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When love hurts
Assessing the intersectionality of ethnicity, socio-economic status, parental connectedness, child abuse, and gender attitudes in juvenile violent delinquency

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ABSTRACT

Researchers have not yet reached agreement about the validity of several competing explanations that seek to explain ethnic differences in juvenile violent offending. Ethnicity cannot solely explain why boys with an ethnic minority background commit more (violent) crimes. By assessing the intersectionality of structural, cultural and individual considerations, both the independent effects as well as the interplay between different factors can be examined. This study shows that aforementioned factors cumulatively play a role in severe violent offending, with parental connectedness and child abuse having the strongest associations. However, since most variables interact and ethnicity is associated with those specific factors, a conclusion to be drawn is that ethnicity may be relevant as an additional variable predicting severe violent offending although indirectly.

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Introduction

Ethnic differences in juvenile violent crime have been repeatedly observed in different countries across the world. For instance, in the USA, official crime statistics (e.g., Engen, Steen, & Bridges, 2002; McCarter, 2009; Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009; Stahl, Finnegan, & Kang, 2007) as well as surveys on juvenile violent delinquency (e.g., Flores, 2002; Pope & Snyder, 2003) show that the rates of involvement in serious violence are much higher for blacks than for whites. In most European countries, ethnic minority boys with a non-Western background are overrepresented among juvenile offenders, such as Turks in Germany, Algerians in France, and Moroccans in Belgium (Esterle-Hedibel, 2001; sostomski, 2003; Put & Walgrave, 2006). This overrepresentation of ethnic minority boys among juvenile offenders can also be found in the Netherlands. Research on reported and unreported crime shows that, compared to native Dutch adolescents, non-native Dutch youngsters are more likely to commit criminal acts, especially violent offenses (De Jong, 2007; Jennissen, Blom, & Oosterwaal, 2009; Komen, 2002;

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Van der Laan & Blom, 2011). This is particularly true for Moroccan-Dutch boys, who are disproportionately represented among juvenile offenders (Lahlah, Lens, Van der Knaap, & Bogaerts, 2013a; Veen, Stevens, Doreleijers, & Vollebergh, 2011). In fact, the proportion of criminal offenses committed by Moroccan-Dutch boys is nearly four times the proportion of this group in the total population (Broekhuizen & Driessen, 2006). These ethnic differences in juvenile violent crime remain constant in temporal, regional, and gender–specific terms (Baiery & Pfeiffer, 2008). Therefore, the academic and public debate has been concentrating on causes of ethnic differences in juvenile violent crime.

