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Gideon Fishman  
Gustavo Mesch

Acculturation, and Delinquency  
among Adolescent Immigrants  
from the Former Soviet Union  
(FSU) in Israel

## Abstract

This study is part of a larger project which follows the acculturation of youth from the Former Soviet Union in Israel over a period of three years. It reports the first wave of data collection that established a base line for a longitudinal comparison later on. This paper examines the relations between adolescent immigrants' acculturation and involvement in delinquency.

Acculturation is conceptualized as the outcome of interactions and encounters between the adolescent and the host society, i. e., the school, the peers and the bureaucracy. Like in many other studies, we used some proxies for acculturation such as length of residence, family economic conditions, and use of language, however, we also included direct measures of the adolescent's perceptions and experiences of daily interactions with people and institutions in the host society.

The current study is based on a face-to-face national survey conducted on a sample of 1,421 adolescents (ages 12-18) who have immigrated from the FSU to Israel during the preceding 6 years. Participants were interviewed face to face by Russian-speaking interviewers without the presence of parents.

The analysis uses logistic regression and calculates predicted probabilities to be involved in delinquency for various profiles of immigrant adolescents. Accordingly, the highest probability to be involved in delinquency is attributed to an adolescent who lives in a poorly functioning family, has a high score of perceived discrimination and has been in the new country for a relatively long period. The lowest probability to become a delinquent is assigned to an adolescent who lives in a highly functioning family, has low perception of discrimination, and is relatively short time in the country. These results underline the importance of the family as a control agent and as a buffer against delinquency.

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## **Acculturation, and Delinquency among Adolescent Immigrants from the Former Soviet Union (FSU) in Israel**

Immigration is an event that requires economic, social, and cultural adaptation. To make a new start in a new society, adolescent immigrants must adjust to new customs and values, and must undergo an acculturation process. This process is often stressful because of two main reasons. First, the adolescent's family, which is the primary source of social support, faces difficulties such as loss of social status and downward social mobility, which may undermine parental authority and the parents' ability to support and control their adolescent's behavior (Samaniego and Gonzales 1999). Second, the adolescent becomes detached from familiar educational and social structures and needs to adjust to a new educational system, make new friends, and acquire social status and recognition among new friends (Vega et al. 1993; Jang 2002). The process can be aggravated by national policies that award citizenship status differentially, accepting some into the mainstream of society while others become second class citizens (Remennick 2002).

Adaptation to the new society is not a linear process. While most immigrants are eventually expected to find their way into the mainstream of society, some exhibit symptoms of maladjustment, including involvement in delinquent activities. Migration can therefore be considered a criminogenic factor (Samaniego and Gonzales 1999; Vega et al. 1993; Fridich/Flannery 1995).

This paper examines how acculturation affects the involvement of adolescent immigrants in delinquency. We conceptualized acculturation as the outcome of interactions and encounters between the adolescent and the host society, i. e., the school, peers and the bureaucracy. The study focuses on how differences in citizenship status (Jewish vs. non-Jewish immigrants) are associated with the outcome variable of delinquency. In addition, unlike previous studies that have used proxies for acculturation such as length of residence, family economic conditions, and use of language, we also

included direct measures of the adolescent's perceptions and experiences of daily interactions with people and institutions in the host society.

## **1. Literature Review**

Two important models deal with the issue of immigration and delinquency: assimilation and segmental assimilation (Nagasawa/Zhenchao/Wong 2001). The assimilation model suggests that for immigrants seeking admission to and acceptance by the host society; acculturation and social acceptance become a condition for social and economic mobility. The assimilation model assumes that the values, beliefs, and norms of the host culture dictate "homogeneous" integration into mainstream society. The model maintains a linear progression of adaptation to the host culture, that is, the longer a group has contact with the host culture the more acculturated the group becomes. This in turn manifests itself in adherence to the norms, values, and expected conduct of the host society (Alba/Nee 1997).

According to this model, the economic, social, and cultural integration of immigrants in the new society is a temporal process in which the immigrant acquires the cultural values of the dominant society and the means (educational skills) to achieve them. According to this approach, the most important variables explaining acculturation outcomes are length of residence, language ability, and socio-economic standing. Understanding of the local culture and the nature of the new society require a basic knowledge of its rules and traditions, acquired by learning the language and becoming involved with local social networks. In this respect, the length of stay in the country can be considered, in itself, as an investment and as part of the effort the immigrant makes to adjust to the new society, and, according to this approach, is as such a delinquency-reducing factor. The hypothesis that follows suggests that the lower the language proficiency the less successful the acculturation and the higher the likelihood of involvement in delinquency. It should follow that the longer immigrants reside in the country the lower their delinquent involvement.

Acquaintance with the norms and language of the host country allows immigrants to identify opportunities. As language proficiency and skills improve with time, the immigrants' social standing improves as well. This approach seems to provide a good explanation for socio-economic achievement and social adaptation of immigrants, but it is limited in scope. First, it assumes a linear process from migration to adaptation, implying that given enough time every immigrant eventually adjusts and becomes part of the mainstream of the host society. Studies have shown that this assumption is not accurate and that there are immigrants who do not integrate economically, socially, and culturally in the host society regardless of the time that has elapsed since their immigration (Portes/Zhou 1993; Bankston/Zhou 1995). Furthermore, some studies have shown that the academic achievements of adolescents are inversely related with their cultural and social integration in the host society (Bankston/Zhou 1995). At times, immigrant adolescents from disadvantaged minority groups end up residing in the inner city, which is often a low income and high crime neighborhood. Nevertheless, they maintain their academic achievements owing to their ability to remain socially connected with their group of origin and to maintain relatively limited contact with members of the host society. Studies have reported that retaining the original cultural identity serves as a shield that protects against stress and perceived discrimination. Hence, preserving the original culture is not necessarily a detrimental factor in the integration of adolescents (Bankston/Zhou 1995; Bankston/Caldas/Zhou 1997).

