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## INTERGROUP BULLYING AND RACIAL HARASSMENT IN THE NETHERLANDS

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*This paper applies Olweus' research on bullying to the question of racial harassment among youths ages 12-17. Data from the Netherlands show that there is a racial dimension to bullying, but that it is not the sole or predominant attribute of bullying appearing in multiracial settings.*

**Introduction.** In recent decades, several European nations have seen a growth of ethnic minorities as a share of their population. The Netherlands was no exception. This demographic trend has created concern among Dutch policy-makers about the possibility of growing racially-motivated violence.

Other West-European nations have raised similar concerns, some of them reflected in research. For example, Dawson's recent study in the inner city of Coventry (Britain) found that whites and Asians were equally often the victim of property offenses and of sexual assault. However, 55% of the Asians were the victims of harassment (broken windows, insults, telephone calls), which was the case for 35% of whites. Some of these harassments were apparently racially-motivated. Although a similar study is lacking in the Netherlands, several reports detail instances of racial discrimination (see, e.g., Biegel & Tjoen-Tak-Sen, 1986; Biegel, Bocker & Tjoen-Tak-Sen, 1987).

There is reason to suspect that youths are often more at risk than adults when it comes to racial harassment and physical attack. This conclusion is suggested not only by most victimization surveys, but also by a report, "Living in Terror," compiled by Great Britain's Commission for Racial Equality. It presents many examples of racial harassment of ethnic minority children, ranging from racist name calling to one case in which a boy was stabbed to death.

Since there is no comparable report for the Netherlands, one purpose of this paper is to fill the gap. We attempt to measure, for the Netherlands, the extent of racial harassment in school among boys of four ethnic groups. For this reason alone, the study is timely, since racial tension is a matter of public concern. However, there are broader scientific concerns. First, racial tensions are now common in so many nations that it is a good idea to gather comparable data on a similar subject in many settings. Second, racial mistreatment may fit into a larger picture of "bullying," for which a research tradition is already found in research by Olweus (1978, 1987) on "bullies and whipping boys" in Sweden, as well as Norway, with increasing evidence in other settings.

**Ethnic minorities in the Netherlands.** The

three largest ethnic minority groups in the Netherlands are the Turks (approximately: 161,000), the Surinamese (approximately: 150,000) and the Moroccans (approximately: 123,000). Most of the persons belonging to these ethnic groups came to the Netherlands during the last 30 years. The Turkish migrants generally came in the 1960s; the Moroccans, at the beginning of the 1970s; and the Surinamese (or Surinamers), the end of the 1970s.

Surinam is a former colony of the Netherlands (once named Dutch Guyana). Approximately 90% of the Surinamese now living in the Netherlands are Dutch citizens. Despite citizenship, Surinamese remain a socially-defined minority in the Netherlands. The Surinamese have a diverse ethnic background. In the present study, 52% are from Hindu families of Asian origin; 22% describe themselves as Creole (namely, of African origin); and 26% have other ethnic backgrounds. Whatever the distinctions and conflicts among these groups in Surinam, minority status in the Netherlands has pushed them somewhat together into an identifiable minority.

The Turks and Moroccans are migrants or "guest-workers" who came to the Netherlands to work for a limited number of years. They came to do mainly unskilled (and badly paid) jobs in the 1960s at a moment of strong economic growth. The industries in which they found work are now suffering severe recession. Although their intention was to stay temporarily, many of them brought their families to the Netherlands; it is now generally assumed that most of them will stay in the Netherlands permanently.

Overall, Turks and Moroccans occupy an unfavorable position in Dutch society. In Turkish and Moroccan communities, unemployment and illiteracy rates are high, the average socioeconomic and educational levels are low, while housing conditions are bad in comparison with Dutch citizens. Turks and Moroccans, coming from Islamic countries, differ from the Dutch in other aspects. They have traditional views about the subordinate position of women in society.

The lack of citizenship puts the Turks and Moroccans at risk of expulsion from the Netherlands back to their own country, for example after having served a long prison sentence. Even the threat of expulsion creates a position of insecurity. Surinamese, generally having Dutch citizenship, do not have this insecurity.

