Internalizing and Externalizing Problems in Early Childhood: A Study of Former Soviet Union and Veteran-Israeli Children Living in Israel

Naama Atzaba-Poria

Abstract
The present study set out to investigate the adjustment of Former Soviet Union (FSU) children living in Israel as well as their veteran-Israeli peers. The sample consisted of 145 children (70 veteran-Israelis and 75 FSU) between the ages of 4.0 and 6.5 years old ($M = 5.54$, $SD = .48$) and their parents. Mothers and fathers reported about the children’s problem behavior and on their own parenting behavior. Analyses revealed that FSU children exhibited more externalizing and peer problems than did their veteran-Israeli peers. No significant differences, however, were found for internalizing problems. Furthermore, FSU mothers and fathers reported significantly lower levels of authoritarian parenting behavior than did their veteran-Israeli counterparts. Finally, ethnicity was found to moderate links between parenting and children’s problem behavior for mothers but not for fathers. Specifically, for the veteran-Israeli group, the more authoritarian mothers were, the more externalizing and peer problems their children exhibited. However, for the FSU families, the more authoritarian mothers were, the more internalizing problems suffered by their children. These findings suggest that authoritarian parenting may be reflected differently in distinct cultures and cultural conditions, and they highlight the importance of considering both mothers and fathers, as they may go through different acculturation processes.

Keywords:
immigrant children, problem behavior, authoritarian parenting

The gap between the large numbers of immigrants around the world and the very few studies concerning the adjustment of their children is striking. Despite some evidence suggesting that the cultural context is important in understanding how parenting relates to children’s adjustment (Deater-Deckard, Dodge, Bates, & Pettit, 1996; J. E. Lansford, Deater-Deckard, Dodge, Bates, & Pettit, 2004), most studies have focused on children’s externalizing problems, ignoring emotional and internalizing problems (cf., G. E. Lansford et al., 2005). Accordingly, the present

1Ben-Gurion University, Beer-Sheva, Israel
study was designed to examine the adjustment of young children from immigrant families living in Israel. In particular, similarities and differences in problem behavior between Former Soviet Union (FSU) children and their veteran-Israeli peers were examined. In addition, differences in the use of parental authoritarian behaviors between the ethnic groups and the links between parental authoritarian behaviors and children’s adjustment in the two different ethnic groups were assessed.

Although immigration is a worldwide phenomenon, few studies have investigated the effects of immigration on the psychological well-being of children (Munroe-Blum, Boyle, Offord, & Kates, 1989; Rutter, Yule, Berger, Yule, & Bagley, 1974) and resulted in inconsistent findings (see Stevens & Vollebergh, 2008). On one hand, several studies have indicated that being part of a minority group does not increase the likelihood of problem behavior (e.g., Fuligni, 1998; Munroe-Blum et al., 1989). A recent book (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006), which details the adaptation of ethnic minority youth (ages 13 to 18) in 13 different countries of settlement (the International Comparative Study of Ethnocultural Youth; ICSEY), shows remarkably consistent results: The minority adolescents demonstrated more favorable adjustment than did the majority group adolescents. The differences, however, were small. On the other hand, there are studies indicating increased rates of problem behavior (e.g., Atzaba-Poria, Pike, & Barrett, 2004; Bradley & Sloman, 1975; Pawliuk et al., 1996; Rutter et al., 1974). Supporting this claim, several studies conducted in the 1990s of FSU adolescent immigrants in Israel have shown that the new immigrants were more inclined to exhibit loneliness, psychological symptoms, social isolation, and school difficulties than their Israeli peers (Mirsky, 1997; Slonim-Nevo & Sheraga, 1997).

A decade later, the current study aimed to examine the adjustment of the second generation of one of these immigrant groups. Most of the studies investigating the adjustment of children from immigrant families have focused on the adolescence period (cf., Atzaba-Poria et al., 2004; Atzaba-Poria, Pike, & Deater-Deckard, 2004). Early childhood is of particular interest, as children have not yet entered school, and therefore the family environment is the primary influence on them. Therefore, this study seeks to examine the adjustment of children during early childhood and the effects of parental immigration status and cultural conditions.