We argue therefore that temporal conditions are not the only ones relevant to the process of adjustment (or maladjustment) of immigrants but that everyday experiences are, too. In other words, even assuming that acculturation is a temporal process that implies a course of internalization of new norms and values, language, and skills, the success of this process is not only time dependent but depends also on the events and experiences that the immigrant faces during that time.

By contrast, the segmented assimilation model assumes that assimilation depends on several social factors (Portes/Zhou 1993) and that youth may adopt deviant norms and values and become involved in delinquency. Findings indicate that exposure to poverty and the timing of such exposure are indeed related to an increased

likelihood of involvement in delinquency (Jarjura et al. 2002). Highlighting this issue from a social control perspective, Sampson and Laub (1994) point out that family poverty inhibits family processes of informal social control, in turn increasing the likelihood of juvenile delinquency. There is also a possibility that immigrant youth may adopt the middle class values of the host society and consequently exhibit normative middle class behavior. However, when youth maintain close ties with their parents, they may adhere to the traditional norms and values of their immigrant culture (Bankston/Caldas/Zhou 1997). According to Portes and Zhou (1993), the path adolescent immigrants choose depends on their social contacts, ethnic solidarity, and their human capital (education and skills). It appears that the path that the youths follow is affected also by the location where the immigrant family settles. If the family settles in a poor neighborhood (because the parents lack proper resources and cannot provide upward mobility), there is a high likelihood that adolescents will adopt delinquent norms. A study of seven groups of immigrants of Asian origin to the US found that variables positively associated with human capital, i.e., parental education and income, as in the population at large, reduce the probability of delinquency. This indicates that human capital insulates one from delinquency and serves as an element of resilience (Jang 2002).

In a similar vein, Berry (2001) rejected the assimilation model and suggested that the long-term consequences of the acculturation process are highly diverse, depending on social and personal variables present in the society of origin and the society of settlement. Within each group, individuals experience the acculturation process differentially. This distinction is important because it does not assume a single path of integration for the entire immigrant group but allows for different individual paths. The model posits that immigrants develop acculturation strategies with reference to two major contrasting issues: cultural maintenance vs. cultural contact.

Assimilation occurs when individuals do not wish to maintain their cultural identity and seek daily interactions with other cultures. Separation prevails when individuals place a value on retaining their original culture and at the same time wish to avoid interaction with other groups. Integration is a possible outcome when there is simultaneous interest in maintaining the original culture in daily interactions and in becoming an integral part of the larger so-

cial network. Marginalization occurs when there is no possibility or interest in cultural maintenance because of forced cultural loss, or insufficient desire to maintain relations with others because of exclusion.

According to Berry (2001), integration in the new society depends on several factors. A central factor is the society's general attitude to immigration and to pluralism, as perceived by the immigrants themselves. It refers to the extent to which immigrants feel welcomed by the new society and are treated equally as other citizens. Studies have shown that when this is not the case and immigrants perceive that the acculturation experience involves discrimination and rejection, they are likely to report lower levels of well-being and are more likely to be involved in deviant and delinquent activities (Finch/Bohdan/Vega 2000). Based on this argument, we expect that the more immigrants perceive society as open and receiving the higher the likelihood that they will be better integrated.

Feelings of discrimination are of particular interest for this paper. It appears that certain structural conditions within the host society can create difficulties for the integration process. One important condition for successful integration is citizenship status. Whether the immigrants' attitude toward the host society is positive or negative depends on the status awarded to the individual immigrant. Individuals who are granted full citizenship are motivated to become integrated in society because they perceive a relatively open structure of opportunities. By contrast, individuals who are not granted citizenship may perceive their presence in the new country as temporary and exhibit lower motivation for acquiring the new norms and language. Furthermore, the relatively marginal status of non-citizens can sensitize them not only to expressions of discrimination but also to their perception of that discrimination. Feelings of marginality derived from an ascribed status (such as resident alien, or non-Jewish) are likely to generate frustration and anger, which may translate into delinquent behavior.

We would expect structural variables that are traditionally considered to relate positively with acculturation to relate inversely with delinquency. For instance, it is well established that the socio-economic status of some families declines after immigration (Rajiman/Semyonov 1998). The reasons for the decline lie in difficulties

in finding jobs, lack of adequate or equivalent certifications required for certain occupations (such as medicine, law, engineering, etc.), inadequate acquaintance with the local market, and poor or insufficient social contacts in the new society (Mesch/Czymanski 1997). This decline in the family's socio-economic status may be associated with adolescent delinquency for several reasons. First, there is deep frustration, disillusion, and anger at the absorbing society because of the immigrants' unmet expectations. In addition, the loss of status places the family, which is expected to be a controlling agent, in an awkward position where its authority and legitimacy are challenged and its cohesion and stability undermined. Therefore, we expect a negative association between the perceived economic situation of the family and delinquency.

