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Verkuyten, Maykel; Thijs, Jochem

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# Racist victimization among children in The Netherlands: the effect of ethnic group and school

Maykel Verkuyten and Jochem Thijs

## Abstract

Using data from a nation-wide study, this article examines the extent of racist victimization among Dutch, Turkish, Moroccan and Surinamese children (10–13 years) in The Netherlands. The responses indicate that ethnic minority children are more often victim of racist name-calling and social exclusion than are Dutch children. Furthermore, Turkish children are more likely to face racism than Surinamese and Moroccan children. Using multilevel analysis, the effects of multicultural education and the ethnic composition of the school were also examined. If teachers reacted to incidents, this had a positive effect on racism. Furthermore, multicultural education was positively related to reported experiences with racist victimization, but this effect was only found for the Dutch children. In addition, a higher percentage of Dutch pupils was related to less racist victimization of the Dutch and to more victimization of the three ethnic minority groups.

**Keywords:** Racism; children; school (de)segregation; multicultural education.

## Introduction

In many Western countries there is growing concern about racist attitudes and behaviour among children, both at schools and in neighbourhoods. However, little is known about the extent of racism and whether it is a widespread phenomenon. There is a lack of large-scale studies among children on racist bullying such as name-calling and social exclusion.

In ethnographic research in primary schools, ethnic minority children have been described as victims of these forms of negative behaviour (e.g. Troyna and Hatcher 1992; Holmes 1995; Van Ausdale and Feagin 1996; Connolly 1998). These studies have provided important insights into the subtle and complex nature of racism in children's lives. The

dynamics of racism are examined in detail and in relation to the characteristics of particular settings. However, these studies provide no information on the extent of racism among children. Racism may or may not be common, and incidences of racism may depend on the organizational and educational characteristics of schools. Issues of school (de)segregation and of multicultural and anti-racism education are particularly important factors to consider. For example, in many countries and schools, curricula aimed at combating racism and discrimination and promoting positive group relations have been proposed and implemented. Furthermore, at least since the *Brown versus Board of Education* case in 1954, school (de)segregation has been an important and controversial topic of debate in the United States. There are similar, although more recent, debates in other countries such as in The Netherlands, about black and white schools (see Penninx and Rath 1990). School (de)segregation is not only discussed in relation to educational achievement, identity and self-esteem, but also to intergroup relations and racism.

However, little is known about the importance of school characteristics in connection with racism in children's lives. Furthermore, most of the existing studies have serious conceptual and methodological problems (Schofield 1991). For example, there are several studies that formulate more general conclusions and policy implications for schooling, based on findings in just four or five schools. It is, however, difficult to draw more general conclusions about, for example, segregated and desegregated schools on the basis of research comparing only a few schools. Apart from the level of (de)segregation, there are always many other school characteristics that may explain the differences found. To avoid such problems, a whole array of segregated and desegregated schools should be studied. Furthermore, individual and school characteristics should be taken into account simultaneously.

This article reports the findings from a study conducted in eighty-two primary schools across The Netherlands. Using multilevel analysis, the main purpose is to assess the extent of racist victimization among different ethnic groups and in relation to school (de)segregation and multicultural education. The focus is on the degree of experience with racist name-calling and social exclusion among ten to thirteen-year old children. Different studies have found that name-calling is the most common form of bullying or peer victimization, and that being excluded from social groups is also a common form (e.g. Kelly and Cohn, 1988; Whitney and Smith 1993; Smith and Shu 2000). Furthermore, these forms of behaviour are typically interpreted as racist and discriminatory by children themselves. In The Netherlands, for example, Verkuyten, Kinket and Van Der Wielen (1997) found shared beliefs and understandings about discriminatory behaviour among both Dutch and ethnic minority group children. For these children, the prototypical example of

discrimination was racist name-calling. Discrimination was also seen, although to a lesser degree, as social exclusion by peers.

### *Existing studies*

There are surveys on peer victimization and bullying in various countries (see Smith *et al.* 1999). The most frequently used instrument is Olweus' (1993) questionnaire that was devised to assess bullying among children in Sweden and Norway. Adapted versions of this measure are by far the most widely used for research in schools in different countries. However, the modified versions typically do not include questions on ethnic or racist victimization and bullying. Thus, little is known about these forms of harassment.

Several questionnaire studies, particularly in the United Kingdom, have focused more explicitly on the degree and frequency of peer victimization and bullying among ethnic minority children. For example, among a sample of 243 children Eslea and Mukhtar (2000) found that racist bullying was widespread among Hindu, Indian Muslim and Pakistani children, and that all three groups suffered equally. Furthermore, Moran *et al.* (1993) compared thirty-three matched pairs of white and Asian children. They found no difference in the overall incidence of bullying, nor did they for specific types of bullying except for racist name-calling, which was reported more frequently by Asian children (see also Boulton 1995).

These examples are small-scale studies, thus making it difficult to assess the incidence and frequency of racist bullying. Smith and Shu (2000) studied a larger sample of 2,308 primary and secondary school pupils in England. One question was on racial name-calling which was experienced by 14 per cent of the sample. However, 90 per cent of the pupils were white and ethnic differences were not examined in this study. Siann *et al.* (1994) studied a sample of 1,139 secondary school pupils. Compared to white pupils, ethnic minorities were found to believe more often that, in general, ethnic minority pupils are bullied more than their majority counterparts. However, no information about personal experiences was gathered, even though research has consistently found a clear and robust discrepancy between perceived group experiences and personal experiences, known as the personal/group discrimination discrepancy (see Taylor, Wright and Porter 1993). Hence, in the present study, we examined both personal experiences with racist victimization as well as the perception of same-ethnic peers' experiences.