Immigrants’ adjustment may be affected by the cultural distance between the country of origin and the country of settlement. Cultural distance is a term used to express the difference between cultures (Berry, 1997), and the larger the distance, the more difficult the adjustment will be. In the current study, the cultural group investigated was FSU immigrants living in Israel. The FSU immigrant group is the largest immigrant group in Israel, with more than a million FSU people (a fifth of Israel’s population) having immigrated to Israel between 1989 and 1992. Therefore, the socialization of children of FSU origin who live in Israel is particularly salient, yet the adjustment of FSU adolescents has received little attention in research, and no research has been conducted on the adjustment of younger children. The next section describes the FSU culture of origin, the Israeli culture of settlement, and stresses the main differences between these cultures.

**Culture of Origin (the FSU Culture) and Culture of Settlement (the Israeli Culture)**

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, many people have immigrated to Israel. These people were born, raised, and socialized predominantly though the norms and values of the collectivist approach. Slobodskaya (1999) suggested that traditional Russian culture is a mixture of Western and Eastern values—it is similar to the East in stressing the importance of communal values, but unlike Eastern cultures, children are not discouraged from independent activities.

In the FSU, the family was perceived as a collective serving as the main unit for achieving the goals of a socialist society (Horowitz, 1989). Parents believed that love should be accompanied
by moral and cultural knowledge and that, devoid of these, love may harm the children (Sen’ko, 1993). Soviet Union parents tended to devalue autonomy and egalitarianism and emphasize conservatism and hierarchy (Schwartz & Bardi, 1997). Consequently, loyalty, conformity, group-mindedness, and unquestioning acceptance of authority were the promoted values (Bronfenbrenner, 1970), and violation of values such as obedience and respect was unacceptable. Similarly, externalizing behavior such as aggression and hyperactivity were strongly discouraged, as this type of behavior contradicts central collectivist values such as compliance and respect of others (Kerig, Alyoshina, & Volvoich, 1993). In addition, parents in the FSU tended to report that internalizing behaviors, such as submissiveness, were characteristics of an ideal child (Kerig et al., 1993; Sen’ko, 1993).

Making a distinction between collectivism and individualism in Israeli society is not simple. The first decades of Israeli statehood were characterized by a dominant collectivist value system (Levi, Levison, & Katz, 1993), and people were encouraged to form communal solidarity. However, since the 1960s, Israel has become an increasingly individualistic culture. The dominant value systems have become much more Western, with growing gaps and differences between people’s income, power, and lifestyle (Sagy, Orr, & Bar-On, 1999), so that Israeli society can no longer be perceived as collectivist. Some researchers claimed that collectivism is part of a bipolar dimension, which is not dichotomous but rather extends along a continuum, where individualism is more applicable to Israeli society and other Western cultures, and collectivism more applicable to FSU societies (Horowitz, 1989; Shor, 1999). Others suggested, however, that collectivism and individualism are two continuous orthogonal dimensions (Gelfand, Triandis, & Chan, 1996). Whether espousing the uni-dimensional or the bi-dimensional approach, Israeli society may be seen as characterized by more individualistic values, whereas the FSU culture may be seen as having a more collectivistic approach (Horowitz, 1989; Shor, 1999).

More than 200,000 second-generation children from the FSU live in Israel today (Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, 1999). These children live between two cultures, often with contradictory expectations. It is therefore important to examine, against this background, whether the fact of being part of an ethnic minority group poses a higher risk for developing problem behavior. Conversely, it may be that the collectivist values of this cultural group provide these second-generation children with a clear direction (Fuligni, 1998), leading to less problem behaviors than their veteran-Israeli peers.

**Dimensions of Parenting**

Several studies have confirmed Baumrind’s finding that the children of “authoritarian” parents, those high in control but low in warmth and parent-child communication, display poor social and emotional outcomes (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Although the authoritarian parenting style is less common among middle-class European American parents in the United States, it is more common in East Asia (Kim & Choi, 1994), Africa (LeVine et al., 1994), and Mexico (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994), as well as in ethnic groups derived from these cultures. Parents in more collectivist societies tend to use a harsher, more rigid parenting style (G. E. Lansford et al., 2005), and parents in the FSU were described as being authoritarian and controlling, allowing children almost no right to participate in family decision making (Knafo & Schwartz, 2003). This description seems to apply also to FSU parents living in Israel (Shor, 1999). It was found that FSU parents are more demanding and monitoring than nonimmigrant Israeli parents (Zaslavsky, 2000).

