechanisms explaining bullying among natives and students with an immigrant background, to prevent bullying behaviors in schools and, to promote a society characterized by positive intercultural interactions, equity, and inclusion. Specifically, the present dissertation proceeds as follows.

Study 1 (Chapter 1) presents a systematic review of the literature on the role of ethnic diversity on bullying in school. The first aim was to investigate the association between school and/or classroom ethnic diversity and bullying perpetration and victimization at school. The second aim was to analyze the role of possible moderating factors of this association (i.e., the operationalization of the definition of ethnicity, the computation of ethnic diversity, and the school level). Results and suggestions provided by the systematic review highlighted some methodological issues to be considered in subsequent studies. Specifically, the systematic review showed the need to study further the association between ethnic diversity and bullying in school. Additionally, it highlighted the possible role of the operationalization of ethnicity in catching specific processes affecting ethnic diversity and bullying.

¹ The works of the present dissertation were carried out within the PRIN project (N. 20173E3Z7W_003) “Prejudicial bullying involving ethnic groups: understanding mechanism and translating knowledge into effective interventions”, funded by the Ministry of University and Research (MUR) (Italy). The project involved three research units: the Catholic University of Sacred Heart of Milan, the University of Udine, and the University of Florence. The main aim of the project was to analyze the prevalence, correlates, and psychological mechanisms explaining Prejudicial Ethnic Bullying (PEB) in three developmental periods: late childhood (University of Udine), early adolescence (Catholic University of Sacred Heart of Milano), and adolescence (University of Florence), to develop evidence-based interventions modules to tackle PEB in three age groups.

Following these considerations, Study 2 (Chapter 2) consists of a cross-sectional study on Italian adolescents in high schools (i.e., grade 9) before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. The aim was to analyze the association between ethnic diversity and ethnic bullying victimization taking into account two different operationalizations of ethnicity (i.e., based on social/legal aspects and perceptual aspects). We used a multiple group multilevel analysis, testing a model in which ethnic bullying and ethnic victimization were the outcomes. Notably, this methodological approach allowed us to examine variables at two different levels: the individual and classroom levels.

Finally, the literature consistently showed the negative consequences of bullying behaviors on victims' adjustment, especially on their internalizing symptoms (Reijntjes et al., 2010; Rudolph et al., 2011; Van Oort et al., 2011). Since the sudden outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has been declared a global emergency (WHO, 2020), the study of the phenomenon of bullying cannot ignore the impact of the pandemic on adolescents and the psychological and social consequences it caused. Therefore, Study 3 (Chapter 3) is characterized by a longitudinal analysis of three waves (pre- and during the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic) about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on internalizing symptoms and victimization among Italian adolescents and students with immigrant backgrounds attending high schools.

CHAPTER 1

Ethnic diversity and bullying in school: a systematic review

1.1. Introduction

Globalization has increased the movement of people from one country to another, thus promoting processes defined as migration. In 2019, it has been recorded that 272 million people out of a global population of 7.7 billion were international migrants, 1 out of 30 people (IOM International Organization for Migration, 2019). Additionally, it should be noted that migration flows follow differential routes and places, depending on the specific area. America, especially the United States, has witnessed incoming flows from other continents since a long time ago, while Europe is characterized by patterns of high intra-regional migration, thanks to several free-movement agreements between countries (IOM International Organization for Migration, 2019). Additionally, around 2015, a massive flow of migrants and refugees started to enter across the Mediterranean and other routes, incrementing the presence of immigrants in Europe (IOM International Organization for Migration, 2019). Thus, compared to America -where early migration led to the population being highly mixed between non-native and native people (Abramitzky & Boustan, 2017), migration in Europe is developing in different directions and in different places.

Ethnicity is a category based on commonly spoken language, religion, nationality, history, and other cultural factors that give people a sense of inclusion into one group and exclusion from another (Mishra, 2016). Being part of an ethnic group can

define individual culture, and ethnicity is a way by which culture is transmitted (Betancourt & López, 1993).

Literature on ethnicity presents mixed methods and different operationalizations of the construct. Some studies focused on immigrant status (Vervoort, Scholte & Overbeek, 2010; Walsh et al., 2016), while others defined ethnicity by looking at participants' race (Graham et al., 2009; Vitoroulis, Brittain & Vaillancourt, 2016), the genetically transmitted physical characteristics of human groups (Mishra, 2016). The first approach is used mainly in Europe, while the latter in America and this can be related to the different patterns of migratory flows in the two continents.

The intersections between geographical, economic, cultural, religious, ethnic, and racial factors have impacted several issues, such as negative attitudes, stigma, and racism (Bosworth, Bowling & Lee, 2008). Despite living in an ethnically and culturally diverse environment, the human mind often relies on categorization processes as a means to organize, simplify and make reality more predictable. A direct consequence of categorization is the indulgence in social biases and stereotypes, that are usually based on prejudicial attitudes and lead to preferential treatment for the ingroup, and discrimination against outgroup members (Jones, Dovidio & Vietze, 2013).

Graham (2006) underlined the relevance of studying the variable of ethnicity to understand bullying. In peer relations, ethnicity may act as a status characteristic and cause an imbalance of power, especially when the students belong to a minority group (Cohen, Lotan & Catanzarite, 1990). Ethnic bullying is a subtype of bias-based bullying and it refers to targeting someone because of her/his ethnic background or cultural identity; it may include direct (e.g., racial taunts and explicit references to culture specific

habits and costumes) and indirect forms of aggression (e.g., exclusion). This behavior has a negative impact on youths' adjustment (e.g., internalizing and externalizing difficulties) (McKenney et al., 2006). Ethnic bullying leads victims to think that their own ethnic background and social identity is the cause of victimization with consequent self-blaming and feelings of inadequacy (McKenney et al., 2006).

Because of the fluxes of migration over time, the education system usually consists of multi-ethnic classrooms and schools, with highly variable grades of diversity. Different studies have investigated ethnic diversity in both the school and classroom context, and how social interactions related to ethnic bullying are affected (Cavicchiolo et al., 2019; Felix & You, 2011; Mehta et al., 2013), with mixed results that led to two main hypotheses.

On one hand, results from some studies suggest that the more diverse a school is, the more bullying occurs (e.g., Jansen et al., 2016; Tolsma et al., 2013). These findings are in line with the theories that are presented below.

The Intergroup Conflict Theory (Turner, Brown & Tajfel, 1979)

According to Tajfel & Turner (2004), a group could be defined as “a collection of individuals who perceive themselves to be members of the same social category, share some emotional involvement in this common definition of themselves, and achieve some degree of social consensus about the evaluation of their group and their membership in it”.

Turner, Brown & Tajfel (1979) found that groups grow up sharing common individual characteristics (e.g., ethnicity), through the mechanisms of social categorization, social identity, social confrontation, and positive distinctiveness. Social

categorizations are cognitive tools through which individuals classify and order the social environment to undertake forms of social actions. Additionally, social categorizations enable the individual to define and create his/her place in society (i.e., social identity) (Tajfel & Turner, 2004).

The mere perception of the existence of two distinct groups is a sufficient condition for a social confrontation, which is the trigger of discrimination towards members of the outgroup and preference towards the ingroup. This process of social confrontation makes the ingroup distinct from the outgroup, creating the in-group bias, which is the tendency for people to give preferential attitudes and behaviors to ingroup members rather than those belonging to the outgroup (Tajfel & Turner, 2004).

These mechanisms contribute to arise the intergroup conflict; the more intense an intergroup conflict, the more likely it is that the members of the outgroup will behave reciprocally as a function of their respective group memberships, rather than in terms of their characteristics or interindividual relationships (Tajfel & Turner, 2004).

The Social Dominance Theory (Sidanius et al., 1994)

Inequalities and conflicts among groups based on gender, race, and other categories could be explained also by the Social Dominance Theory (SDT) by Sidanius et al. (1994). According to the authors, people develop hierarchy-supporting belief structures as a support for institutional dominance (i.e., Social Dominance Orientation; SDO; Sidanius et al., 1994). Literature found that SDO was positively related to negative attitudes toward low-status groups and was correlated with sexism and ethnic prejudice (Pratto et al., 2000). Additionally, SDO decreased cooperation and increased social distance from outgroup members (Sidanius, Pratto & Mitchell, 1994).

The Integrative Threat Theory (Stephan & Stephan, 2000)

Stephan & Stephan (2000) in their Integrative Threat Theory identified four types of threats (i.e., realistic threats, symbolic threats, intergroup anxiety, and negative stereotypes) to explain intergroup conflicts. Realistic threats concern threats to the existence and the political and economic power of the ingroup; the greater the threat of the outgroup is perceived by the ingroup, the more negative the attitudes put in place by the members of the ingroup (Stephan, Ybarra & Bachman, 1999). Symbolic threats concern differences in morals, values, norms, standards, beliefs, and attitudes. Intergroup anxiety could be caused by the individual feeling of threat because of negative outcomes for the self (e.g., being rejected, embarrassed, etc.). The Intergroup anxiety could occur particularly when groups with a story of conflict and antagonism come into contact (Stephan, Ybarra & Bachman, 1999); literature found a positive association between intergroup anxiety and prejudice (Britt et al., 1996). Finally, there are negative stereotypes, which are pre-established and generalized opinions, that lead ingroup members to discriminate against the outgroup. Literature found that negative stereotypes are correlated to prejudice (Stephan et al., 1994).

On the other hand, results from different studies are in line with the opposite framework (i.e., classroom ethnic diversity as a protective factor for bullying victimization; e.g., Bellmore, Nishina, You, & Ma, 2012; Closson, Darwich, Hymel & Waterhouse, 2014; Juvonen, Nishina & Graham, 2006).

The Contact Hypothesis (Allport, 1954)

Allport (1954) found that contact could have positive effects, and reduce prejudices and tension between groups. However, this happens only when individuals

cooperate all together, feeling part of a single group and under certain conditions. At first, people involved in the groups should experience prolonged contact; this could encourage the development of positive relations between groups. Second, they should look for the achievement of common aims; people should work together to achieve a certain purpose. Then, they should have a similar status; both groups have to perceive equal status in the situation (Riordan & Ruggiero, 1980). Finally, they should be supported by situational and social components. It's relevant that authority sanction establishes norms of acceptance and guidelines for how members of different groups should interact with each other.

In this regard, Graham (2006) highlighted how ethnic diversity in classroom and school may have psychological benefits, reducing feelings of victimization and vulnerability. The balance of power among different ethnic groups could play an important role to decrease majority vs minority conflicts and bullying phenomena. From these theoretical perspectives, school or classroom ethnic diversity could be considered as a protective factor against bullying.

Considering that both hypotheses appear to be consistent and are supported by empirical research, it is plausible that other moderating variables could come into play in the association between both classroom and school ethnic diversity and bullying. In fact, along with the two opposite hypotheses supported by empirical research, no significant association between the two variables has been found (e.g., Larochette, Murphy & Craig, 2010; Stefanek et al., 2011).

First of all, many studies about this topic have been conducted in different countries (Graham, Bellmore, Nishina & Juvonen, 2009; Nikolaou, Kalovirou &

Spyropoulou, 2019) with different cultural and historical backgrounds (Green, 2007). Processes and policies of each country could influence citizens' feelings and thoughts about immigration and diversity and their attitudes towards people with different ethnicity (Jackson et al., 2001). So, the geographic area where the research has been conducted could be relevant to explain different results about the relation between ethnic diversity in school and bullying.

Additionally, ethnicity is operationalized in different ways in relation to the specificity of the area. Studies conducted in North America mainly outlined participants' ethnicity by race (Closson et al., 2014; Connell et al., 2015), while research in Europe focuses on participants' immigrant background (e.g., first and second generations of immigrants) (Cavicchiolo et al., 2019; Stefanek, et al., 2011). Since defining students' ethnicity by their race or their immigrant background means analyzing different paths and definitions, changes in operationalization of ethnicity could play a role in understanding puzzling results about association between ethnic diversity and bullying.

Moreover, ethnic diversity in school is measured using indexes focused on catching the weight of the majority group (vs minority groups) or the shades of diversity. In fact, some scholars analyze school or classroom ethnic diversity by simply calculating the percentage or the proportion of students belonging to ethnic minorities, altogether, in relation to the entire group (Cavicchiolo et al., 2019). At the same time, composite indexes have also been proposed in the literature to take into account the degree of concentration of each ethnic group. Examples are the Simpson Diversity Index (Simpson, 1949), the Herfindhal Index (Putnam, 2007) and the Budescu and Budescu Diversity Index (Budescu & Budescu, 2012). The Simpson Diversity Index (Simpson, 1949) and Budescu and Budescu Diversity Index (Putnam, 2007) range between 0 and 1, where 1

represents complete diversity and 0 complete uniformity in the classroom or school. The Herfindhal Index (Putnam, 2007) ranges between -1 and 0, where -1 implies no diversity at all and 0 means total diversity.

Finally, it could be that developmental changes emerge when we analyze the association between ethnic diversity and bullying at different school levels (Graham et al., 2009; Vitoroulis, Brittain & Vaillancourt, 2016). Inguglia & Musso (2013) showed that the role of in-group favoritism emerges from six years of age, while out-group discrimination becomes evident at older ages. It is therefore possible to hypothesize that the association between ethnic diversity and bullying could be different in relation to school level.

1.1.2. The present study

The aim of the present study is to conduct a systematic review in order to investigate the association between school and/or classroom ethnic diversity and bullying perpetration and victimization. Since the literature has showed mixed results, we shall consider possible moderating factors such as: the geographical area where data have been collected, the operationalization of the definition of ethnicity (i.e., based on immigrant background vs race), how ethnic diversity was computed (i.e., a composite proportion index vs percentage/proportion), and school level (i.e., primary vs secondary schools).

1.2. Method

For our Systematic review, we followed the PRISMA guidelines (Moher, Liberati, Tetzlaff, Altman & Prisma Group, 2009). The stages are summarized in the flow-chart in Figure 1.

1.2.1. Identification

We identified potentially relevant studies by searching in the SCOPUS, Web of Science and Eric scientific databases without any time restriction. The search was conducted in January 2021 combining either the title, abstract, or keywords. The keywords belonged to four clusters: the 1st cluster regarding *ethnic background* (keywords: ethnic*, minorit*, immigra*, race*); the 2nd cluster *bullying and violence among peers* (keywords: bull*, victim*, harassment*, violence, exclusion, discriminat*); the 3rd *diversity* (keywords: composit*, divers*, variability, heterogene*, percent*, proportion*); the 4th *school context* (keywords: school*, class*). In the initial stage we identified 7419 records in SCOPUS, 5779 in Web of Science, and 350 in ERIC.

1.2.2. Screening

All records were exported to the Endnote X9 reference library (Hupe, 2019) and the duplicates were removed automatically and manually, leading to 4496 studies. For this stage we identified the following hierarchical inclusion criteria: 1) only journal articles (e.g., no dissertations, book chapters etc.); 2) only quantitative empirical research (e.g., no systematic research, no qualitative analyses); 3) school context, papers not referring specifically to this context were excluded; 4) topic: papers not referring to bullying or victimization and ethnic diversity were excluded; 5) language: papers not in English, Italian, or Spanish were excluded; 6) school - age: papers not referring to students up to high school level were excluded.

The screening based on title, abstract, and keywords was conducted independently by two authors. The inter-raters' agreement on the acceptance/rejection criterion was computed on a subsample of 85 papers (2% of records included at this stage)

and was 95.3 % ($k = 0.83$). At the end of this phase 50 papers were selected for the eligibility phase.

1.2.3. Eligibility

The full-text of each papers was downloaded and rated. Exclusion criteria at this stage were: 1) papers not referring to school or classroom ethnic diversity as a measured variable; 2) papers not referring to bullying or victimization as a measured variable; 3) papers not directly analyzing the relationship between ethnic diversity and bullying or victimization. Following these criteria, 20 papers remained and were included in the present systematic review.