In The Netherlands, in two different studies Verkuyten and Thijs (2000) examined the frequency of racist name-calling. In one study, conducted among 865 primary school children from twenty-six schools, they found no difference in the overall frequency of bullying. However, for racist name-calling, a clear significant difference was found. In total, 40

per cent of the Turkish children reported no experiences with racist name-calling, 52 per cent reported some incidents, and 7 per cent indicated frequent experiences. For the Dutch children, these percentages were 77 per cent, 21 per cent, and 2 per cent, respectively. In a second study among 490 pupils in nineteen primary schools, similar differences between Turkish and Dutch children were found. The present study is an attempt to extend these results and to address two issues on which previous surveys have provided little information.

Firstly, in the existing research, there is a tendency to treat ethnic minorities as a homogeneous group which contrasts with the majority group (Eslea and Mukhtar, 2000). That is, a distinction between white and non-white or between majority and minority group predominates. This approach ignores the many visible and cultural differences between ethnic groups that may affect the experiences of ethnic minority group children. Verkuyten and Kinket (2000), for example, found that Dutch children showed different preferences for contact with contemporaries of different ethnic minority groups. Turkish children were the least liked, followed by Moroccans, and the Surinamese were more accepted. This same pattern of preferences has been found among Dutch adolescents and adults (see Hagendoorn 1995). Hence, it can be expected that Turkish children are particularly likely to report racist victimization. The present study examines racist bullying among Dutch, Surinamese, Moroccan and Turkish children. The latter three groups are the numerically largest minority groups in The Netherlands. The Surinamese are from the former Dutch colony Surinam. The vast majority are Dutch nationals but their skin colour makes them 'visible'. The Turks and Moroccans living in The Netherlands have a history of migrant labour. Most of them are Muslims and have a strong sense of their own culture and history that they want to preserve. In general, within the Turkish and Moroccan communities the relationship between parents and children are strongly affected by what is considered appropriate cultural behaviour (e.g. de Vries 1987; Pels 1999).

### *School characteristics*

Secondly, the present study looks at the importance of some organizational characteristics of schools and the content of their educational practices for racist name-calling and ethnic exclusion. In doing so, some of the problems and flaws in research to date are addressed.

Since 1985 Dutch primary schools have been legally obliged to implement a multicultural curriculum that tries to foster understanding and appreciation of ethnic diversity, to promote positive inter-ethnic interactions and to combat racism and discrimination. In practice, schools differ strongly in how they carry out such multicultural curricula (Kloosterman 1991), and the effects are equivocal (e.g. Verkuyten and Thijs

2000). However, a shared assumption is that multicultural education may be most effective in increasing awareness. One of the aims is to make children aware of discrimination and racism and to promote positive group relations. Hence, a multicultural curriculum may be expected to lead to a heightened awareness and perception of racial bullying (Bigler 1999). Children may learn to label and interpret negative situations and forms of behaviour in terms of racism and discrimination. Verkuyten and Thijs (2000) found empirical evidence for this process in their study among Turkish and Dutch children.

The effectiveness of multicultural initiatives in reducing racist bullying will not only depend on curricula and materials used (Banks 1995; Bigler 1999), but probably also on the way teachers are seen to deal with ethnic diversity and negative interactions. What may be particularly important is the extent to which a teacher is perceived to act on racist name-calling and ethnic exclusion. Hence, we measured the perceived reaction of the teacher to racist bullying and analysed this measure as a class-level variable. It can be expected that the teacher's reaction will have a positive effect on the frequency of racist name-calling and ethnic exclusion.

A class' ethnic composition or its relative proportion of different ethnic groups is another class-level factor that may affect racist experiences of ethnic minority group children. Composition measures are important because the number of own-ethnic children in school may determine experiences and attitudes (see Fishbein 1996; Schofield 1991, for reviews). Rosenberg (1979) argues that the child's social similarity or dissimilarity to those around him or her affects its experiences. In an ethnically consonant environment, a child is more protected from prejudice and discrimination, whereas in a dissonant context, a higher incidence of discrimination and less social support may exist.

Existing research on the ethnic composition of schools and class is predominantly on school (de)segregation in the United States (see Schofield 1991; Khmelkov and Hallinan 2000). Furthermore, most of these studies focus on positive behaviour such as friendships, and avoid measuring negative behaviour such as racism and discrimination. However, positive interethnic behaviour may be predicted by other factors than negative behaviour (Fischbein 1996). In addition, many of these studies have conceptual and methodological flaws (Schofield 1991).

Conceptually, the ethnic composition in schools and classrooms can mean different things. Most studies focus on the proportion of white children, or alternatively, on ethnic minority group children. The implicit assumption is that ethnicity is a dichotomous (white/non-white) variable and that this dichotomy affects the degree of racist bullying. However, not all racism involves white perpetrators and black or minority group victims. Black on white racism does occur, and in the UK, Eslea and Mukhtar (2000) found that Asian children were as likely to be bullied by other Asian children of a different ethnic group as by white children. Hence, the classroom percentage of children from the same or different

ethnic group(s) may be a crucial factor. Furthermore, it is also possible that the number of different ethnic groups present – or the ethnic heterogeneity of the class – has an effect. Increased heterogeneity increases the chance of interethnic contact. Contact may have a positive effect on group relations as predicted by the well-known contact hypothesis (Allport 1954). However, mere contact is not enough. The positive effect depends on additional conditions and contact may also reinforce previously held stereotypes and hostilities (Brown 1995).

In addition, the total number of children or the size of the school and class may be important. Among other things, size implies opportunities for contact and scope for monitoring and control by the teacher. In addition, the inclusion of size helps to assess the effects of ethnic compositions of schools and classes adequately. In The Netherlands, for example, classes with a high percentage of ethnic minority children tend to be smaller. As a result, the potential effects proportion might have, may be confused with size. Controlling statistically for size allows us to test whether the proportion of ethnic minorities and ethnic heterogeneity affect pupils' experiences with racist bullying.