Acculturation also entails a social dimension, particularly during adolescence, a period in which the youth's social circle expands and time spent with peers increases. Acquiring local friends enhances the adolescents' social status in school and helps them become involved in extracurricular and social activities that are organized by peers. It is natural for immigrants to associate with other immigrant youths upon arrival in the new country. Such conduct provides security and information needed to take the initial steps in the new society. But this behavior can also have a negative effect because it can marginalize individuals and keep them from taking the steps necessary to join the mainstream of society. Association with locals is important and functional because it provides information and sharpens the adolescents' awareness to opportunities and to realistic social expectations. Thus, adolescents who have predominantly immigrant friends are expected to be more marginal and therefore more susceptible to becoming involved in delinquency.

## **2. The Family, Acculturation, and Delinquency**

Adolescence is a period characterized by rapid developmental changes. As children enter their teenage years, they interact less with their parents and more with peers (Youniss/Smollar 1996; Giordano 2003). Yet parents continue to have influence over the behavior and decisions of their offspring, and are an important source of social support (Hartup 1996). During the immigration pro-



cess, parents face important challenges such as understanding a new culture, finding housing, and making a living. A connection between acculturation and deviance can follow from adolescents becoming acculturated more quickly than their parents, creating intergenerational acculturation gaps that may result in intergenerational conflicts within the family. Conflicts between parents and children are likely to undermine parental authority and family communication (Vega et al. 1993). Families going through the process of acculturation while maintaining high levels of communication and cohesion can continue guiding and mentoring their adolescents in the new country. It is therefore expected that the more cohesive and controlling the family is the lower the delinquency of the children.

Adolescents caught up in the personal and social dynamics of acculturation are at unusually high risk owing to a variety of personal adjustment problems that may result in non-normative and deviant behaviors (Vega et al. 1993). At the same time it is reasonable to assume that when family ties and personal attachment are strong, the positive bonds have the potential to mitigate the adjustment problems. The findings of Vega et al. (1993) show that perceptions of discrimination and the derogative behavior of others, are directly related to the increased likelihood of adolescents' involvement in delinquency. Family characteristics act as a protective factor, and the study shows that when the family is not fulfilling its protective function, there is a higher likelihood of adolescents becoming involved in delinquent behavior.

Several studies on acculturation and delinquency have suggested that the more integrated adolescents are with their traditional culture of origin, the less likely they are to become involved in delinquent behavior. Pumariega, Swanson, Holzer, Linskey and Quintero Salinas (1992) compared the activity orientation of Mexican and Mexican-American youths and found that Mexican-Americans spent significantly less time with their family members, more unstructured time with peers, and more time watching television and listening to radio, differences that indicate a shift in focus of Mexican-American youths, away from family and toward peers. This shift in focus leads adolescents to resist parental monitoring of their behavior, which may enhance their exposure to delinquent opportunities.

Fridich and Flannery (1995) found a link between acculturation status and adolescent delinquency. Their study compared three groups of adolescents and found that Mexican adolescents who immigrated to the U. S. recently reported higher levels of parental monitoring than did native Caucasians or already acculturated adolescents of Mexican descent. Acculturated Mexican-American adolescents expressed more susceptibility to peer pressure and peer delinquency than recently immigrated Mexican adolescents. The findings show that acculturated Mexican-Americans and native Caucasians were more likely to become involved in delinquency. In other words, the more integrated adolescent immigrants are within their culture and the more subject to family control, the less likely they are to be involved in delinquency.

Parental control was found to be associated with delinquency in other studies (Loeber/Loeber 1986; McCord 1991). According to these studies, lack of parental control increases the probability of association with delinquent peers, which in turn increases the susceptibility to antisocial peer pressure. Association with delinquent peers and susceptibility to peer pressure is believed to lead to increased participation in delinquent activities. Patterson and Dishon (1985) have suggested that lack of parental control can have both direct and indirect effects on delinquency. Parents' failure to adequately monitor their children was directly related to delinquency by enabling children to spend unsupervised time, and had an indirect effect on delinquency, mediated by the children's increased association with delinquent peers.

In a study on Chinese youth in Canada, Wong (1999) suggested a different way of looking at such findings, whereby acculturation of adolescent immigrants to the host society is expected to be positively related to delinquency. The underlying assumption is that adolescents who have not yet been acculturated are more attached to their families and as a result their behavior is more closely monitored and controlled by their parents. On the other hand, adolescents who have been acculturated are more involved in peer group relations, more resentful of parental attempts to control them, and therefore less affected by parental control. The results confirm the hypothesis and show that the more successful the acculturation to the host society the more likely adolescents are to report involvement in delinquency in general, and especially in minor offenses.

Jang (2002) makes a similar point. His study focused on adolescent deviance, primarily misbehavior at school. The results show that immigrant adolescents who were less acculturated were also less likely to be involved in deviance than acculturated or native-born adolescents. It appears that while limited or partial assimilation presents an obstacle to full participation in mainstream society, it also has a positive effect on the behavior of adolescents. Limited assimilation means also a limited exposure to the host cultures and, in the U. S. and Canadian cases, their emphasis on individualism. Nevertheless, a possibly negative effect of partial assimilation is that adolescents may feel free of cultural restraints and uninhibited by their cultural traditions and conventions. Such feelings may lead them to test the limits of tolerance of their behavior in the new culture in the process of establishing their own identity. At such times, intact families, cohesion, and parental control provide a favorable milieu that fosters conventional norms and behavior and reduces deviant behavior among immigrant youths.