Israeli culture emphasizes egalitarianism and autonomy to a larger extent than FSU cultures (Schwartz, 1999), and Israeli parents may be characterized as indulgent (Knafo & Schwartz, 2003). Accordingly, we hypothesized that FSU parents would use more authoritarian, harsh parenting behavior than veteran-Israeli parents.
Most of the extant knowledge on parental behavior and children’s outcome stems from Western cultures. As different parental goals may lead to distinct meanings and emotional contexts, children’s outcomes may vary for the same parental behaviors (Greenfield & Suzuki, 1998). For example, in a broad cross-cultural study, G. E. Lansford et al. (2005) revealed that the links between physical discipline and children’s externalizing problems were moderated by the normativeness of physical discipline. That is, in cultures where physical punishment is more normative, there was a weaker association with children’s adjustment problems, compared to cultures in which physical punishment is less widely practiced. It is important to note that most of the studies of children’s problem behavior focused on harsh maternal disciplining and ignored paternal behavior. The current study aims to assess whether there is a unique association to maternal and paternal authoritarian behavior and children’s externalizing, internalizing, and peer problems.

**Ecological System Theory**

Ecological models such as Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) are useful for the understanding of cultural variation. This model suggests a comprehensive perspective for examining children’s behavior and development. An ecological perspective considers how the child develops in interaction with the immediate environment as well as how aspects of the larger context and culture influence the child and his or her immediate environment. Accordingly, we examined whether the culture (macrosystem) is related to variation in the links between parenting behavior (a microsystem setting) and children’s problem behavior. This pattern follows Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ideas in which a child’s environment “is conceived as a set of nested structures, each inside the next, like a set of Russian dolls” (p. 3).

**Present Study**

The present study had three main aims: first, to explore FSU and veteran-Israeli group differences in children’s problem behavior; second, to examine differences in both maternal and paternal authoritarian parenting behaviors between the two ethnic groups; and third, to investigate the role of ethnicity as a moderator of the link between authoritarian parenting and children’s problem behavior. Based on the assumption that authoritarian parenting is more normative in the FSU culture, it is hypothesized that the associations between authoritarian parenting and children’s behavioral problems would be smaller for the FSU sample than for the veteran-Israeli sample.

**Method**

**Eligibility Criteria**

Children were eligible to participate in this study if they were 4 to 6 years old, living at home with both parents, and were either Israelis or second-generation FSU immigrants. Children belonging to the veteran-Israeli group (i.e., the ethnic majority group) were born in Israel and had parents who were Israeli born or who had immigrated to Israel before they were 3 years old. Additionally, children in the veteran-Israeli group were to have no family origins in the FSU. Children belonging to the FSU group (i.e., the ethnic minority group) were born in Israel or born in the FSU but immigrated before they were 3 years of age and had parents who were born in the FSU. Finally, in order to control for as many confounding variables as possible, all families were recruited from the same preschools. Recruitment was conducted in Beer-Sheva, a large city in south Israel. All preschools were public, expanding the representativeness of the sample.
The sample consisted of 145 families. Seventy children came from the veteran-Israeli group (30 boys and 40 girls) and 75 from the FSU group (37 boys and 38 girls). Data were available for mothers for all families and for fathers for 109 families. Children’s ages ranged from 4.0 to 6.5 years old ($M = 5.54, SD = .48$).

Demographic information for both parents, including age, place of birth, years of education, and occupation, are presented for the whole sample as well as for each ethnic group separately (see Table 1). As can be seen, all veteran-Israeli parents were born in Israel or had immigrated to Israel before they were 3 years old, whereas all of the FSU parents were born in the FSU. In addition, 85% of the FSU children were born in Israel and 15% were born in the FSU but immigrated before the age of 3. Most FSU parents had lived in Israel for 9 to 16 years ($M = 11.48, SD = 3.78$, for mothers and fathers, respectively). The sample was diverse in terms of parental education. Although this pattern was broadly similar for both ethnic groups, veteran-Israeli fathers and mothers held lower educational qualifications than their FSU counterparts, $t(143) = -6.52, p < .001$; $t(132) = -2.03, p < .05$.

Mothers’ and fathers’ current or most recent occupations were categorized using the Israeli Standard Occupational Classification (Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, 1998). Most of the mothers and fathers had skilled occupations or partly skilled occupations. A single SES composite was created using mothers’ or fathers’ highest educational level and highest occupational status. These two variables were moderately correlated within each of the ethnic groups ($r_s = .41$, $p < .001$) and thus were standardized and averaged to create a single SES composite, with higher scores representing higher SES.