1.2.4. Quality assessment

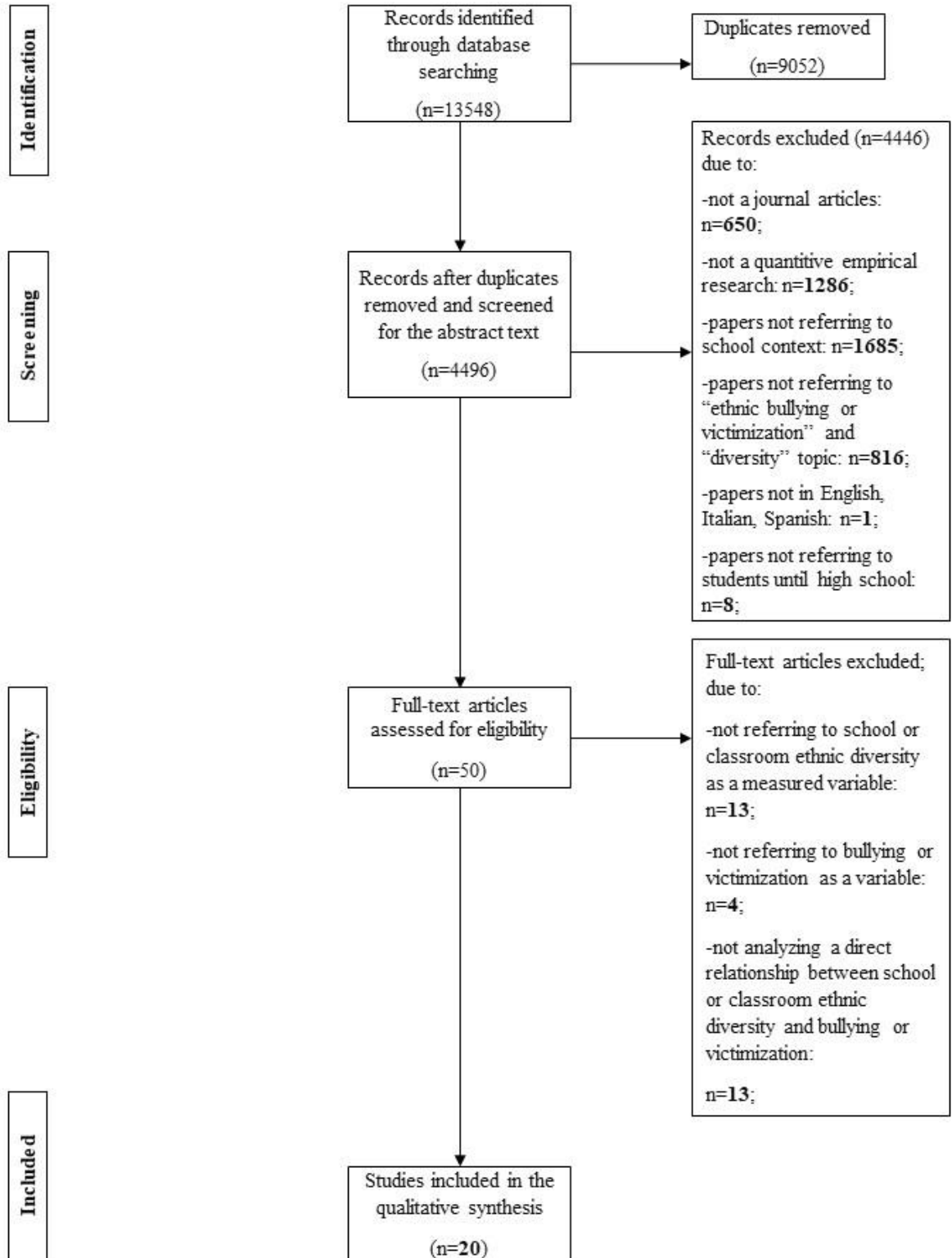
In order to measure the quality of the studies that met the inclusion criteria, two of the authors assessed them independently. In analyzing the papers, the recommendations from the NHS Centre for reviews and dissemination were followed (2008) and a validated checklist designed for quantitative studies was used (Kmet, Lee & Cook, 2004). This checklist originally included 14 criteria. However, since the present study does not evaluate interventions, three of them were not applicable to the designs of our study – specifically, random allocation, blinding of investigators, blinding of subject- and were removed from the checklist. Therefore, items included for quality assessment refer to: study question, study design, method of subject selection, subject characteristics, outcome and exposure measures, sample size, description of analyses, estimate of variance for the main results, study of confounding, descriptions of results, conclusions. To assess interrater reliability scores, a random selection of 20% of the papers was double

coded. It resulted in unanimous agreement (100%). A complete report of results is available in the supplementary materials.

All 20 papers were globally evaluated as more than adequate in their quality, and consequently all of them were used for data extraction. Several variables of papers were considered. As regards the study characteristics, the design was considered along with the participants' characteristics (e.g., type of informant, age, school level etc.) and the type of behavior considered (e.g., bullying, discrimination, racial bullying etc.). Data about ethnicity related variables were extracted: the school vs the classroom level analysis for ethnic diversity, the operationalization of the definition of ethnicity (i.e., based on immigrant background vs race) and how ethnic diversity was computed (i.e., a composite proportion index vs percentage/proportion). Finally, the results on the association between bullying perpetration and victimization and diversity were extracted. Analyses related to subgroups (e.g., minority vs majority) are reported separately.

Figure 1.1.

Flowchart of study identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion



1.3. Results

1.3.1. General characteristics of included studies

The general characteristics regarding the studies we included are reported in Table 1.1. The 20 articles were published in 17 journals, between 2002 and 2019. Most of the studies (90%; $n=18$) were cross-sectional. Data were mainly collected from single informants (students; 85%; $n=17$) and only a few of them (15%; $n=3$) included reports made by principals, teachers, or parents. Sample sizes ranged from 335 to 161,838 participants. In most of the studies, the participants were random community sample of school students. In terms of numbers, in 65% ($n=13$) participants were greater than 1000 students, only in 15% ($n=3$) they were less than 1000 and in 20% ($n=4$) they were greater than 10000; with females representing between 46% and 57.30% of the total sample. Only 12 articles reported participants' mean age, which ranged from 12.65 to 15.6 years old. Looking at the type of peer aggression, 70% ($n=14$) of papers analyzed bullying, 10% ($n=2$) racial bullying, 10% ($n=2$) analyzed racial discrimination, 5% ($n=1$) discrimination, 5% ($n=1$) examined both bullying and racial bullying. As there is little variability, this variable was not considered. Peer aggression was assessed in 65% of studies ($n=13$) by *ad hoc* items, in 10% ($n=2$) by *ad hoc* items after presenting Olweus' (1996) definition of bullying, in 20% ($n=4$) by validated scales, and in 5% ($n=1$) by peer nominations.

While all of the papers included in the present study focused on bullying victimization, only half of them ($n=10$) investigated bullying perpetration as well. Among these, 60% ($n=6$) investigated the association between ethnic diversity and bullying perpetration on the overall sample, only 10% ($n=1$) focused on ethnic minority, 20% ($n=2$) analyzed ethnic diversity and bullying perpetration respectively on ethnic majority

and ethnic minority and 10% ($n=1$) examined both first and second generations immigrants.

Bullying victimization is taken into account in all of the papers ($n=20$) included in the review. However, only 45% ($n=9$) investigated the association between ethnic diversity and bullying victimization on the overall sample; 20% ($n=4$) examined the association between an ethnic majority and minority, respectively 5% ($n=1$) on ethnic majority, ethnic minority and the overall sample, 5% ($n=1$) on first and second generation of immigrants, 5% ($n=1$) on same ethnicity peers, recent immigrants youth and total sample, 5% ($n=1$) on first and second generation of immigrants and ethnic majority, 5% ($n=1$) on ethnic majority and ethnic heterogeneity and 5% ($n=1$) on ethnic minority. Additionally, one paper (5%) studied the association between ethnic diversity and bullying victimization at the school level and classroom level on all participants involved.

Table 1.1. *General characteristics of included studies*

	Reference	Study design	Type of behavior evaluated		Informants		
					N	Female %	Students' Age/Age range
1	Agirdag, O., Demanet, J., Van Houtte, M., & Van Avermaet, P. (2011)	C-S	Victimization	Students	2845	51.5%	M=11.61
2	Bellmore, A., Nishina, A., You, J. I., & Ma, T. L. (2012)	L	Victimization (racial discrimination)	Students	1072	55.0%	NR
3	Cavicchiolo, E., Girelli, L., Leo, I. D., Manganelli, S., Lucidi, F., & Alivernini, F. (2019)	C-S	Perpetration; Victimization	Students	25573	51.0%	M=15.6 SD=.76
4	Closson, L. M., Darwich, L., Hymel, S., & Waterhouse, T. (2014)	C-S	Victimization (racial discrimination)	Students	2220	49.0%	12 to 17 years old
5	Connell, N. M., El Sayed, S., Reingle Gonzalez, J. M., & Schell-Busey, N. M. (2015)	C-S	Perpetration; Victimization	Students	3965	54.0%	M=12
6	Durkin, K., Hunter, S., Levin, K. A., Bergin, D., Heim, D., & Howe, C. (2012)	C-S	Victimization (discrimination)	Students	925	46.0%	M=9.8 SD=0.91
7	Felix, E. D., & You, S. (2011)	C-S	Victimization	Students	161838	52.6%	NR
8	Fisher, S., Middleton, K., Ricks, E., Malone, C., Briggs, C., & Barnes, J. (2015)	C-S	Perpetration; Victimization (racial bullying)	Students	4581	53.4%	M=12.75 SD=1.09
9	Hoglund, W. L., & Hosan, N. E. (2013)	C-S	Victimization	Students	335	57.3%	M=12.50 SD=0.59
10	Jansen, P. W., Mieloo, C. L., Dommissie-van Berkel, A., Verlinden, M., van der Ende, J., Stevens, G., ... & Tiemeier, H (2016)	C-S	Perpetration; Victimization	Students; teachers; parents	8871	48.7%	5-6 years
11	Juvonen, J., Nishina, A., & Graham, S. (2006)	L	Victimization	Students; teachers	1421	55.0%	NR
12	Larochette, A. C., Murphy, A. N., & Craig, W. M. (2010)	C-S	Perpetration; Victimization (racial bullying)	Students; principals	3684 students; 116 principals	56.0%	11-15 years
13	Mehari, K. R., & Farrell, A. D. (2015)	C-S	Victimization	Students	4593	51.0%	NR
14	Plenty, S., & Jonsson, J. O (2017)	C-S	Victimization	Students	4795	51.0%	M=14.69

							SD=38
15	Stefanek, E., Strohmeier, D., van de Schoot, R., & Spiel, C (2011)	C-S	Perpetration; Victimization	Students	1451	48.8%	M=12.31
16	Tolsma, J., van Deurzen, I., Stark, T. H., & Veenstra, R. (2013)	C-S	Perpetration; Victimization	Students	739	50.1%	M=11
17	Verkuyten, M., & Thijs, J. (2002)	C-S	Victimization (racial bullying)	Students	2851	49.0%	10 to 13 years
18	Vervoort, M. H., Scholte, R. H., & Overbeek, G. (2010)	C-S	Perpetration; Victimization	Students	2798	48.1%	M=13.10 SD=6.77
19	Vitoroulis, I., Brittain, H., & Vaillancourt, T. (2016)	C-S	Perpetration; Victimization	Students	11649	48.7%	M=12.79 SD=2.49
20	Walsh, S. D., De Clercq, B., Molcho, M., Harel-Fisch, Y., Davison, C. M., Madsen, K. R., & Stevens, G. W. (2016)	C-S	Perpetration; Victimization	Students	51636	50.1%	M=13.7

Note: *NR*= Not reported *C-S*=Cross-sectional *L*=Longitudinal

1.3.2. The association between ethnic diversity and bullying perpetration

Findings are reported in Table 1.2.

The relation between ethnic diversity and bullying perpetration was analyzed in 13 different analyses involving different subgroups and belonging to 10 papers. In 53.8% of them ($n=7$) a non-significant association was found, while 46.2% ($n=6$) found a positive association. None of the analyses found a negative association between ethnic diversity and bullying perpetration.

Examining the level at which ethnic diversity is measured, 69.2% of analyses ($n=9$) focused on school diversity while the remaining 30.8% ($n=4$) on classroom diversity. Out of 9 analyses focusing on school, 44.4% ($n=4$) found a non-significant association between ethnic diversity and bullying perpetration and 55.5% ($n=5$) a positive one. Conversely, out of 4 analyses focusing on the classroom level, 3 found a non-significant association while 1 a positive one. Results do not give a clear indication about the moderating role played by the level at which ethnic diversity is measured especially because of the low number of studies.

Looking at the area where the study was conducted, 46.2% ($n=6$) collected data in Europe, 38.5% ($n=5$) in North America. 15.4% ($n=2$) of the analyses collected data from multiple countries (Denmark, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Netherlands, Spain, United Kingdom and USA). Studies that obtained data in Europe always operationalized ethnicity by taking into consideration the immigrant background of students and their parents. In particular, 2 out of 6 of these analyses used the birthplace of students' parents, while 66.7% ($n=4$) considered the birthplace of both students and their parents. Research that collected data in North America focused on participants' race.

Aside from Walsh et al.'s (2016) analyses ($n=2$), that collected data from multiple countries examining students' immigrant background to operationalize ethnicity, there is an overlap between the area of data collection (i.e., Europe vs North America) and the way in which ethnicity was operationalized (i.e., focus on immigrant background vs race). Consequently, in the following paragraphs we will refer to these moderators as a single one: ethnicity/area.

A trend about the possible role of ethnicity/area in the association between ethnic diversity and bullying perpetration, emerged. 62.5% ($n=5$) of analyses focused on immigrant background/Europe highlighted a positive association and 37.5% ($n=3$) a non-significant association. Out of 5 analyses focused on race/North America, only 1 found a positive association while the other 4 did not. However, because of the low number of analyses, caution should be exercised when commenting on this trend.

As a method to compute ethnic diversity, 76.9% of the analyses ($n=10$) used percentage/proportion, while 23.1% ($n=3$) used a composite proportion index such as the Simpson Diversity Index ($n=1$), Budescu and Budescu Index ($n=1$) and Herfindahl Index ($n=1$). Out of 10 analyses examining ethnic diversity by percentage/proportion, 60% ($n=6$) showed a non-significant association and 40% ($n=4$) a positive one. Out of 3 analyses based on a composite proportion index, 1 found a non-significant association and the remaining 2 a positive one.

As for the school level, 15.4% ($n=2$) of the analyses were conducted on primary schools, 23.1% ($n=3$) on middle schools, 15.4% ($n=2$) on high schools. Since 30.8% of the analyses ($n=4$) were conducted both on middle and high schools and the remaining 15.4% ($n=2$) on primary, middle and high schools, we separated the analyses conducted

on primary school students from those conducted in secondary schools. Therefore, 15.4% ($n=2$) of analyses on ethnic diversity and bullying perpetration were on primary schools and 69.3% ($n=9$) on secondary schools. The remaining 15.4% ($n=2$) on both primary and secondary schools was not considered. Both analyses ($n=2$) on ethnic diversity and bullying perpetration conducted in primary school found a positive association; on the other hand, of 9 works conducted in secondary school, 80% ($n=5$) found a non-significant association and 20% ($n=4$) a positive one.

Given the method used to measure ethnic diversity and the school level of participants, the results do not offer a clear picture about these moderating factors, especially for the lack of studies found.

Table 1.2. Summary of main findings about the association between ethnic diversity and bullying perpetration

	Reference	Level at which ethnic diversity is measured	Area	Operationalization of Ethnicity	Measure used in computing Ethnic diversity	School Level	Groups	Association
3	Cavicchiolo, E., Girelli, L., Leo, I. D., Manganelli, S., Lucidi, F., & Alivernini, F. (2019)	Classroom	Italy	Immigrant background	Percentage/proportion	Secondary school	First generation immigrants	Positive
							Second generation immigrants	Not significant
5	Connell, N. M., El Sayed, S., Reingle Gonzalez, J. M., & Schell-Busey, N. M. (2015)	School	United States	Race	Percentage/proportion	Secondary school	All sample	Positive
8	Fisher, S., Middleton, K., Ricks, E., Malone, C., Briggs, C., & Barnes, J. (2015)	School	United States	Race	Percentage/proportion	Secondary school	All sample	Not significant
10	Jansen, P. W., Mieloo, C. L., Dommisse-van Berkel, A., Verlinden, M., van der Ende, J., Stevens, G., ... & Tiemeier, H (2016)	School	The Netherlands	Immigrant background	Composite proportion index	Primary School	All sample	Positive
12	Larochette, A. C., Murphy, A. N., & Craig, W. M. (2010)	School	Canada	Race	Percentage/proportion	Secondary school	All sample	Not significant
15	Stefanek, E., Strohmeier, D., van de Schoot, R., & Spiel, C (2011)	Classroom	Austria	Immigrant background	Composite proportion index	Secondary school	All sample	Not significant
16	Tolsma, J., van Deurzen, I., Stark, T. H., & Veenstra, R. (2013)	School	The Netherlands	Immigrant background	Composite proportion index	Primary School	All sample	Positive
18	Vervoort, M. H., Scholte, R. H., & Overbeek, G. (2010)	Classroom	The Netherlands	Immigrant background	Percentage/proportion	Secondary school	Ethnic minority	Not significant
19	Vitoroulis, I., Brittain, H., & Vaillancourt, T. (2016)	School	Canada	Race	Percentage/proportion	Primary School and Secondary school	Ethnic majority Ethnic minority	Not significant Not significant
20	Walsh, S. D., De Clercq, B., Molcho, M., Harel-Fisch, Y., Davison, C. M., Madsen, K. R., & Stevens, G. W. (2016)	School	Denmark, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, The Netherlands, Spain, United Kingdom, USA	Immigrant background	Percentage/proportion	Secondary school	Ethnic majority	Positive
							Ethnic minority	Positive

1.3.3. The association between ethnic diversity and bullying victimization

Findings are reported in Table 1.3.