Samaniego and Gonzales (1999) attempting to answer why better acculturated youths were more likely to be involved in delinquency than poorly acculturated ones, hypothesize that the link between acculturation and delinquency is mediated by three factors: cultural identity, the family, and the interaction with others. Apparently, exposure to the absorbing culture might be hazardous to some degree. Previous studies in traditional cultural conflict suggested that during the acculturative process adolescents were affected by several stressors because of conflicts between the immigrant and the dominant cultures (Phinney et al. 2001). While some stressors, such as poor language proficiency, are expected to decrease over time, other potential stressors are expected to increase. For example, discrimination increases the more immigrants come into contact with society at large. As exposure to the general culture becomes more frequent and adolescents become less aligned with their own culture, they may become more aware of and sensitive to negative attitudes and stereotypes. Attempts by immigrant youths to associate with veteran locals may evoke a perception of discrimination, a sense of injustice, and feelings that opportunities for advancement are blocked. Such feelings are absent as long as adolescents are protected by their own culture and avoid close contact with the dominant culture.

There is evidence that there is a higher rate of delinquency among more acculturated adolescents because they spend more time with friends and are more vulnerable to peer pressure. Research shows that more acculturated adolescents tend to become more involved in systems outside the family, such as peer groups and school activities. However, one can also argue that youth involvement with peers and the loss of family control are not necessarily an outcome of acculturation but rather of its failure. Thus, an alternative hypothesis can be suggested based on the control theory argument, whereby acculturation has only a negligible effect on delinquency. Apparently it is family control (whether the family survives the hardships of immigration and remains intact and functioning) that makes the difference. Therefore, the temporal variable (length of stay in the country) can be misleading because a longer stay in the new country does not necessarily mean better adjustment. It is the impact of peers and feelings of discrimination, together with poor family control, that may account for delinquency.

### **3. The Israeli Context**

Israel is a multiethnic society. Approximately 81% of the population is Jewish; the remainder is Arab. Jewish immigrants have come to Israel from many different countries in a sequence of waves. As a result, the Jewish population consists of various groups from different backgrounds and is divided almost equally between Jews of Asian and African Origin on the one hand, and of European and American descent on the other. There are important socio-economic differences within the Jewish population. Jews of western origin are considered more privileged, are over-represented in positions of political power, engage in higher status occupations, and enjoy higher incomes on average than Jews of Asian and African origin.

Immigration from countries of the former Soviet Union (FSU) to Israel took place in two waves. The first was during 1968-79, when 150,000 Jews arrived in Israel. At that time, the Soviet government was hostile to the attempts of its Jewish citizens to maintain their Jewish nationality and culture in the Soviet Union, which resulted in a selective migration of cultural and political leaders of the Jewish community. The current wave of immigration started after the

dissolution of the Soviet Union and the change in regime there. It is estimated that 836,000 immigrants have arrived in Israel from the FSU since then.

Studies report several differences and similarities between the first and second waves of immigrants from the FSU. Immigrants in the 1970s were ideologically motivated and seemed to wish to migrate to the Jewish homeland, whereas the immigrants in the 1990s sought economic opportunity and political stability (Leshem/Lisak 2000). A study comparing the two groups after four years in the country showed that they differed slightly in age and education. The 1970s immigrants were younger than those who came in the 1990s, and the latter have completed, on average, more years of formal schooling than the former. Both groups had considerably higher levels of formal education than the comparable Israeli workforce. Immigrants of the 1970s were more evenly distributed across regions in Israel than those of the 1990s, who were more concentrated in the urban centers. Both groups showed high levels of labor force participation, with 90% of males and 80% of females able to find jobs after four years in the country. The data showed considerable rates of downward occupational mobility in both periods, but the rate of downward mobility or occupational loss was much more pronounced in the 1990s than in the 1970s (Raijman/Semyonov 1998).

Studies indicate that FSU immigrants largely confine their social encounters to other immigrants from their country of origin. Five years after immigration, about 60% of 1990s immigrants reported meeting frequently with their former compatriots, compared with 40% of 1970s immigrants. Nevertheless, 1990s immigrants reported a continuously increasing percentage of meetings with Israelis, from 11% to 19% after four years to 22% after five years. After five years in the country, most of the immigrants indicated that they knew a veteran to whom they could turn for help and advice (Damian/Rosenbaum-Tamari 1999). Apparently, the extent of interaction with neighbors depends on acculturation factors, such as length of residence in Israel, ability to speak Hebrew, and home ownership. Education, profession, and proximity to friends from the same country did not affect the extent of interaction with neighbors (Itzhaky 1998).