**Theoretical framework**

Attempts to explain ethnic differences in juvenile violent offending can be classified into three general categories (for a review see Lahlah et al., 2013a). First, sociological theories suggest that relative deprivation or a socially imposed general strain can contribute to violent behavior among some adolescents (Agnew, 1992; Demuth & Brown, 2004; Gould, Weinberg, & Mustard, 2002; Pratt, 2001). Structural approaches explore relationships between social conditions and levels of juvenile crime in a given place or situation and suggest that harsh economic, political, and social conditions facing a population account for the disparate rates of crime (Demuth & Brown, 2004; Gould et al., 2002; Pratt, 2001). The social disadvantages arising from greater exposure to poverty and lower school education of ethnic minorities in general and Moroccan-Dutch families in particular is well documented (Boom, Weltevrede, Wensveen, San, & Hermus, 2010; CBS, 2012). Second, cultural explanations focus on the existence and maintenance of specific orientations (Baiery & Pfeiffer, 2008) and assert that value systems for minority groups might be qualitatively different from those of natives (Berry, 1997). Youth who are involved in two cultures can experience problems when these two cultures have partly different value systems and/or prescribe different behavior in particular situations (Ait Ouarass & van de Vijver, 2005). A different, yet related approach would be to see violence among ethnic minority youths as associated with a *cultural of honor,* an important characteristic of some ethnic minority groups with a non–Western background. The culture of honor, which is said to be a strong motivation of violence (Enzmann & Wetzels, 2003; Nisbett & Cohen, 1996), may not be uniformly distributed among different ethnic groups. Lahlah, Van der Knaap, Bogaerts and Lens (2013b) provide evidence that Moroccan-Dutch boys hold more conventional gender attitudes in comparison with their Dutch peers and show that after controlling for these norms in multivariate models, Moroccan-Dutch boys do not turn out to be more violent than Dutch boys. Third, individual-oriented psychological explanations focus on the importance of family functioning (Stouthamer-Loeber, Wei, Homisch, & Loeber, 2002). It is likely that family functioning could help explain violent offending among ethnic minority youth. Family risk factors, particularly those associated with parental behavior and the family environment are key to understanding why some youth are at greater risk of violence. Studies have convincingly shown that youth who are safely attached to and subjected to sufficient monitoring by their parents are less likely to be involved in delinquency (Palmer & Hollin, 2001; Reid, Patterson, & Snyder, 2002), whereas parental rejection has been shown to be positively related to juvenile violent offending (Bogaerts, Vanheule, & Desmet, 2006; Hoeve et al., 2008; Low & Stocker, 2005; Vazsonyi & Pickering, 2003). Lahlah, Van der Knaap, Bogaerts and Lens (2013c) have shown ethnic differences in the degree to which Dutch and Moroccan-Dutch boys perceive their parents’ upbringing, with Moroccan-Dutch boys reporting lower levels of parental emotional warmth in comparison with their Dutch peers. In addition, Lahlah et al. (2013c) have shown the significance of parental warmth in self-reported violent delinquency, supporting a vast body of research that identifies the importance of this variable (Davalos, Chavez, & Guardiola, 2005; Eichelsheim et al., 2010). However, some of the key family functioning factors believed to be associated with violent offending include child abuse, partner violence and a family sphere of conflict or hostility (e.g., Fagan, Van Horn, Hawkins, & Arthur, 2007; Stouthamer-Loeber et al., 2002; Swanson et al., 2003; Widom, 1989a, 1989b). Child abuse and domestic violence seem to be more prevalent among some ethnic groups (Alink et al., 2011; Finkelhor, Turner, Owmd, & Hamby, 2005), albeit research is mixed whether ethnicity alone counts for these disparities, or whether other factors may play more explanatory roles (Dettlaff et al., 2011; Ferrari, 2002). If minority adolescents experience violence at home, they may learn to see violence as an appropriate way of dealing with conflicts. Lahlah, Van der Knaap, and Bogaerts (2013) show that Moroccan-Dutch boys are much more frequently victim of parental violence than Dutch boys are. This frequent confrontation with parental violence might result in more frequent imitation too (Widom, 1989a, 1989b).

In sum, although there is considerable agreement about the statistical fact of minority overrepresentation in the juvenile justice system, researchers have not yet reached agreement about the validity of several competing explanations for that disparity. Ethnicity cannot solely explain why boys commit violent crimes, and neither can structural, cultural, or individual factors. These studies have been undertaken as if the effects of ethnicity, structural, cultural, or individual explanations can be separated and examined independently. As a result, most studies lack the possible interplay between different sets of factors and as such the possible combination of influences on juvenile violent delinquency, or include ethnicity as a control variable only (Lahlah et al., 2013a). As opposed to examining them as separate systems, intersectionality explores how these systems mutually construct one another. ‘Intersectionality’ originally refers to the interaction between gender, race/ethnicity, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power (McCall, 2005). While the theory began as an exploration of the oppression of women within society (Crenshaw, 1989), current research incorporating intersectionality strives to apply it to many different intersections of group membership as certain ideas and practices emerge repeatedly across multiple systems of oppression and serve as mediators for these intersecting systems (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1992; Andrew, Russo, Sommer, & Yaeger, 1992).
Similarly, recent research on ethnic disparities in violent offending call into question the use of aggregate (demographic) measures (Baskin-Sommers, Baskin, Sommers, & Newman, 2013) as to do so obscures important distinctions. Consequently, a more nuanced understanding of ethnic disparities in juvenile violent offending requires an examination of these variables in interaction with each other. Several risk factors for juvenile delinquency that have been identified in the extant literature are prominent among ethnic minority families and commonly associated with an ethnic minority status. Additionally, research has also shown that structural factors, such as low family income, are risk factors for both familial abuse (e.g., Fagan et al., 2007) and masculinity norms (Enzmann & Wetzels, 2003). Furthermore, researchers have argued that beliefs about masculinity are often enforced through gender role socialization processes what leads to supposed behavior for boys to possess. It can be argued that family violence might strengthen this socialization process, as research has shown that in most cases perpetrators of domestic violence are male. Lastly, research has shown that a strong emotional bond between parent and child is known as a protector, buffering adolescents from the many challenges and risks they face. Likewise, one might argue that weak emotional bonds between parent and child might increase the risk for familial abuse (see Fig. 1).

However, up till now research has lagged behind in fully incorporating intersectionality into theory and methods, provided that research can, for example, separate the effects of ethnicity and socio-economic status from one another. Given the large ‘ethnic’ disparity in juvenile violent offending, this lack of knowledge is surprising. Prevention and intervention programs that target risk factors will not be equally effective for native and ethnic minority boys if these influences are not similarly related to juvenile violent delinquency. Likewise, only if the ethnic specific risk factors of violent offending are known can ethnic-specific prevention strategies be developed.