Significant differences were found for SES between the veteran-Israeli and the FSU families, $t(143) = -3.21, p < .01$. Veteran-Israeli families had significantly lower SES than did the FSU

### Table 1. Demographics for the Entire Sample and by Ethnic Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Veteran-Israeli Group</th>
<th>FSU Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$n = 66-70$</td>
<td>$n = 67-75$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age (years)</strong></td>
<td>$M (SD)$</td>
<td>$M (SD)$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place of birth</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>34.46 (4.43)</td>
<td>33.93 (5.70)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FSU</td>
<td>37.70 (5.45)</td>
<td>36.73 (6.54)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (immigrated to</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israel as young</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>children)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 8 years of</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>studies</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 to 12 years of</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>studies</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher nonacademic</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>qualification</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate and/or</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>postgraduate</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>qualification</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional occupations</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managerial and</td>
<td></td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>technical occupations</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skilled occupations:</td>
<td></td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>manual and nonmanual</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partly skilled</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>occupations</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unskilled occupations</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
families ($M = -.24, SD = .84; M = .20, SD = .80$, respectively). For both ethnic groups, family size varied between 2 and 7 people ($M = 4.48, SD = 0.95; M = 4.09, SD = 1.03$, for the veteran-Israeli and FSU families, respectively). Most veteran-Israeli families had two (43%) or three (41%) children living at home, whereas most FSU families had one (36%) or two (52%) children at home. Finally, for both the veteran-Israeli and the FSU groups, the target children were primarily eldest (40% and 48%, respectively), or second born (34% and 40%, respectively).

**Procedure**

To protect families’ confidentiality, letters were sent via preschools to the children’s homes. Teachers were asked to target those children from two-parent families of either Israeli or FSU origin. Certainly, this volunteer sample represents a minority of eligible families. However, the sample included a wide range of SES families and indeed wide variability on most measures. Interested families were visited at home where parents completed questionnaires and were interviewed. In addition, teachers were visited at school and were asked to complete questionnaires that were then mailed back to the researchers.

**Measures**

**Child problem behavior.** The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ; Goodman, 1997) is a parental report of problem behavior for children 4 to 10 years of age. Parents and teachers were asked to indicate the degree to which different statements were true about the child’s behavior within the previous 6 months, using a 3-point scale ranging from 0 (*not true*) to 2 (*certainly true*). The 20 questionnaire items cover common areas of emotional and behavioral difficulties. In the current study, four scales were used, creating three composites: externalizing behavior problems (items from the Conduct Problems and Hyperactivity scales; e.g., “Often has temper tantrums or hot temper”), internalizing behavior problems (items from the Emotional Difficulties scale; e.g., “Often unhappy, downhearted, or tearful”), and peer problem scale (e.g., “Picked on or bullied by other children”). The SDQ has been translated and is in use in more than 40 languages, including Hebrew and Russian.

Correlations between mothers’ and fathers’ reports were calculated for each of the problem behavior indices. Mother-father agreement was substantial for externalizing ($r = .55$) and moderate for internalizing problems ($r = .37$) and peer problems ($r = .25$). On the basis of these inter-reporter correlations, reports from both parents were averaged. This strategy was used to increase the reliability and validity of these indices (Rushton, Brainerd, & Pressley, 1983). Internal reliability coefficients were .82 for externalizing behaviors, .62 for internalizing behaviors, and .54 for peer problem behavior for reports from both parents. Teachers’ reports were treated separately from parental reports, as the correlations between parental reports and teachers reports were relatively low ($rs = -.17, .34, and .08$, for internalizing, externalizing, and peer problems, respectively).