Out of 20 articles, the relation between ethnic diversity and bullying victimization was analyzed in 33 different analyses involving subgroups. A negative association was found in 39.4% of these analyses ($n=13$) while a non-significant association emerged in 42.4% ($n=14$) and a positive association was found in 18.2% ($n=6$) of them.

From observing the level at which ethnic diversity is measured, 60.6% ($n=20$) of analyses focused on schools. Out of these, 45% ($n=9$) found a negative association, 45% ($n=9$) a non-significant and 10% ($n=2$) a positive one. In relation to the classroom level, 39.4% ($n=13$) of analyses focused on this level and out of these, 30.8% ($n=4$) found a negative association, 38.5% ($n=5$) had a non-significant and 30.8% ($n=4$) a positive one. A trend seems to emerge when looking at ethnic diversity measured at the school level, underlying a possible protective role of diversity on victimization. Looking at the classroom level results, which are the perfect balance among the three possible outcomes, it appears that ethnicity measured at this level is not a crucial variable for victimization.

Looking at the area of the study, 42.4% of analyses ($n=14$) collected data in Europe, 6.1% ($n=2$) in United Kingdom, 45.5% ($n=15$) in North America and 6.1% ($n=2$) of the studies collected data from multiple countries (Denmark, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Netherlands, Spain, United Kingdom and USA). Studies that obtained data in Europe, operationalized ethnicity by considering the immigrant background of students and their parents; while research that collected data in North America focused on participants' race. Finally, analyses conducted in the United

Kingdom studied participants' ethnicity by focusing on students' identities (students were asked to choose from a list the race and religion they felt belonged to) and for this specificity, were excluded from the analyses related to definition of ethnicity/area as moderator. Among studies that identified student's ethnicity via immigration status, 35.7% ($n=5$) used the birthplace of students' parents, 35.7% ($n=5$) the birthplace of both students and their parents, 21.4% ($n=3$) the birthplace of students' parents or grandmothers and 7.1% ($n=1$) considered students' first language. With the exception of the Walsh et al. (2016) study, that collected data from multiple countries by focusing on immigrant background, there is an overlap between the area of data collection (i.e., Europe vs North America) and the operationalization of ethnicity (i.e., focus on immigrant background vs race). Consequently, we will continue to refer to these moderators as a single one: ethnicity/area.

Among the analyses based on immigrant background/in Europe, 25% ($n=4$) found a negative association, 50% ($n=8$) a non-significant one and 25% ($n=4$) found a positive association. Conversely, looking at analyses based on race/ in North America, 60% ($n=9$) found a negative association, 40% ($n=6$) a non-significant and none a positive one. A clear trend seems to emerge in relation to ethnicity/area: while in North America, focusing on race, ethnic diversity seems to be a protective factor for victimization, mixed findings emerged from the European context that have stressed more the aspect of immigration status referring to ethnicity.

To compute ethnic diversity, 63.7% of analyses ($n=21$) used a percentage/proportion while 36.4% ($n=12$) used a composite proportion index such as the Simpson Diversity Index (75%; $n=9$), the Budescu and Budescu Index (8.3%; $n=1$), the Herfindahl Index (16.7%; $n=2$). Among analyses based on percentage/proportion, 38.1%

found a negative association ($n=8$), 42.9% ($n=9$) a non-significant and 19.1% ($n=4$) a positive one between ethnic diversity and bullying victimization. Among analyses based on composite proportion index, 41.7% found a negative association ($n=5$), 41.7% a non-significant ($n=5$) and 16.7% ($n=2$) a positive one between ethnic diversity and bullying victimization. These results do not show evidence of a clear trend: the way ethnic diversity is computed does not seem to be a possible moderator factor.

Looking at the participants school level, 27.3% of the analyses ($n=9$) were conducted in primary schools, 33.4% ($n=11$) in middle and 21.2% ($n=7$) in high schools. 12.1% ($n=4$) of analyses included both middle and high schools and 6.1% ($n=2$) involved primary, middle, and high schools. As we did in the analyses on ethnic diversity and bullying victimization, we created two subgroups, respectively: analyses conducted on primary and secondary schools. In this paragraph of results, we do not take into consideration the two analyses involving participants from primary and secondary schools together and consequently we have: 29% of analyses ($n=9$) were on primary schools and 71% ($n=22$) on secondary schools. Among primary schools' analyses, 11.1% ($n=1$) showed a negative association, 44.5% ($n=4$) a non-significant and 44.5% ($n=4$) a positive one. About secondary schools, 50% ($n=11$) found a negative association, 40.9% ($n=9$) a non-significant and only 9.1% ($n=2$) a positive one. A trend emerged: ethnic classroom and school diversity show a higher probability to be a risk factor for victimization at younger ages.

Table 1.3. Summary of main findings about the association between ethnic diversity and bullying victimization

	Reference	Level at which ethnic diversity is measured	Area	Operationalization of Ethnicity	Measure used in computing Ethnic Diversity	School Level	Groups	Association
1	Agirdag, O., Demanet, J., Van Houtte, M., & Van Avermaet, P. (2011)	School	Belgium	Immigrant background	Percentage/ proportion	Primary school	Ethnic majority	Not significant
					Percentage/ proportion		Ethnic minority	Negative
					Composite proportion index		All sample	Not significant
2	Bellmore, A., Nishina, A., You, J. I., & Ma, T. L. (2012)	School	California	Race	Composite proportion index	Secondary school	All sample	Negative ¹
3	Cavicchiolo, E., Girelli, L., Leo, I. D., Manganelli, S., Lucidi, F., & Alivernini, F. (2019)	Classroom	Italy	Immigrant background	Percentage/ proportion	Secondary school	First generation immigrants	Not significant
							Second generation immigrants	Not significant
4	Closson, L. M., Darwich, L., Hymel, S., & Waterhouse, T. (2014)	School	Canada	Race	Percentage/ proportion	Secondary school	Same ethnicity peers	Negative
					Percentage/ proportion		Recent immigrant youth	Negative
					Composite proportion index		All sample	Not significant
5	Connell, N. M., El Sayed, S., Reingle Gonzalez, J. M., & Schell-Busey, N. M. (2015)	School	United States	Race	Percentage/ proportion	Secondary school	All sample	Not significant
6	Durkin, K., Hunter, S., Levin, K. A., Bergin, D., Heim, D., & Howe, C. (2012)	Classroom	United Kingdom	Identities	Percentage/ proportion	Primary School	Ethnic majority	Positive
							Ethnic minority	Positive

7	Felix, E. D., & You, S. (2011)	School	California	Race	Composite proportion index	Secondary school	All sample	Negative
8	Fisher, S., Middleton, K., Ricks, E., Malone, C., Briggs, C., & Barnes, J. (2015)	School	United States	Race	Percentage/proportion	Secondary school	All sample	Negative
9	Hoglund, W. L., & Hosan, N. E. (2013)	Classroom	Canada	Race	Composite proportion index	Secondary school	All sample	Negative
10	Jansen, P. W., Mieloo, C. L., Dommissie-van Berkel, A., Verlinden, M., van der Ende, J., Stevens, G., ... & Tiemeier, H (2016)	School	The Netherlands	Immigrant background	Composite proportion index	Primary School	All sample	Positive
11	Juvonen, J., Nishina, A., & Graham, S. (2006)	Classroom School	California	Race	Composite proportion index	Secondary school	All sample All sample	Negative ² Negative ²
12	Larochette, A. C., Murphy, A. N., & Craig, W. M. (2010)	School	Canada	Race	Percentage/proportion	Secondary school	All sample	Not significant
13	Mehari, K. R., & Farrell, A. D. (2015)	School	United States	Race	Composite proportion index	Secondary school	Ethnic majority Ethnic minority	Not significant Not significant
14	Plenty, S., & Jonsson, J. O (2017)	Classroom	Sweden	Immigrant background	Percentage/proportion	Secondary school	First generation immigrants Second generation immigrants	Negative Negative
15	Stefanek, E., Strohmeier, D., van de Schoot, R., & Spiel, C (2011)	Classroom	Austria	Immigrant background	Composite proportion index	Secondary school	Ethnic majority All sample	Positive Not significant
16	Tolsma, J., van Deurzen, I., Stark, T. H., & Veenstra, R. (2013)	School	The Netherlands	Immigrant background	Composite proportion index	Primary School	All sample	Positive
17	Verkuyten, M., & Thijs, J. (2002)	Classroom	The Netherlands	Immigrant background	Percentage/		Ethnic majority	Not significant

					proportion	Primary School	Ethnic heterogeneity	Not significant
18	Vervoort, M. H., Scholte, R. H., & Overbeek, G. (2010)	Classroom	The Netherlands	Immigrant background	Percentage/proportion	Secondary school	Ethnic minority	Positive
19	Vitoroulis, I., Brittain, H., & Vaillancourt, T. (2016)	School	Canada	Race	Percentage/proportion	Primary School; Secondary school	Ethnic majority	Not significant
20	Walsh, S. D., De Clercq, B., Molcho, M., Harel-Fisch, Y., Davison, C. M., Madsen, K. R., & Stevens, G. W. (2016)	School	Denmark, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, The Netherlands, Spain, United Kingdom, Usa	Immigrant background	Percentage/proportion	Secondary school	Ethnic minority Ethnic majority Ethnic minority	Negative Not significant Negative

¹School ethnic diversity was associated with initial levels of peer discrimination but not with changes in discrimination over time;

²Same results were both in spring and fall;

1.4. Discussion

The aim of the present study was to systematically analyze the association between schools and classrooms ethnic diversity and both bullying perpetration and victimization. In fact, scientific literature reported mixed results about the impact of this aspect on the involvement in bullying. Additionally, we analyzed possible moderators of this association, and specifically: the area where data have been collected; the operationalization of the ethnicity definition (i.e., based on immigrant background vs race); how ethnic diversity is computed (i.e., a composite proportion index vs percentage/proportion); and the school level (i.e., primary vs secondary schools). Overall, 20 papers were identified and analyzed for this systematic review. Finally, we highlighted 13 analyses on ethnic diversity and bullying perpetration and 33 analyses on ethnic diversity and bullying victimization.

As a first result, we found few studies on this topic, especially in relation to bullying perpetration. Specifically, we found only 13 analyses, belonging to 10 papers, involving subgroups concerning ethnic diversity and bullying perpetration and 33 analyses, belonging to 20 papers, involving subgroups on ethnic diversity and bullying victimization. So, although the increasing presence of diversity in school, the impact of having multi-ethnic classrooms and schools on social negative interactions is still understudied.

Among the moderators, we found an overlap between the area of data collection (i.e., Europe vs North America) and the operationalization of ethnicity (i.e., focus on immigrant background vs race). Since it is not possible to disentangle these dimensions, in the present study they were analyzed as a unicum. The possible underpinning cultural

differences between countries could explain this finding especially in relation with the earlier timing of migration fluxes in North America and the highly mixed population in this country (Abramitzky & Boustan, 2017).

In relation to bullying perpetration, almost half of the analyses did not find any significant association while the other half found a positive one with ethnic diversity. This implies the possible role of other factors, in addition to the moderating factors taken into account in the present study, that could be associated with bullying perpetration in school such as the supervision of teachers (Vaillancourt et al., 2010) or the role of teachers as agents of socialization (Smith et al., 2004). However, half of the studies included in the present systematic review highlight the possible role of ethnic diversity as a risk factor for bullying perpetration. This result is in line with the Intergroup Conflict Theory (Turner, Brown & Tajfel., 1979) which argues that in an interethnic context, individuals tend to identify themselves with their own group and to develop negative attitudes towards the out-group. Results are consistent also with what is expressed by the Social Dominance Theory (Sidanius et al., 1994), where ethnicity often leads to intergroup conflicts in hierarchically structured social systems. Additionally, Stephan & Stephan (2000) suggested that some type of threat (i.e., realistic threats, symbolic threats, intergroup anxiety, and negative stereotypes) could cause negative attitudes towards the outgroup. Following these lines of research, students attending a multi-ethnic classroom could identify more closely with members of their ethnic group and differentiate themselves from others. These attitudes could lead to conflict and bullying perpetration, especially when the target belongs to a minority group (Cohen, Lotan & Catanzarite, 1990). In any case, considering the presence of mixed results about the association between ethnic diversity and bullying perpetration, the low number of studies included

and the more qualitative nature of the present work, all these require caution in the interpretation of data.

Although the limited number of studies warns us for caution, the operationalization of ethnicity/area of the study seems to play a role as a possible moderator for bullying perpetration. Analyses based on immigrant background/Europe consistently found more often a positive association (62.5%) as compared to analyses based on race/North America (20%). Two aspect needs consideration in analyzing these results related to the immigrant background/Europe classification: “who” is perpetrating bullying and the socio-political and historical context.

Bullies can be students with an immigrant background. This label refers to different situations: the time spent in a country, the assimilation of habits, language etc. the place where someone is born (Kunst & Sam, 2014) and aspects like citizenship that relates to the recognition by the country of arrival (Palladino et al., 2020). All these aspects could impact on bullying differently. Comparing first-generation (i.e., students and their parents born abroad and then moved to another country), and second-generation immigrants (i.e., students born in the country of arrival from immigrant parents - born abroad), Cavicchiolo et al. (2019) found a positive association between classroom ethnic diversity and bullying perpetration in the first group, while a non-significant one in the second group. Different generations of immigrant could approach processes of acculturation differently (Berry, 1997; 2006) and this could be linked to the phenomenon. For example, Strohmeier, Kärnä & Salmivalli (2011) hypothesized that first generation of immigrants face more acculturative stress compared to second generation immigrants, who already master the common language.

Bullies can be students belonging to the majority group. Vervoort et al. (2010) found a non-significant association between classroom ethnic diversity and bullying perpetration in the ethnic minority group. This could suggest that students of the minority group may be the victims rather than perpetrators because of power imbalance, due to their ethnicity (Cohen, Lotan & Catanzarite, 1990) and to the hierarchical structure of the intergroup systems (Sidanius et al., 1994). Conversely, Walsh et al. (2016) found a positive association between school ethnic diversity and bullying perpetration for both ethnic majority and ethnic minority groups. However, this is a study involving 11 countries both from Europe, North America and Middle East and we cannot exclude the presence of other factors affecting the findings.

The socio-political context and its historical development may also play a role in the association between school and classroom ethnic diversity and bullying when we consider the immigrant background in Europe. Papers that highlighted a positive association between school and classroom ethnic diversity and bullying perpetration were published between 2013 and 2019. We know that from 2015 to 2019, there was an increase of non-European economic migrants in Europe. In 2018, the largest number of irregular maritime arrivals to Europe was registered and the big number of deaths in the Mediterranean Sea attracted public attention (IOM International Organization for Migration, 2019). Additionally, recent conflicts in Libya and Yemen created the need of urgent protection for war migrants. At that time, irregular migration became one of the major issues in the European agenda. Between 2017 and 2018, fake news about migration have spread across European countries, setting the stage for several anti-immigrant political campaigns (IOM International Organization for Migration, 2019). All these aspects highlight the possible impact of media and the influence of political parties in

Europe on citizens' thoughts and feelings toward migrants over the past decade. Following Stephan and Stephan theory (2000), negative stereotypes against other ethnicities could contribute to prejudicial and negative attitudes toward outgroups. So, political and historical contextual factors could play a role on bullying perpetration against ethnic minority groups.

Looking at the impact of other moderators on the association between ethnic diversity and bullying perpetration, the low variability in the limited number of studies identified cannot allow us to draft any conclusions. However, considering the impact they have on the association with victimization, it seems relevant to further investigate these aspects (i.e., how ethnicity is operationalized, how ethnic diversity is computed, participants' school level) in future empirical studies.

The association between school and classroom ethnic diversity and victimization highlighted more articulated findings: 39.4% of analyses found a negative association; 42.4% a non-significant association, while 18.2% a positive one. This is in line with Graham's (2006) claims, that in schools where there is not a strong majority group, diversity is associated with lower levels of victimization and anxiety and higher levels of school safety. The analyses on the moderators shed light on this association: the level at which ethnic diversity is measured (i.e., school vs classroom); the operationalization of ethnicity/area of data collection and the school level seem all to play a role.

About the level at which ethnic diversity is measured (i.e., school vs classroom), only 10% of the analyses focusing on school ethnic diversity found a positive association between ethnic diversity and victimization while for classroom ethnic diversity no main differences emerged in frequencies of positive-non-significant-negative association.

These results suggest that greater diversity at the school level could be a protective factor for victimization. In a completely homogeneous school, the ethnic diversity at the classroom level would match the school ethnic diversity. However, this rarely happens because the process of segregation is likely to happen; being segregated in a multi-ethnic context could affect feeling of marginalization for all youth when they represent a numerical minority (Kogachi & Graham, 2020). Since staying with students with matched ethnic group in the classroom means minor out-group contact (Allport, 1954), failing to create ethnically inclusive classrooms could contribute to highlight ethnic differences between groups (Kogachi & Graham, 2020).