Methodologically, studies which examine both individual and school variables have to deal with data that are hierarchically structured. However, this hierarchical structure is almost always disaggregated to the individual level: variables that describe the school context are assigned to individuals. Assigning group-level variables to individual children may result in spuriously significant results because the standard errors, which are based on the higher number of disaggregated cases, are too small. Hence, originally small differences between contexts will become significant because the numbers of observations have been increased. Furthermore, groups, and in particular school classes, are hardly ever formed randomly and children from the same class will share many experiences. Therefore, the assumption of independence of observations is often violated (Kenny and Judd 1984). The statistical technique of multilevel modelling allows the simultaneous analysis of individual and classroom level variables, without compromising the quality of the information at both levels (Kenny 1996). In the present study, racist name-calling and ethnic exclusion are explained by children's individual characteristics, such as ethnicity and gender, and by the (aggregated) properties of school classes.<sup>1</sup>

### *Data and measurements*

Data were gathered in the spring of 2000 in eighty-two primary schools across the country. Originally, a cross-section of 200 schools was approached using the Dutch national listing of primary schools. The schools that were willing to participate form a cross-section of schools from thirty different cities in all regions of the country.

At each school, the children in the two highest year groups participated

on a voluntary basis. The questionnaire was administered in 182 school classes and all children approached were willing to participate. A total of 3,806 children took part. Ethnic background was assessed by means of self-definition on an open question and by two questions on the ethnic background of the parents. Over 180 different self-definitions were given, including many hyphenated ones. For the present analyses, we focused on the children of the largest ethnic groups. That is, those children who used the same label to define themselves as well as their father and mother. The sample used in the analyses contained 2,851 children: 1,641 were of an ethnic Dutch background, 612 of a Turkish one, and there were 463 Moroccan and 135 Surinamese children. Forty-nine per cent were girls and 51 per cent boys. There was no ethnic difference for gender. The Dutch children were somewhat younger than the Turkish and Moroccan ones.<sup>2</sup> Fifty-four per cent of the Turks and 52 per cent of the Moroccans were twelve or thirteen years old. For the Dutch this percentage was 38, and for the Surinamese 43.

### *Racist victimization*

Perceived personal racist victimization was assessed with four questions on five-point scales (ranging from 'no, never' to 'yes, very often'). The children were asked to what extent they were called names and teased because of their Dutch (Turkish, Moroccan or Surinamese) background. In each question the children themselves filled in the label used for self-definition. The questions were asked in connection with school, and about the direct neighbourhood. The other two questions were on experiences with social exclusion from play in school and in the neighbourhood because of ethnicity.

For perceived ethnic peer group victimization, two questions were asked using the same five-point scale. One question concerned name-calling and teasing, the other ethnic exclusion from play at school.

In analysing the results for these questions, the percentages of children reporting experiences with racist name-calling and ethnic exclusion will be presented first. In doing so, the four ethnic groups will be compared for each of the six questions. Secondly, for the multilevel modelling, two composite scores will be used. One measures personal racist victimization by means of the four questions for which reliability analysis yielded a Cronbach's alpha equal to 0.68. The other uses the two questions on perceived peer group victimization for which an alpha of 0.66 was found.

### *Class-level measures*

Four questions (on a five-point scale: 'no, never' to 'yes, very often') were used to obtain children's perceptions of the teacher's reactions to racial harassment (see Kinket and Verkuyten 1997). The children were



asked to imagine that a child is being teased or called names because he or she is from a different country. Subsequently they were asked whether their teacher would say and do something about this and whether they and their classmates would tell their teacher. The four questions used were related, and reliability analysis yielded an alpha of 0.62. Hence, for each child, a composite score was computed and a subsequent classroom measure was obtained by aggregating the scores within each class.

Four questions (on a five-point scale: 'no, never' to 'yes, very often') were used to obtain perceptions of multicultural education. These questions were taken from previous Dutch research (Kinket and Verkuyten, 1997, 1999). Two sample items were 'Does the teacher sometimes talk about being fair to children from different countries?'; 'Does the teacher sometimes talk about the habits of people from different cultures during class?'. Reliability analysis yielded an alpha of 0.69. Hence, a composite score was used that was aggregated in order to obtain a measure for the extent of multicultural education on a classroom-level.

Another measure of the extent of multicultural education in the classes concerned was obtained by three questions which were put to each teacher. The teachers were asked how important they considered it to teach about cultural differences within The Netherlands, to teach about racism and discrimination and to teach children to respect other cultures and religions. Reliability analysis for these questions yielded an alpha equal to 0.77.

Different composition measures at classroom-level were computed. Firstly, the percentage of Dutch pupils in each class was used (ranging between nil per cent and 100 per cent). Secondly, the percentage of same-ethnic minority group pupils (Turkish, Moroccan or Surinamese) was used (ranging between nil per cent and 86 per cent). Also, a measure of the ethnic heterogeneity was computed by dividing the number of self-defined ethnic groups by the total number of children (ranging between 0.03 and 0.46). Finally, the total number of pupils or the size of the class was computed (ranging between ten and thirty-six pupils).

In order to examine and interpret the possible effects of these classroom-level characteristics, it is important to know how they are related. The pupils' perception of the extent of multicultural education showed a low correlation with the teachers' (0.20,  $p < .05$ ). Furthermore, perceived teacher reactions towards racism was related to the pupils' perception of the level of multicultural education (0.43,  $p < .001$ ), but not significantly with that of the teachers (0.13,  $p > .05$ ).

On a classroom-level, the degree of multicultural education according to the children was negatively related to the percentage of Dutch pupils ( $-0.26$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and positively with the percentage of Turkish (0.30,  $p < .001$ ) and Moroccan pupils (0.25,  $p < .001$ ). In classes with a higher percentage of Dutch (or Turkish, or Moroccan) pupils, there was less (more)

attention for multicultural issues. However, there were no associations between the percentage of Dutch, Turkish, Moroccan or Surinamese pupils and multicultural education according to the teachers nor with the perceived teachers' reactions to racism. In addition, the different percentages of pupils from the different ethnic groups were not related to the teachers' perceived reactions.