**Parenting Behavior Questionnaire (PBQ).** Mothers and fathers completed the authoritarian parenting style cluster from the short version of the PBQ (Robinson, Mandleco, Olsen, & Hart, 1995). Both parents rated their own behavior for 12 items on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*) while thinking about interactions with their target child. The authoritarian cluster consists of items measuring physical coercion, verbal hostility, and nonreasoning/punitive discipline (e.g., “I use physical punishment as a way of disciplining my child”). The PBQ has been previously used in the Russian language (Robinson et al., 1995). Internal reliability coefficients in the current study were good ($\alpha = .71, \alpha = .70$, for mothers’ and fathers’ reports, respectively).
Results

Ethnic Differences in Problem Behavior Between the Veteran-Israeli and FSU Children

Preliminary analysis. Correlations between SES and maternal and paternal authoritarian behavior were first calculated. SES was not found to be related to maternal ($r = -0.08$), not paternal ($r = -0.05$), authoritarian behaviors. In addition, multiple regression analyses, including ethnicity, SES, and the interaction variable of ethnicity by SES, were conducted to examine whether SES interacts with the group effects. All beta coefficients for the interaction variable were insignificant, ranging between $\beta = -0.01$ to $\beta = 0.18$.

Next, gender and ethnic group differences were examined for the problem behavior scales. Due to the ethnic group differences in SES, as reported in the sample section, all of the analyses were conducted controlling for SES. Accordingly, $2 \times 2$ ANCOVAs were calculated for parental reports. These analyses revealed no significant gender differences for internalizing behaviors, $F(1, 143) = 2.83, ns$; $F(1, 119) = 0.02, ns$ (parents’ and teachers’ reports, respectively), for externalizing behaviors, $F(1, 143) = 0.08, ns$; $F(1, 120) = 2.97, ns$ (parental and teachers’ reports, respectively), or for peer problem behavior, $F(1, 143) = 3.17, ns$; $F(1, 120) = 0.39, ns$ (parental and teachers’ reports, respectively). However, significant ethnic group differences in paternal report of children’s externalizing problems and in peer problem behavior were revealed. Specifically, as can be seen in Table 2, FSU children displayed significantly more externalizing, $F(1, 143) = 53.23, p < .001$, and peer problems, $F(1, 143) = 30.37, p < .001$, than did the veteran-Israeli children. No significant difference was found for internalizing problems, $F(1, 143) = 0.11, ns$ ($M = 1.94, SD = 1.48$; $M = 1.88, SD = 1.35$, for the veteran-Israeli and FSU boys, respectively), nor for teachers’ reports of children internalizing, $F(1, 119) = 0.12, ns$, externalizing, $F(1, 120) = 0.24, ns$, or peer problem behavior, $F(1, 120) = 0.06, ns$.

In addition, interaction effects were found for parental report of children’s externalizing problems, $F(1, 143) = 6.24, p < .05$, with FSU boys exhibiting significantly more externalizing

| Table 2. Externalizing, Internalizing, Peer Problems (Reported by Parents and Teachers), and Maternal and Paternal Parenting Behavior by Ethnicity (Means, SD, and Cohen’s [1988] $d$ Effect Size) |
|----------------|----------------|----------------|
|                | Veteran-Israeli | FSU             | Effect Size |
|                | $n = 75$        | $n = 70$        | (Cohen’s $d$) |
| Externalizing problems (parents’ reports) | 2.10 (1.38) | 3.20 (1.55) | **0.75** |
| Internalizing problems (parents’ reports) | 2.25 (1.56) | 2.03 (1.54) | 0.14 |
| Peer problems (parents’ reports) | 1.46 (1.23) | 2.54 (1.41) | **0.82** |
| Externalizing problems (teachers’ reports) | 2.15 (1.71) | 2.04 (1.91) | 0.06 |
| Internalizing problems (teachers’ reports) | 1.77 (1.88) | 1.65 (2.03) | 0.06 |
| Peer problems (teachers’ reports) | 1.81 (1.84) | 1.71 (1.50) | 0.06 |
| Maternal authoritarian behavior | 2.01 (.45) | 1.82 (.44) | **0.43** |
| Paternal authoritarian behavior | 2.10 (.44) | 1.79 (.42) | **0.72** |

Note: SES has been controlled. Effect sizes for the significant differences are in bold.
problems \((M = 3.57, SD = 1.50)\) than the veteran-Israeli boys \((M = 1.78, SD = 1.30)\). No other Gender \(\times\) Ethnic Group interaction effect was revealed.

Gender and ethnic group differences were examined for the maternal and paternal authoritarian behavior scales—2 (Gender) \(\times\) 2 (Ethnicity) ANCOVAs were calculated. These analyses revealed no significant gender differences for maternal or paternal authoritarian behavior, \(F(1, 143) = .80, ns; F(1, 104) = 1.85, ns\), respectively (see Table 2). However, the analysis revealed significant ethnic group differences in the use of authoritarian parenting. As can be seen in Table 2, FSU mothers and fathers used significantly lower levels of authoritarian parenting than did their veteran-Israeli counterparts, \(F(1, 143) = 5.22, p < .05; F(1, 103) = 11.97, p < .01\), respectively. Finally, no Gender \(\times\) Ethnic Group interaction effect was revealed for parental authoritarian behavior.