Looking at the operationalization of ethnicity/area, analyses focused on race in North America found predominantly a negative association (60%) and never a positive one, highlighting that in this case diversity seems to constitute a protective factor for victimization. Conversely, analyses focused on immigrant background in Europe showed mixed results about the role of this moderator. Due to the countries' different migration histories (Jackson et al., 2001), negative attitudes towards immigrants in Europe could be stronger than in North America toward minorities. This underlines that different histories of each country could influence people's attitudes towards diversity (Jackson et al., 2001; Verdier et al., 2012). It became especially true in a social context in which migration and diversity are claimed to be a reason for anti-immigration campaigns and political debates (Van Spanje, 2010). This could lead to target more the students with an immigrant background as victims. Different history might influence people's attitudes towards diversity (Jackson et al., 2001; Verdier et al., 2012) and this becomes especially true in a social context in which migration and diversity are claimed, mainly for political reasons, to be a major threat for people belonging to majority groups (Van Spanje, 2010).

Moving to possible developmental trends, we found that in primary school ethnic diversity seems to be a risk factor for victimization while it became a protective factor in secondary school. In fact, when involving samples from primary schools, only 11.1% of the analyses found a negative association while 44.5% found a non-significant and 44.5% a positive one. Quite the opposite pattern for secondary schools: 50% of analyses highlighted a negative association, 40.9% a non-significant one and only 9.1% a positive one. With the exception of Plenty and Jonsson's study (2017), all analyses that found a positive association between ethnic diversity and bullying victimization involved participants attending primary school. This suggests that students' age may influence this association.

Developing processes working at the individual level, such as categorization and concrete operative thinking, can affect attitudes and prejudice, thus impacting the association between school and classroom ethnic diversity and victimization. In line with Nesdale (2004), we know that by four years old, a child can categorize people via racial cues and identify members of its own ethnic groups. These processes create a strong in-group bias, that remains present up to about seven years and then gradually tends to decline. Growing up, children develop concrete operative thinking, as well as the concept of ethnic constancy. These allow them to understand that being a member of a specific ethnic group is an immutable characteristic. The acquisition of that concept is related to attitudes and relationships with both the ingroup and outgroup. In support of this reasoning, the meta-analysis of Raabe and Beelmann (2011) which summarizes findings from 113 studies on age differences in ethnic, racial, or national prejudice among children and adolescents, found an increase of prejudice between early and middle (5-7 years) and a decrease between middle and late childhood (8-10 years). So, it is possible that, at the

individual level, prejudice could affect the rates of victimization in younger age, on occasions when children may interact with peers that belong to ethnic minorities.

Looking at the relational level, an important factor that could affect bullying is the relationship between student and teachers (Dake et al., 2003). Literature highlights how the role of the teacher influences student's bullying attitudes (Troop-Gordon & Kopp, 2011; Veenstra et al., 2014). Moreover, Han, Zhang and Zhang (2007) found that primary school students are more likely to be involved in bullying behavior, but they pointed out how the teacher could be a protective factor. The importance of the teacher's role is further demonstrated by how the lack of teacher intervention in a bullying scenario could spark episodes of cyberbullying later on (Nappa et al., 2020). So, a different kind of student-teacher relationship in primary and secondary school related to the bullying phenomenon could be further investigated. Additionally, Gaffney, Farrington and Ttofi (2019), by examining the effectiveness of anti-bullying interventions, defined the teachers' involvement as a key component to evaluate programs. So, involving teachers in anti-bullying interventions could help them to cope with the implementation of bullying in their classrooms or schools. In addition to teachers, also parents are significant adults that can influence children's behaviors and attitudes from very young age (Grusec, 2011). The parenting style is a significant predictor of all forms of bullying and victimization (Charalampous et al., 2018). Additionally, some studies highlighted how the parental intergroup behavior contribute to perception of the norms about intergroup contact of their children (Degner & Dalege, 2013; Pehar et al., 2020). Moreover, literature evidenced that linguistic competence influenced the quality of 5-to-6 years old children's peer relationships and that failure to master the common language is a risk factor for ethnic victimization (Von Grünigen et al., 2012; Von Grünigen et al., 2010). Being part

of ethnic minority could cause incorrect use of the common language, and, among younger students, this factor could play a role in the possibility of being bullied.

Results from this systematic review highlight that ethnic diversity seems to be a protective factor for victimization in secondary schools. According to Erikson (1968), adolescents are involved in the task of identifying, evaluating, and selecting their roles and values in the society. Some adolescents could perceive greater social identity complexity and consequently, manifest a stronger orientation towards other groups and more positive inter-group attitudes (Flynn, 2005; Knifsend & Juvonen, 2013). Additionally, some studies (Bellmore et al., 2012; Brown, 2004) highlighted that the hierarchical nature of peer groups, and the relevance of the peer status, diminished in the later high school years. This change in peer group processes could lead also to a decrease in discrimination. Again, Greene, Way & Pahl (2006) showed that students in high schools have more experienced of familiarity and exposure to their peers, and this implies a decrease of negative peer interactions.

Furthermore, despite the limited number of studies on the topic, a contrasting trend emerges about bullying victimization in secondary schools from the results of the present work. Indeed, ethnic diversity seems to hinder victimization, more than bullying. This could suggest that more episodes of bullying are addressed to fewer victims. Literature highlighted that a main factor that consistently predicts victimization is being different from the larger peer group. Consequently, being part of an ethnic minority group could be a risk factor for victimization (Graham, 2016). So, the same student with a different ethnic background could be the target of different bullies. However, these controversial results should be analyzed taking into account students who are bully-victim (Mishna et al., 2012) to further understand intergroup dynamics.

Although no clear effects emerged in the analyses of how ethnic diversity is operationalized (i.e., the weight of the majority group or the shades of diversity with more complex indexes), some final considerations should be given to the implications of using a single variable or analysing subgroups in relation to diversity. Plenty and Jonsson (2017) specified subgroups involved in their study on the basis of the density of immigrant students in the classroom, and found that ethnic diversity was a risk factor for victimization only for the majority group attending highly diverse classrooms. Conversely, for minority ethnic groups (both first and second generations immigrants), ethnic diversity represented a protective factor, especially when classrooms showed high variability in the density of immigrant students in the classroom (i.e., high diversity). This could be related to the fact that greater ethnic variability in the classroom reduces the weight of the ethnic majority group in relational dynamics, suggesting the importance of studying distribution and variability of ethnic groups within classrooms, by using different approaches to understand the complexity of the phenomena and their association.

1.5. Conclusions and practical considerations

All in all, the results of the present systematic review offer us some possible suggestions about practical aspects. In Europe, where the media and public attention on immigration is still high, and people's attitudes remain still controversial and conflictual, special attention should be given to highly ethnically mixed classrooms and schools. Without interventions to promote inclusion, conflict between majority and minority groups and bullying could create a negative climate affecting all the students. In general, interventions should be set up at early stages of development, starting from primary school, or even earlier. In fact, ethnic diversity can be a protective factor for bullying

victimization in secondary school, thus opening a discussion on the importance of not only avoiding segregation mechanisms, possibly at classroom level (Benner & Graham, 2013), but also giving students the opportunity to meet and interact with peers from a different ethnic background (e.g., promoting activities that foster more positive interracial climates and intergroup relations) (Benner & Graham, 2013).

1.6. Limitations and future directions

The present findings must be interpreted while considering some limitations. First, our systematic review was based on a search of paper in English, Spanish, and Italian that did not include any grey literature. Therefore, some findings may have been neglected. Additionally, other moderating factors (e.g., gender, classroom's size, type of bullying etc.) were left unconsidered because of the few data present in the scientific literature. Once again, the literature presents puzzled findings about the role of gender and the age of the participants (Graham & Juvonen, 1998; Larochette, Murphy & Craig, 2010; Ryoo, Wang & Swearer, 2015) while classroom's size needs more exploration, as it implies more or less opportunities for contact between peers (Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002). Additionally, in future studies, the time it takes to assess bullying situation could also be considered as a moderator variable, both in relation to the period of the school year (e.g. at the beginning, at the end) and to the time lag of the phenomenon (e.g. the year before (Walsh et al., 2016), the month before (Plenty & Jonsson, 2017), the previous two or three months (Stefanek, Strohmeier, D., Van De Schoot & Spiel, 2011)).

Another aspect to take into consideration is the limited number of studies in the literature about the association between ethnic diversity and bullying perpetration. More

efforts should be made in future studies to better analyze this association in different geographical contexts, involving different age groups. Furthermore, excepting for Walsh et al. (2016), the studies included in the present systematic review were conducted only in North America and Europe. Since migration flows also affect other geographical areas (IOM International Organization for Migration, 2019), it is relevant that studies in other continents and cultures will be carried out to better understand the relationship between variables taken into account in the present study also in other contexts.

Considering these aspects within a multi-cohort longitudinal design for empirical studies, could allow scholars to analyze the stability of the association during its development and the interactions between structural factors (e.g., students' and teachers' diversity) and process (e.g., attitudes, prejudicial climate) in affecting bullying rates. Since literature about school and classroom ethnic diversity in primary school seems to be limited, future research could conduct more empirical studies within this age group. Moreover, only 30.4% of analyses studied the different types of peer aggression such as racial bullying or discrimination. None of the analyses included in the present review analyzed ethnic bullying specifically, which is a type of bullying based on students' prejudice towards the race, ethnicity or immigrant background of the victimized peer (Juvonen and Graham, 2014). For a more comprehensive understanding of this type of bullying an ad hoc measure could be adopted, or an in-depth focus on ethnic bullying implementation across subgroups could be carried out. Furthermore, it could be relevant to analyze the interactions between the different moderating factors. Since the literature on the topic of the present review is limited as of yet, it was not possible to investigate any further. Finally, considering both the small number of studies investigating the topic and their high heterogeneity in terms of characteristics of the sample, operationalization

of ethnicity, methods used to compute ethnic diversity and type of peer aggression assessed, we decided that a meta-analysis would not be suitable. This is the first systematic review about the role of ethnic diversity on bullying and it could represent a first step for the study of this relevant topic. For the future, when the literature on this topic will be broader, studies may consider meta-analysis as an approach highly recommended, in order to estimate the effect size of the association between ethnic diversity in school and bullying taking also into account the role of possible moderators.

CHAPTER 2

The association between social/legal and perceptual aspects of ethnicity and ethnic bullying and victimization

2.1. Introduction

In recent years, it has been recorded a growing wave of immigration all around the world, that led all countries to face greater social challenges (IOM International Organization for Migration, 2019). Ethnicity definition implies different stories of immigration policies and racial categorization and it refers to mutual cultural characteristics such as religion, language, customs, and ancestry (Clarke et al., 2008). Despite the increasing presence of ethnic diversity at school, findings on the impact of multi-ethnic classrooms and schools on social interactions are not yet clear (Basilici et al., 2022).

Ethnic bullying, also defined as prejudice-related bullying (Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017) is a subtype of bias-based bullying and it refers to targeting someone because of her/his ethnic background or cultural identity, involving direct and indirect forms of aggression. Ethnic bullying has a negative impact on youth's adjustment (e.g., internalizing and externalizing difficulties; McKenney et al., 2006) and it leads victims to think that their own ethnic background and social identity is the cause of victimization with consequent self-blaming and feelings of inadequacy (McKenney et al., 2006). Graham (2006) underlined the relevance of analyzing ethnic diversity to understand bullying and victimization. In peer relations, ethnicity may influence personal status characteristics, causing an imbalance of power between the majority and minority groups

(Cohen et al., 1990). These factors could increase the building of a hierarchical structure of the intergroup systems (Sidanius et al., 1994).

However, mixed results have been found on the role of ethnic diversity on ethnic bullying victimization in the school context, and how social interactions related are affected (Basilici et al., 2022). On one hand, some studies showed that the more diverse a school is, the more bullying occurs (e.g., Jansen et al., 2016; Tolsma et al., 2013). These results are in line with the Intergroup Conflict Theory (Turner et al., 1979) and the Social Dominance Theory (Sidanius et al., 1994). On the other hand, researchers pointed out the role of ethnic classroom or school diversity as a protective factor against bullying (Bellmore et al., 2012; Closson et al., 2014; Juvonen et al., 2006). These studies are in line with the Contact Hypothesis (Allport, 1954). About research concerning ethnic diversity and bullying, a specific match between the country where studies are conducted and the operationalization of ethnicity can be found (Basilici et al., 2022). European studies define participants' ethnicity by the immigrant status (i.e., first or second generation of immigrants) while in North America, students' ethnicity is defined mainly by race that relates more to perceptual aspects (Basilici et al., 2022).

Migration history is relevant to understanding the perceived discrimination of immigrants in the host country (André & Drokers, 2017). Indeed, immigrants of first- and -second-generation could differ in acculturation processes in the country of arrival (Berry, 2006). Specifically, the better language proficiency of second generations immigrants, as opposed to the first generation (Christmas & Barker, 2014), could be related to less acculturative stress (Strohmeier et al., 2011).

A systematic review (Basilici et al., 2022) showed a positive association between ethnic diversity and bullying perpetration in most of the studies that focused on immigrant backgrounds in Europe. On the other hand, many studies focusing on race in North America showed no significant association between bullying perpetration and ethnic diversity. In Europe, focusing on the immigrant background, ethnic diversity might constitute a risk factor; whereas this was not true in North America, where focusing on race, ethnic diversity showed a protective role.

These results imply two questions about ethnic bullying: which groups (i.e., majority or minority) is perpetrating bullying, and the role played by the socio-political and historical context. About group dynamics, some studies reported that ethnic minority groups were more victimized than ethnic majority groups (Graham & Juvonen, 2002; Strohmeier & Spiel, 2013). However, Tolsma et al. (2013) in their research about ethnicity and bullying in primary schools pointed out that pupils belonging to minority groups bully significantly more than native pupils. In any case, literature found that many aspects of an immigrant background could affect bullying differently (e.g., acculturation expectation, belonging to first or second generations immigrants; Kunst & Sam, 2014).

Additional considerations can be made in light of some historical factors, related to different timing of migration fluxes. North America has always been characterized by a highly mixed population (Abramitzky & Boustan, 2017), conversely to Europe, where immigration has become an issue of public attention in recent years (IOM International Organization for Migration, 2019) with a quite polarized debate.

The Italian context and the citizenship status

In 2018, the largest number of irregular maritime arrivals to Europe was registered and the big number of deaths in the Mediterranean Sea attracted public attention. Specifically, Italy was the sixth most popular migrant destination in Europe in 2020 (IOM International Organization for Migration, 2022). Italy represents the first point of arrival in Europe because of the central geographic position of its southern area in the Mediterranean (Profanter, 2021) and it has begun to know the phenomenon of immigration more and more in recent years. From 2010 to 2020, students with immigrant backgrounds increased overall by 23.4%. In Italian schools has been recorded an overall growth of 19 thousand students without citizenship status. Of these, over 65.4% are represented by second generation immigrants (MIUR, 2021).

In Italy, there has been a lively political debate about the acquisition of citizenship status especially after the outbreak of the economic crisis (Finotelli, La Barbera & Echeverria, 2018). The Italian citizenship is currently regulated by the *ius sanguinis* principle (Law n.91, 1992) that declared the Italian citizenship acquisition dependent upon having Italian parents/ancestors. So, citizenship is passed from parent to child with no limit by generation. Despite what is happening in other countries (e.g., USA) where the citizenship status is based on the *ius soli* principle, people born in Italy from foreign parents (i.e., second generation immigrants) do not acquire automatically the citizenship status but they can apply for it when they turn 18 years old and it could be granted under certain conditions (i.e., years spent in Italy, employment status, etc.).

Palladino et al. (2020) found that citizenship status could be a good operationalization of ethnicity in Italy: it is related to specific processes in ethnic bullying victimization. For instance, adolescents born abroad without Italian citizenship showed a higher level of ethnic victimization compared to adolescents born in Italy with an Italian

parent (i.e., they have Italian citizenship). Also, Maehler, Weinmann & Hanke (2019) pointed out that citizenship is a prerequisite for successful acculturation and integration in the residence country.

The present study

The operationalization of ethnicity seems to be relevant to analyze the association between ethnic diversity and bullying perpetration and victimization (Basilici et al., 2022). We hypothesized that social/legal aspects (i.e., the citizenship status) or perceptual aspects (i.e., how different they are perceived from the majority) could catch different aspects in this association. The aim of the present study is to analyze the impact of both types of operationalization of ethnic diversity on ethnic bullying perpetration and victimization using a multilevel model that can grasp processes acting at the individual and class level. We focused on both outcomes (i.e., bullying perpetration and victimization) to take into account reactive behavior as well (i.e., bully-victim).

2.2. Materials and methods

2.2.1. Participants

Data collection refers to the first year of a longitudinal study started in 2019 (Prin Project N. 20173E3Z7W_003: Prejudicial bullying involving ethnic groups: understanding mechanism and translating knowledge into effective interventions). All procedures performed in this study were approved by the ethical committee of the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart of Milan and all procedures were in accordance with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments. 1309 students in the first year of high school (i.e., grade 9) from 13 different schools participated to the project. Parents and students were required to provide their consent to participate after the initial

school and classroom council approval of the study. Students that did not have their own or their parent's consent (14.6%) or students that were absent on the day of the questionnaires' administration (12.0%) were excluded from the study. The final sample included 960 students (52% girls) from 58 classrooms. The age of participants ranged from 12 to 19 years, with a mean age of 15.19 years ($SD=.60$). Trained Ph.D. students administered the questionnaire in January/February 2020 (before the COVID-19 pandemic) and students were asked to answer a self- and peer-reported scales. Students involved in the present study had started high school 4 months earlier, so they had just met each other.