**Aims of the study**

According to the studies and theories described above, it seems that ethnicity or rather an ethnic minority status increases the risk of involvement in juvenile violent offending. However, this does not automatically mean that violent offending can be viewed as a typical pathway that is built on ethnicity, nor on simple ethnic differences in structural, cultural and individual factors. The current study is designed to examine possible pathways between the abovementioned factors and violent offending. For this study, a large sample of Dutch and Moroccan-Dutch adolescent boys was used to compare on several risk factors related to juvenile violent offending. We examined (a) whether Dutch and Moroccan-Dutch boys report different levels of (exposure to) structural, cultural, and individual risk factors; (b) whether violent offending can be explained as an effect of structural, cultural and individual risk factors; (c) whether ethnic differences in violent offending can be explained as an effect of structural, cultural and individual risk factors and lastly; and (d) which factors contribute most to the development of violent offending.

*The construction of the hypothetical model.* To test the usefulness of theories in general, it is necessary to construct a theory-driven hypothetical model. Our model (see Fig. 1) is based on the literature discussed above and composed of five intersecting latent concepts representing structural factors, cultural factors, individual factors, and juvenile violent offending, severe violent offending. The dimension of structural factors, socio-economic status, was constructed with the manifest and measured variables of family wealth, father’s unemployment and mother’s unemployment. The dimension of cultural factors, gender attitudes, was constructed with the manifest and measured variables of gender-based family roles. Finally, the dimension of
individual factors was constructed by latent variables *parental connectedness*, constructed with the manifest and measured variables of father’s emotional warmth and mother’s emotional warmth, and *child abuse*, constructed by manifest and measured variables sexual abuse, physical assault, psychological aggression, and exposure to intimate partner violence (IPV).

**Method**

**Procedure and participants**

The data used to test these hypotheses were taken from both a school survey and a youth probation office survey. In the school survey, all 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th grade pupils of five participating high schools (senior high) were questioned through paper-and-pencil interviews during a one hour lesson, while a research staff member was present. All types of schools were represented in the survey, except special needs schools. This resulted in 941 questionnaires returned from both boys and girls. Only adolescent boys who designated themselves as Dutch or Moroccan-Dutch were included in the present analyses. At the project site, surveys were inspected for validity (e.g., incomplete sections or identical responses to every item). Fifteen boys were subsequently disqualified because they failed the initial validity check. Five boys did not complete the questionnaire, the remainder either filled in identical responses to every item (2) or filled in ‘abnormally’ high scores on all juvenile delinquency items (8) (for example, stating that they committed each offense a thousand times). Twelve boys were Dutch; the mean age was 16.01 (SD=0.91); and socio-economic status ranged from medium to upper class. The analyses of the school survey were based on data from 364 Dutch and Moroccan-Dutch boys only: compared with the original sample, the number of cases was significantly lower because only adolescent boys who had designated themselves as Dutch (295) or Moroccan-Dutch (69) and who had passed the initial validity test were included.

Second, with the goal of oversampling delinquent boys (Loeb et al., 2005), participants were recruited among Dutch (70) and Moroccan-Dutch (43) boys who were subject to a supervision order either at the time of the study or in the period preceding the study (113), in two (regionally operating) youth probation offices, located in the same regions as the participating schools. To avoid that boys were selected twice, via both school and youth probation office, probation officers were asked to exclude boys attending one of the five participating high schools. In addition, when a research staff member contacted a boy to schedule an appointment, the boy was asked which school he attended. None of the boys attended one of the five participating high schools. A research staff member was present while the boys completed the questionnaire on their own, either at their school or at a time and place convenient to them but did not look at the participants' responses unless the subject asked for help. They were all school-going youth who lived with one or both of their parents.

An information letter describing the study was sent to parents who could indicate if they did not wish their son to participate. Participants were informed that they were free not to participate in the research and that the information provided in the questionnaire would remain confidential. Participants’ anonymity was maintained by ascribing identification numbers rather than names to surveys. Inclusion criteria were (a) sufficient reading ability to complete self-report measures and (b) age between 15 and 18 years. As no background information of the non-participants was available, possible non-response bias could not be estimated.