Ethnic moderator of the links between authoritarian parenting and children’s problem behavior. In order to investigate the links between authoritarian parenting and children’s problem behavior, Pearson correlations were conducted separately for mothers and fathers in each ethnic group. Using parents’ reports of children’s problem behavior, this investigation revealed a different pattern of results for mothers and fathers in the two ethnic groups (see Figure 1). Whereas for the veteran-Israeli group the more authoritarian mothers were, the more externalizing \((r = .34, p < .01)\) and peer problem behavior \((r = .25, p < .01)\) but not internalizing problems \((r = .08, ns)\) their children exhibited, for the FSU group, elevated levels of authoritarian behavior were linked to increased levels of children’s internalizing problems \((r = .35, p < .01)\) but not to externalizing \((r = .08, ns)\) nor to peer problems \((r = .07, ns)\). Furthermore, the correlations between maternal authoritarian parenting and internalizing as well as externalizing problems were found to be significantly different \((p < .05)\) for the two ethnic groups—indicative of moderation. In contrast, the veteran-Israeli and FSU fathers did not differ significantly in their results. The more authoritarian parenting the fathers reported, the more externalizing \((r = .39, p < .01; r = .33, p < .05, \text{for veteran-Israeli and FSU fathers, respectively})\) problems their children exhibited. In addition, paternal authoritarian behaviors were related to children’s internalizing \((r = .27, p < .05)\) and peer problems \((r = .28, p < .05)\) for the veteran-Israeli group but not for the FSU groups \((r = .13, ns; r = .12, ns, \text{respectively})\), but these correlations were not significantly different from one another.

Correlations between parents’ authoritarian behavior and teachers’ reports of children’s problem behavior were somewhat weaker (ranging between .05 and .27). Replicating correlations using parents’ reports of children’s problem behavior, teachers’ reports of children’s externalizing problems were positively associated with maternal authoritarian behavior \((r = .23)\) for the veteran-Israeli group and significantly linked with paternal authoritarian behavior \((r = .27)\) for the FSU group. However, all other correlations did not reach significance.

Discussion

The growing proportion of minority group families in the world illustrates the need to investigate the daily life of ethnic minority children and its impact on their adjustment. The results indicate that according to parents’ reports, FSU children are at higher risk for exhibiting externalizing and peer problems. These results contradict the findings from the ICSEY project, conducted on adolescents from 13 countries (Berry et al., 2006). However, they support and expand previous findings indicating that ethnic minority adolescents from the FSU living in Israel displayed more behavioral difficulties and social isolation than their Israeli peers (Mirskey, 1997; Slonim-Nevo & Sheraga, 1997). These results should be considered with caution before being replicated in a larger sample.

The differences seen between these results and the ICSEY results may be due to the developmental stage of these children. Alternatively, it may reflect the cultural distance between
veteran-Israeli and FSU cultures, meaning that the FSU children, as part of an ethnic minority group, may experience conflict between the expectations stemming from the two cultures (e.g., in the process of socialization) and that this in turn is expressed in their behavior. In addition, it may be that the externalizing problems are due to parents’ experiences of hostility and prejudice from the host culture. In other words, being a part of their family, children are affected by things occurring to their parents (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Minuchin, 1974). Thus, these results provide evidence that before adolescence, and even prior to the middle childhood period, children can experience difficulties related to their ethnic status (Atzaba-Poria et al., 2004). It should be noted that as children in the current study came from families that had lived in Israel for 9 to 16 years,
linking their externalizing problems to their immigration status may not be trivial. Childrearing ideologies, expectations, norms, and beliefs adhered to by parents tend to preserve meaningful elements of the original culture, even for second and third generations (Frankel & Roer-Borenstein, 1982; Levine, 1988). Therefore, it seems possible that second generation FSU children living in Israel are experiencing differences between the home and the external environment, resulting in adjustment difficulties (Atzaba-Poria et al., 2004). More future in-depth examination of the process leading FSU children to exhibit externalizing and peer problems is needed before a clear conclusion can be made.

