

Roma's School Ethnic Composition, Intergroup Contact and Global Citizenship Identification as Predictors of Well-Being

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Abstract

We examined a serial mediation model of Roma's prior school ethnic composition on well-being through intergroup contact and global citizenship identification. Slovak Roma completed measures related to school ethnic composition, intergroup friendships, global citizenship identification, and mental and physical well-being. The results showed that attendance at schools with a larger number of non-Roma predicted more intergroup friendships. A greater number of intergroup friendships predicted greater global citizenship identification, which in turn, predicted greater well-being. Furthermore, intergroup friendships also predicted greater well-being. The association between school ethnic composition and well-being was mediated by intergroup friendships and global citizenship identification. Together, the results highlight the environmental impact on Roma's social network, identity, and mental and physical well-being.

Keywords: Roma, Education, Integration, Desegregation, Intergroup Contact, Global Citizenship, Identification, Social Identity, Well-Being.

1. Introduction

Roma are the most discriminated group in Europe (McGarry, 2011). Roma, compared to non-Roma, face verbal harassment and threats of physical violence (Vermeersch, 2011), lower psychological well-being (Kamberi, Martinovic, & Verkuyten, 2015), employment difficulties and lower pay (Drydakis, 2012), poor health care (Cook, Wayne, Valentine, Lessios, & Yeh, 2013), substandard living conditions (Kósa, Daragó, & Ádány, 2009), and poorer education (Cudworth, 2008). Despite efforts by the European Union (along with a multitude of NGOs) to integrate Roma, particularly in the education domain (Buşiu, 2014), schools remain relatively segregated (Kovács, 2015). The problem of school desegregation is especially evident in Slovakia where little effort has been made (Taba & Ryder, 2012). Roma are segregated in education through practices such as inappropriately placing Roma children in special schools for individuals with disabilities and also by placing them in Roma-only classes at regular schools (Arabadjieva, 2015). In the present research we examined associations between Slovakian Roma's perception of school ethnic composition, intergroup contact, global citizenship identification, and well-being.

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1.1. Roma's Well-Being

Roma experience poorer physical (Cook et al., 2013) and psychological well-being (Kamberi et al., 2015; Lee et al., 2014) than non-Roma. For example, Cook and colleagues (2013) reviewed prior research concerning Roma's physical health to find that Roma (vs. non-Roma) are more at risk of developing diabetes, have higher blood pressure, show greater prevalence of end stage renal disease, are more likely to suffer from migraine headaches, and are more vulnerable to disease outbreaks. Goward, Repper, Appleton, and Hagan (2006) surveyed Roma and non-Roma in the UK and found Roma to report higher levels of anxiety and depression, and lower levels of health related quality of life. Similarly, Lee and colleagues (2014) surveyed children in Romania and Bulgaria to find Roma (vs. non-Roma) reporting higher prevalence of a variety of psychological disorders (e.g., phobias, anxiety, depression). There are a variety of predictors for the difference in physical and mental health between non-Roma and Roma. Jarcuska and colleagues (2013) surveyed Roma in Slovakia to find that lack of money was the most frequently endorsed reason for facing difficulty in accessing physical health services. Kamberi and colleagues (2015) examined a variety of mediators of the association between Roma and non-Roma and subjective well-being. The results showed health status, household income, education, quality of housing, discrimination, and ethnic pride were all significant mediators. Other variables, such as school ethnic composition, intergroup contact, and viewing the self in terms of a global identity may also influence Roma well-being.