The number of children in class correlated positively with the percentage of Dutch pupils (0.38,  $p < .001$ ), and negatively with the percentage of Turkish ( $-0.19$ ,  $p < .01$ ), Moroccan ( $-0.31$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and Surinamese ( $-0.09$ ) pupils. In classes with a relatively high proportion of Dutch pupils, the number of pupils tended to be higher. There were no significant correlations between class size and the measures for multicultural education and teacher's reactions.

The percentage of Dutch children showed a strong negative correlation with the percentage of Turkish ( $-0.63$ ,  $p < .001$ ), Moroccan ( $-0.62$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and Surinamese pupils ( $-0.53$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The highest correlation between the percentages of Turkish, Moroccan and Surinamese pupils was 0.16. Finally, ethnic heterogeneity was related negatively to the percentage of Dutch pupils ( $-0.43$ ), and positively to the percentage of Surinamese pupils (0.39,  $p < .001$ ), but not to the percentages of Turkish and Moroccan pupils.

## Results

Table 1 presents the results for personal and perceived group experiences with racist name-calling and ethnic exclusion in school and in the neighbourhood.<sup>3</sup> Four clear results emerged.

Firstly, the answers to all six questions showed that there is a difference between Dutch children on the one hand and ethnic minority group children on the other.<sup>4</sup> A lower percentage of Dutch children report racist name-calling and ethnic exclusion from play. For example, 79 per cent of the Dutch children indicate that they have never been victims of racist name-calling in school. For the Turks this percentage is 58, for the Moroccans it is 67 and for the Surinamese 66. Hence, between 42 and 33 per cent of the ethnic minority children has been victim of racist name-calling in school, whereas this is the case for 21 per cent of the Dutch children. Furthermore, between 26 and 30 per cent of the ethnic minority group children have experienced ethnic exclusion, whereas this percentage is 19 for the Dutch children. In addition, and in agreement with studies on bullying in general (for example, Glover *et al.* 2000; Smith and Shu 2000), being a frequent or regular victim of racist name-calling (highest percentage is seven) and ethnic exclusion (highest percentage is 12) is relatively exceptional, but more so for Dutch children. For the different questions there are few differences between the ethnic minority groups. However, more Turkish children report having been subject to racist name-calling.<sup>5</sup>

**Table 1.** Percentages for personal experiences with racist name-calling and social exclusion and perceived experiences of peers from one's own ethnic group. For four ethnic groups and in two situations.

|                             | Dutch<br>(N = 1641) | Turkish<br>(N = 612) | Moroccan<br>(N = 463) | Surinamese<br>(N = 135) |
|-----------------------------|---------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| <i>Personal experiences</i> |                     |                      |                       |                         |
| Racist name-calling         |                     |                      |                       |                         |
| in school                   |                     |                      |                       |                         |
| Never                       | 79%                 | 58%                  | 65%                   | 66%                     |
| Occasional                  | 19%                 | 35%                  | 29%                   | 28%                     |
| Frequent                    | 2%                  | 7%                   | 6%                    | 6%                      |
| Racist name-calling         |                     |                      |                       |                         |
| in neighbourhood            |                     |                      |                       |                         |
| Never                       | 74%                 | 53%                  | 63%                   | 67%                     |
| Occasional                  | 24%                 | 42%                  | 33%                   | 28%                     |
| Frequent                    | 2%                  | 5%                   | 3%                    | 5%                      |
| Ethnic exclusion            |                     |                      |                       |                         |
| in school                   |                     |                      |                       |                         |
| Never                       | 81%                 | 74%                  | 73%                   | 70%                     |
| Occasional                  | 11%                 | 14%                  | 15%                   | 19%                     |
| Frequent                    | 8%                  | 12%                  | 12%                   | 11%                     |
| Ethnic exclusion            |                     |                      |                       |                         |
| in neighbourhood            |                     |                      |                       |                         |
| Never                       | 80%                 | 72%                  | 73%                   | 72%                     |
| Occasional                  | 15%                 | 17%                  | 17%                   | 16%                     |
| Frequent                    | 5%                  | 11%                  | 10%                   | 12%                     |
| <i>Ethnic peer group</i>    |                     |                      |                       |                         |
| Racist name-calling         |                     |                      |                       |                         |
| in school                   |                     |                      |                       |                         |
| Never                       | 49%                 | 30%                  | 40%                   | 43%                     |
| Occasional                  | 48%                 | 59%                  | 54%                   | 52%                     |
| Frequent                    | 3%                  | 11%                  | 6%                    | 5%                      |
| Ethnic exclusion            |                     |                      |                       |                         |
| In school                   |                     |                      |                       |                         |
| Never                       | 56%                 | 42%                  | 48%                   | 51%                     |
| Occasional                  | 39%                 | 49%                  | 40%                   | 38%                     |
| Frequent                    | 5%                  | 9%                   | 12%                   | 11%                     |

Secondly, the percentages for racist name-calling are higher than those for ethnic exclusion.<sup>6</sup> Incidences of name-calling are more common than social exclusion which is found in many other studies on bullying (see Borg 1999; Smith and Shu 2000). Hence, for all groups, being the victim of racist name-calling is more common or more noticed than experiencing ethnic exclusion.

Thirdly, it was also found that there are no differences between the situation at school and the direct neighbourhood. That is, an approximately equal number of children report experiences with racist name-calling and

ethnic exclusion in both situations. Furthermore, the correlation between the questions on both situations is high (lowest correlation is 0.58).