Coming from a former colony Surinamese

share elements of the Dutch culture: they speak Dutch, learned Dutch history and geography at school and some of them have the same religious background (Catholic or Protestant). Many of them came when the recession made jobs hard to find. In many respects Surinamese have a position in between the white-Dutch citizens and the immigrants. In general Surinamese speak Dutch rather well, their education level is relatively high, their housing conditions are not poor and their socioeconomic status is higher than the SES of the other immigrants. However, on all these factors, they do not attain the Dutch average SES (see for example Junger-Tas, 1985).

**Data.** The data presented in this paper come from a comprehensive study designed to answer (among other things) the question of the degree of victimization of crime of different ethnic groups in the Netherlands. The sample of ethnic minority boys is random but the sample of indigenous Dutch boys is "comparable" in socioeconomic background and type of schools they attend.

Approximately 200 boys ages 12 to 17 from four ethnic groups were interviewed: Moroccans, Turks, Surinamese and native Dutch. For every third minority boy, we interviewed one Dutch boy of the same age, living on the same street or block. This was an effort to make the sample of native boys similar in socioeconomic background to those from ethnic minorities. This group of Dutch boys will be referred to as the "comparison group." The boys in the sample came from 33 different localities in the Netherlands (see Appendix).

The comparison group of Dutch boys was imperfect. The Dutch boys are similar in SES to the Surinamese boys, but are somewhat higher in SES than the Moroccan and Turkish boys. Perhaps we should not be surprised that absolute equivalence between the groups was not attained, given the great social differences between the immigrants and native Dutch population. Although perfect matching among ethnic groups is probably impossible, we can view the "comparison" groups as allowing a partial, if not complete, SES control.

Personal interviews were carried out by a private contractor (NSS marktonderzoek). The structured questionnaire included many questions on family, school and leisure time activities. Respondents were also asked whether they avoided particular groups of boys, disliked them, or did not want to get involved with them. Racial harassment was operationalized in questions about verbal abuse and bullying.

**Results.** Some 30% of all boys stated that they avoid particular groups of youths. This figure is the same in each ethnic group (239 of 811;  $p > .05$ ). Those youths who affirmed their avoidance of some groups of youths were asked to specify what types of youths they did not want to get involved with. Seventy-two per cent of the 30% who avoided some types of boys gave

nonracial types, including "punks," "squatters," "boys who discriminate," "boys who are causing trouble." The remaining 28% of the 30% "avoiders" do not want to mix with boys of particular ethnic groups. In other words, only about eight per cent of the total sample mention avoiding boys from particular ethnic groups.

As can be seen in Table 1, these figures are identical for each ethnic group. This suggests that expressing feelings of dislike towards particular categories of people and/or towards other ethnic groups is something which is not limited to a particular ethnic group, but rather occurs in every ethnic group.

*Experiences with racial harassment.* The boys were asked how often they were bullied at school or had been abused verbally. The results show that overall 74% of respondents mention that they are never or rarely bullied; 20% of them mention being bullied from time to time; and six per cent mention being bullied often or very often (see Table 2). Verbal abuse is mentioned somewhat more often: 68% of respondents mention that this almost never happens to them, 26% mention that they are abused verbally from time to time, and 7% are abused often or very often. Contrary to what we expected when the research was designed, the data show no differences at all among ethnic groups.

*Reasons for bullying and verbal abuse.* Boys who mentioned being bullied or verbally abused were asked follow-up questions about the motives of the perpetrators. More than one motive could be mentioned. These reported motives fit into four categories.

1. Characteristics of the perpetrator: "Some boys are looking for trouble," "are bored," "want to be noticed," "want to bully someone" or "want to work off their feelings."
2. Ethnic group of victim: belonging to a particular nationality or ethnic group (e.g. "because I am Dutch").
3. Nonphysical characteristics of victim: "because I am shy," "because of my pronunciation."
4. Physical appearance of victim: "the way I look," "because I am fat."

(The reasons above are from the perspective of the victims of bullying or verbal abuse. The bullies or abusers might have other reasons, perspectives, and personal problems, as Olweus (1978, 1987) argues.)