1.2. Intergroup Contact

Psychologists have long recognized the negative impact of discrimination and feeling rejected by society on well-being (Schmitt, Branscombe, Postmes, & Garcia, 2014), while feeling accepted is related to positive well-being (Blackhart, Nelson, Knowles, & Baumeister, 2009). Intergroup contact theory (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1998) posits that under some circumstances, contact between members of different groups can reduce intergroup prejudice. A wealth of research shows that intergroup contact, in ideal contexts, does reduce prejudice (Lemmer & Wagner, 2015; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006) through increasing knowledge regarding the outgroup, lowering anxiety, and increasing empathy (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). Research suggests that the associations are universal (Pettigrew, Tropp, Wagner, & Christ, 2011) and work for children and adolescents (Beelmann & Heinemann, 2014) as well as adults. The association between intergroup contact and prejudice reduction is particularly strong when friendships are formed (Davies, Tropp, Aron, Pettigrew, & Wright, 2011). Kao and Joyner (2006) show that students in schools in which the racial composition is more heterogeneous (vs. homogeneous) are likely to have more intergroup friendships. In other words, in schools in which one's racial/ethnic identity is a minority, students have fewer opportunities to form friendships with intragroup individuals and instead make friends with outgroup members. Thus, school composition can influence intergroup contact and friendships. Intergroup contact may also influence students' view of the world and well-being. Thus, for Roma, attendance at desegregated schools may provide greater opportunities for intergroup contact with non-Roma. This can lead to more opportunities for intergroup friendships, which in turn can influence Roma's well-being.

Research shows that minority group members with more intergroup friends experience a greater sense of belongingness to their school (Mendoza-Denton & Page-Gould, 2008). Interpreted differently, greater intergroup friendships may be related to greater felt acceptance in the school environment, which may lead to positive well-being. Although the majority of intergroup contact research focuses on intergroup attitudes and prejudice as an outcome, contact may also be related to well-being. Some support for this notion was shown by McGill, Way, and Hughes (2012), where the researchers observed that middle school students with both intra- and interracial friendships (vs. only intra and only inter) are found to report less depressive symptoms and greater friend support. Beyond well-being, contact may also broaden individuals' worldview. Heyward (2002) suggests that intergroup contact in schools, where the normative context is supportive for interactions, students are equal status and level of competence, and the context promotes

cooperation (vs. competition), may promote intercultural literacy and a broader worldview. Verkuyten, Thijs, and Bekhuis (2010) showed that intergroup contact is associated with support for multiculturalism, and suggest that contact leads to lessening of ethnocentric worldviews in favor of more open worldviews. Thus, intergroup contact may predict individuals view of self as a global citizen.

1.3. Global Citizenship

Building up prior theorizing, Reysen, Larey, and Katzarska-Miller (2012) define global citizenship as awareness, caring, embracing cultural diversity, promoting social justice and sustainability, and a sense of responsibility to act for the betterment of the world. Reflecting this definition, a wealth of research shows that individuals' degree of felt psychological connection to the identity of global citizen (i.e., global citizenship identification) predicts intergroup empathy, valuing diversity, social justice beliefs, endorsement of environmental sustainability, intergroup helping, and a responsibility to act (e.g., Reysen et al., 2012; Gibson & Reysen, 2013; Katzarska-Miller, Barnsley, & Reysen, 2014; Plante, Roberts, Reysen, & Gerbasi, 2014; Reysen & Katzarska-Miller, 2013a, 2013b; Reysen, Katzarska-Miller, Gibson, & Hobson, 2013; Reysen, Katzarska-Miller, Salter, & Hirko, 2014). However, little research has examined whether global citizenship identification is related to either intergroup contact or well-being.

One study found that college students who indicated interacting with others from another nation (vs. no interaction) showed greater global competency (Soria & Troisi, 2014). Global awareness, which reflects the construct of competency, is one antecedent to global citizenship identification (Reysen & Katzarska-Miller, 2013a, 2013b). Chickering and Braskamp (2009) surveyed students before and after studying abroad. Students reported interacting with others outside their ingroup as well as greater global citizenship identity. Although the evidence is limited, the above studies suggest that intergroup contact is related to identifying the self as a global citizen. No research has directly examined the association between global citizenship and well-being. However, indirect evidence is provided by Gibson and Reysen (2013) who showed that students exposed to a lecture regarding global awareness (vs. a lecture containing negative connotations regarding global citizenship) reported experiencing greater positive affect and global citizenship identification. Snider, Reysen, and Katzarska-Miller (2013) also found a correlation between global citizenship identification and positive emotions. To the extent that positive affect reflects well-being, the results of these two studies suggest that global citizenship identification should be associated with well-being.