Finally, compared to the Dutch more ethnic minority children indicate that children of their own group are victims of racist name-calling and ethnic exclusion.<sup>7</sup> Again, there are few differences between the ethnic minority groups, but relatively more Turkish children report Turkish peers to be victims of racism.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the results for the questions on the perceived racist group victimization differ from those for personal experiences with racist victimization. Using the two composite scores, pair-wise tests of means showed for all four ethnic groups a significant difference between personal and ethnic peer group victimization (all comparisons  $p < .001$ ). That is to say, in agreement with the personal/group discrimination discrepancy, children report higher levels of racist name-calling and social exclusion from play directed at peers of their group than at themselves as individual members of that group.

By means of composition measures and multilevel analyses these results were examined in more detail.<sup>9</sup>

### *Personal experiences*

To discover whether between-class variances are significant, and thus whether characteristics of the class context have an effect, an intercept only model was examined, excluding explanatory variables. Model 1 in Table 2 shows the results of this analysis for personal racist victimization.

The class-level variance turns out to be significant for personal victimization. This means that experiences with racial harassment are determined not only by individual factors but also by characteristics of the classroom context. In some classes, children are more likely to report being subject to racist name-calling and social exclusion. The intra-class correlation (class-level variance divided by total variance) reveals that 6.6 per cent of the variance in victimization is explained by the class' structure. Hence, the within-class variance is larger than the between-class variance. Therefore, individual factors explain more variance in personal experiences with racism than class features, but the latter do have a significant effect.

In the second step of the analysis, the contribution of the individual level variables, ethnicity, gender and age, were examined to see whether they predict racist victimization. Model 2 in Table 2 shows that the effect for the child's ethnicity is significant. The three ethnic minority groups are significantly more likely than the Dutch to experience racism. In addition, more Turkish than Moroccan children indicate victimization.<sup>10</sup>

The results show no effect for age, but boys report more racist victimization than girls. This gender difference is in agreement with studies on bullying in general (for example, Smith and Shu 2000). This difference

between boys and girls is found for all ethnic groups except the Turkish one. In this group, boys and girls report equal levels of victimization.

In Model 3, the aggregated scores for perceived reaction to racial harassment and the level of multicultural education as seen by the children, the extent of multicultural education according to the teacher, the proportion of Dutch pupils, ethnic heterogeneity, and the size of the class were included.

Reaction to racial harassment has a positive effect. Thus, in classes where children see that teachers act on ethnic harassment there is less racist victimization. The children's opinion of the level of multicultural education also affects the degree of victimization. A more multicultural curriculum relates to more reported racist victimization. The extent of multicultural education according to the teachers has no significant effect. Furthermore, neither the proportion of Dutch pupils nor ethnic heterogeneity has significant effects. Finally, class size does have a significant effect. Racist victimization is less likely to occur in larger classes.

Model 4 (not in Table 2), examined whether the effects of the class-level characteristics differed for the four ethnic groups. As far as the reaction to racial harassment is concerned this is not the case, as it has a positive effect for all ethnic groups. However, the children's opinion

**Table 2.** Results of the multilevel analysis for personal racist victimization; standardized betas

|  | Model 1      | Model 2   | Model 3   |
|--|--------------|-----------|-----------|
| <i>Individual variables</i>                        |              |           |           |
| Gender (girl)                                      |              | -0.053**  | -0.055**  |
| Age  |              | -0.013    | -0.011    |
| Turkish  |              | 0.172**   | 0.152**   |
| Moroccan   |              | 0.064**   | 0.041     |
| Surinamese   |              | 0.070**   | 0.059**   |
| <i>Class variables</i>                             |              |           |           |
| Perceived teachers' reactions                      |              |           | -0.057*   |
| Pupils' assessment<br>of multicultural education   |              |           | 0.068*    |
| Teachers' assessment of<br>multicultural education |              |           | -0.027    |
| Percentage Dutch pupils                            |              |           | -0.023    |
| Ethnic heterogeneity                               |              |           | -0.011    |
| Class size   |              |           | -0.072**  |
| <i>Variance</i>                                    |              |           |           |
| Between classes                                    | 0.030 (6.6%) | 0.020     | 0.014     |
| Between children                                   | 0.428        | 0.421     | 0.422     |
| df   | 1            | 5         | 5         |
| Deviance difference                                | 60.332***    | 82.673*** | 19.954*** |

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

of the level of multicultural education only has an effect for the Dutch, not for the other children.<sup>11</sup> Hence, particularly for the Dutch, a higher level of multicultural education relates to more self-reported racist victimization. Furthermore, the effect for class size is also significant for only the Dutch.<sup>12</sup> For the ethnic minority group children, the number of children is not related to racist victimization.

The proportion of Dutch pupils in the class has no main effect on racist victimization, but it does affect the experiences of the Dutch and the ethnic minority group children differently. For the Dutch children, a higher proportion Dutch pupils is related to less racist victimization.<sup>13</sup> In contrast, when there is a higher proportion of Dutch children, the Turkish and Moroccan children report significantly more experiences with racist victimization. For the Surinamese children there is a similar tendency which, however, is not significant.

In an additional analysis, we examined whether the proportion of pupils of same-ethnic group (rather than just Dutch pupils) has an effect on racist victimization.<sup>14</sup> The proportion of same-ethnic children did show a significant negative effect. Hence, the higher this proportion, the lower the number of children who report being the victim of racism. There was an interaction effect with ethnic group, however. The proportion of pupils of one's own ethnic group had a significant effect only for the Dutch and the Turkish children.<sup>15</sup>

In this analysis, ethnic heterogeneity in class was also found to have a significant and independent effect on racist victimization. The more ethnically heterogeneous a class is, the less racist victimization is reported. However, this effect differed for the four ethnic groups. It was found for the Dutch and Moroccans only.<sup>16</sup>

### *Perceived racist group victimization*

Table 3 shows that the class-level variance is also significant for perceived ethnic peer-group victimization. In some classes, children are more likely to report that contemporaries of their ethnic group are subject to racist name-calling and social exclusion from play. Here too, the within-class variance is larger than the between-class variance (5.1 per cent). Hence, individual factors explain more variance in perceptions of racist group victimization than do class features, but again the latter do have a significant effect.