The reasons the boys give are presented by ethnic group in Table 3. It appears that not all of the motives mentioned by the boys for bullying and verbal abuse differ according to ethnic background. For example 17% and 15% respectively of boys who report being bullied or verbally abused attribute the experience to personal characteristics, such as shyness or their pronunciation. No differences among ethnic groups are found for this type of perceived motive for bullying and abuse.

About 15% of the boys think that they are being bullied because of characteristics of the offenders (e.g. "they are bored..."). Characteris-

tics of others as a motive for verbal abuse are mentioned somewhat more often by Dutch and Surinam boys (25% and 19% respectively) than by Turks and Moroccans (9% and 10% respectively). These differences are not very large and do not differentiate between the Dutch versus the ethnic minority boys.

Larger differences emerge between the Dutch boys on the one hand and the ethnic minority boys on the other hand, when one considers the other two motives for bullying or verbal abuse. It appears clearly that ethnic minorities mention being bullied and verbally abused more often because of their ethnic background. Between 40% and 49% of the boys of ethnic minorities who are objects of bullying and abuse attribute this to their ethnic background, compared to five to seven per cent for Dutch boys (see Table 4). On the other hand, 33% of Dutch boys mention their physical appearance as a reason for being bullied and 23% give this explanation for their being verbally abused. Among ethnic minorities this percentage varies between two and 13%.

These percentages suggest that these two motives ("ethnic background" and "physical appearance") might be complementary. It seems possible that a number of boys see their physical appearance as a motive for bullying or verbal abuse. Among ethnic minorities boys victims label the motive for the incident as related to their ethnic background. Dutch boys interpret the incident as related to some other physical characteristic. To check this, a new variable was computed which counted the number of boys mentioning either their ethnic background or their physical appearance as a reason for bullying or verbal abuse (see Table 4).

As is suggested above, the results in Table 4 show that when physical appearance is considered as a broader category (including boys mentioning their ethnic background or verbal abuse as a motive for bullying) practically no differences can be established between ethnic groups. Among bullying no differences are found between ethnic groups. About 12% of the boys think that their physical appearance or their ethnic background are the reason for the harassment. When verbal abuse is considered there are differences between the various groups. Dutch boys mention their physical appearance and/or ethnic background in only nine per cent of the cases, followed by Surinamers (13%), Moroccans (16%) and Turks (20%). When both motives are also summed up approximately one in five boys mention that they experienced bullying and verbal abuse because of their appearance or ethnic background.

Are we adding apples and oranges? Does ethnic abuse and abuse because of other physical attributes carry different levels of hatred? Do victims suffer more from one than from the other, quite aside from how the perpetrator feels? We have no data on this point, but hope it remains a part of the discussion.

**Consistency with Olweus framework.** How can these results be interpreted? It seems possible that boys of ethnic minorities interpret incidents as related to their ethnic background, whereas Dutch boys see their physical appearance as the main reason for being bullied or verbally abused. The "real" reason might be something else.

Support for this interpretation comes from Olweus (1978, 1987), who notes that whipping boys usually lack assertiveness and social skills. A whipping boy is a boy

who, for a fairly long time, has been exposed and still is exposed to aggression from others; that is, boys or possibly girls from his own class or maybe from other classes often pick fights and are rough with him or tease and ridicule him.

Whipping boys are characterized by fear and a lack of confidence. They are anxious and are unable to react by being aggressive themselves, even if that would be desirable (when they are harassed). A bully is a boy

who fairly often oppresses or harasses somebody else; the target may be boys or girls, the harassment physical or mental.

Bullies have confidence in themselves and lack fear. They also tend to have a bad relationship with their parents and so they lack adequate supervision.

For the victims, the consequences of this continual harassment can be serious. They become fearful, feel threatened and sometimes do not want to go to school anymore. They can develop psychosomatic complaints like headaches and/or stomachaches as an answer to the long periods of stress they suffer. In Norway the problem became up-to-date when the suicide of two boys was related to the harassment at school. In the Netherlands Van der Meer (1988) is the only one who described the phenomenon of the whipping boys. The problem does not get very much attention of the public or the school authorities.