One of the characteristics of Israel as an immigrant society is that each wave of immigrants faces negative and at times hostile attitudes from groups of previous waves of immigration. The old immigrants express their prejudices and doubts about the newcomers, which appears to be a pattern that repeats continually. The hostile attitudes seem to be related to education and socio economic status. Individuals with a higher level of education are more aware of the positive impact of immigration and view it as a national mission of high priority. Another longitudinal study showed that during 1986-1992 the percentage of the population that believed that Israelis will face difficulties finding work and housing because of immigration increased from 20% in the 1980s to more than 50% in the 1990s. At the same time, the percentage of Israelis willing to become directly involved in volunteer work to help the new immigrants decreased (Leshem/Lisak 2000; Lewin-Epstein et al. 1998). Another important issue is citizenship status. Following World War II and the Holocaust, the state of Israel was established with the vision of becoming a homeland and a safe haven for all Jews. To this end, and in conformity with the Declaration of Independence of May 14, 1948, which established Israel as the state of the Jewish people, the Law of Return was legislated in 1950. The Law of Return declared that every Jew can become an Israeli citizen upon arrival. The definition of who is a Jew was to be determined by Halacha (Jewish Law). In 1970, an amendment to the Law of Return also recognized the rights of non-Jewish family members to become immigrants and citizens, so the Law of Return now applies also to the spouses of Jewish immigrants as well as to anyone who is a descendent of a Jew, whether a son or grandson (regardless of the religion of the mother), as long as the individual has not been registered anywhere as a non-Jew. The change in the law had little effect during the 1970s, when the immigration was ideological and consisted predominantly of Jews who were persecuted in the Soviet Union. But the picture changes if we examine the composition of the 1990s immigration wave. A dominant characteristic of the current wave of immigration from the FSU has been its low level of selectivity compared with previous waves. It is estimated that between 30% and 50% of the 1990s immigrants are not Jewish. This produces differentiation and distinction within the immigrant group and creates a natural laboratory for studying the outcomes of immigrati-

on policy on the one hand, and the identification of people according to their religion on social marginalization and its consequences on the other.

## **4. Method**

### *4.1 Data and Methods*

The current study is based on a face-to-face national survey conducted on a sample of 1,421 adolescents (ages 12-18) who migrated from the FSU to Israel during the previous six years. This report constitutes the Israeli component of a broader longitudinal panel study on the acculturation of adolescents from the former FSU in Israel and Germany that examines the process of acculturation at three points in time, using three waves of interviews. The focus of the study is on understanding the effects of social interaction between adolescents and the host society and their adjustment in educational and social settings. For the purpose of data collection, the country was divided into three regions: north, center, and south. In each region we identified towns with a high concentration of immigrants from the FSU and randomly selected 13 of the identified towns: five from the north, five from the center, and three from the south. A quota was set for each town according to criteria of age, length of residence in the country, gender, and country of origin within the FSU. Participants were interviewed face to face by Russian-speaking interviewers without the presence of parents.

For the purposes of this study we used the first wave of data collection. Data were collected between November 2002 and February 2003. Each interview was completed in about 45 minutes. Subjects were paid for their participation. The sample consisted of almost an equal representation of males (52.4%) and females (47.4%), 71.2% of adolescents were 15-19 years old, 21.9% were 13-14 years old, and 6.9% were 19 years old, 38.5% emigrated from the Ukraine, 34.9% from Russia, and the rest are from the various Asian republics of the FSU, 29.3% reported being non-Jews. On average, the adolescents' length of residence in the country was 3.39 years (s. d. = 1.37).

Only 4.5% of participants did not attend school, 92.8% declared their intention to complete their high school diploma, and 53.9% reported that they planned to continue to higher education at a technical or university level.

#### *4.2 Measures*

To study the relationship between acculturation and delinquency, we used several items to define the study variables.

##### *Dependent variables*

Delinquency is traditionally measured by looking at the frequency of offenses. Criminological literature often categorizes criminal juvenile activity into such groups as property, violence, sex, drug, or status offenses. This was our intention when we began constructing the dependent variable of delinquency. But because the initial stage consisted of examining the marginal distributions of the main offense categories (violence, property, juvenile offenses, and drug offenses), we encountered an unexpected phenomenon. Of the total sample (N = 1,423) only 1.8% committed exclusively violent offenses, only 0.7% were involved exclusively in property offenses, and only 0.2% committed exclusively drug related offenses. At the same time, 18.2% were involved in very minor juvenile offenses and status offenses, without any simultaneous involvement in property, drug, or violent offenses. Given that specialized delinquency is rare among the immigrant youth, we decided to drop from the analysis all offenders who committed only one offense or specialized in one type of offending. We also excluded juvenile offenses because they can hardly be considered criminal. Instead, we created a new, combined category of delinquency that includes only juveniles who were involved in more than one type of offense: either violence and property, or drugs, or property and drugs, or all three. This combined category included 45.1% (n = 637) of the total sample population. The empirical evidence reflected in these figures is consistent with our knowledge of what juvenile delinquency means. Rather than specific, focused, and targeted criminal behavior, it is more a symptom of discontent and frustration. We therefore decided to adopt for our analysis the combined category as an indicator of delinquency for the immigrant sample.



We also performed the regression on two dependent variables, violence and property offenses, to determine the extent to which the joint offending pattern we chose to use made a difference, and we found that the differences in the parameter estimates and their significance were very small and in the same direction (see Appendix 1). However, as we have already shown, using these crime specific models would have been confusing because neither violence nor property offenses are exclusive acts. Purely defined property or violent offenses are very rare in this group, so that a proper statistical analysis is impossible due to the small sample size. Therefore, the decision to examine juvenile offenses as a mixed bag of delinquent acts makes empirical, as well as, theoretical sense.

### *4.3 Independent variables*

We used several survey items to measure different dimensions of acculturation. Respondents were asked to indicate the month and year of their arrival in the country; based on that date, we calculated the length of stay in the country in months. The calculation in months was necessary because the sample was restricted to adolescents who arrived in the country in the last six years. We also asked respondents to indicate the extent to which they used Hebrew to communicate with parents and friends and about their consumption of Hebrew media (written, newspapers/books and audiovisual, publications, TV/radio). We used factor analysis to form a composite scale from the four items ( $\alpha = .74$ ). We also included a measure of social integration by asking respondents to indicate the extent to which they felt socially integrated with local friends and to state how many of their friends were still from the FSU.

