

# Competence Under Stress: A Comparative Study of Immigrant and Native Adolescents

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## Introduction

Population movement towards Europe due to immigration has dramatically increased in the past 15 years. Greece, in particular, has become host of immigrants from Europe, Asia and Africa. The two largest groups of immigrants are the ethnic Greeks, who came from ex-Soviet Republics, and the Albanians, consisting of ethnic Greeks and Albanians. It should be noted that the Greekness of ethnic Greeks from Albania is contested (Triandafyllidou, 2000).

Immigration is considered a stressful experience for children as well as for adolescents. However, many children, after an initially difficult period of adjustment, manage to successfully adapt to their new environment (Garcia Coll & Magnuson, 1997).

The successful adaptation of these children has led researchers to focus on the study of resilient immigrant adolescents. Resilience refers to the ability of a person to function competently despite living under high adversity (Masten & Powell, 2003).

The purpose of this study, which is part of a larger research project on resilience of immigrant adolescents, was to examine whether immigration is a risk factor for school competence, especially after controlling for other sources of adversity, and whether personal assets compensate or mediate the effect of immigration and other adversity on school competence.

The **main hypotheses** were:

1. Immigration would be a risk factor for school competence (Sameroff & Fiese, 1990).
2. Immigration would be related to higher levels of other adversity (Sameroff, Morrison Gutman & Peck, 2003).
3. Personal assets, such as self efficacy and locus of control would predict school competence (Rutter, 1979).

## Method

Immigrant Status and Gender of Participants

Immigrant status	Gender				Total	
	Boys		Girls			
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Native Greek	297	57.2	288	55.8	585	56.5
Immigrant born in Greece	47	9.1	38	7.4	85	8.2
Immigrant from Albania	64	12.3	72	14.0	136	13.1
Immigrant from former USSR	111	21.4	118	22.9	229	22.1
Total	519	50.1	516	49.9	1035	100

Age of Participants

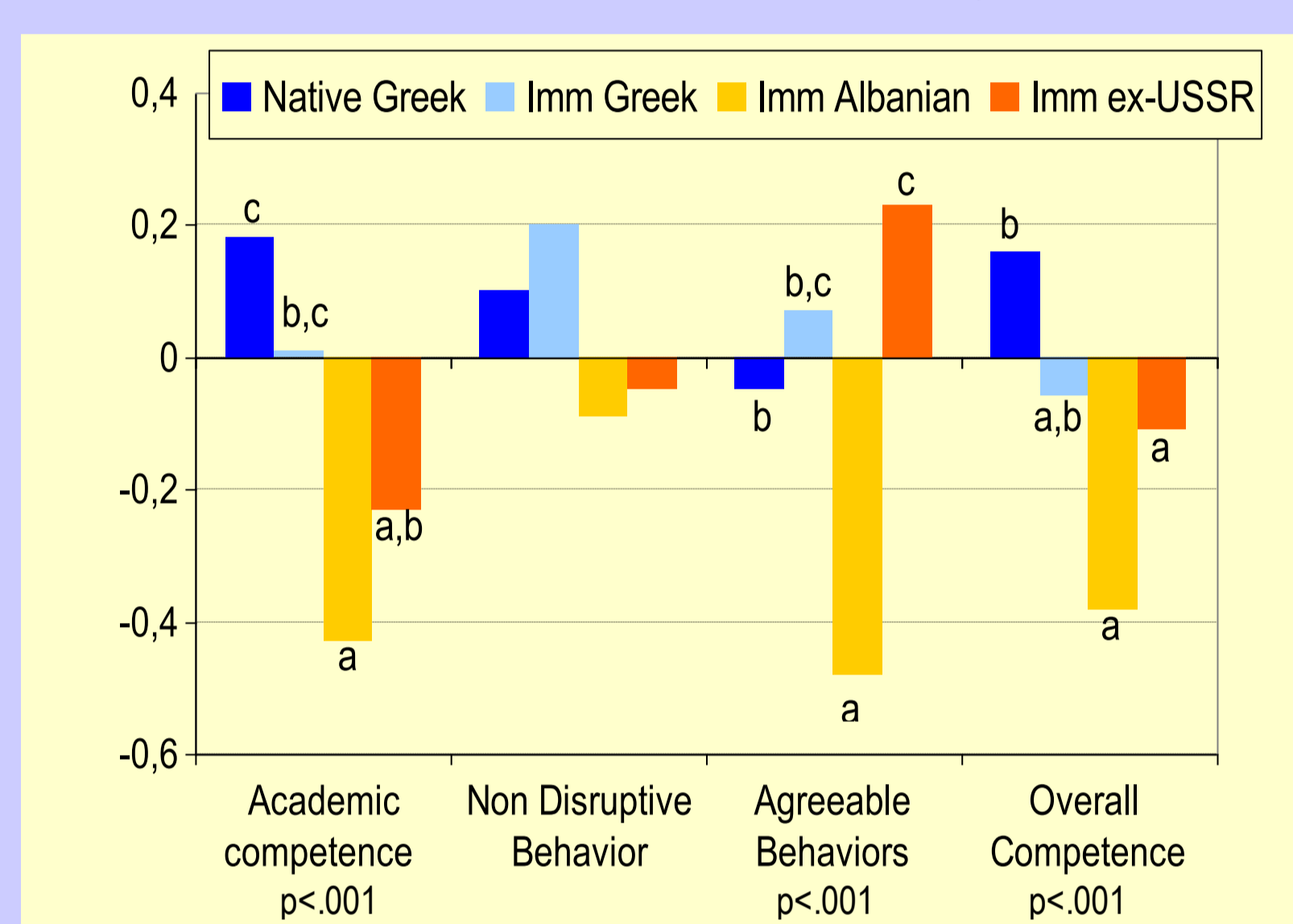
	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Age	13.69	1.10	11.75	16.92