2. Present Study

The purpose of the present study is to test a serial mediation model of Roma's perception of school ethnic composition on well-being through perceived intergroup contact and global citizenship identification. Prior research shows that heterogeneous schools promote intergroup friendships (Kao & Joyner, 2006), intergroup friendships is related to a greater sense of belongingness at school (Mendoza-Denton & Page-Gould, 2008), and feeling a sense of belonging or acceptance is related to positive well-being (Blackhart, Nelson, Knowles, & Baumeister, 2009). Further, students with both intra- and interracial friendships report less depressive symptoms and greater friend support (McGill et al., 2012). Intergroup contact is also suggested to lead to a broader and more open worldview (Verkuyten et al., 2010). For example, studying abroad is associated to greater interactions with outgroup members and global citizenship (Chickering & Braskamp, 2009). Just as positive emotions are related to global citizenship identification (Snider et al., 2013), global citizen identification may be related to well-being. In the present study Roma participants completed measures related to school ethnic composition, intergroup contact, global citizenship identification, and well-being. We predict a serial mediation model such that prior school composition in which participants were the minority (vs. majority) predicts greater well-being through more intergroup friendships and greater identification with global citizens. In other words, Roma that attended schools with

a majority of non-Roma will report more intergroup friendships, intergroup friendships will predict greater identification with global citizens, and global citizenship identification will predict greater well-being.

3. Method

3.1. Participants and Procedure

Participants ($N = 151$, 64.2% women; $M_{\text{age}} = 32.93$, $SD = 10.44$) included self-identified Roma from Slovakia. Participants were solicited both online through Roma related organizations and in Roma communities in Slovakia by a native Slovak Roma. The survey was back translated to ensure equivalency in meaning prior to distribution. As part of a larger survey regarding Roma identity and experiences, participants completed measures related to ethnic composition of schools attended, contact with non-Roma, global citizenship identification, well-being, and demographic items.

3.2. Materials

A single item ("The majority of schools I attended had..." with responses ranging from 1 = *all Roma students* to 5 = *all non-Roma, except for myself*; $M = 3.75$, $SD = 1.01$) assessed the degree of ethnic make-up of participants' educational experience in school. A single item ("How many of your friends and good acquaintances are Non-Roma;" $M = 2.71$, $SD = 0.97$) adapted from prior research (Pettigrew, Christ, Wagner, & Stellmacher, 2007) assessed the degree of intergroup contact on a response scale from 0 = *none* to 4 = *very many*. A single item measure of ingroup identification ("I strongly identify with global citizens;" $M = 3.91$, $SD = 1.84$) was adapted from prior research (Postmes, Haslam, & Jans, 2013; Reysen, Katzarska-Miller, Nesbit, & Pierce, 2013) to assess global citizenship identification on a 7-point Likert-type scale, from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*. Five items from prior research (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985; DeSalvo et al., 2006; Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995) were standardized and combined to assess well-being ($\alpha = .74$). One item ("Compared to others my age, I would say my health is..."), rated from 1 = *poor* to 5 = *excellent*, tapped physical health ($M = 3.53$, $SD = 0.97$). The remaining items ("I am satisfied with my life," "I often feel depressed," "I am often anxious," "I often feel stressed;" the latter three items were reversed), rated from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*, tapped psychological well-being ($M = 4.75$, $SD = 1.33$).

4. Results

A hierarchical linear regression showed that a school ethnic composition predicted greater well-being (see Table 1, Step 1). However when the mediators were included in the analysis, the association between school composition and well-being was lower (see Step 2), and intergroup contact and global citizenship identification were significant.

Table 1. *Unstandardized Coefficients for Regression showing Association of School Ethnic Composition, Intergroup Contact, and Global Citizenship Identification with Well-Being*

Variable	Step 1			Step 2		
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>
School Composition	.28	.05	5.39**	.17	.06	3.09**
Intergroup Contact				.16	.06	2.71**
Global Citizenship Identification				.08	.03	2.61*
R^2 Change	.16			.09		
F Change	29.03**			8.66**		
df Change	(1, 149)			(2, 147)		

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

To examine the predicted serial mediation model we used the PROCESS SPSS macro with 95% confidence intervals and 20,000 bootstraps (Hayes, 2013). The total effect (i.e., association between school composition with well-being) and direct effect (i.e., association between school composition with well-being partialling out the potential mediators) were demonstrated in the prior regression. The mediation of school composition to well-being through intergroup contact, and through global citizenship identification, as single mediators were significant, as indicated by the absence of zero within the confidence intervals of the indirect effects (see Table 2). Additionally, the predicted serial mediation model of school composition to well-being through both intergroup contact and global citizenship identification was significant (see Figure 1 and Table 2). This final pathway supports the hypothesis that attending schools with more non-Roma (vs. more Roma) predicts greater well-being is mediated by intergroup contact and global citizenship identification. In other words, attending a school with a greater number of non-Roma students predicts more contact and friendships with non-Roma, intergroup contact predicts viewing the self as a global citizen, which in turn predicts greater well-being.