Measure were based on adolescent self-reports. Although concerns about the relative merits of self-reported delinquency and official statistics exist (Juby & Farrington, 2001), self-report measures provide a widely preferred method of measuring juvenile delinquency in research (Thornberry & Krohn, 2000; Wells & Rankin, 1991). Whereas reliance on official reports might introduce layers of potential bias between the actual behavior and the data (e.g., a substantial amount of crime is not reported, and even many crimes that are reported or brought to the attention of law enforcement officers are not officially recorded), self-reports of delinquency are considered to be the data source nearest to the actual behavior (Thornberry & Krohn, 2000).

**Measures**

**Severe violent offending:** Severe violent offending was assessed using the Youth Delinquency Survey of the Research and Documentation Center of the Dutch Ministry of Security and Justice (2005), a self-report measure of delinquent behavior by the youngsters, comprising six categories of specific criminal acts: Internet offenses, drug offenses, discrimination, vandalism, property offenses and violent offenses. For each offense, the youngster was asked whether he/she had ‘ever’ committed that crime (lifetime prevalence) and, if so, how often in the previous twelve months (number of incidences in the previous year). For the present analyses, we only used the number of incidences in the previous year of the subscale *severe violent delinquency* containing four indicators. An example of an item measuring severe violent offending is “Did you ever hurt someone with a weapon?” The four items demonstrated good intercorrelations: Alpha coefficient (α) = 0.79. This seems to suggest that even relatively different items, such as ‘robery with a weapon’ and ‘fight where a weapon was involved’, were dependent on the same latent variable ‘severe violent offending’. As a means to handle outliers, recoded scales of violent delinquency were utilized in the analysis, from 0 to 6; with values 3–5 recoded into 3; 6–10 recoded into 4; 11–20 recoded into 5; 21–100 recoded into 6. After recoding, alpha remained high (α = 0.81).
Socio-economic status: A measure of social economic status was captured through the participant’s rating of his family’s wealth. Responses were given from very rich, quite rich, medium rich, not so rich, not rich. In addition, the participants were asked to indicate whether their father and mother were unemployed (yes vs. no).

Parental connectedness was measured by 36 items of the Egna Minnen Betraffande Uppfostran for Adolescents (EMBU-A), a self-report instrument for measuring adolescents’ current perception of parental rearing (Gerlsma, Arrindell, Van der Veen, & Emmelkamp, 1991). This questionnaire consists of two parallel questionnaires concerning relationships with father and mother, using a 4-point Likert-type scale (i.e., 1 = never, 2 = sometimes, 3 = often and 4 = most of the time). For the present analyses, we used the total scores on the subscales father’s emotional warmth and mother’s emotional warmth as indicators of parental connectedness. Examples of items measuring Emotional Warmth are: “Does your father/mother show you that he/she loves you?” and “Do you and your father/mother ever hug each other?”. The eighteen items measuring father’s emotional warmth demonstrated high intercorrelations: Alpha coefficient (α) = 0.96. Similarly, the eighteen items measuring mother’s emotional warmth showed an alpha coefficient (α) = 0.95.

Child abuse exposure was assessed by 20 items of the Unpleasant and Nasty Incidents Questionnaire (see also Lammers-Winkelman, Slot, Bijl, & Vrijbrief, 2007). This questionnaire is based on the Dating Violence Questionnaire (Douglas & Straus, 2006) and the Parent–Child Conflict Tactics Scales (CTSPC; Straus, Hamby, Finkelhor, Moore, & Runyan, 1998). The questionnaire assesses (recalled) victimization in the home as reported by the adolescent. Examples of items measuring child abuse are: “How often in the previous year did your mom/dad grab you by the neck or choked you?”, “How often in the previous year did an adult family member ever force you to perform certain sexual acts?” and “How often in the previous year did your mom/dad ever throw or knock your dad/mom down?”. The twenty items demonstrated high intercorrelations: Alpha coefficient (α) = 0.89. The high intercorrelations between the items suggest that relatively different types of child abuse, such as ‘sexual abuse by a family member’, ‘physical assault’, ‘psychological aggression’, and ‘witnessing IPV’ were dependent on the same latent variable ‘Child abuse’. As a means to handle outliers, recoded scales of child abuse were utilized in the analysis, from 0 to 6; with values 3–5 recoded into 3; 6–10 recoded into 4; 11–20 recoded into 5; more than 20 recoded into 6. After recoding, alpha remained high (α = 0.84).

Gender attitudes were assessed by the Gender–based Family Roles scale of the Gender Attitude Inventory (for a more detailed description of this questionnaire, see Ashmore, Del Boca, & Bilder, 1995). The Gender–based Family Roles scale consists of ten items using a 7-point Likert-type scale. Examples of items constituting the Family Roles scale are: “I would not respect a man if he decided to stay at home and take care of his children while his wife worked” and “The husband should have primary responsibility for taking care of the children”. Alpha coefficients for Family Roles scale this was 0.81 indicating a good reliability (Kline, 1999).