We defined the *citizenship status* by looking at three questions about the country of origin of the participants and their parents ("Where were you born?"; "Where was your mother born?"; "Where was your father born?"). 81.7% of students were Italians, they were born in Italy to at least one Italian parent; they have had Italian citizenship since birth (females=51.6%; mean age= 15.08; $SD=.46$). The remaining 18.3% of students were both first (i.e., students born abroad with foreign parents) and second (i.e., students were born in Italy from parents born abroad) generation immigrants; they do not have Italian citizenship (females=62.7%; mean age=15.57; $SD=.81$).

Among students not born in Italy, 10.7% were from Asia, 22.6% from Africa, 36.9% from Europe 27.4% from South/Central America, and 2.38% from North America. Among students' mothers not born in Italy, 21.7% were from Asia, 16% were from Africa, 43.3% from Europe, 15.6% from South/Central America, and 0.8% from North America. Among students' fathers not born in Italy, 28.3% were from Asia, 17.8% were from Africa, 37.7% were from Europe, 13.8% from South/Central America, 2.6% from North America and 0.5% from Oceania.

2.2.2. Measures

Individual-level variables

Social/legal aspects – the citizenship status. Following the *ius sanguinis* principle (Law n.91, 1992), we recoded Italian students as students with citizenship (81.7%), or without citizenship (first and second generation immigrants; 18.3%).

Perception of diversity by others. The students were asked “How often this situation has happened to you: when you meet a stranger, he/she thinks that you are from a different ethnic group” rating on a 4-point Likert scale if this has happened “Never”, “Rarely”, “Sometimes”, “Often”. Of all students, 49.2% declared that they have never been recognized as from a different ethnic group by a stranger, 21.1% declared that it rarely happened, 13.3% sometimes and 8.8% often (M=1.34; SD=1.24).

Ethnic bullying perpetration and victimization. Adaptation of the Florence Bullying and Victimization scale (Palladino et al., 2016; 2020) was used in order to measure the specificity of ethnic bullying (4 items) and ethnic victimization (4 items). Respondents were asked how often during the past couple of months they have experienced attacks in physical (i.e., “I have been beaten...”), verbal (i.e., “Someone made fun of me”), and indirect forms (i.e., “Rumors about me...” and “I have been excluded”) because of “my ethnic group/origin” or how often during the past couple of months they attacked in physical (i.e., “I beat someone...”), verbal (“I made fun of someone...”), and indirect forms (i.e., “I’ve been spreading rumors about someone” and “I excluded someone...”) because of “her/his ethnic group/origin”. The answers were assessed on a 5-point-Likert scale from “never” (0) to “several times a week” (5). CFAs showed a good fit in the present sample (ethnic bullying; $\chi^2_{(2)}=3.068, p=.21$; CFI= 0.958;

RMSEA= 0.024, 90% CI [0.000, 0.073]; ethnic victimization; $\chi^2_{(2)} = .345, p = .84$; CFI= 1.000; RMSEA= 0.00, 90% CI [0.000, 0.036]. Cronbach's alpha was used as an index of internal consistency, demonstrating good reliability of the measure of both ethnic bullying and victimization ($\alpha = .971$; $\alpha = .973$, respectively). The average was 4.25 (SD=1.06) for ethnic victimization and 4.14 (SD=.84) for ethnic bullying.

Classroom-level variables

Classroom ethnic diversity - social/legal aspects. Simpson's Diversity Index (D_c) (Simpson, 1949) was computed in each classroom based on students with and without citizenship status. About the latter, the country of origin of each student was taken into account in order to capture the classroom ethnic diversity. D_c values can range from 0 to 1; higher values indicate greater ethnic diversity. The average D_c value was .43 (SD=.22; $MAX_{D_c} = .87$; $MIN_{D_c} = .00$).

Classroom ethnic diversity -perceptual aspects. The percentage was calculated for each classroom on the base of individual responses to the question about the perception of diversity by others. We recoded the answers as follows: students that declared that they have never or rarely been recognized as from a different ethnic group by a stranger (70.3%) and those that declared that they have sometimes or often been identified as from a different ethnic group by a stranger (22.1%). The percentage of each class was used as a variable measured at the class level. The average D_c value was .22 (SD=.13; $MAX_{D_c} = .63$; $MIN_{D_c} = .00$).

2.2.3. Plan of Analysis

Multilevel model is used to evaluate associations between variables at the individual and classroom levels, and to study whether, depending on classroom-level

characteristics, the associations between individual-level predictors are affected. In the Italian high school system, the classroom-level variable is relevant because students remain in the same classroom for the whole year and across the years. So, Italian students spend in the same classroom with the same peer group every day of high school, while teachers move from one classroom to another.

We tested a model in which ethnic bullying and ethnic victimization are the outcomes. At the within level, we included the following variables: social/legal aspects – the citizenship status, and the perception of diversity by others. Thus, we also tested the association between these variables at the classroom level: classroom ethnic diversity – social/legal aspects and classroom ethnic diversity – perceptual aspects. Additionally, we tested for both within-level and cross-level interactions. Given the non-normality distribution of outcome variables, we used a maximum likelihood parameter estimator with standard errors (MLR) to obtain robust estimates (Yuan & Bentler, 2000). The analyses were conducted with MPlus 7.0 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2012).

2.3. Results

2.3.1. Descriptive analysis

Descriptive analysis and correlations are presented in Table 1.

The final multilevel model is displayed in Figure 1. No significant cross-level nor within level interactions have been found.

Table 2.1.*Bivariate correlations between the study variables*

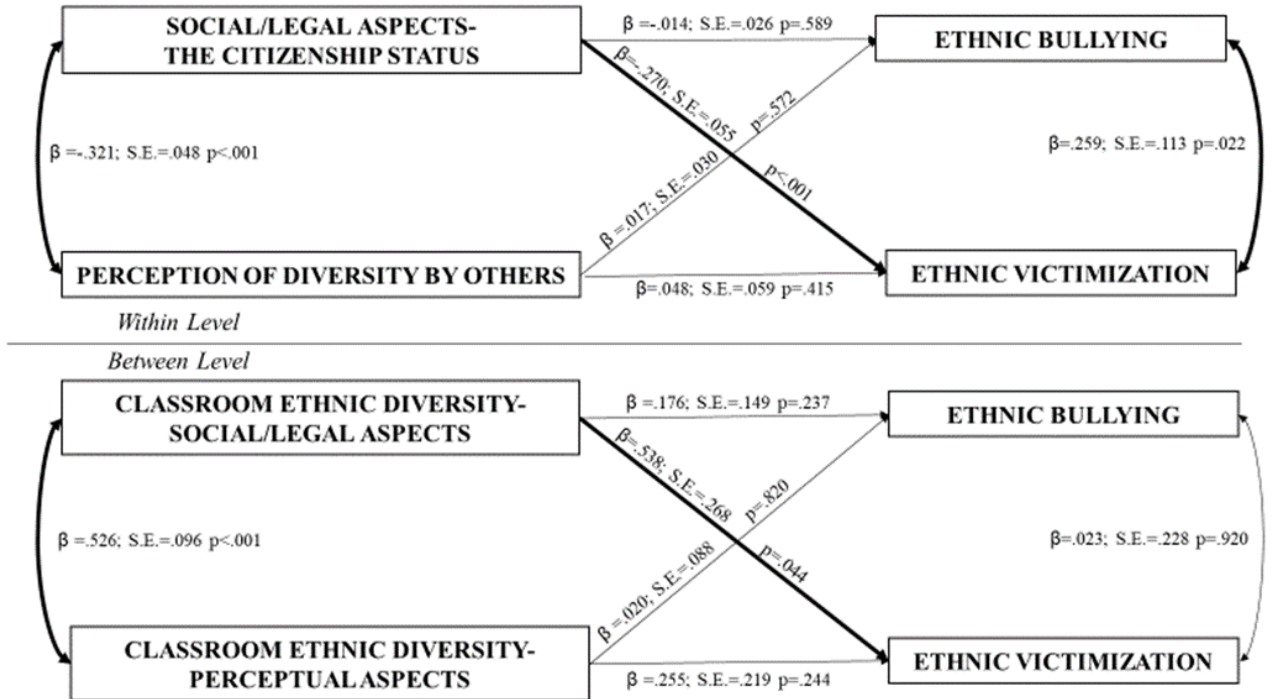
	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.
1.Social/legal aspects – the citizenship status	1					
2.Perception of diversity by others	-.346 (p<.001)	1				
3.Class ethnic diversity – social/legal aspects	-.347 (p<.001)	.179 (p<.001)	1			
4.Class ethnic diversity – perceptual aspects	-.264 (p<.001)	.280 (p<.001)	.554 (p<.001)	1		
5.Ethnic Victimization	-.350 (p<.001)	.165 (p<.001)	.167 (p<.001)	.119 (p<.001)	1	
6.Ethnic Bullying	-.050 (p=.195)	.038 (p=.265)	.084 (p=.002)	.049 (p=.077)	.249 (p=.031)	1

We found that the social/legal aspects are significantly associated with ethnic victimization both at the individual (i.e., the citizenship status; $\beta = .270$; $p < .001$) and the classroom level (i.e., class ethnic diversity - social/legal aspects; $\beta = .538$; $p = .04$). Conversely, the perceptual aspects did not seem to play a significant role for ethnic victimization (respectively $\beta = .048$; $p = .42$; $\beta = .255$; $p = .24$).

Looking at ethnic bullying, at the individual level, being with or without the citizenship status ($\beta = -.014$; $p = .58$) nor the perception of diversity by others ($\beta = -.017$; $p = .57$) showed any association with this behavior. Similarly, at the classroom level, not classroom ethnic diversity–social/legal aspects ($\beta = .176$; $p = .23$) nor the perceptual aspects ($\beta = .020$; $p = .82$) have an impact on bullying perpetration during the first year of high school in our sample.

Figure 2.1.

Multilevel model on operationalizations of ethnicity and ethnic bullying and victimization



2.4. Discussion

The aim of the present study was to analyze the association between two different aspects- operationalizations of ethnicity (i.e., social/legal and perceptual aspects) and ethnic bullying and ethnic victimization, considering both the individual (i.e., the citizenship status and perception of diversity by others, respectively) and the classroom level (i.e., classroom ethnic diversity based on social/legal and perceptual aspects, respectively).

At the individual level, the role of citizenship status seems to be relevant only for ethnic bullying victimization. Specifically, the non-possession of citizenship status seems to be a risk factor for ethnic victimization, over and above the impact of the perceptual aspects of ethnic diversity. This is in line with Palladino et al. (2020) who found that the citizenship status is highly relevant for ethnic bullying victimization, at least in Italy. These results suggest that this social/legal recognition could create different labels of categorization of a group membership. Consequently, it could increase the creation of the hierarchical structure of the intergroup systems, so that students of the minority group may be the victims rather than perpetrators because of power imbalance (Sidanius et al., 1994). Additionally, difficulties related to the process of acquiring national citizenship increase feelings of uncertainty and fear influencing their decision-making processes (Stewart & Mulvey, 2014). These conditions could make students with an immigrant background more vulnerable to ethnic victimization.

Some empirical studies highlighted that as national governments implement increasingly restrictive policies, consequently emotional and psychological obstacles to long-term integration rise (Stewart & Mulvey, 2014). In recent years, the Italian context

has been characterized by several debates concerning the granting of citizenship status and proposals for reforms (Tintori, 2018). Indeed, following Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory (1979), the microsystem (e.g., school context, peer groups) can be indirectly influenced by all other systems. In this case, contextual aspects (e.g., political debates quite evident in the newspapers and on TV and Social Network) although distal in their nature, may have influenced students' dynamics.

At the classroom level, we found that being part of a multiethnic class can be a risk factor for ethnic victimization, confirming the results about the European context pointed out in a recent systematic review (Basilici et al., 2022). These results are in line with Intergroup Conflict Theory (Turner et al. 1979) and the Social Dominance Theory (Sidanius et al., 1994). Following these theoretical perspectives, greater diversity at school or in the classroom may contribute to an increase in conflictual behaviors and, consequently ethnic victimization. The results confirm the need to give special attention to the European context where migration, especially the irregular one, has become one of the major issues on the agenda in the last decade (IOM International Organization for Migration, 2019) leading to processes of conflicts and prejudice also for the whole group of immigrants, including the regular ones and the second generations. We can hypothesize a possible impact of media on citizens' thoughts and feeling toward migrants over the past decade. Indeed, Berry (2009) showed that not only immigrants choose acculturation strategies to adapt to the host country, but also host societies implement acculturation strategies toward immigrants. Consequently, the perception of not being welcome could lead them to employ an acculturation strategy of separation (Christmas & Barker, 2014). Moreover, since Plenty & Jonsson (2017) and Durkin et al. (2012) took into account classroom density and the proportion of pupils of minority backgrounds in relation to

discriminatory aggressions, we could hypothesize that bullying is not carried out among members of the majority and minority groups.

We did not find significant effects of perceptual aspects on the outcomes. This indirectly implies the strong role of the social/legal aspects for the categorization of the social world as a sufficient condition to discriminate the others (Tajfel et al., 1971).

Additionally, no one of our variables had significant effects on ethnic bullying in both levels. At the individual level, this result firstly highlights that students with immigrant background (i.e., first and second generation immigrants) are not bullying more other classmates (i.e., not students belonging to other minority groups nor students belonging to the majority) compared to natives. At the classroom level, this result is in line with the systematic review (Basilici et al., 2022), showing in more than half of the analysis in literature about ethnic diversity and bullying perpetration a non-significant association, considering both operationalizations of ethnicity. Rather, this finding suggests looking at more interpersonal factors that affect this association which should be analyzed in future analyses (i.e., prejudice; Crocetti et al., 2021).

Lastly, the current study presents some limitations that should be mentioned. First, it adopted a cross-sectional design, thus limiting causal inferences. Future studies should analyze the association between ethnic diversity and bullying over time in order to supplement our evidence. Secondly, we did not investigate specific aspects related to ethnicity (e.g., acculturation processes, languages; Berry, 2006). Additionally, the perceptual of diversity by others is defined by the point of view of students, therefore some biases may interfere. Furthermore, future research could investigate possible gender differences. Finally, the cohort of the present study is composed only of students in the

first year of high school. Other age groups (e.g., second or third year of high school) could be analyzed to understand if processes investigated in this study could be impacted by more familiarity among students.

All in all, results from this study showed the relevant role played by social/legal aspects at both individual and classroom levels on ethnic victimization. Special attention should be given to the ethnically mixed classrooms and schools in Italy. Specifically, intervention should be set up to promote inclusion and to contrast conflicts and bullying between majority and minority groups. Following Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979), working with schools, may have an impact also for the other related systems, such as families, and informal peer groups. In general, working with youth about inclusion can be an important asset to build an inclusive and equity society and to prevent conflicts in the future.

CHAPTER 3

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on victimization and its emotional symptoms: a longitudinal study on Italians and students from immigrant backgrounds

3.1. Introduction

In recent years, Europe has been characterized by rising levels of immigration (International Organization for Migration, 2020). In 2020, nearly 87 million international migrants lived in Europe, a 16% increase since 2015 (International Organization for Migration, 2022). Even if the COVID-19 pandemic has radically changed mobility around the world, in 2020 there was also a growth of arrivals from both the Central and Western Mediterranean areas. Specifically, tens of thousands of migrants attempted to access Europe from North Africa by two major routes: from Libya and Tunisia to Italy and from Morocco and Algeria to Spain (International Organization for Migration, 2022). Besides, Spain and Italy were respectively the fifth and sixth most popular migrant destinations in Europe in 2020 (International Organization for Migration, 2022). In Italy, 10.3% of the school population has an immigrant background; in 2019/2020, Italian schools accepted a total of 8.484.000 students, of which approximately 877.000 had non-Italian citizenship. Over 65.4% of students with non-Italian citizenship were second generation immigrants (Ministero dell'Istruzione, 2021). Consequently, given the increasing presence of ethnic groups in schools and classrooms, major attention has been paid on bullying of ethnic minority groups.

Bullying victimization is one of the main risks that students may face at school (Smith, 2016). Globally, one in three students is bullied (UNESCO, 2019). It is a form of

aggressive behavior, characterized by three conditions: repetition, power imbalance, intention to harm (Olweus, 1993). Major consequences of being victimized are depression (Ttofi & Farrington, 2008; Smith, 2016), self-harm (Fisher et al., 2012), and a risk of suicide (Kim et al., 2009).