Model 2 in Table 3 shows that the effect for ethnic background is significant. The three ethnic minority groups are significantly more likely than the Dutch children to report that children of their ethnic group are victims of racism. In addition, more Turkish than Moroccan children acknowledge the existence of racist group victimization.<sup>17</sup> The results do not show main effects for age or for gender. However, additional analyses indicate that Dutch girls report less group victimization than

Dutch boys. No gender differences were found for the three ethnic minority groups.

Model 3 includes the class-level characteristics. Two effects were found. The children's opinion of the level of multicultural education has an effect on perceived group victimization. A more multicultural curriculum is related to higher levels of perceived racist victimization of other children. Again, this is particularly true for the Dutch and the Turkish children, but not for the Moroccan and Surinamese children.<sup>18</sup>

The extent of multicultural education according to the teachers has a negative significant effect. The children are less likely to perceive victimization of same-ethnic peers in classes where, according to the teachers, more time is spent on multicultural education.

The reaction to racial harassment, the proportion of Dutch children, the level of ethnic heterogeneity and the size of the class, none of these had significant main effects on group victimization. However, the proportion of Dutch pupils in the class did affect the perceived group victimization of each group. In the case of the Dutch children, a higher proportion of Dutch pupils is related to less perceived racist group victimization, whereas it relates to more perceived racist group victimization for the Turkish and Moroccan children. Thus, Turkish and

**Table 3.** Results of the multilevel analysis for perceived racist victimization of peers from the same ethnic group: standardized betas

|   | Model 1      | Model 2   | Model 3   |
|---|--------------|-----------|-----------|
| <i>Individual variables</i>                     |              |           |           |
| Gender (girl)                                   |              | -0.027    | -0.028    |
| Age   |              | -0.016    | -0.014    |
| Turkish   |              | 0.193**   | 0.162**   |
| Moroccan  |              | 0.076**   | 0.041     |
| Surinamese                                      |              | 0.069**   | 0.050*    |
| <i>Class variables</i>                          |              |           |           |
| Perceived teachers' reactions                   |              |           | -0.033    |
| Pupils' assessment of multicultural education   |              |           | 0.052*    |
| Teachers' assessment of multicultural education |              |           | -0.061**  |
| Percentage Dutch pupils                         |              |           | -0.040    |
| Ethnic heterogeneity                            |              |           | 0.012     |
| Class size                                      |              |           | -0.039    |
| <i>Variance</i>                                 |              |           |           |
| Between classes                                 | 0.034 (5.1%) | 0.017     | 0.011     |
| Between children                                | 0.636        | 0.626     | 0.626     |
| df  | 1            | 5         | 5         |
| Deviance difference                             | 38.442***    | 91.953*** | 19.493*** |

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Moroccan children believe peers of their own ethnic group to be more likely to experience racist victimization in classes with relatively more Dutch children. In this situation, the Dutch children perceive less racist victimization of Dutch peers.

In an additional analysis, it was again examined whether the proportion of pupils of same-ethnic group (rather than just Dutch pupils) affects racist victimization. The proportion of same-ethnicity pupils did show a significant negative effect.<sup>19</sup> Hence, the higher this proportion, the less racist group victimization was perceived. This effect was found for all ethnic groups except the Moroccans.

Furthermore, for the Moroccan children, ethnic heterogeneity in the class had a significant and independent effect on perceived racist group victimization.<sup>20</sup> The more ethnically heterogeneous the class is, the less racist victimization of Moroccan peers is perceived. For the Dutch, Turkish and Surinamese children no effects were found for ethnic heterogeneity.

## **Discussion**

There are several ethnographic studies describing the complexity and subtlety of racism in children's lives. Furthermore, there are various ones that examine a limited number of schools in detail in order to come to an understanding about the way schools affect group relations among children (for example, Troyna and Hatcher, 1992; Connolly, 1998). What are lacking are large-scale studies that provide information on how widespread racism is among children, and that address conceptual and methodological problems in research to date (Schofield 1991).

The present study was conducted in eighty-two primary schools in the Netherlands and focused on two of the most common forms of bullying among children: name-calling and social exclusion from play (for example, Kelly and Cohn 1988; Smith and Shu 2000). That is to say, it was examined whether children are called names or excluded from play because of their ethnic background. Individual and school characteristics were hereby simultaneously taken into account by using multi-level modelling.

The results show that Turkish, Moroccan and Surinamese children are more likely to become victims of racist name-calling and social exclusion than Dutch children. One out of five Dutch children, for example, reported having experienced racist name-calling, whereas this was the case for at least one out of three ethnic minority group children. Hence, a clear difference between Dutch children on the one hand and Turkish, Moroccan and Surinamese children on the other was found (see also Junger 1990; Verkuyten and Thijs 2000). Furthermore, Turkish children, more so than Moroccan and Surinamese children indicated that they had experienced racist name-calling. One possible reason for this might be



what several studies among Dutch children, adolescents and adults found, namely that in terms of social distance, the Turks are the least accepted minority group (Hagendoorn 1995; Verkuyten and Kinket 2000). Another related reason is that abuse referring to a Turkish background is more common in Dutch society than are terms that refer to other ethnicities (Verkuyten 1997).

In addition to the results on personal experiences, there is also an ethnic difference regarding perceived racist bullying of same-ethnic peers. One out of two Dutch children, for example, thought that other Dutch children were confronted with racist name-calling, whereas this was the case for approximately two out of three ethnic minority group children. Again, the highest percentages were found for the Turkish children. These results also indicate that minority on majority group racism does occur (Kelly and Cohn 1988).