Ethnicity was assessed by a single item in the questionnaire: “What ethnic group best describes you?” (see also Dekovic, Wissink, & Meijer, 2004). Only those adolescents who designated themselves as Dutch or Moroccan-Dutch were included in the present analyses. Dutch boys served as the reference category in all analyses in this study.

Statistical analyses

The present study used structural equation modeling (SEM) with latent variables based on multi-item measurements, which should improve the analysis by reducing the effect of measurement errors associated with individual items (Bratt, 2004). Measurement models of latent variables consider possible autocorrelations between items, i.e., questionnaire-imposed context effects from one item on the next (Byrne, 2010). First, a correlation analysis with all measured variables was conducted. This correlation analysis was done in two versions—one with the school sample and one with the probation office sample. These correlations are presented together with standard deviations, following the general recommendation to include information on covariances between measured variables when structural equation modeling is used (e.g., Hoyle & Panter, 1995). A confirmatory factor analysis was used to test the assumption that the selected items could be applied as indicators of latent variables. The latent variable ‘Severe violent offending’ was tested with four indicators. ‘Socio-economic status’ was tested with three indicators. Further, the latent variable ‘Parental connectedness’ was tested with the sum scores of eighteen items measuring father’s emotional warmth and eighteen items measuring mother’s emotional warmth respectively. The latent variable ‘Child abuse’ was tested with the sum scores of twenty items measuring sexual abuse by a family member (four items), physical assault (eight items), psychological aggression (one item), and exposure to intimate partner violence (seven items). The latent variable ‘gender attitudes’ was measured by ten indicators, all on item level. When both theory and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) supported the use of latent variables, they were included in more extended structural models. An advantage of some SEM applications (such as Amos 19, used in this study) is the opportunity to include cases with missing data in the analysis by using the full information maximum likelihood estimation method (see Arbuckle, 1996; Bratt, 2004; Woolke, 2000). This option was used in this study. Maximum likelihood estimations assume multivariate normality, but are known to be relatively robust in the presence of non-normal data (Chou & Bentler, 1995). Several fit indices were used to test how well SEM models reproduced the covariances in the sample data (tests of general fit of the model). When comparing nested models, hierarchical $\chi^2$ (hierarchical chi-square) was applied (with $p < 0.05$ falsifying the more parsimonious model, i.e., the model that used fewer parameters to explain the complex data matrix). For other tests of general fit, $\chi^2$ was not emphasized, because of the tendency of $\chi^2$ to be inflated by large samples, even with trivial deviations from the sample matrix – particularly when data are not multivariate normally distributed (West, Finch, & Curran, 1995). In addition to $\chi^2$, the following fit measures are
Table 1
Sample characteristics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>School sample</th>
<th>Probation office sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dutch boys (295)</td>
<td>Moroccan-Dutch boys (69)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severe violent offending</td>
<td>0.07 (0.60)</td>
<td>0.17 (1.16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connectedness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father’s emotional warmth</td>
<td>60.99 (13.03)</td>
<td>51.94 (13.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother’s emotional warmth</td>
<td>61.77 (11.17)</td>
<td>55.93 (14.22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child abuse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual abuse</td>
<td>0.19 (1.43)</td>
<td>0.07 (0.60)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical assault</td>
<td>0.29 (1.40)</td>
<td>0.62 (2.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological aggression</td>
<td>0.14 (0.59)</td>
<td>0.97 (1.71)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposure to IPV</td>
<td>0.32 (1.98)</td>
<td>1.58 (3.45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender based family roles</td>
<td>40.07 (11.03)</td>
<td>53.46 (11.87)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% (N)</td>
<td>% (N)</td>
<td>% (N)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Socio-economic status
Family’s wealth
very rich | 3.7% (11) | 1.4% (1) | 7.1% (5) | 2.3% (1)
quite rich | 34.2% (101) | 10.1% (7) | 37.1% (26) | 2.3% (1)
medium rich | 56.6% (167) | 71.0% (49) | 45.7% (32) | 48.8% (21)
not so rich | 4.7% (14) | 14.5% (10) | 7.1% (5) | 30.2% (13)
not rich | 0.7% (2) | 2.9% (2) | 2.9% (2) | 16.3% (7)
Paternal unemployment | 5.1% (15) | 29% (20) | 14.3% (10) | 72.1% (31)
Maternal unemployment | 10.2% (30) | 65.2% (45) | 24.3% (17) | 72.1% (31)

Missing data were not included in calculations of means.

presented: the normed chi-square (NC), the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), together with the 90% confidence interval for the RMSEA. Although fit measures are based on subjective judgments and therefore cannot be regarded as infallible or correct (Byrne, 2010; Iacobucci, 2010), recommended cut-off values for these tests are: NC ≤ 5.0; CFI ≥ 0.90; RMSEA < 0.10 (Arbuckle & Wothke, 1999; Byrne, 2010; Hu and Bentler, 1999; Kline, 1999).