Race, nationality, or skin color is the second most common reason for being bullied (UNESCO, 2019). In Europe, 8.2% of the bullied students reported that the reason for being targeted was based on that (UNESCO, 2019). Ethnic bullying is a subtype of bias-based bullying and it refers to targeting someone because of her/his ethnic background or cultural identity (McKenney et al., 2006). It has a negative impact on victims' adjustment (e.g., internalizing and externalizing difficulties (McKenney et al., 2006). Ethnic bullying leads victims to think that their own ethnic background and social identity is the cause of victimization with consequent self-blaming and feelings of inadequacy (McKenney et al., 2006). Researchers found that cognitive styles such as rumination and self-blame may make people more vulnerable to emotional problems (Garnefski & Kraaij, 2014; Garnefski, Kraaij & Van Etten, 2005).

In general, literature consistently showed the association between peer victimization and internalizing symptoms in childhood and adolescence (Reijntjes et al., 2010; Rudolph et al., 2011; Vanderbilt & Augustyn, 2010; Van Oort et al., 2011). Specifically, a meta-analysis review of cross-sectional studies found that victimization was most strongly associated with depression, and least strongly with anxiety (Hawker & Boulton, 2000). Another study investigated two types of peer victimization (i.e., physical and relational) in the association with internalizing symptoms, and results showed that both were related (Yeung Thompson & Leadbeater, 2013). Additionally, experiences of

childhood bullying were predictive of high levels of anxiety and depression in later life (Gladstone, Parker & Malhi, 2006; Ttofi et al., 2011).

The global emergency of the COVID-19 virus

In March 2020 the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the outbreak of the Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19) pandemic. Since that time, governments' main challenge has been to "flatten the curve", to counter the spread of the virus and prevent overcrowding in Intensive Care Units (ICUs) (Jetten et al., 2020). Each government has implemented preventive measures based on the COVID-19 cases in their own country. Consequently, all life changes related to the pandemic impacted public health, including mental health (WHO, 2020). The global emergency of the COVID-19 pandemic was defined as "the biggest health emergency of our generation" (Jetten et al., 2020).

A systematic literature review including empirical studies on adolescents from four continents highlighted the great impact of the pandemic on the increase of internalizing symptoms and the decrease of academic adjustments (Branje & Morris, 2021). However, not all adolescents were affected equally by the pandemic, depending on the individual, family, and community resources available. Specifically, Branje & Morris (2021) found that those who were already at risk before the pandemic, had more negative effects as compared to those not at risk. Barendse et al., (2022) highlighted that the most negative mental health impacts during the COVID-19 pandemic were reported by multiracial adolescents.

On the topic of bullying victimization at school, literature from different countries suggested a mitigation of the phenomenon (Vaillancourt et al., 2021) and a decrease of anxiety levels among the victims of bullying during the pandemic (León, 2021).

Additionally, Mlawer et al. (2022) found a different change in depressive and anxiety symptoms, which depend on pre-pandemic peer relationships. Specifically, adolescents with higher levels of pre-pandemic peer victimization reported a less positive change in anxiety symptoms in the second data collection during the pandemic compared to the others with lower levels of pre-pandemic peer victimization; while adolescents who reported greater pre-pandemic aggression toward peers experienced less change in depressive symptoms compared to others with lower pre-pandemic aggression toward peers.

Different containment measures may have had different impacts on the population and consequences on health. Italy was the first European country to face the pandemic (WHO, 2020) and it could be relevant to understand the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on adolescents in terms of internalizing symptoms and peer victimization. On the 21st of February 2020 the first case of COVID-19 was discovered (Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center, 2020) in Italy. On March 11th, a national lockdown was declared with the implementation of measures to reduce the risk of contagion through gatherings. This included closing all schools, and students started distance learning till the end of the scholastic year (Italian Ministry of Health, 2020). In September 2020, 50% of school lessons were held in person, with distancing measures and, in the event of a positive case, the entire classroom was required to quarantine. From November 6th, 2020 to January 11th 2021, Italian secondary schools were closed and students started distance learning. By the beginning of the year 2021, the COVID-19 situation seemed to be improving so, from January 2021 to June 2021, in person secondary school lessons started at 75%, with containment measures and requirement of quarantine for all students of the classroom in the event of a positive case.

Italian literature highlighted high rates of post-traumatic stress symptoms, depression, anxiety, insomnia, perceived stress and adjustment disorders three weeks after the declaration of the lockdown in March 2020 (Rossi et al., 2020). Furthermore, Fioretti et al. (2020) explored emotional and cognitive problem patterns among Italian adolescents during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic using qualitative methods. They highlighted that absence from school, lack of social relationships, and attending online classes were major stressors for the adolescent students. In addition, Nocentini et al. (2021) showed that older adolescents and female students were more likely to be affected by the pandemic in terms of stress reactions during the first wave of COVID-19, however the impact of the pandemic did not change according to the geographical diffusion in Italy. Additionally, personal experiences (i.e., direct or indirect) with the virus were all associated with stress reactions. Besides, other stressors that the pandemic caused were related to the combined effects of the spread of the virus, lockdowns, stay-at-home orders, decreased public transport, school and business shutdowns, and decreased social interactions (Santomauro et al., 2021). About the trend of bullying, Mastorci et al. (2021) highlighted a lower perception of bullying among Italian adolescents during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic (i.e., mid-late April 2020).

3.1.1. The present study

All in all, literature highlighted that the outbreak of COVID-19 and the related adopted measures to contain the spread of the virus impacted adolescents' social interactions and their mental health (Nocentini et al., 2021). Even if Branje & Morris (2021) found that adolescents who were already at risk before the pandemic, and reported low peer support and low SES or minority status, experienced more stress during the COVID-19 pandemic, the consequences of the pandemic in relation to minority groups

have not yet been studied. Furthermore, although some studies have reported lower rates of victimization during confinement (Mastorci et al., 2021; Vaillancourt et al., 2021), it is still unclear how the developmental trajectories of people at higher risk of social exclusion and victimization changed over time during this challenging period. Additionally, studies analyzing the bullying phenomenon during the COVID-19 pandemic focused only on the first and second wave of the virus' spread in Italy (i.e., year 2020).

The aim of the present study was double: 1) to analyze trends over time in both victimization (V) and emotional symptoms (ES) from the pre-pandemic period to 15-months after the outbreak; 2) to look for differences and similarities between Italians and students from immigrant backgrounds.

3.2. Method

3.2.1. Participants and procedures

The participants were drawn from an ongoing longitudinal study started in 2019 that aims at examining the psychological mechanism related to Prejudicial Ethnic Bullying (PEB) and developing an intervention. For the participants' recruitment, secondary schools of Tuscany region were contacted by e-mail. Our only exclusion criterion was the voluntary withdrawal of schools or classrooms. Consequently, students from 10 high schools were included in the present study, all of them attended lyceum (30%), technical or vocational (70%) high schools and, specifically 36 classrooms of grade 9 (i.e., first year of high school) were involved in the present work. Participants were assured of the anonymity of their responses. Informative documents about the study were sent to parents and teachers. Students under the age of 14 were required to provide their parental consent, in addition to their own, upon both school and class council

approval of the study. Students were informed that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time. All procedure performed in studies involving human participants were approved by the Catholic University of Sacred Heart's ethnic committee and were in accordance with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

Trained researchers (psychologists) administered a set of scales. At T1, 52.9% of students filled the paper version of the questionnaires, while 47.1% filled it out online, using computers at school. In time 2 and time 3 the data were collected only online due to the COVID-19 restrictions. Researchers was connected through an online platform with the classroom, and the questionnaires administration was done also under the supervision of the teachers. Students filled in the questionnaires through their personal smartphone or digital device.

Based on approaches regarding sample size and power using structural equation modeling (Kim, 2005), the fit index root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) was used to compute the minimum sample size required to achieve a level of power .80. For the model of the present study, the minimum required sample size is 650.64 to achieve a level of power of .80, for a .05 (Kim, 2005), which is exceeded by our sample size of 826 participants.

Three times of data were gathered; data collection for time 1 occurred in January/February 2020 (before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in Italy), time 2 in February/March 2021 and time 3 in May/June 2021 (during the COVID-19 pandemic in Italy)². Retention rates between consecutive assessments ranged between 94.48% and

² The first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic included the period from March to the end of May 2020. In the months of March/April 2020, the excess deaths were 49 thousand compared to the average of the same

98.57% (95.84% between times 1 and 3). 826 were students included in the present study: 52.8% ($n=436$) were males, 46.4% ($n=383$) were females and 0.8% ($n=7$) did not specify their gender. At time 1, the age ranges from 12 to 19 ($M=15.22$; $SD=.64$). To compare participants with and without data, Little's (1988) Missing Completely at Random (MCAR) tests were performed ($\chi^2=56.558$; 51 df; $p=.275$ for victimization and emotional symptoms). The results showed that data were likely missing at random. Thus, all participants with available data at the one-time point at least were included in the analyses.

We defined the students' immigrant background by looking at three questions about the country of origin of the participants, their fathers, and mothers. Concerning mothers' nationality, 73.6% ($n=608$) declared that their mother was born in Italy, 25.8% ($n=213$) were born abroad, and 0.6% ($n=5$) did not define the mother's country of birth. Concerning fathers' nationality, 78.8% ($n=651$) of students declared that their father was born in Italy, 20.5% ($n=169$) that was born abroad, while 0.7% ($n=6$) did not define the father's country of birth. About students, 88.9% ($n=734$) were born in Italy, 10.8% ($n=89$) abroad and 0.4% ($n=3$) did not specify their country of birth. Two groups were defined: Italians, students born in Italy with at least one Italian parent (80.6%, $n=666$); students with an immigrant background (18.6%; $n=153$) composed by first generation immigrant (8.4%; $n=69$), students born abroad with foreign parents and second generation immigrant (10.2%; $n=84$), students born in Italy from parents born abroad.

months in the previous five years; 60% (29.210) of them were attributable to COVID-19 (ISTAT, 2020). In the summer season, the spread of the virus was limited from June to mid-September (transition phase). At the end of September 2020, the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic started with a rapid increase in COVID-19 cases throughout the Italian regions (ISTAT, 2020). Between February and November 2020, 57.647 deaths occurred among people who were positive for COVID-19 (ISTAT, 2020).

3.2.2. Measurements

Bullying Victimization. Victimization was measured with the Florence Bullying Victimization scales (Palladino et al., 2016). The victimization scale consists of 7 items asking how often respondents have experienced physical, verbal, and indirect behavior as a victim (e.g., “I have been beaten up”; “Rumors about me have been spread”; “I have been excluded from activities”) during the past couple of months. Each item was rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (several times a week). Internal reliability of victimization was .75, .78, and .78 at time 1, time 2, and time 3, respectively.

Emotional symptoms (ES). ES is a subscale of the Strength and Difficulties Questionnaires (SDQ), a brief self-report questionnaire of 25 items, analyzing conduct problems, hyperactivity, emotional symptoms, peer problems, and prosocial behavior (Goodman, 1997; 2001). ES was assessed by 5 items (e.g., “I get a lot of headaches, stomach-aches or sickness”, “I worry a lot”, “I am often unhappy, down-hearted or tearful”) rated on a three-point Likert scale (0= not true, 1= somewhat true, or 2= certainly true). Cronbach’s α of ES was .74, .77, and .80 at time 1, time 2, and time 3, respectively.

3.2.3. Data analysis

The analyses were conducted using Mplus version 7 (Muthén & Muthén, 2017). We used Latent Growth Curve Analysis (LGCA) In the LGCA statistical technique there are latent factors representing the initial levels of statistics variables (i.e., intercepts) and their rates of change or developmental trends (e.g., slopes) (Muthén B., 2002). Because the duration between each assessment point was not equally spaced, the three terms of each latent slope variable were fixed to 0, 1, 1.3 for time 1, time 2 (12 months after time 1), and time 3 (15 months after the time 1), respectively. Given the non-normality

distribution of variables, the MLR estimator was used. Multigroup analysis (i.e., Italians and immigrant students) was used to examine whether the level and the development of victimization and emotional symptoms were similar for Italian and students with immigrant backgrounds. Moreover, since participants were nested in classrooms, this stratification variable was added to the model. The model was evaluated according to the following indices: the chi-square (χ^2) statistic, the root-mean squared error of approximation (RMSEA), the comparative fit index (CFI), the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), and the standardized root mean squared residual (SRMR). Recommended cut-off points for RMSEA and SRMR indices are .0830 or .0630, while recommended cut-off points for CFI and TLI are .90 or .95 (Browne & Cudek, 1993).

We determined our sample size following Kim (2005), we reported all measures analyzed in this study, all data exclusion, and we follow JARS (Kazak, 2018). All data, analysis code, and research materials are available by prior request to the author. Data were analyzed using Mplus version 7 (Muthén & Muthén, 2017). This study's design and its analysis were not pre-registered.

3.3. Results

Table 3.1. provides bivariate correlations, means, and standard deviations for all study variables.

Table 3.1.

Descriptive statistics: Mean, associated standard deviations, and Pearson's r bivariate correlations. Pearson's r bivariate correlations for Italian students are shown at the top of the diagonal, while Pearson's r bivariate correlations for students with immigrant backgrounds are presented at the bottom of the diagonal.

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.
1. T1 ES	--	.588**	.581**	.158	.286*	.367**
2. T2 ES	.634**	--	.799**	.137	.263**	.321**
3. T3 ES	.615**	.698**	--	.100	.209	.327**
4. T1 V	.321**	.158**	.177**	--	.387**	.298*
5. T2 V	.229**	.223**	.171**	.506**	--	.792**
6. T3 V	.235**	.236**	.277**	.482**	.455**	--
Mean (SD)	3.47	4.29	4.54	1.41	1.34	1.25
Italians	(2.56)	(2.90)	(3.19)	(.50)	(.53)	(.34)
Mean (SD)	3.46	4.11	4.18	1.37	1.34	1.30
Students with immigrant background	(2.55)	(2.69)	(2.77)	(.48)	(.46)	(.45)

Note. * $p < .01$; ** $p < .001$; SD= Standard Deviation; T1= Time 1; T2= Time 2; T3= Time 3; ES= Emotional Symptoms; V= Victimization

The tested model showed a satisfactory fit ($\chi^2(10) = 8.773, p = .055, CFI = 1.000$ (TLI=1.005), RMSEA=0.000 [CI .000-.049], SRMR=.017). All the estimates of the tested model are shown for two groups (i.e., Italians and students with immigrant backgrounds) in Table 3.2.

The estimated slopes of Victimization were $-.257$ ($p = .038$) and $-.463$ ($p = .041$) for Italians and students with an immigrant background, respectively. These results suggest a significant decrease in victimization over the three times of data collection for both groups, Italians and students with immigrant background. The correlations between the intercepts and the slopes were significant and negative ($\beta = -.606; p < .001$ and $\beta = -.675; p = .002$; for Italians and students with immigrant background, respectively) showing that higher initial levels are related to steeper decline or more decline over time, and lower initial levels are related to slower declines or less steep negative slope.

The estimated slopes of Emotional Symptoms were $.572$ ($p = .022$), and $.406$ ($p = .024$) for Italians and students with immigrant background, respectively. These results

highlight a significant increase of emotional symptoms over three times of data collection for both groups, Italians and students with immigrant background. The correlation between each intercept and slope was non-significant.

Only for Italian students, we also found a significant correlation between the intercept of Victimization and the intercept of Emotional Symptoms ($\beta=.433$; $p<.001$). So, the higher the initial level of victimization the students experienced, the higher were their emotional symptoms in this group. Additionally, only in the same group, we found a significant negative correlation between the intercept of Victimization and the slope of Emotional Symptoms ($\beta=-.355$; $p=.037$). This result suggests that higher levels of victimization are related to a slower increase of emotional symptoms over time, and lower initial levels of victimization are related to steeper increase of emotional symptoms during the three times only for Italians.

Table 3.2.*LGC parameter estimates for victimization and emotional symptoms*

	Students with immigrant background			Italians		
	<i>Est.</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>Est.</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>P-value</i>
Intercept (V)	1.092	.312	p<.001	1.106	.181	p<.001
Slope mean (V)	-.463	.226	.041	-.257	.124	.038
Intercept (ES)	1.699	.435	p<.001	1.604	.179	p<.001
Slope mean (ES)	.406	.180	.024	.572	.250	.022
Factor covariance between intercept and slope						
Intercept (V) and slope (V)	-.675	.214	.002	-.606	.173	p<.001
Intercept (ES) and slope (ES)	-.011	.516	.984	-.163	.337	.628
Intercept (V) and Intercept (ES)	.286	.177	.106	.433	.100	p<.001
Slope (ES) and Slope (V)	.103	.189	.585	.405	.234	.083
Slope (ES) and Intercept (V)	-.071	.186	.673	-.355	.170	.037
Intercept (ES) and Slope (V)	.016	.153	.916	-.162	.104	.120

Note. Significant estimates are in bold.