Because the central question of the study is how perceived discrimination is related to delinquency, we also needed to consider religious affiliation as a relevant variable. The assumption was that the daily experiences within local society would be different for Jews and non-Jews. The respondents were asked to specify what their religion was: those who stated that their religion was Jewish were assigned a value of 1; all others were assigned a value of 0.

Because economic conditions are often also related to involvement in delinquency, we measured the subjective perception of the

family's economic conditions. The adolescents were asked to make a subjective evaluation of their family's economic situation compared with its prior situation in the FSU. The answer was registered on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from much worse (1) to much better (5).

Studies on delinquency have shown that it varies with age. Delinquency usually starts in early adolescence and reaches a peak after the transition from middle to high school. We therefore collapsed the age variable into two groups: a value of 1 indicates adolescents aged 16-19 and the value of 0 adolescents aged 12-15.

Delinquency varies also with gender, with females less likely to be involved than males. To be able to account for other differences, we checked for gender.

The core of the study was to explore the relationship between the immigrants' day-to-day experiences and delinquency. Respondents were asked to indicate their perceptions of discrimination in four situations: at school, by the bureaucracy, while spending leisure time in bars, restaurants, or discotheques, and in the course of daily shopping ( $\alpha = .61$ ).

The functioning of the family is another central variable in any attempt to account for the conduct of immigrant youths. It refers to the family's ability to monitor and control behavior and to its cohesiveness as a unit capable of serving as a safe haven for adolescents during crises. In our study, family functioning is a composite variable. It forms a scale consisting of five items: how often parents are aware of their adolescents' whereabouts; the parents' awareness of the persons with whom the adolescents socialize; how the adolescents spend their money; where they go out with friends at night; and what they do after school. Three additional items asked about whether the family engaged in many activities together, whether the adolescents discussed issues freely and trustingly with parents, and whether the adolescents had a generally good relationship with the family. The eight items constitute a reliable composite scale ( $\alpha = .82$ ).

## 5. Results

### 5.1 Descriptive results

Involvement in delinquency is relatively high in the current study. Out of the total sample, 17% of adolescents reported involvement in the perpetration of at least one violent offense, and 48% reported the perpetration of at least one property offense. Due to the distribution of offenses in the population, as described in the method section, we decided to look at juvenile offenses in a somewhat innovative way, and examined offenses not by category but jointly. This combined category includes 45.1% of the sample. Only 25% of respondents reported complete non-involvement in any act of delinquency, including minor juvenile acts.

In the combined group of juvenile offenses, the proportion of Jews vs. non-Jews was not statistically significant. The study found that on average respondents of Jewish origin had been significantly ( $p < .001$ ) longer in the country (mean = 3.07 years, s. d. 1.38) than those of non-Jewish origin (mean = 2.74 years, s. d. 1.33). We also examined differences in perceived institutionalized discrimination against immigrants. No differences were found between Jews and non-Jews in the perceived differential treatment by government offices, in schools, or in the course of shopping or leisure activities. We also examined the relations between perceived discrimination and delinquency. Adolescents who were involved in the combined juvenile offending category reported significantly ( $p < .001$ ) higher levels of perceived discrimination (mean = .153, s. d. 1.03) than those who reported not being involved in juvenile delinquency (mean = -.130, s. d. .950). The correlation matrix of all the variables in the analysis is shown in Table 1.

The table shows that relations between perceived discrimination and family functioning are statistically insignificant, suggesting that although one feels discriminated against the family milieu can function well and, as will be shown later, can neutralize the negative effects of discrimination. At the same time, family functioning correlates with a lower number of friends from the FSU. This suggests that functioning families can also neutralize the potentially harmful influence of peers. Length of residence seems to associate with improved language skills but does not correlate with family func-

tioning, which may suggest that strong families can withstand acculturative hardships and can be considered a reliable resiliency factor.

**Table 1:** Correlation Matrix of Variables in the Analysis

	Length of residence	Language use	FSU friends	Economic standing	Perceived discrim.	Family functioning
Length of residence	1.0					
Language use	.229**	1.0				
FSU friends	-.005	-.033	1.0			
Economic standing	-.002	.032	-.016	1.0		
Perceived discrimination	-.021	-.004	.022	.034	1.0	
Family functioning	-.030	.185**	-.118**	.054*	-.022	1.0

## 5.2 Multivariate analysis

At the initial stage, it was important to identify the variables that differentiate between delinquents and non-delinquents. Therefore, the dependent variables were dichotomized into offenders/non-offenders and logistic regression models were used in the multivariate analysis. The analysis was carried out in three stages. First, a regression including the background variables was undertaken. Variables such as age, gender, religious affiliation, and the variables most directly associated with being an immigrant (economic situation compared with that in the FSU, use of the Hebrew language, length of residence, and the number of friends from the FSU) were included in the regression. Second, the scale of perceived discrimination was introduced into the regression. In the third stage, the family functioning scale was added. This scale combined items that referred to cohesion and feelings of closeness, and the ability of the family to exercise control over the adolescents' activities. The three-stage analysis was conducted based on the assumption that background variables and variables derived from the assimilation

perspective may be related to the acculturative experience. It is conceivable that acculturative experiences mediate the effect of acculturation on delinquency. This required, initially, the introduction of background and objective measures of assimilation.