Although the definitions used by Olweus (1978) differ from those in this study, the problems he describes seem to explain the results very well which were presented above. The frequencies of the number of victims is practically identical: in the present study six to seven per cent of boys mentioned being the target of bullying or verbal abuse (very) often. In his study, Olweus finds seven per cent of the schoolboys can be considered as whipping boys.

Several myths exist as to the causes of the problem of harassment. Very often it is assumed that youths are harassed because in some way they differ (or deviate) from other youths, especially because of the way they look or talk. This is not the case. According to Olweus (1978) youths who are too thin or too fat, or who are a newcomer in a class, can all become a target of harassment. He also finds that being from an ethnic minority group does not relate to being

harassed. Speaking with a foreign accent was also unrelated to being harassed. This fits very well with the results of the current study.

Another myth is that a number of school characteristics are related to the problem of harassment. Factors like the degree of competition at school; the attitudes of the pupils towards school, teachers and home work; school results; the size of the classes; and the satisfaction of teachers with their profession--none of these were related to the occurrence of bullying.

Which are the main causes of such harassment? According to Olweus (1978, 1987), bullies have stable aggressive tendencies derived from their homelife. The parents seem to provide (1) more hostility than warmth, and (2) a permissive pattern. In particular, highly aggressive boys have mothers who are very often both hostile and lax.

There is a relatively strong relation between bullying behavior and delinquency at a later age. It appears that 60% of the bullies are convicted for a criminal offense at the age of 24. At that age 40% of them have had three convictions (or more) whereas this is the case for 10% of the controls.

How whipping boys differ from average boys, other than weaker physique, is largely unknown (Olweus, 1987).

**Aggression pays.** An additional problem is that experiences of bullies teach them that aggression is usually rewarded. Bullies develop their tendency for aggressive behavior early in life. By behaving as they do bullies generally obtain what they want.

The rewards come from diverse sources. First, bullies usually attack youths who find it difficult to fight back. All those interviewed by Van der Meer (1988) stress the fact that their victims are scared, fearful, anxious and unable to retaliate. The advice to fight back could be called a paradoxical instruction. One asks people to do something which one could know they are unable to do.

Second, teachers seldom intervene. They usually do not give the problem of harassment a lot of consideration. They often think that "youths should solve their own problems." In the British study (Commission for Racial Equality, 1988) it appears that authorities (teachers, the police) are excessively lax in responding to complaints. One little girl claimed that some teachers are afraid of bullies in her class (Van der Meer, 1988: 39).

Third, victims are often too intimidated to ask for help from parents or teachers, fearing new incidents of harassment. Parents are very often completely ignorant of what is happening.

The result is that aggressive behavior is rewarding because one gets what one wants and unpleasant consequences of the aggressive behavior are absent. This might explain the great self-confidence of bullies.

**Prevention of bullying.** Olweus (1987) emphasizes that the psychological tendency towards aggressive behavior, which seems to be the ori-

gin of bullying behavior, is not immutable. Rather, bullying is subject to situational factors, providing means for reducing the problem. In Norway a program has been developed to fight harassment in schools (Olweus, 1987). The results of this program were very positive. A reduction of 50% of the number of incidents occurred. There was also a decrease of anti-social behavior, such as theft, vandalism and truancy. Significantly, the satisfaction of the pupils with their life at school increased.

A very important factor is the degree of supervision at school (Olweus, 1978). Schools which have an adequate supervision have a lower level of harassment than schools where supervision is inadequate. Two aspects determine the amount of aggression in schools:

1. The presence of strong values in the school condemning violence.
2. The fact that teachers take responsibility and feel that it is their task to intervene when they witness incidents.

When both aspects are present the number of incidents diminishes. Often, bullying can be stopped by giving attention to the problems of the bullies, not just those of the whipping boys.

We suggest that, in multiracial societies, attention to this problem has an extra significance in preventing interracial abuse and, especially, mistreatment of minority youths. It also may have significance for long-run racial tensions and persecution.

#### NOTE

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1. In each group 14% of the boys mentioned that their pronunciation was the motive for being bullied and 12% mentioned this as a motive for verbal abuse (or being scolded). This was the reason for including "pronunciation" in this category and not interpreting it as another way for the respondents of saying that ethnicity was the motive.