3.4. Discussion

The present study aims to analyze the change over time of victimization and emotional symptoms from the pre-pandemic period to 15 months after the outbreak, looking for differences and similarities between Italians and students from immigrant backgrounds. Because of the increasing presence of multiethnic classrooms in school, literature found that students with an immigrant background were more often targets of victimization than their native peers (Peguero, 2012; Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017; Strohmeier et al., 2011). The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures adopted to contain the virus' spread impacted adolescents' social interactions and mental health (Nocentini et al., 2021), so it is relevant to understand the development of the bullying phenomenon during this challenging period. Some studies have reported lower rates of bullying during confinement (León, 2021; Vaillancourt et al., 2021). However, containment measures and lockdowns were established by the individual governments of each country, depending on the spread of the virus across the territory, and the availability of hospitals. In regards to the Italian case, Mastorci et al. (2021) conducted a survey during the first national lockdown (mid-late April 2020) among students from 10 to 14 years old, which highlighted a reduction in the perception of bullying. However, until now no longitudinal study in Italy has been published about the trajectories of bullying victimization during the COVID-19 pandemic and the parallel change over time in emotional symptoms.

In our study, we involved a sample of students who started the national lockdown five months after the beginning of their first year of high school. Immediately after the first data collection, a national lockdown was declared by the government due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. This containment measure included the closing of

schools, and students finished the school year via distance learning. The second and third data collections were gathered during the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically 12- and 15-months later the declaration of the first national lockdown. During these data collections, secondary school lessons were at 75% classroom learning, with containment measures and requirement of a class quarantine in the event of a positive case.

Our results highlighted a decrease in victimization from the pre-pandemic up until 15 months later, both for Italians and students with an immigrant background. Additionally, the correlation between the intercept and the slope of victimization were negative and significant in both groups (Italians and students with an immigrant background) showing that students that at T1 were more victimized, decreased more over time. This data further highlighted the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the phenomenon of bullying. Specifically, it seems that there was a reduction in the more systematic situations of victimization. This is in line with previous studies (Mastorci et al., 2021; Vaillancourt et al., 2021) and it could be explained by the government measures adopted to contrast the spread of the virus. After the first data collection (January/February 2020), students started with distance learning from March to June; without meeting face to face. Subsequently, they came back to school with containment measures (e.g., spending recess at one's own desk, security distancing reduction of classroom size). Teachers played an important role in the supervision of safety regulations. The decrease of victimization showed the impact of the pandemic and of the containment measures on social interactions and conflicts. The ban from attending common spaces in the school structure due to covid regulations may have prevented contact and interactions between students. This is in line with studies (Vaillancourt et al., 2010; 2021) which specify the cafeteria, outside break spaces, and the hallways as places

at risk for bullying. Additionally, smaller classroom sizes could support a cooperative classroom climate and prosocial behaviors (Finn et al., 2001; Vaillancourt et al., 2021). Besides, more teacher supervision could have been a relevant factor in the decrease of bullying victimization.

Our results also showed an increase from the T1 (pre COVID-19 pandemic) to T3 (after 15 months), both for Italians and students with immigrant backgrounds. Literature about Italy showed that immediately after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, there were higher rates of post-traumatic stress symptoms, depression, anxiety, perceived stress and adjustment disorder among adolescents; additionally, the impact of the pandemic seemed to exist regardless of the geographical area of diffusion (Fioretti et al., 2020; Nocentini et al., 2021; Rossi et al., 2020). Specifically, adolescents denounce as stress factors the absence of school as a place for relationships and the online classrooms (Fioretti et al., 2020). Looking at later studies, a systematic review focused on studies of the COVID-19 pandemic up until January 2021 (11 month after the outbreak) showed lockdowns, stay-at-home orders, school and business shutdowns and decreased social interactions as negative effects of the spread of the virus (Santomauro et al., 2021). Even if during T2 and T3 of our data collection, students went back to 75% in classroom learning, we were still in a state of emergency with containment measures and mandatory classroom quarantines in the event of even one positive case. Consequently, students went to school in a state of alert. Additionally, the class was a potentially risk place for the spread of the virus, so many students continued to quarantine to avoid positive contacts. The fear of infecting family members at home and other similar factors (i.e., loss of work, low SES) may have been additional stressors. The pandemic may have had different effects on adolescents; those who experienced loneliness or depressive symptoms during

the lockdown and those who showed better adjustment in regards to parent-child relationship quality (Branje & Morris, 2021) or a reduction of daily stress and social pressure (Bruining et al., 2021). However, after spending half of the school year in blended learning, the students' back-to-school typology may have harmed both groups of adolescents. Alternating between distance learning and going to school, the anxiety of being infected by the virus, classroom quarantines, and the uncertainty of the situation day by day may have increased the emotional symptoms of those who experienced symptoms of depression and anxiety during the total lockdown, and these could have harmed those who had shown good adjustment, by disrupting their daily routine and increasing their stress.

Furthermore, students included in the present study faced the COVID-19 pandemic during their adolescence. This is a period of physical, emotional and social transformation (Blakemore, 2012) where social relationships are crucial in order to developing an independent sense of identity (Larson et al., 1996). The peer context has direct effects on social development, including self-esteem and social adjustment (Berndt, 2002). Higher levels of social connectedness in adolescence are related to better well-being over time (Jose, Ryan & Pryor, 2012). First, the national lockdown and later, the containment measures reduced the possibilities of interacting with peers in several contexts (i.e., school, sport, neighborhood, other organized activities). So, the increasing emotional symptoms of the present sample could be also related to the lack of social interactions during adolescence.

Unexpectedly, in the group of students from immigrant backgrounds, there was no significant correlation between the intercepts of victimization and emotional symptoms or between the intercepts and the slopes. We expected that students from

immigrant backgrounds were at higher risk of bullying victimization than native students, in line with the literature (Graham & Juvonen, 2002; Strohmeier & Spiel, 2003). This result could be related to the fact that at time 1, students of the present study were in their first year of high school, so they had been in the same classrooms for only four months, after graduating from middle school and changing all their classmates, teachers and their general environment (i.e., usually high schools are not as close to home as middle schools are). This could suggest that the significant peers of the minority group may be outside the classroom. Again, they could have different stories of bullying victimization in middle school; they might have suffered from victimization in the past and benefited from a new classroom context or, they may not have been impacted by bullying behaviors in the new context in terms of consequences – at least not yet. Additionally, there could be some factors that could have moderated the impact of victimization on students such as sociocultural aspects or parents' support (Xu et al., 2020). Again, literature highlighted that a strong ethnic identity is negatively correlated with loneliness and depression, so this factor should be analyzed to better understand the result (Roberts et al., 1999). Besides, other research found an association between the need for peer acceptance and peer aggression, showing a stronger effect for first generation immigrants than for second generation students (Strohmeier et al., 2012). So, also the consequences of victimization should be analyzed taking into account the generation of immigrants to which students belong. All in all, we cannot exclude the presence of other mechanisms and psychological factors affecting the findings, which were not considered in the present study.

Differently from students with immigrant backgrounds, for Italian students, a positive correlation between the intercept of victimization and the intercept of emotional symptoms was found. This means that being victimized is related to higher emotional

symptoms. This result confirms the studies in the literature about the short-term consequences of bullying resulting in low levels of psychological well-being and social adjustment, and high levels of psychological distress (Rigby, 2003).

Among native students, results suggested that the COVID-19 pandemic had a greater impact in terms of emotional symptoms on those who were not victimized at time 1 than those who were victimized before the pandemic. This result is also in line with Mlawer et al. (2021) and highlighted the great impact of the pandemic on students' mental health. Specifically, it seems that the pandemic had an impact on the phenomenon of bullying victimization, at least in the period examined in this study. On the other hand, students that were not victims of bullying before the pandemic showed a greater increase in emotional symptoms. This suggested how the emergency impacted not only students that were already at risk, but all the others as well. This result could be linked to the numerous difficulties that the pandemic caused to the population; many families faced economic crises (Codagnone et al., 2020), and this may have been reflected in adolescents' anxieties and worries. Regarding stress factors related to distance learning, some students could also have suffered from school burnout (Salmela-Aro et al., 2021).

3.5. Conclusion

The role played by the pandemic in bullying victimization highlights that this phenomenon should not be underestimated. This has led us to ask what will happen with the return of students to so-called "normality". The school community must face a new difficult situation, where students with higher emotional symptoms compared to the past return to classrooms together after a long period of no face-to-face interactions. This study reinforces results in the literature regarding the great psychological impact of the COVID-

19 pandemic on adolescents. Students who come back to classrooms after this challenging period are stressed, affected by anxiety and other psychological problems. Additionally, they may also have difficulties studying in person and suffer from low school engagement. Salmela-Aro et al. (2021) highlighted the role of socio-emotional competencies in protecting students exposed to crisis situations, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Following this line of research, the school community should implement interventions to promote socio-emotional skills and help students with their difficulties. Furthermore, interventions to make the school community resilient should be set up to face future crises, and parents, teachers and educators should pay greater attention to the emotional problems of adolescents. Finally, public policies should consider the great difficulties of Italian adolescents and promote initiatives to help them overcome the hardships caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.6. Limitations and strengths of the present study

The present study should be considered in light of some limitations.

First, the sample of students from immigrant backgrounds is small compared to the Italians. Second, given the long-term nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, this study focused on three assessments over 15 months after the outbreak of the pandemic, when the spread of the virus was still a public emergency. It could be interesting to analyze other phases in order to obtain specific differences in the development of the impact of the pandemic at further stages. Third, this study focused exclusively on victimization and it does not consider bullies on one side and ethnic victimization on the other, limiting our possibility to also analyze those who were bully victims or the ethnic dynamics within the classrooms. Fourth, all the data were self-reported. This may have influenced the estimates of the phenomena measured. Finally, findings of the present study are closely

related to the Italian context and the restrictive measures put in place by the government to slow the spread of the virus may have influenced the data. So, this study is context-specific, and the findings cannot be generalized to other countries. Despite the limitations, the present study was the first one to investigate longitudinal effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on bullying victimization in Italy. Since each government declared containment measures based on the spread of the virus in its state, it is probable that the COVID-19 pandemic had different effects in different places. Additionally, with the goal of further understanding the mechanisms of bullying towards minorities at school, this study took into account both Italians and students from immigrant backgrounds, on which Italian literature is limited.

CHAPTER 4

General discussion and conclusions

The main aim of the present dissertation was to shed light on structural and psychological mechanisms explaining bullying among native and immigrant students, in order to prevent bullying behaviors in schools and to promote a society characterized by positive intercultural interactions, equity, and inclusion. Specifically, three studies were conducted: 1) Ethnic diversity and bullying in school: a systematic review; 2) The impact of social/legal and perceptual aspects of ethnic diversity on bullying at school; 3) The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on victimization and its emotional symptoms: a longitudinal study on Italians and students from immigrant backgrounds.

As a consequence of worldwide waves of immigration, there is a permanent increase of ethnically mixed classrooms in countries all over the world (International Organization for Migration, 2020). However, to date, scientific literature showed limited and mixed results about the impact of ethnic diversity on the involvement in bullying in school (Bellmore et al., 2012; Closson et al., 2014; Jansen et al., 2016; Tolsma et al., 2013). Thus, since the importance of understanding the impact of diversity on social negative interactions, the first study of the present dissertation (Chapter 1) was a systematic literature review of published studies concerning the association between ethnic diversity and bullying in school. Specifically, the aim was twofold: 1) to analyze the association between school and/or classroom ethnic diversity and bullying perpetration and victimization; 2) to investigate the role of possible moderating factors of this association (i.e., the geographical area where data have been collected, the operationalization of the definition of ethnicity, how ethnic diversity was computed, and

the school level). Among others, results suggested some aspects that need attention by scholars on this topic and informed the other studies of the present dissertation. First, there is a limited number of studies on this topic, especially in relation to bullying perpetration. Second, the overlap in the literature between the area of data collection (i.e., Europe vs North America) and the operationalization of ethnicity (i.e., focus on immigrant background vs race) highlighted the possible role of the socio-political context and the historical development of each country on the association between school and classroom ethnic diversity and bullying.

Therefore, the aim of study 2 (Chapter 2) was to analyze the impact of two aspects that relate to ethnic diversity (i.e., social/legal and perceptual aspects) on ethnic bullying perpetration and victimization using multilevel models. The focus of this study was on both outcomes to take into account victim-bully behaviors as well. The study involved students attending the first year of high school (i.e., grade 9) from 13 schools. Results showed the effect of the social/legal aspects on ethnic victimization at both individual and classroom levels. Not having Italian citizenship seemed to act as a risk factor for ethnic victimization over and above the perceptual differences. No effects of both aspects of ethnic diversity on ethnic bullying have been found at the individual level nor the classroom level.

Finally, study 3 (Chapter 3) of the present dissertation has been developed, following the sudden outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, in March 2020 the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the outbreak of the CoronaVirus Disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which has been defined as a psychosocial catastrophe (Cerami et al., 2020) that had a great impact on mental health (WHO, 2022). Even if literature showed an increase in internalizing symptoms in adolescents (Branje & Morris, 2021;

Barendse, 2022) and a decrease in bullying phenomenon during the COVID-19 pandemic (Lèon, 2021; Vaillancourt et al., 2021), to date, the impact of the pandemic on these phenomena has not yet been analyzed in Italy, taking into account differences related to students' immigrant background. So, this longitudinal study was carried out with students with and without an immigrant background in Italy pre- and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Results showed a decrease in victimization and an increase in emotional symptoms over time in both groups. Among Italians, students who started from low levels of emotional symptoms before the pandemic and who were not victimized experienced greater growth in emotional symptoms 15-months after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. These results showed the great impact of this catastrophic event not only on students who were at risk before the outbreak of the virus but on all the others.

4.1. Dissertation's contribution to the literature

The association between ethnic diversity and bullying perpetration and victimization

The first contribution wanted to synthesize, by a systematic literature review, the state of the art in the area of ethnic bullying. Specifically, scientific research on the role of ethnic diversity in bullying in school has started about 10 years ago, but to date, the literature showed mixed and limited results. Given the strong impact of ethnic bullying in school and the negative consequences of this behavior on adolescents' mental health (McKenney et al., 2006), the first contribution aimed to analyze the association between school and classroom ethnic diversity and both bullying perpetration and victimization. As a first result, we found few studies on this topic (i.e., specifically, 13 analyses belonging to 10 papers concerning ethnic diversity and bullying perpetration and, 33

analyses belonging to 20 papers about ethnic diversity and bullying victimization), highlighting the impact of diversity on social negative interactions is still understudied. Therefore, the need for further understanding of the topic guided the design and implementation of study 2 of the present dissertation. Furthermore, this line of research led us also to wonder if bullies belonged to the majority or the minority group. Again, literature is still mixed on this question (Cohen et al., 1990; Vervoort et al., 2010; Walsh et al., 2016), which is addressed in study 2 of the present dissertation.

Regarding the association between school and classroom ethnic diversity and victimization, results were mainly in line with Graham (2006), who hypothesized ethnic diversity to be a protective factor against bullying. However, a contribution provided by the present study is to show that these articulated results could be disentangled by considering some moderating factors of the association between ethnic diversity and bullying perpetration and victimization. Specifically, the relevant role of the operationalization of ethnicity/area of data collection and participants' school level has been highlighted. A clear trend emerged about bullying victimization: in North America, focusing on race, ethnic diversity seems to be a protective factor for victimization, while in the European context, where the operationalization of ethnicity was based on the immigrant background of participants, ethnic diversity may constitute also a risk factor. It underlined the possible role of the story and the socio-political context of each country in influencing the attitudes toward diversity (Verdier et al., 2012). So, study 1 emphasized and invited future studies on ethnic bullying to pay attention to the socio-political context and the history of immigration in each country. Indeed, North America and Europe have been characterized by different migration histories (IOM International Organization for Migration, 2019) that could have impacted the discriminative behaviors of their citizens.

While America, especially the United States, is identified by a long history of immigration, Europe has only recently been flooded with migratory flows from several countries (IOM International Organization for Migration, 2019). Furthermore, issues related to irregular migration are arousing political and public debates (IOM International Organization for Migration, 2019). This climate of uncertainty and controversy could have also influenced students' attitudes toward diversity.

Finally, study 1 contributed to literature disentangling the role of participants' school level in the association between ethnic diversity and bullying: ethnic diversity seems to be a risk factor at younger ages and turns into a more protective factor in secondary schools. This trend showed the importance of considering different developmental processes influencing the association between ethnic diversity and bullying.

The different aspects related to ethnicity and their impact on bullying

The overlap between the operationalization of ethnicity and the area of data collection (i.e., participants' perceptual aspects/North America vs social/legal aspects/Europe) in literature highlighted the possible role of a methodological issue. This result from study 1 led us to hypothesize that distinct categorizations could underline different processes affecting the relationship between ethnic diversity and ethnic bullying and victimization. Consequently, in study 2 this issue has been deepened and analyzed. The ethnicity of students from high school (i.e., grade 9) has been analyzed in two different ways: based on their social/legal aspects (i.e., the citizenship status) and their perceptive aspects (i.e., being identified as from a different ethnic group by a stranger). This study contributes to the literature on ethnic bullying and victimization by

simultaneously testing the impact of different categorizations of ethnicity at both individual and classroom levels, using a multilevel modeling technique. Results differed depending on the social indicator considered (i.e., social/legal aspects seem to impact more than perceptive aspects on ethnic victimization both at individual and classroom levels). Together with findings from study 1, these results suggest that different operationalizations of ethnicity could explain mixed findings in the literature on the association between ethnic diversity and bullying victimization.