Results

Group differences and correlation between items

Characteristics of the study participants are reported in Table 1. In both the school sample and the probation office sample, Moroccan-Dutch boys reported committing more severe violent acts in the past year than their Dutch peers. These differences were statistically significant for the probation office sample only (t = 3.71, p < 0.001). As for structural factors, the social circumstances of Moroccan-Dutch boys are particularly poor in comparison with their Dutch peers: They rated their family’s wealth significantly lower (χ²(4) = 24.34, p < 0.001 for the school sample and χ²(4) = 29.67, p < 0.001 for the probation office sample) and the proportion of father’s unemployment (χ²(1) = 36.76, p < 0.001 for the school sample and χ²(1) = 38.50, p < 0.001 for the probation office sample) and mother’s unemployment (χ²(1) = 103.59, p < 0.001 for the school sample and χ²(1) = 24.92, p < 0.001 for the probation office sample) was significantly higher.

Further, the Moroccan-Dutch boys rated significantly lower levels of paternal emotional warmth (t = 4.26, p < 0.001 for the school sample; t = 5.93, p < 0.001 for the probation office sample) and significantly lower levels of maternal emotional warmth (t = 3.19, p < 0.001 for the school sample; t = 6.70, p < 0.001 for the probation office sample) in comparison with their Dutch peers.

With the exception of sexual abuse by a family member, Moroccan-Dutch boys reported significantly more exposure to different types of child abuse in comparison with their Dutch peers. In both samples, significant differences between the two groups were found only for psychological aggression (t = 4.00, p < 0.001 for the school sample; t = 6.25, p < 0.001 for the probation office sample) and exposure to IPV (t = 2.93, p = 0.004 for the school sample; t = 1.36, p = 0.02 for the probation office sample).

Finally, in both samples, significant differences in gender attitudes were found (t = 1.40, p < 0.001 for the school sample; t = 2.98, p < 0.001 for the probation office sample), with Moroccan-Dutch boys having more conventionally defined roles compared to Dutch boys.

Table 2 presents correlations between measured variables. The upper part of the matrix (above the diagonal) shows correlations in the school sample. The variables ‘Child abuse’ and ‘Severe violent offending’ are slightly skewed, with L-shaped distributions. Skewness of these variables is slightly lower in the probation office sample (below the diagonal).
Patterns of correlations were fairly similar across both samples, although effect sizes were stronger in the probation office sample. Among all indicators, only Family wealth was significantly associated with severe violent offending in the school sample, while in the probation office sample all indicators, with the exception of Sexual Abuse and Physical assault were significantly associated.

Structural equation modeling

Tests of measurement models (latent variables).

Severe violent delinquency. Four indicators of the tendency to commit severe violent offending were used: robbery with assault, assault with a weapon, weapon possession, and rape. A model with a latent variable loading on all four indicators provided a close approximate fit ($\chi^2$ based on $p = 0.984$; RMSEA = 0.000). The measurement model was also supported when tested on the probation office sample ($\chi^2$ based on $p = 0.503$; RMSEA = 0.000).

Socio-economic status. A measurement model that applied three indicators of socio-economic status was supported (CFI = 0.988; RMSEA = 0.080). This measurement model was also supported when tested on the probation office sample (CFI = 1.000; RMSEA = 0.000).

Parental connectedness. A measurement model that applied 18 indicators of father’s emotional warmth provided a reasonable fit, though it had a relatively high RMSEA in both samples (CFI = 0.920; RMSEA = 0.082 on the school sample; CFI = 0.946; RMSEA = 0.082 on the probation office sample). Further, a measurement model that applied 18 indicators of mother’s emotional warmth provided a reasonable fit, though it had a relatively high RMSEA (CFI = 0.893; RMSEA = 0.084). On the probation office sample, the measurement model resulted in a relatively high RMSEA as well (CFI = 0.920; RMSEA = 0.082 on the probation office sample).

Child abuse. A measurement model with a latent variable loading on all four indicators provided a close fit ($\chi^2$ based on $p = 0.286$; RMSEA = 0.020) when two theoretically reasonable correlations between residual variables were included: (1) a correlation between the residual variables for sexual abuse by a family member and psychological assault and (2) a correlation between the residual variables for physical assault and psychological assault. The measurement model was also supported when tested on the probation office sample ($p = 0.648$; RMSEA = 0.000).