Table 2. *Bootstrap Analysis of Indirect Effects through Intergroup Contact and Global Citizenship Identification*

	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower	Upper
Total Effect	.28	.05	.177	.382
Direct Effect	.17	.06	.063	.285
Intergroup Contact	.07	.03	.013	.142
Global Citizenship Identification	.03	.02	.000	.078
Intergroup Contact + G.C. Identification	.01	.01	.002	.035

Note. The ratio of the indirect effect to the total effect of the serial model is .04.

A careful analysis of Table 2. demonstrates that Levene’s Test for Equality of Variances shows no diversity between the variances of the two age groups, which enables t-test for Equality of Means to be taken into consideration and thus, the H₀ –null hypothesis- that assumes no relation between the students’ age and attitudes is tested. Since the Sig. (2-tailed) value (0.38) is greater than p value=0.05, the H₀ hypothesis may not be rejected. This denotes that there is no significant correlation between the students’ age and attitudes towards TCT.

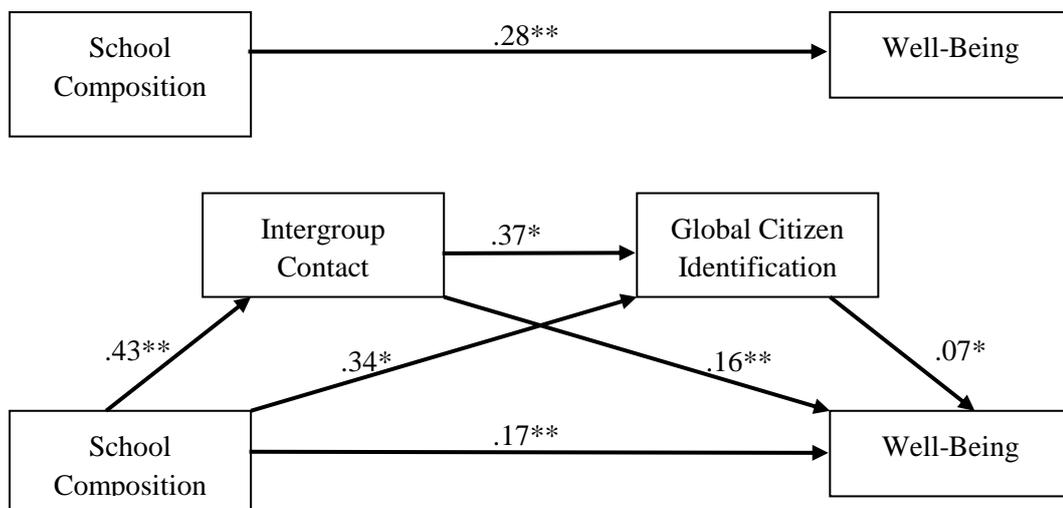


Figure 1. Serial mediation model of school ethnic composition predicting well-being through intergroup contact and global citizenship identification.

5. Discussion

The purpose of the present research was to test a serial mediation model of the association of Roma's perception of prior school ethnic environment on well-being through intergroup contact and global citizenship identification. As predicted, the model was supported. In effect, Roma whose prior schools were predominantly non-Roma reported greater intergroup friendships. Participants with more intergroup friendships predicted greater identification with global citizens, reflecting a broader perspective of the world. Lastly, global citizenship identification predicted greater well-being. Together, the results highlight the environmental impact on Roma's social network, identity, and mental and physical well-being.