Another point that requires consideration is the fact that this difference was seen via parental reports, but not for teachers’ reports. This may suggest that the FSU children exhibited these problems in the home environment and not in the preschool environment. One possible reason for this may be that FSU children, like other ethnic minority children, do not want to be different and therefore conform to majority group attitudes and expectations at school (Connolly, 1998). Furthermore, FSU parents perceive schooling as an important setting even at this age (Rosenthal & Roer-Strier, 2001), and therefore, FSU children may readily adopt majority cultural values and attitudes at preschool. Consequently, they may not experience conflict and thus may not exhibit more behavioral problems in this setting. However, in the home environment, these contradicting expectations may lead children to experience conflict and hence to exhibit problems, specifically in the home context.

On the other hand, as most of the teachers in the study were not from FSU origin, it may be that the difference in results is due to different cultural expectations of the FSU parents and the teachers. Future studies, involving observation of children’s behavior in the school and home environments, may clarify this point.

Differences in Authoritarian Parenting Between the Two Ethnic Groups

FSU mothers and fathers reported lower levels of authoritarian parenting than did their veteran-Israeli counterparts. In the current study, it was hypothesized that FSU mothers and fathers, being part of a collectivist society, would use more authoritarian, harsh parenting behavior than veteran-Israeli mothers (G. E. Lansford et al., 2005). However, it may be that this result reflects the process of change FSU parents are undergoing. At the time of the study, participating parents had been living in Israel for 9 to 16 years, a duration which may have allowed them to adjust their parental behavior to the host society. Furthermore, the fact that they exhibited lower levels of authoritarian parenting than the veteran-Israeli mothers and fathers may be a result of avoiding disciplining their children. This often happens, as parents who immigrated from more collectivist societies mistakenly assume that it is more appropriate and suitable in more Western cultures to exert little or no discipline in childrearing (Aycan & Kanungo, 1998).

Are Authoritarian Parenting Style and Children’s Problem Behavior Linked in the Same Manner for Children From Different Ethnic Groups?

An interesting pattern of results emerged when investigating the links between authoritarian parenting and parental reports of children’s problem behavior separately for each ethnic group: Maternal authoritarian style was related to elevated levels of problem behavior for children from veteran-Israeli as well as for the FSU children. However, these links were somewhat different. Whereas for the veteran-Israeli authoritarian parenting was linked to more externalizing and peer problem behavior, for the FSU children it was related to increased internalizing problems.
These results support the well-established finding that authoritarian parenting is linked in Western cultures to more externalizing problems (e.g., Baumrind, 1971; Deater-Deckard et al., 1996). Furthermore, the results support previous findings indicating that children from non-Western cultures may not be negatively affected by maternal authoritarian style, due to a different and more positive perception and understanding of this parental behavior (e.g., Deater-Deckard et al., 1996; J. E. Lansford et al., 2004). These findings could lead one to conclude that FSU children are not negatively affected by authoritarian parenting, in a manner similar to the results reported by Deater-Deckard et al. (1996) with African American children living in the United States.

However, it was found that children from the ethnic minority group exhibited higher levels of internalizing problems when their mothers displayed more authoritarian behavior. Why was authoritarian mothering related to more internalizing but not externalizing problems? To understand this result, an explanation taking into account the cultural context should be considered. Accordingly, it is proposed that internalizing behaviors are expressed by the FSU children due to the specific characteristics of the Soviet-influenced culture. Specifically, FSU children are part of a collectivist culture in which obedience and respect are two major principles (Horowitz, 1989). Consequently, it may be that FSU children are implicitly urged to express their difficulties through internalizing behaviors.

Support for this finding and explanation has been reported in another study, in which ethnic minority children from a collectivist society (i.e., from India) living in Britain expressed more internalizing than externalizing problems when experiencing difficulties (Atzaba-Poria et al., 2004). This interpretation is also supported by Bronfenbrenner’s (1986) person-process-context model, suggesting that individual attributes of the context in which authoritarian parenting occurs will be related to its effects on children’s adjustment. In this case, cultural norms may influence the manner in which problem behaviors are expressed. Furthermore, the findings suggest that authoritarian parenting may be reflected differently in different cultural conditions. The association with the less apparent behavior of internalizing problems also indicates that other behavioral problems beyond externalizing problems should be investigated.