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#### APPENDIX: THE SAMPLE

For practical reasons, we drew our sample from 16 places. Places with a very small number of Turks or Moroccans have not been included. This resulted in 26 cities being selected where Moroccans and/or Turks lived (in several places both Moroccan and Turkish boys have been interviewed).

In these cities a number of boys were selected proportional to the size of the Moroccan and/or Turkish community as listed by the border police agency. The selection process implies that the sample of Turkish boys is representative for 88% of the Turkish community and the sample of the Moroccans for 90%. The sample of Surinam boys was selected from municipalities which had a number of inhabitants of at least 30,000 (to limit the number of places), after which the sample was chosen on the basis of birth place.

These municipalities probably represent 75% of the Surinamese in the Netherlands (as there is no registration of ethnicity the number of Surinamese in the Netherlands can only be estimated). The Surinamese come from 19 places in the country in total (only partly the same as the cities from which the Turks and Moroccans were drawn). In total the boys come from 33 different places.

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Table 1: Respondent Specifications of Groups of Children with Whom They Prefer Not to Mix, Dutch Multiethnic Sample.

*Are there (groups of) children you prefer not to mix with?*

#### Respondent Groups

	Moroccans	Turks	Surinamese	Dutch	Total	X <sup>2</sup>	df	p <
%Yes	26	29	27	36	30	6.1	3	.08
Base	198	203	206	204	811			

*Percent specifying Turks, Moroccans, Surinamese, or foreigners:*

	29	31	33	22	28	2.3	3	.50
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*Percent specifying punks/squatters, boys who fight, who discriminate, who are looking for trouble, boys I do not like:*

	69	70	66	80	72	3.8	3	.29
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Note: Due to missing values in the answers, percentages do not add up to 100.

Table 2: Respondent Reports of Frequency of Being Bullied or Abused, Dutch Multiethnic Sample.

*How often are you being bullied or verbally abused?*

A. Bullied: N	Respondent Groups				
	Moroccans 197	Turks 203	Surinamese 206	Dutch 204	Total 810
often and very often	5	7	3	7	6
sometimes	19	20	20	21	20
almost never and never	76	73	77	72	74
<b>B. Verbal abuse:</b>					
often and very often	8	8	3	7	7
sometimes	24	29	26	25	26
never and almost never	68	62	71	68	68

NOTES

The number of Moroccans is 198 for verbal abuse.

A:  $X^2 = 4,2$ ;  $df = 6$ ;  $p < 0.64$

B:  $X^2 = 8,1$ ;  $df = 6$ ;  $p < 0.23$

Table 3: Motives for bullying/verbal abuse, Dutch Multiethnic Sample.

BULLYING:*								
	Moroccans	Turks	Surinamese	Dutch	Total	X <sup>2</sup>	df	p <
N	47	55	48	57	207			
Victim's ethnic group	40	44	42	7	32	23.2	3	0.00
Perpetrator's traits	17	9	13	21	15	3.5	3	0.32
Victim's non-phys. traits	17	18	17	16	17	0.1	3	0.99
Victim's phys. appearance	2	13	8	33	15	23.1	3	0.0001
VERBAL ABUSE								
	Moroccans	Turks	Surinamers	Dutch	Total	X <sup>2</sup>	df	p <
N	63	76	59	65	263			
Victim's ethnic group	48	49	41	5	36	37.5	3	0.00
Perpetrator's traits	10	9	19	25	15	8.7	3	0.03
Victim's non-phys. traits	6	16	10	19	15	1.7	3	0.63
Victim's phys. appearance	3	4	7	23	9	20.8	3	0.001

Note: Several answers were possible, thus some respondents are categorized in more than one category. As a result, for each reason for being bullied or scolded at, a new cross table was made.



Table 4: Total: Motives for bullying and/or verbal abuse, Dutch Multiethnic Sample.

	Moroccans	Turks	Surinamese	Dutch	Total	X <sup>2</sup>	df	p <
N	198	203	206	204	811			
a. Bullying:	10	15	11	11	12	2.5	3	.49
b. Verbal abuse	16	20	13	9	14	10.5	3	.01
c. Both a. and b.	19	24	18	16	19	4.8	3	.18