Measures of Competence, Adversity, and Psychological Assets

Competence Factors	Adversity Indices	Psychological Assets
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Academic Competence (based on school grades, hours of absence from school, and teachers' ratings, 7 items, <math>\alpha=.88</math>)</li> <li>Non-Disruptive Behavior (based on teachers' ratings, 3 items, <math>\alpha=.89</math>)</li> <li>Agreeable Behaviors (based on teachers' ratings,</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sociodemographic Adversity (based on family status, density of residence, educational level and occupation of father and mother)</li> <li>Uncontrollable Life Events (10 items selected from Fthenakis &amp; Minsel, 2002)</li> <li>Immigrant Status (native Greek, immigrants born in</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Self-Efficacy Scale (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, &amp; Pastorelli, 1996; mean of 9 subscales summarizing 55 items, <math>\alpha=.86</math>)</li> <li>Nowicki-Strickland Locus of Control Scale (Nowicki &amp; Strickland, 1973; 40 items, KR20=.66; higher score indicates external locus of control)</li> </ul>

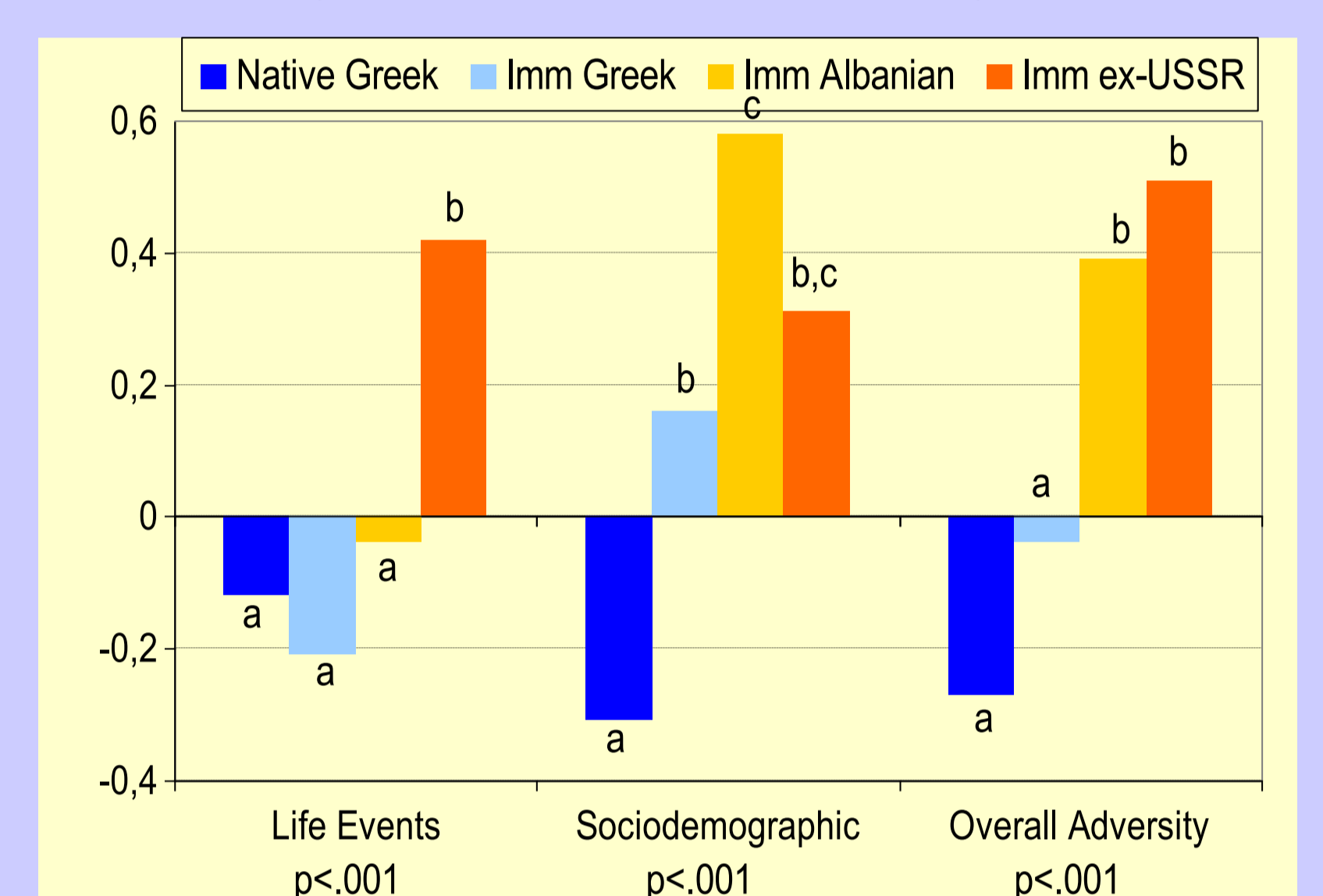
## Results

### Question 1. Is immigration a risk factor for school competence?



- Immigration was generally related with lower school competence.
- The country of birth of the adolescent seemed to be significantly related to some aspects of school competence. Native Greek adolescents had higher total school competence and higher academic competence than adolescents born in Albania or the former USSR. Immigrant adolescents born in Greece, however, scored between the native and the other immigrant groups.

### Question 2. Is immigration related to higher levels of other adversity?



- Immigration was also related to higher levels of other adversity.
- Immigrant students from former USSR reported significantly more life events than the other three groups.
- All three immigrant groups experienced higher sociodemographic adversity than native Greek students.