Finally, the different pattern of correlations seen for mothers and fathers within the FSU group suggests that FSU parents may go through distinct acculturation processes. Results indicate that FSU fathers are more similar to the veteran-Israeli parents. One explanation may be that the FSU fathers, through their role in the wider society, have become more assimilated. Alternatively, being the center of the family, FSU mothers may be more careful in keeping traditional child socialization rules and norms including monitoring children’s proper behavior. Accordingly, children may express their difficulties and react to maternal authoritarian behaviors through more culturally accepted behaviors (i.e., internalizing behaviors). Previous studies have focused on mothers (e.g., Deater-Deckard et al., 1996; G. E. Lansford et al., 2005; J. E. Lansford et al., 2004). To reach more general conclusions about ethnic minority families, it is important to include fathers and examine whether their parenting behavior is associated with children’s adjustment in the same manner as mothers or whether they have different patterns of relationship with their children.

**Limitations and Future Directions**

Several limitations should be noted. First, although differences in areas such as childrearing expectations and beliefs adhered to by parents tend to preserve meaningful elements of the original culture for several generations (Frankel & Roer-Borenstein, 1982; Levine, 1988), it cannot be stated unequivocally that parents who had been in Israel for a long time (e.g., 16 years) still hold collectivist values. Future research, directly assessing parents’ values and beliefs, could provide substantiated information on the adaptation process that FSU parents had undergone. In
addition, there is also a need to further explore differences between parents’ and teachers’ reporting on children’s problem behavior and to learn whether these differences reflect real different behavior in the two settings or differences in reporting.

As this study was not longitudinal, conclusions cannot be drawn as to the developmental trajectories of children’s adjustment. Replication of this study including a longitudinal component will be necessary to assess change and continuity.

The distinct links between authoritarian parenting and children’s behavior problems within each ethnic group should be further explored. Future study focusing on the motivation for using authoritarian behaviors (e.g., proactive and reactive use) within each ethnic group may uncover the nature of these links. For example, it may be that for FSU mothers, authoritarian style is related to demands for self-control of children; thus, it results in internalized problems. Authoritarian style among the veteran-Israeli mothers, however, may reflect impatience—resulting from low self-control—toward their children, and this may be expressed in externalized problems. Finally, the interaction between SES and the families’ neighborhood (exosystem settings) and ethnicity (macrosystem level) should be furthered investigated. That is, parental behavior and its relation to children’s adjustment should be examined in the context of different ecological niches (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

**Conclusions and Implications**

The results of this study support Bronfenbrenner’s basic premise. Ethnic minority and majority children may differ not only in certain behaviors or outcomes but also in the processes that lead to these behaviors and outcomes (Bronfenbrenner, 1988). The knowledge gained from the detection of differences between groups is narrow. Only by exploring the processes involved can one gain a real understanding of these differences (Grotevant, 1998). This concept reflects an important change in recognizing other groups in Western societies and of an awareness that psychological processes may operate in ways other than “the Western way.” Different cultures may have different patterns in which the micro-, meso-, and exosystems operate (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), and thus, views of ethnic group should be much more comprehensive and aim to identify processes and links among “environmental” variables rather than solely between “risk” variables and outcome.

FSU ethnic minority children displayed significantly higher levels of externalizing and peer problems. It is as yet unclear whether they directly perceive their minority status or whether they are mainly affected indirectly through their parents’ psychological adjustment. The mechanism of risk requires further investigation. It should be noted that as other factors that could have influenced the children’s behavior were not measured in the current study, the culturally based explanation may be one of several possible ones. Finally, previous studies examining only the relationship between authoritarian parenting and externalizing problems style are incomplete. For some cultures, internalizing problems may well be the more accepted expression of children’s difficulties. More culturally sensitive studies that consider different culturally dependent patterns of behaviors are required. Therefore, other behavioral problems, especially internalizing problems, should be further examined in relation to negative parenting behavior.

**Declaration of Conflicting Interests**

The authors declared that they had no conflicts of interests with respect to their authorship or the publication of this article.

**Financial Disclosure/Funding**

This study was supported by a research grant from the Israeli Foundation Trustees.
Note

1. All analyses described in this article were also carried out separately for mothers’ and fathers’ reports of children’s problem behavior. This was done to examine whether any information is lost when combining mothers’ and fathers’ reports. These analyses did not reveal any differences. Consequently, results are described for the combined reports.

References