Furthermore, study 2 showed the great impact of the social/legal aspects on ethnic victimization in Italy (Europe), suggesting one more time the possible effect of the socio-political context of the country, already highlighted in study 1. Additionally, the questions addressed by study 1 concern if native students bully students with immigrant backgrounds or vice versa. Study 2 did not show significant effects of ethnic diversity on ethnic bullying, suggesting that students with an immigrant background could be the victims rather than the bullies. Both in studies 1 and 2 of the present dissertation, Europe appeared as a country characterized by a society in which prevailed discriminatory attitudes and bullying behaviors towards people from immigrant backgrounds and ethnic diversity constituted a risk factor rather than a positive resource.

Finally, since studies 1 and 2 showed that in studies conducted in Europe, ethnicity is mainly defined by social/legal aspects, this categorization was also used in study 3.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

The last contribution aimed to analyze trends over time in both victimization and emotional symptoms from the pre-pandemic period to 15 months after the outbreak in

Italy, examining differences and similarities between native and students from immigrant backgrounds. Prior works have highlighted the great impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on adolescents' mental health (Branje & Morris, 2021; Fioretti et al., 2020; Nocentini et al., 2021; Rossi et al., 2020) and only a few studies have focused on the bullying phenomenon in school yet (Mastorci et al., 2021; Vaillancourt et al., 2021). In 2020, Italy has been the first country after China that had to face the pandemic (WHO, 2020). However, despite the impact this event has had on the nation at the moment, study 3 was the first longitudinal study to analyze the trajectories of bullying behaviors and emotional symptoms among adolescents before and during the pandemic. Additionally, this was the first study investigating the effects of the pandemic taking into consideration students' immigrant backgrounds.

The present dissertation showed the great and transversal impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on adolescents, despite the peculiar differences of the groups involved in the study (i.e., native and students from an immigrant background). Specifically, at first, study 3 highlighted an increase over time in the emotional symptoms of students, regardless of their immigrant background. Furthermore, this study contributed to the research on the topic of bullying in challenging periods such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Scientific research on the evolution of this behavior after the outbreak of the virus is very limited, especially in the Italian literature. So, the decrease in bullying victimization during the pandemic contributed to the scientific knowledge about structural factors and mechanisms related to it, especially on bullying towards students from immigrant backgrounds on which literature is still limited. Notably, this study warns about the return of students to school, who will relate again with their peers face to face daily, and suggests the need for follow-up in future research.

Finally, given the magnitude of the COVID-19 pandemic (Jetten et al., 2020; WHO, 2022), study 3 contributes also to the literature on the effects that historical events have had on people's lives. In a previous historical event, Elder (1994) showed the consequences of the Great Depression on families and their children's insecurity and how the mass mobilization in World War II influenced families' dynamics due to the fathers' absence from households over a period of years. Again, youths who experienced the Great economic recession crisis displayed worse conduct problems, higher levels of absenteeism, and, lower self-efficacy than precrisis youths (Motti-Stefanidi & Asendorpf, 2017). Additionally, Schoon (2006), defining the social causation hypothesis, claimed how events related to a change in the socio-economic sector (e.g., World War, COVID-19 pandemic) influence individual adjustment. All in all, in light of the "Life course theory" (Elder, 1998), historical forces form the social trajectories of family, education, and work contexts, thus influencing lines of development. Consequently, all life choices are contingent on historical events, social structure, and, the culture of belonging (Elder, 1998). Following this line of research and given the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on adolescents highlighted by study 3, the present dissertation suggests that it is not possible to ignore the historical event of the COVID-19 pandemic in the analysis of the psychological patterns of current generations.

4.2. Limitations and future research

In addition to the study-specific points explained in the three central chapters (e.g., the limited number of studies in the literature on the association between ethnic diversity and bullying, the importance of analyzing the differences between first and second generation of immigrants, the timing of data collections), some general limitations of the present dissertation must be acknowledged.

First, a methodological limitation is related to the use of student self-report measures, which could have been affected by social desirability or respondent bias and led results to possible misinterpretation.

Secondly, studies 2 and 3 of the present dissertation are culture-specific. Indeed, as it has been pointed out by the chapters' discussion, results could be strongly influenced by the political climate and the history of the country. Consequently, cross-cultural studies are strongly recommended in future research.

In general, the present dissertation points out some directions of research investigation on ethnic bullying victimization. The first consideration arising from the three central chapters concerns the great impact of contextual factors on bullying toward ethnic minorities. Following Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory (1979), future studies could take into account all systems; individual (i.e., age, immigrant background), mesosystem (i.e., interactions between systems), exosystem (i.e., the role of mass media, local policies, social services), macrosystem (i.e., culture, ideology laws, and customs) and chronosystem (i.e., historical events such as the pandemic). The three chapters of the present dissertation showed that all these factors could have a role in the social interactions between native and students with immigrant backgrounds. Future studies are strongly encouraged to consider both individual and contextual factors in studying bullying behaviors.

Regarding the controversial theories about the role of classroom and school ethnic diversity as a risk condition (the Intergroup Conflict Theory; Turner, Brown & Tajfel, 1979; the Social Dominance Theory; Sidanius et al., 1994; the Integrative Threats Theory; Stephan & Stephan, 2000) or a protective factor (the Contact Hypothesis; Allport, 1954)

for bullying, given the limited number of studies on the topic, it has been important to take moderating factors into account in the present dissertation. Results showed that intergroup contacts play a relevant role in the implementation of bullying behaviors, but it is not possible to ignore the impact of the context to fully understand the interactions between different ethnic groups in schools in each country. Future studies are strongly encouraged to consider this factor.

Additionally, the literature showed the role of one's perception of diversity in leading to prejudice toward others (Fennelly, 2008). However, as this dissertation showed, it's also important to consider the social/legal aspects of diversity in studying bullying behaviors.

Furthermore, literature on bullying towards ethnic minorities is still limited. Since the increasing presence of multiethnic classrooms and schools (IOM International Organization for Migration, 2022), the consideration of the participants' immigrant background in all future studies is strongly recommended.

Finally, given the strong impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on all groups of adolescents (i.e., natives and students from an immigrant background) highlighted in study 3, future research could analyze the effects of these historical events also in the long-term, looking for differential effects on minority groups that have not been captured in the present dissertation.

4.3. Practical implications for educational and public policies

The present dissertation showed the need to implement interventions to prevent bullying behaviors toward peers of different ethnicity/origins. Schools should promote intercultural competencies in both native and students from immigrant backgrounds,

through positive and well-planned intergroup contact opportunities (Allport, 1954; Zambuto et al., 2022).

Specifically, the findings of the three studies suggested the importance of intervening both at the individual and community levels. Following this line of research, public policy should take into account the impact of legislation on populations' behaviors (i.e., the acquisition of citizenship). Additionally, the host country government should support youth with an immigrant background in the adaptation and acculturation process in their new society (i.e., learning the host cultures and languages; Berry, 2006).

In general, the major events of the current historical period that imply population movements (e.g., the COVID-19 pandemic, economic crisis, the war between Russia and Ukraine) and the research data (IOM International Organization for Migration, 2022) suggested a steady increase in the phenomenon of immigration in the future, actions in favor of integration between ethnic groups and cultures are strongly needed.

As Berry (2016) claimed, societies that value cultural diversity and adopt a multicultural ideology promote equity, integration, and, a positive adaptation of all young people and individuals. All in all, in a highly diverse and globalizing world, an important challenge is to become able to engage appropriately and respectfully in intercultural interactions and dialogue with people from other cultural backgrounds, to promote the well-being of individuals and societies.

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APPENDIX 1

CHAPTER 1: Ethnic diversity and bullying in school: a systematic review

Table 1.4.

Quality assessment report

Article	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	Total score
Agirdag, O., Demanet, J., Van Houtte, M., & Van Avermaet, P. (2011)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	1.00
Bellmore, A., Nishina, A., You, J. I., & Ma, T. L. (2012)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	1.00
Cavicchiolo, E., Girelli, L., Leo, I. D., Manganelli, S., Lucidi, F., & Alivernini, F. (2019)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	1.00
Closson, L. M., Darwich, L., Hymel, S., & Waterhouse, T. (2014)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Partially	0.90
Connell, N. M., El Sayed, S., Reingle Gonzalez, J. M., & Schell-Busey, N. M. (2015)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Partially	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	0.90
Durkin, K., Hunter, S., Levin, K. A., Bergin, D., Heim, D., & Howe, C. (2012)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	1.00
Felix, E. D., & You, S. (2011)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Partially	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	0.90
Fisher, S., Middleton, K., Ricks, E., Malone, C., Briggs, C., & Barnes, J. (2015)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	1.00
Hoglund, W. L., & Hosan, N. E. (2013)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Partially	0.90
Jansen, P. W., Mieloo, C. L., Dommisse-van Berkel, A., Verlinden, M., van der Ende, J., Stevens, G., ... & Tiemeier, H (2016)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	1.00
Juvonen, J., Nishina, A., & Graham, S. (2006)	Yes	Yes	Partially	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	0.90

Larochette, A. C., Murphy, A. N., & Craig, W. M. (2010)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	1.00
Mehari, K. R., & Farrell, A. D. (2015)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Partially	0.90
Plenty, S., & Jonsson, J. O (2017)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	1.00
Stefanek, E., Strohmeier, D., van de Schoot, R., & Spiel, C (2011)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	1.00
Tolsma, J., van Deurzen, I., Stark, T. H., & Veenstra, R. (2013)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	1.00
Verkuyten, M., & Thijs, J. (2002)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Partially	0.90
Vervoort, M. H., Scholte, R. H., & Overbeek, G. (2010)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	1.00
Vitoroulis, I., Brittain, H., & Vaillancourt, T. (2016)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	1.00
Walsh, S. D., De Clercq, B., Molcho, M., Harel-Fisch, Y., Davison, C. M., Madsen, K. R., & Stevens, G. W. (2016)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	1.00

Quality assessment criteria: 1= study question sufficiently described; 2= design evident and appropriate to answer study question; 3= method of subject selection (and comparison group selection, if applicable) is described and appropriate; 4= subject (and comparison group, if applicable) characteristics sufficiently described; 5= outcome and (if applicable) exposure measure(s) well defined and robust to measurement; 6= sample size appropriate; 7= analysis described and appropriate; 8= some estimate of variance for the main results/outcomes; 9= controlled for confounding; 10= results reported in sufficient detail; 11= do the results support the conclusion. Studies were scored depending on the degree to which the specific criteria were met (“yes”=2; “partial”=1; “no”=0). A summary score was calculated for each paper by summing the total score obtained across relevant items and dividing by the total possible score (for a complete description of the score computing procedure, see Kmet et al., 2004).

APPENDIX 2

CHAPTER 2: The association between social/legal and perceptual aspects of ethnicity and ethnic bullying and victimization

Table 2.2.

Multilevel model of ethnic bullying and victimization

	Ethnic Victimization			Ethnic Bullying		
	Parameter estimate	S.E.	Two-Tailed P value	Parameter estimate	S.E.	Two-Tailed P value
<i>Within Level</i>						
Social/legal aspects-the citizenship status	-.270	.055	p<.001	-.014	.026	.589
Perception of diversity by others	.048	.059	.415	.017	.030	.572
Social/legal aspects-the citizenship status with the perception of diversity by others	-.321	.048	p<.001			
Ethnic bullying with ethnic victimization	.259	.113	.022			
<i>Between Level</i>						
Classroom ethnic diversity-social/legal aspects	.538	.268	.044	.020	.088	.820
Classroom ethnic diversity-perceptual diversity	.176	.149	.237	.255	.219	.244
Classroom ethnic diversity by social/legal aspects with classroom ethnic diversity by perceptual diversity	.526	.096	p<.001			
Ethnic bullying with ethnic victimization	.023	.228	.920			

Note. Significant estimates are in bold.

Ethnic Bullying and Ethnic Victimization Scales

Table 2.3.

Ethnic Bullying Scale

<i>Items</i>	<i>During the last 2/3 months</i>
Item 1	I spread rumors about someone because of his/her ethnicity/origin
Item 2	I excluded someone because of his/her ethnicity/origin
Item 3	I beat someone because of his/her ethnicity/origin
Item 4	I made fun of someone because of his/her ethnicity/origin

Note. Each item was evaluated along a 5-point scale: “never”, “only 1 or 2 times”, “2 or 3 times per month”, “once a week” and “several times a week”.

Table 2.4.

Ethnic Victimization Scale

<i>Items</i>	<i>During the last 2/3 months</i>
Item 1	Rumors about me have been spread because of my ethnicity/origin
Item 2	I was excluded because of my ethnicity/origin
Item 3	I was beaten because of my ethnicity/origin
Item 4	Someone made fun of me because of my ethnicity/origin

Note. Each item was evaluated along a 5-point scale: “never”, “only 1 or 2 times”, “2 or 3 times per month”, “once a week” and “several times a week”.

APPENDIX 3

CHAPTER 3: The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on victimization and its emotional symptoms: a longitudinal study on Italians and students from immigrant backgrounds

Table 3.3.

Items of Victimization's subscale (Florence Bullying Victimization Scale; Palladino et al., 2016)

Items	During the last 2-3 months
Item 1	I have been beaten up
Item 2	I have been teased
Item 3	I have been excluded from activities.
Item 4	Rumors about me have been spread.
Item 5	My personal belongings have been stolen or damaged.
Item 6	I have been pushed and shoved.
Item 7	I have been threatened.

Note. Each item was evaluated along a 5-point scale: “never”, “only 1 or 2 times”, “2 or 3 times per month”, “once a week”, and “several times a week”.

Table 3.4.

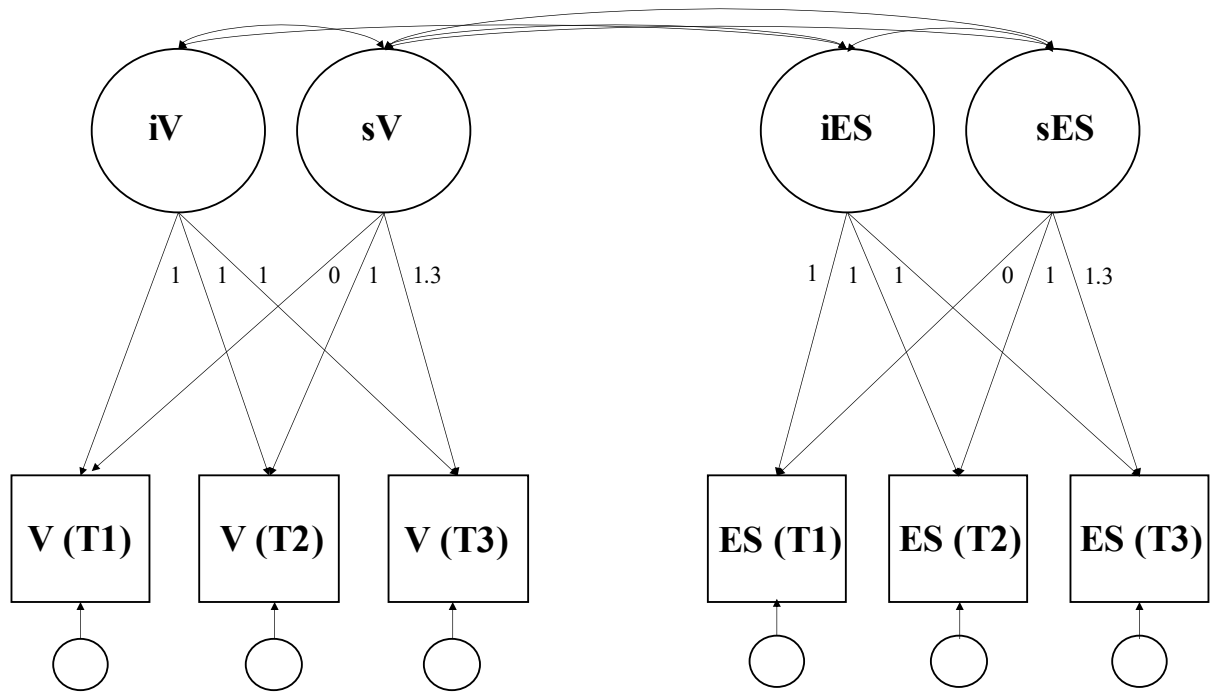
Items of Emotional Symptoms' subscale (Strength and Difficulties Questionnaires; Goodman, 1997; 2001)

Items	
Item 1	Often complains of headaches, stomach-aches or sickness
Item 2	Many worries, often seem worried
Item 3	Often unhappy, down-hearted, or tearful
Item 4	Nervous or clingy in new situations, easily loses confidence
Item 5	Many fears, easily scared

Note. Each item was evaluated along a 3-point scale: “not true”, “somewhat true”, and “certainly true”.

Figure 3.1.

LGC on victimization and emotional symptoms



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Dr. Maria Chiara Basilici (Ph.D. Candidate)