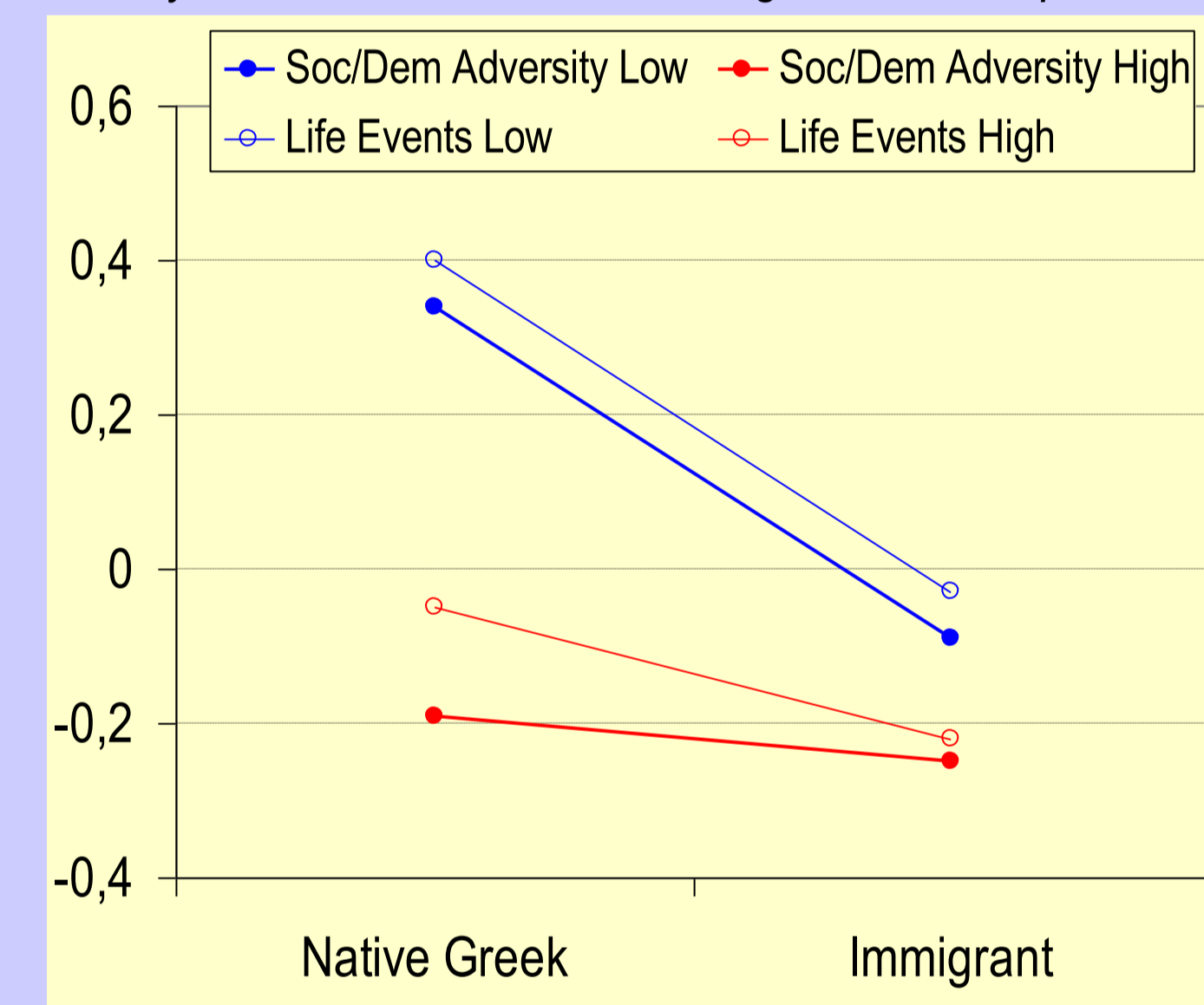
### Question 3. Is it a risk factor for school competence to be an immigrant, over and above adversity?

Hierarchical Regression for the Prediction of School Competence from Gender, Age, Adversity Indices, and Immigrant Status

	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$
1. Gender	.09***	.30***
2. Age	.11***	-.30***
3. Sociodemographic Adversity	.04***	-.36***
Uncontrollable Life Events		-.31***
4. Immigrant Status	.00	-.03
5. Immigrant Status * Sociodemographic Adversity		.25**
Immigrant Status * Life Events	.01**	.19*

Note. \*  $p<.05$ ; \*\*  $p<.01$ ; \*\*\*  $p<.001$ . Dependent variable: Overall school competence. Summary statistics: Total  $R^2=.25$ , Total  $F(7, 912)=43.07$ ,  $p<.001$ .

Interaction of Immigrant Status by Sociodemographic Adversity and Life Events in Predicting School Competence



- Girls, younger students, students with lower sociodemographic adversity and with fewer life events had higher school competence.
- Immigration did not predict school competence over and above other adversity.
- Under low adversity, native Greek students had significantly higher school competence than immigrant youth, whereas under high adversity this difference decreased significantly (see figure above).

### Question 4. Is it a risk factor to belong to one of the three immigrant groups for school competence, over and above adversity?

Hierarchical Regression for the Prediction of School Competence from Gender, Age, Adversity, and Country of Birth of Immigrant

	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$
1. Gender	.09***	.29***
2. Age	.10***	-.27***
3. Sociodemographic Adversity	.04***	-.69**
Life Events		-.35
4. Immigrant Greek		-.01
Immigrant born in Albania	.01	-.09*
Immigrant born in ex-USSR		-.00
5. Imm. Greek * Soc/Dem. Adversity		.02
Imm. Greek * Life Events		-.19
Imm. Albanian * Soc/Dem Adversity	.02***	.31**
Imm. Albanian * Life Events		.25*
Imm. ex-USSR * Soc/Dem Adversity		.26*
Imm. Ex-USSR * Life Events		.18

Note. \*  $p<.05$ ; \*\*  $p<.01$ ; \*\*\*  $p<.001$ . Dependent variable: Overall school competence. Summary statistics: Total  $R^2=.25$ ; Total  $F(13, 897)=22.84$ ,  $p<.001$ .