Furthermore, and in agreement with other findings (see Taylor, *et al.* 1993), it was found that perceiving racism to be directed at oneself as an individual member of a group is not the same as perceiving racism to be directed at other children of one's group. A positive but moderate correlation was found and children reported a higher level of peer group racism than personal racism. This discrepancy is a constant finding among an array of disadvantaged groups and using different wordings of questions (see Taylor *et al.* 1993). Several explanations have been offered for this phenomenon, such as the denial of personal racism, the exaggeration of racism directed at the group as a whole, and basic cognitive processes of information processing. Whatever the explanation, the phenomenon seems real and indicates that investigators of racism must be clear about their focus and analysis, and that the one form of racism cannot be used to draw conclusions about the other.

The present study not only investigated individual-level characteristics but also features of classroom context. Most existing studies on the importance of school characteristics for group relations among children have methodological shortcomings because levels of analysis are disregarded. Disregarding these levels has serious statistical problems and may lead to misleading conclusions.<sup>21</sup> In the present study, multilevel analyses were used and the results provide evidence that racist bullying is not only determined by individual characteristics, but also independently by classroom settings and structures. This means that children in the same form are more similar to each other regarding experiences with racism and perceptions of peer group racism than they are to children in different forms. Yet the results indicate that a small proportion of the total variance (less than 7 per cent) is explained by the class to which children belong. The larger context of Dutch society may be one reason for this relatively low impact of classroom context. For example, Turkish children may constitute a numerical majority in a classroom, but they

are still a minority within Dutch society. This latter fact may diminish the effect of classroom variation.

In addition, there are possible statistical reasons for the small proportion of explained variance. Statistically, studying a whole array of schools decreases the likelihood that specific characteristics of one or two schools determine the results. Conclusions drawn from research comparing just a few schools can be affected greatly by such characteristics. However, using many schools means that the error variance due to differences between schools might mask the effects schools might have. Furthermore, it is generally quite difficult to develop reliable measures for contextual variables, in particular when these variables refer to normative issues such as multicultural education. Thus, it is likely that the effect of the classroom is underestimated (Kreft 1987; Hox 1994).

The children's opinion of the level of multicultural education affected personal experiences with racist bullying as well as the perception of other same-ethnic children's experiences. Children reported being victimized more if they said that more time was spent on multicultural issues. This suggests that multicultural education leads to a higher awareness of racism and that children learn to label and interpret negative forms of behaviour in terms of racism and discrimination. Another finding in support of this interpretation is that there was only an effect for multicultural education among the Dutch children. Ethnic minority children did not report being bullied more when enjoying a higher level of multicultural education. For the Dutch children, bringing cultural differences and racism to their attention may have a sensitizing effect leading to greater vigilance. In contrast, ethnic minority group children are probably well aware of the existence of racism and discrimination in the first place, which would explain why their level of awareness would remain unaffected. However, all children reported less racism directed at peers of their own group when the teacher claimed that more time was spent on multicultural issues. This effect was not found for personal experiences but suggests that multicultural education for all children plays a role in how they perceive the experiences of their group members.

In all ethnic groups, fewer children reported experiences with racist bullying when they believed that they could tell their teacher about it and that the teacher would react. This result suggests that actual practices and informal contacts affect racist name-calling and ethnic exclusion more directly than do more formal aspects of multicultural education, such as the curriculum.<sup>22</sup>

Of the different composition measures used, the percentage of Dutch pupils in class had the most clear and consistent effects. Fewer Dutch children reported personal racist experiences when the percentage of Dutch pupils was higher. In other words, Dutch children felt more

victimized in classes where there were fewer Dutch. In contrast, Turkish, Moroccan and to a lesser extent Surinamese children reported more experiences with racist victimization in classes with a relatively high percentage of Dutch pupils. Furthermore, in these classes, the Turks and Moroccans perceived more racism to be directed at peers of their own ethnic group. Hence, in situations where ethnic groups are a numerical minority they are more likely to be subjected to racism. However, the percentage of Turkish, Moroccan or Surinamese pupils in form had little effect on experiences with racist bullying. These results suggest that the ethnically Dutch and non-Dutch distinction is particularly important for children's understanding of racism. Verkuyten *et al.* (1997) studied Dutch and ethnic minority children and found shared beliefs about discriminatory behaviour. Children indicated the prototypical example of discrimination to be a situation in which a Dutch child is the perpetrator and a minority child the victim. Hence, for racist harassment the issue of segregated and desegregated (or black and white schools) seems more important than the number of pupils from the same ethnic background. However, the percentage of Turkish classmates did turn out to be relevant for Turkish children. A higher percentage of Turkish children favourably affected their experiences with and perceptions of racist bullying. This result may be due to the relatively high level of racism that Turkish children face, making a consonant environment with more social support and protection particularly important. In addition, ethnic heterogeneity had an effect for the Moroccan children only. They reported less racist victimization in more ethnically heterogeneous classes. The reasons for this effect are unclear.

To conclude, we have examined the extent of racist victimization among children and the role that school characteristics play. Hopefully, the present study will help to provide a conceptual and methodological basis for future large-scale investigations into experiences of children from both ethnic minority and majority groups. The survey method obviously has its limitations, especially in relation to complex topics such as racism and multicultural education. However, the same can be said for all methods, and the survey is at least able to offer what small-scale ethnographic studies cannot. For one thing, survey research can identify individual and contextual factors and conditions that do and do not have an effect on racist victimization. This can be helpful in setting up studies that want to examine racism in more detail. It can also be helpful for assessing the generality of conclusions of small-scale studies and the policy implications for schooling that these studies often make.