The first model (Table 2a) presents the results of the association of acculturation variables with the likelihood of being involved in delinquency. The effect of gender is statistically significant, indicating that males are more likely to be involved in delinquency than females. Jewish immigrants are less likely to be involved in delinquency than non-Jews, an effect that remains significant in all the models, even after the introduction of acculturative experiences and family variables.

Contrary to our expectation that the immigrants' adjustment improves with time, our data show that with time the likelihood of adolescents being involved in delinquency increases. At the same time, improved economic conditions compared with those in the old country are inversely related to delinquency. Language proficiency came close to significance but was not significant even in the first regression model, and it became less and less significant in the second and third models, despite the significant correlation between language proficiency and length of stay in the country ( $r = .219$ ;  $p < .01$ ), as shown in Table 1. However, as seen in the regression in Table 2, language proficiency does not affect the tendency toward delinquency. Another finding that fits the acculturative argument has to do with the effect of social networks. As shown in Table 2, the more social ties adolescents have with others from the same country of origin (FSU), the higher the likelihood of involvement in delinquency.

The findings of the first model did not change dramatically after adding the measures of perceived discrimination (Table 2b). The scale of perceived discrimination is statistically significant, and is a reflection of the acculturative experiences as perceived by the adolescents.

In the third regression we added the family functioning scale to the model (Table 2c). Family functioning is statistically significant and clearly underlines the important role of the family in decreasing the likelihood of adolescents' involvement in delinquency, giving extra credence to the control hypothesis.

**Table 2:** Logistic Regression Predicting Delinquency (combined offenses)

	Model A N = 1423		Model B N = 1423		Model C N = 1423	
	Parameter Estimate (S. E.)	Odds Ratio	Parameter Estimate (S. E.)	Odds Ratio	Parameter Estimate (S. E.)	Odds Ratio
Age	.001 (.036)	1.001	.023 (.037)	1.023	.010 (.038)	1.010
Gender	1.440** (.121)	4.219	1.393** (.122)	4.027	1.334** (.126)	3.396
Religion	-.612** (.128)	(.592) 1. 845	-.590** (.130)	(.554) 1.805	-.600** (.134)	(.549) 1.821
Economic Conditions	-.096** (.035)	(.909) 1.100	-.109** (.036)	(.897) 1.115	-.102** (.037)	(.903) 1.107
Language Use	-.108 (.064)	(.897) 1.114	-.105 (.065)	(.900) 1.111	-.016 (.067)	(.984) 1.016
Length of Residence	.214** (.046)	1.239	.210** (.046)	1.234	.196** (.048)	1.216
FSU Friends	.014** (.003)	1.014	.014 (.003)	1.014	.012** (.003)	1.012
Perceived Discrimination	_____	_____	.274** (.062)	1.315	.276** (.064)	1.317
Family Functioning	_____	_____	_____	_____	-.576** (.066)	(.562) 1.779
Constant	-1.292		-1.553		-1.247	
Chi Square	241.203		254.207		330.819	
-2log likelihood	1674.007		1640.665		1552.469	

The complete model confirms several obvious truths regarding delinquency, not solely confined to immigration: males are more prone to delinquency, an improved economic situation reduces the likelihood of delinquency, and functioning families are a solid buffer against delinquency. Consistent with these findings and relevant to the immigration situation, negative experiences resulting from perceived discrimination also have a strong effect on delinquency. The unexpected finding is that length of stay in the new country increases rather than reduces the probability of delinquent involvement, as does estrangement from society. In the Israeli case, the latter can be measured by not being Jewish and by the number of friends from the FSU. Both variables have a strong effect, as shown in Table 2.

After the logistic regression revealed the impact of perceived discrimination, family functioning, and length of stay in the country, we proceeded to calculate profiles of adolescents most likely and least likely to be delinquents, controlling for the variables in the regression either by the mean or, where standardized scales are used, by the median.<sup>1</sup>

**Table 3:** Predicted Probability of Juvenile Delinquency for Selected Models

Model*	Predicted probability
All variables of the equation controlled at the mean or median	.417
High** family functioning	.210
Low*** family functioning	.794
High perceived discrimination	.674
Low perceived discrimination	.372
Long residence	.605
Short residence	.303
High family functioning; High perceived discrimination	.434
Low family functioning; High perceived discrimination	.917
High family functioning; Low perceived discrimination	.180
Low family functioning; Low perceived discrimination	.761
High family functioning; High perceived discrimination; Long residence	.620
High family functioning; High perceived discrimination; Short residence	.319
Low family functioning; High perceived discrimination; Long residence	.959
Low family functioning; High perceived discrimination; Short residence	.871
High family functioning; Low perceived discrimination; Long residence	.320
High family functioning; Low perceived discrimination; Short residence	.110
Low family functioning; Low perceived discrimination; Long residence	.872
Low family functioning; Low perceived discrimination; Short residence	.660

\* In all profiles the remaining of the variables are controlled at the mean or median level.

\*\* High = the highest value of the variable or scale.

\*\*\* Low = the lowest value of the variable or scale.

The predicted probability table (Table 3) presents the probabilities of becoming delinquent when certain variables are manipulated and the rest are controlled at their mean or median levels. The table shows that high family functioning is the best buffer against delinquency; this is clear whether the variable is examined singly or in

<sup>1</sup> prob. (event) =  $1 / (1 + e^{-z})$  when  $Z = B_0 + B_1X_1 + B_2X_2 + \dots + B_pX_p$ .

combination with other important variables. The lowest probability of becoming delinquent is scored by adolescents from a high-functioning family whose perception of discrimination is low and who have arrived relatively recently ( $p = .110$ ). When the family does not function well the probability of delinquency rises sharply to  $p = .794$ . The highest probability of becoming delinquent results from a combination of low family functioning, high perceived discrimination, and long stay in the country ( $p = .959$ ).