Gender attitudes. A measurement model that applied ten indicators of gender-based family roles was supported (CFI = 0.966; RMSEA = 0.055). This measurement model was also supported when tested on the probation office sample (CFI = 0.967; RMSEA = 0.062).

Predicting violent offending. Fig. 2 presents the results for a model seeing severe violent delinquency as dependent on socio-economic status, parental connectedness, child abuse and gender attitudes, analyzed with full information maximum likelihood estimation using the full sample (The figure uses standardized coefficients). The model resulted in satisfying fit measures (CFI = 0.842; RMSEA = 0.074) and could explain a moderate percentage of the variance of the latent variable severe violent offending ($R^2 = 0.14$). Child abuse ($beta = 0.28$) and connectedness ($beta = −0.16$) were estimated to be more closely
related to violent offending than socio-economic status (beta = 0.01) and gender attitudes (beta = 0.05). On the other hand, if socio-economic status was estimated as the sole predictor of severe violent offending, it demonstrated a beta = 0.17. Similarly, using connectedness as the sole indicator gave a beta = −0.30. Child abuse as the sole indicator gave a beta = 0.31. Lastly, if gender attitudes were estimated as the sole predictor of severe violent offending, it demonstrated a beta = 0.13.

The results obtained with the school sample were compared with an analysis of the probation office sample (Table 3). It was necessary to use measurement variance between the school sample and the probation office sample, since identical unstandardized factor loadings for the school and probation office were not supported by the data. Full information maximum likelihood estimation then provided a close fit for the school sample (CFI = 0.966; RMSEA = 0.055) and a moderate fit for the probation office sample (CFI = 0.800; RMSEA = 0.094). The regression coefficient for ‘socio-economic status’ loading on ‘severe violent offending’ was similar for the school sample (b = 0.08) and the probation office sample (b = 0.04). The regression weight for ‘connectedness’ loading on severe violent offending was similar as well (b = −0.00 for the school sample; b = −0.00 for the probation office sample), while the regression weight for ‘child abuse’ on ‘severe violent offending’ became statistically significant in the probation sample (b = 0.07, p = 0.03). For ‘gender attitudes’, the regression coefficient was similar for both samples (b = 0.02 for the school sample; b = 0.07 for the probation office sample).

**Ethnicity predicting severe violent offending.** A separate part of the analyses explored whether ethnicity could account for differences in severe violent offending, using an alternative model which considered indirect paths, with ethnicity as the
Table 3
The model in Fig. 1 used with the school sample and the probation office sample. Full information likelihood estimations with unstandardized estimates.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>School sample (N = 364)</th>
<th>Probation-office sample (N = 113)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Socio-economic status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family’s wealth</td>
<td>1.00*</td>
<td>1.00*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father’s unemployment</td>
<td>0.72**</td>
<td>0.83**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother’s unemployment</td>
<td>1.05**</td>
<td>0.56**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental connectedness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father’s emotional warmth</td>
<td>1.00*</td>
<td>1.00*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother’s emotional warmth</td>
<td>1.45**</td>
<td>1.00**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child abuse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposure to IPV</td>
<td>1.00*</td>
<td>1.00*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual abuse by a family member</td>
<td>0.24*</td>
<td>0.08*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical assault</td>
<td>0.44*</td>
<td>0.55*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological aggression</td>
<td>0.12*</td>
<td>0.72**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender attitudes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GAI1</td>
<td>1.00*</td>
<td>1.00*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GAI2</td>
<td>1.13*</td>
<td>0.91*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GAI3</td>
<td>2.66*</td>
<td>1.57**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GAI4</td>
<td>4.18*</td>
<td>1.50*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GAI5</td>
<td>3.53*</td>
<td>1.48**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GAI6</td>
<td>3.12*</td>
<td>1.63*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GAI7</td>
<td>3.88*</td>
<td>1.74**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GAI8</td>
<td>0.26*</td>
<td>0.83*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GAI9</td>
<td>3.52*</td>
<td>1.48*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GAI10</td>
<td>1.98*</td>
<td>0.94*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severe violent offending</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robbery with assault</td>
<td>1.00*</td>
<td>1.00*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assault with a weapon</td>
<td>1.75*</td>
<td>1.00*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weapon possession</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>1.67**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rape</td>
<td>1.74*</td>
<td>0.61*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SES → Severe violent offending</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.04*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connectedness → Severe violent offending</td>
<td>−0.00</td>
<td>−0.00*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child abuse → Severe violent offending</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.07*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender attitudes → Severe violent offending</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.07*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SES → Child abuse</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>1.50*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SES → Gender attitudes</td>
<td>0.64*</td>
<td>0.70*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child abuse → Gender attitudes</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.166*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connectedness → Child abuse</td>
<td>−0.04*</td>
<td>−0.08**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