## Notes

1. The school was not included as a level in the analyses. No systematic information on schools had been gathered, and moreover, bullying has repeatedly been found to be

carried out by children of the same class or age group (e.g. Borg 1999; Smith & Shu 2000). For children, the context of the school class is a more important point of reference and site of experiences than the school as a whole

2. Chi square (9, 2844) = 51.35,  $p < .001$
3. The responses to the questions were grouped as follows: 'no, never' to indicate no racist experiences, 'no, not very often' and 'sometimes' to indicate occasional victimization, and 'yes, quite often' and 'yes, very often' to indicate frequent victimization.
4. For personal racist name-calling in school, Chi square (6, 2806) = 101.49,  $p < .000$  and in the neighbourhood, chi square (6, 2795) = 116.78,  $p < .000$ . For personal ethnic exclusion in school, chi square (6, 2798) = 23.92,  $p < .001$ , and in the neighbourhood, chi square (6, 2786) = 43.59,  $p < .000$ .
5. Comparison between the three ethnic minority groups shows for racist name-calling in school, chi square (4, 1189) = 23.23,  $p < .001$ , and for racist name-calling in the neighbourhood, chi square (4, 1186) = 12.05,  $p < .01$ .
6. In school, chi square (4, 2777) = 356.26,  $p < .000$ , and in the neighbourhood, chi square (4, 2768) = 447.19,  $p < .000$ .
7. For racist name-calling in school, chi square (6, 2587) = 103.04,  $p < .000$ , and for ethnic exclusion, chi square (6, 2593) = 62.24,  $p < .000$ .
8. For the three ethnic minority groups, chi square (4, 1102) = 21.94,  $p < .001$ .
9. In order to examine classroom effects, we used M1wiN version 1.00 (Rasbach *et al.*, 1998) to conduct multilevel regression analyses. Level 1 of the analysis represents differences between children, whereas level 2 represents differences between classes. The dependent variables consisted of personal racist victimization and ethnic peer group victimization. As predictors on the level of the children, ethnicity (Dutch, Turkish, Moroccan, and Surinamese), gender, and age were used. The aggregated score for pupils' perception of multicultural education, the aggregated score for the perceived reactions towards racism, the teachers' assessment of multicultural education, and the ethnic composition measures were used as class-room level predictors.

When performing these analyses, the following procedure was used. Firstly, an 'intercept-only model' was examined for each dependent variable (Model 1), in which only a random intercept was fitted and no explanatory variables. This model partitions the total variance in within-group and between-group variance. This means that differences between pupils as well as between classes can be determined.

Secondly, we investigated which variables on the individual level contributed significantly to the prediction of the dependent variable. Model 2 will show the results of the analyses in which all individual level variables are included. In this model, these categorical variables are fixed, that is, the regression coefficients are not assumed to vary across classes. Thirdly, in Model 3, class-level variables were included in the equation. Next, in order to examine differences between Turkish, Moroccan, Surinamese, and Dutch children, the significant (cross-level) interactions with ethnicity were included in Model 4. That is, it was examined whether the effects for multicultural education and class composition were similar for the different ethnic groups.

10. Difference between Turks and Moroccans:  $\beta = 0.166$ ,  $p < .01$ .
11. For the Dutch,  $\beta = 0.203$ ,  $p < .01$ .
12. For the Dutch,  $\beta = -0.014$ ,  $p < .01$ .
13. For the Dutch,  $\beta = -0.716$ ,  $p < .001$ , for the Turks,  $\beta = 0.403$ ,  $p < .001$ , for the Moroccans,  $\beta = 0.383$ ,  $p < .001$ , and for the Surinamese,  $\beta = 0.097$ ,  $p > .05$ .
14. This additional analysis was made because of the relatively high correlation between the percentage of Dutch and ethnic minority group children (around  $-0.60$ ), making it statistically difficult to test these effects in a single analysis. Therefore, an analysis was conducted using the percentage of same-ethnic group as an additional intermediate level in a three-level model. The effect for the proportion of same-ethnic group was,  $\beta = -0.176$ ,  $p < .01$ .
15. For the Dutch,  $\beta = -0.18$ ,  $p < .01$ , and for the Turks,  $\beta = -0.14$ ,  $p < .05$ .

16. The general effect for heterogeneity is  $\beta = -0.085$ ,  $p < .01$ , for the Dutch children  $\beta = -0.021$ ,  $p < .05$ , and for the Moroccans  $\beta = -0.041$ ,  $p < .01$ .
17. Differences between Turks and Moroccans,  $\beta = 0.215$ ,  $p < .001$ .
18. For the Dutch children,  $\beta = -0.26$ ,  $p < .001$ , and for the Turkish children,  $\beta = -0.16$ ,  $p < .01$ .
19. For the proportion of same-ethnic group,  $\beta = -0.182$ ,  $p < .001$ .
20. For the Moroccans,  $\beta = -0.059$ ,  $p < .01$ .
21. For example, using analyses performed at the individual level to make inferences at a higher level is known as the 'atomistic fallacy', whereas the 'ecological fallacy' refers to the fact that inferences at a lower level are made from analyses performed at a higher level (Robinson 1950).
22. However, due to our survey data the direction of the effects for teacher's reactions as well as for multicultural education cannot be established. That is, it is of course feasible that (growing) concern about racism or increasing racist incidents motivates teachers to pay more attention to multicultural issues.

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**MAYKEL VERKUYTEN** is an Associate Professor at the Faculty of Social Sciences and a Senior Researcher at the European Research Center on Migration and Ethnic Relations (ERCOMER) at Utrecht University

**JOCHEM THIJIS** is a psychologist working as Researcher in the Department of Education, at the University of Amsterdam.

ADDRESS: (for correspondence): Faculty of Social Sciences, Ercomer, Utrecht University, Heidelberglaan 2, 3584 CS Utrecht, The Netherlands. email: M.Verkuyten@fss.uu.nl