## 6. Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to identify risk factors associated with delinquency within a sample of adolescents that immigrated recently to Israel from the FSU.

Based on the literature review, it was expected that traditional measures of acculturation (length of residence, linguistic competence, religion, and socio-economic status) would serve as proxies for acculturative experiences. We expected the effects of these variables to be reduced or canceled out after the perceived discrimination factor scale, which supposedly summarized the perceived outcome of actual experiences, was introduced into the model. The rationale was that being a newcomer, not knowing the language, facing economic difficulties, or being different might result in discrimination. The results of the study show that the effect of the acculturation variables (length of stay in the country, linguistic proficiency, etc.) is independent of perceived discrimination, which can also be treated as a proxy for daily experiences in school, during leisure time, or in facing the bureaucracy.

Overall, the results point to a temporal dimension that affects delinquency. This dimension is inferred predominantly from the effect of the length of residence, but also from the effect that the family's economic conditions and perceived discrimination have on delinquency. Arrival in a new country and the encounter with a new culture constitutes a stress factor for the immigrant family, for parents and adolescents alike. New immigrants face a higher risk of involvement in delinquency the longer they reside in the new country, the worse their economic conditions are compared with those in the old country, and the more they associate with friends from



their country of origin. From among the acculturative factors, we found that perceived discrimination is a risk factor that affects delinquent activity and remains significant even after the family functioning factor is added into the analysis.

One could argue that the feelings of perceived discrimination are temporary and can change in time if the parents become better integrated in the labor market, the local culture becomes more familiar, and the adolescents develop new acquaintances and friendships with native-born youths, which in fact means reducing the amount of contacts with other peers from the FSU. One could hypothesize therefore that as these changes take place the likelihood of becoming involved in delinquency diminishes. But the results show that time is not necessarily a healer. By itself, the temporal variable of length of residence is positively associated with increased delinquency. While an improved economic condition is negatively associated with delinquency, association with peers from the FSU (as opposed to association with native-born youths, which is expected to increase over time) is positively associated with delinquency.

Clearly, some factors are not temporal. One important finding of this study is the effect of religion on delinquency. Israel is defined as the Jewish state and there is no separation of church and state. Being non-Jewish places the immigrant in an awkward situation. On the one hand, the adolescent has arrived in a country that is perceived as an open society with unlimited opportunities. But soon the non-Jewish adolescents realize that being non-Jewish excludes them from belonging to the majority group, and non-Jewish immigrants are ascribed to a less desirable status that is difficult to change. This may create continuous feelings of alienation and result in marginalization and distinct feelings of discrimination. These feelings can drive adolescents to associate with other marginal groups in society, including delinquent groups.

According to our findings, the family functioning factor is probably also a non-temporal variable that plays an important role. It contains items having to do with cohesion and closeness, as well as with the monitoring of adolescents. Upon arrival in the new country all immigrant families face hardships such as difficulties in finding housing and work. The results indicate that families that manage to stick together under these difficult circumstances, maintain their cohesion, and preserve the parental function of social control are

sources of social support and serve as a buffer against juvenile delinquency. The importance of the family functioning variable is demonstrated in our profiles of predicted probability. When controlling for all other variables, the family variable had the strongest effect in either restraining delinquency ( $p = .210$ ) when functioning at its best, or unleashing delinquency ( $p = .794$ ) when the family performs poorly.

Our results contribute to the expanding literature on perceived discrimination and its effects on adjustment. Experiences of marginalization at school and of not being recognized as a member of the majority group can be linked to feelings of perceived discrimination. In recent years the criminological literature has emphasized the association between strain and delinquency. Exclusion from the mainstream by not belonging to the majority group and being treated differentially at school are the essence of the perceived discrimination variable. Such feelings evoke a feeling of being blocked or restricted in social interaction and attainment of status. According to strain theory, this leads to frustration that is often translated into action directed at changing the damaging situation. These actions can take the form of involvement in delinquency.

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## Appendix 1

	Property offenses: logistic regression		Violent offenses: logistic regression	
	B (S. E.) N = 1423	Exp(B)	B (S. E.) N = 1423	Exp(B)
Age	.026 (.039)	1.026	-.131** (.040)	.877
Gender	1.149** (.128)	3.155	1.467** (.131)	4.337
Length of residence	.208** (.049)	1.232	.187** (.051)	1.206
Language use	-.031 (.068)	.969	.052 (.070)	1.053
Economic situation	-.176** (.053)	.838	-.104 (.055)	.901
FSU friends	.013** (.003)	1.013	.010** (.003)	1.010
Religion	-.524** (.137)	.592	-.417** (.142)	.659
Perceived discrimination	.240** (.067)	1.271	.169* (.070)	1.184
Family functioning	-.510** (.067)	.601	-.559* (.070)	.572
Constant	-1.098	.333	1.591	4.909

p < .05; \*\*p < .01

*The Authors*

Professor Gideon Fishman, The Minerva Center for youth Studies,  
The University of Haifa, Haifa 31905, Israel,  
fgidi@univ.haifa.ac.il

Ph. D. Gustavo Mesch, The Minerva Center for youth Studies, The  
University of Haifa, Haifa 31905, Israel,  
gustavo@soc.haifa.ac.il

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