- Immigrant girls, younger immigrant students, and immigrant students with lower sociodemographic adversity had higher school competence.
- Albanian students had lower school competence even after controlling for other adversity.
- Under low adversity Albanian students had significantly lower school competence than the other immigrant students, whereas under high adversity this difference decreased.
- A similar pattern was observed under low and high adversity between ex-USSR and other immigrants.
- However, under both low and high adversity ex-USSR students had significantly higher competence than Albanians.

### Question 5. Do assets, such as self efficacy and locus of control, compensate or moderate the effect of adversity on school competence?

Hierarchical Regression for the Prediction of School Competence from Gender, Age, Adversity Indices, Self-Efficacy and Locus of Control for the Four Groups according to Country of Birth

	Native Greek		Imm. Greek		Imm. Albanian		Imm. Ex-USSR	
	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$
1. Gender	.06***	.21***	.09*	.24*	.12***	.29**	.19***	.40***
2. Age	.07***	-.22***	.21***	-.27*	.04*	-.18*	.05**	-.18**
3. Self-Efficacy		-.18***		.35**		.22		.17*
External Locus of Control	.10***	-.15***	.13***	-.02	.08**	-.17	.07***	-.28***
4. Sociodemographic Adversity	.04***	-.16***	.05	-.17	.01	.04	.00	.00
Uncontrollable Life Events		-.12**		-.23*		.08		-.11
5. Self-Efficacy * Life Events		-.04		.04		.03		-.05
Self-Efficacy * Soc/Dem Adversity		.00		.10		.00		-.12
Locus of Control * Life Events	.00	.00	.06	.23*	.01	.02	.03	.14
Locus of Control * Soc/Dem Adversity		.02		-.16		.08		.03

Note. \*  $p<.05$ ; \*\*  $p<.01$ ; \*\*\*  $p<.001$ . Dependent variable: School competence total. Summary statistics for Native Greek: Total  $R^2=.27$ , Total  $F(10, 511)=19.23$ ,  $p<.001$ ; for Immigrant Greek: Total  $R^2=.54$ , Total  $F(10, 58)=6.77$ ,  $p<.001$ ; for Immigrant Albanian: Total  $R^2=.26$ , Total  $F(10, 105)=3.61$ ,  $p<.001$ ; and for Immigrant from ex-USSR: Total  $R^2=.34$ , Total  $F(7, 161)=8.20$ ,  $p<.001$ .

Separate hierarchical regressions were performed in order to predict school competence from gender, age, adversity, and assets (locus of control, self-efficacy) for each immigrant group.

- Native Greeks**  
Girls, younger students, students with higher self efficacy internal locus of control, lower sociodemographic adversity, and fewer life events had higher school competence.
- Immigrants born in Greece**  
Girls, younger students, students with higher self efficacy and fewer life events had higher school competence. Internal locus of control was found to enhance school competence but only under low sociodemographic adversity conditions.
- Immigrants born in Albania**  
Girls and younger students had higher school competence. No other factor predicted school competence.
- Immigrants born in ex-USSR**  
Girls, younger students, students with higher self efficacy and internal locus of control had higher school competence.

## Conclusions

- Immigration and adversity were both risk factors for school competence. However, the number of risk factors seemed to be more important in predicting school competence than any particular kind of risk (Sameroff, & Gutman & Peck, 2003).
- Immigration alone did not seem to be a risk factor after controlling for other adversity. A general pattern was that under high adversity the effect of any advantage (e.g., being a native Greek, not being Albanian, and having internal locus of control) decreased, thus suggesting a protective-but-reactive process (Luthar, Cicchetti & Becker, 2000).

- Albanians had lower school competence than the other groups. Personal assets and level of adversity did not differentiate considerably this finding. Triandafyllidou (2000) has suggested that immigrants from Albania are less accepted by natives than immigrants from former USSR, since they don't share a common descent and historical ties with native Greeks. A hypothesis is that social factors, such as discrimination, may be related to lower competence of immigrant Albanians.
- High self-efficacy and internal locus of control were generally related with enhanced school competence. This result has been found in studies of other groups of children at risk (e.g. Rutter, 1979).

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