As the most discriminated group in Europe (McGarry, 2011), research has understandably shown repeatedly that Roma (vs. non-Roma) experience poorer physical (Cook et al., 2013) and psychological well-being (Kamberi et al., 2015; Lee et al., 2014). Researchers have provided evidence of finances (Jarcuska et al., 2013), health status, household income, education, quality of housing, discrimination, and ethnic pride (Kamberi et al., 2015) as explanatory factors for the discrepancy between Roma and non-Roma with respect to well-being. Given the extent of segregation in schools experience by Roma in Slovakia (Taba & Ryder, 2012), in the present research we examined the ethnic composition of prior schools attended by participants as a predictor of Roma's well-being.

Prior research has shown that in schools that are heterogeneous, minority students are likely to have more intergroup friendships (Kao & Joyner, 2006). The results of the present study support this finding in that Roma that attended schools with more non-Roma reported more intergroup contact and friendships with non-Roma. Also, supporting prior research suggesting that ingroup contact is associated with a broader worldview (Heyward, 2002; Verkuyten et al., 2010) and global citizen identity (Chickering & Braskamp, 2009), intergroup friendships was shown to predict identification with global citizens. Building upon prior research suggesting that global citizenship identification may be related to well-being (Gibson & Reysen, 2013; Snider et al., 2013), the results of the present study show that global citizenship predicts mental and physical well-being. Furthermore, despite past researchers' focus on intergroup attitudes as the primary outcome of intergroup contact (e.g., Beelmann & Heinemann, 2014; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006, 2008), the present research highlights a positive association between intergroup contact and friendships and well-being. Overall, when accounting for Roma's intergroup friendships and degree of global citizenship identification, the association between school ethnic composition and well-being was significantly reduced.

Although many Roma students in Slovakia continue to be segregated (Taba & Ryder, 2012) there are schools (as shown in the present study) that are desegregated, although still affording Roma students minority status. However, those students that did attend schools in which they were the minority, reported greater well-being, more intergroup friendships, and a more global perspective as indicated by identification with global citizens. The positive outcomes for these participants highlight the beneficial results of desegregation. Although the current study explored the minority experience, similar to prior research showing prejudice reduction for children exposed to intergroup contact (Beelmann & Heinemann, 2014), we argue in favor of greater desegregation in schools. Such a change in the normative environment in these settings may lessen discrimination and prejudice toward Roma for future generations. However, negative intergroup contact hinders the reduction of prejudice (Hewstone, 2015). If teachers and school administration afford a normative environment in which non-Roma students are allowed or encouraged to express prejudice toward Roma then such desegregation efforts will likely hinder any beneficial outcomes of intergroup contact. As noted in the introduction, Roma face a high degree of prejudice and discrimination in Europe. For integration to be effective in schools, greater efforts are needed to reduce prejudice toward Roma from both teachers and students. Yet, the beneficial outcomes for Roma in the present research suggest that greater desegregation in Slovakia is needed.

The present research showed a variety of novel outcomes with respect to the influence of the environmental context of schools for Roma's well-being, however there are limitations to consider when interpreting the results. First, the present research was correlational. Therefore, we are unable to make any causal claims about the pathways presented in the present study. Future researchers may experimentally introduce intergroup contact interventions to examine the effect of such programs on global citizenship identification and well-being. Second, respondents in the present research consisted of Roma from one country and one region within that country. As minority populations of Roma are spread across European nations, the results may differ in these other cultural spaces. Further research with Roma in other contexts is needed to generalize the present findings. Third, the present research only included participants who self-identified as Roma. There are a variety of subgroups (e.g., travelers) that fall under the umbrella of the term Roma, and individuals who may be categorized by non-Roma as Roma, who were not included in the present research. Further research with a greater variety of individuals, perhaps including the non-Roma majority as a comparison sample, is needed.

In conclusion, the results of the present research showed that the association between Roma's prior school ethnic composition and well-being was mediated through Roma's intergroup friendships and global citizenship identification. The results highlight the importance of Roma's school environmental context, interactions with non-Roma, and global citizen identity in predicting well-being. As the education system in many parts of Europe, particularly in Slovakia, continue to segregate and intentionally or unintentionally discriminate against Roma students, the results show beneficial outcomes of desegregation. Greater intergroup contact and friendships was related to both viewing the self as a global citizen and well-being. With a greater acceptance of Roma and desegregation at all levels of the educational system, the cultural context of racism that disproportionately and negatively impact and oppress Roma may lessen in the future.

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