χ² | 456.073 | 437.988 |

df | 220    | 220    |

p | 0.000  | 0.000  |

Normed chi-square (NC) | 2.073 | 1.991 |

Comparative fit index (CFI) | 0.925 | 0.800 |

Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) | 0.054 | 0.094 |

RMSEA conf. interval, lower bound | 0.047 | 0.081 |

RMSEA conf. interval, upper bound | 0.061 | 0.107 |

* Fixed to unstandardized value of 1 to identify the model (which implies that no significance test of this individual parameter is provided).

** p < 0.05.

*** p < 0.01.

**** p < 0.001.

only exogenous variable (see Fig. 3), thus testing ethnicity as a predictor of socio-economic status, connectedness, child abuse, and gender attitudes, while all these five variables were used to predict severe violent offending.

In the school sample, the SEM-based analysis with only ethnicity (Dutch = 1) predicting the latent variable ‘severe violent offending’ found a small association: beta = 0.05 (see Table 4). The estimated weight of ethnicity was reduced when socio-economic status and connectedness was accounted for, beta = 0.04; extending the model further by also including child abuse did not improve the explanation of ethnic differences, beta = 0.02. However, ethnicity did have a significant effect on all remaining predictor variables: socio-economic status (beta = 0.69, p < 0.001); connectedness (beta = −0.27, p < 0.001); child abuse (beta = 0.31, p < 0.001), and gender attitudes (beta = 0.29, p = 0.03). Since the complete model (Fig. 2) accounted for only 1% of the variance of severe violent offending, no further analyses were performed on the school sample.

In the probation office sample, the SEM-based analysis with only ethnicity predicting severe violent offending found a strong association: beta = 0.38 (see Table 5). The estimated weight of ethnicity in the probation office sample was reduced when socio-economic status (beta = 0.13), connectedness (beta = 0.13), child abuse (beta = 0.17), and gender attitudes (beta = 0.18) was accounted for. In addition, ethnicity had a significant effect on the predictor variables: socio-economic sta-
Severe violent offending seen as dependent on ethnicity, socio-economic status, parental connectedness, child abuse and gender attitudes. 

Alternative models were tested by hierarchical $\chi^2$. Both the direct path from ethnicity on severe violent offending ($\Delta \chi^2 = 1.59, p > 0.05$) and the direct path from socio-economic status on severe violent offending could be released.

### Table 4

SEM-models testing the impact of ethnicity on a latent variable of violent offending, with full information maximum likelihood estimations (standardized estimates): school sample.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Ethnicity (Dutch = 1)</th>
<th>Socio-economic status</th>
<th>Parental connectedness</th>
<th>Child abuse</th>
<th>Gender attitudes</th>
<th>$R^2$</th>
<th>$\chi^2$</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>$p$</th>
<th>Normed chi-square (NC)</th>
<th>CFI</th>
<th>RMSEA</th>
<th>RMSEA conf. interval, lower bound</th>
<th>RMSEA conf. interval, upper bound</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Model 1</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>4.263</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.512</td>
<td>0.853</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.067</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model 2</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>42.104</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>2.339</td>
<td>0.984</td>
<td>0.061</td>
<td>0.037</td>
<td>0.085</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model 3</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>58.633</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>1.891</td>
<td>0.984</td>
<td>0.050</td>
<td>0.030</td>
<td>0.069</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model 4</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>173.104</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>2.509</td>
<td>0.951</td>
<td>0.064</td>
<td>0.053</td>
<td>0.077</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model 5</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>482.73</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>2.020</td>
<td>0.927</td>
<td>0.053</td>
<td>0.046</td>
<td>0.060</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** $p < 0.01$.  
* $p < 0.05$.  
*** $p < 0.001$.  

Table 5

SEM-models testing the impact of ethnicity on a latent variable of violent offending, with full information maximum likelihood estimations (standardized estimates): probation office sample.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th>Model 4</th>
<th>Model 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity (Dutch = 1)</td>
<td>0.38*</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-economic status</td>
<td>0.38*</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental connectedness</td>
<td>−0.58*</td>
<td>−0.46*</td>
<td>−0.53*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child abuse</td>
<td>0.40*</td>
<td>0.38*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender attitudes</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| $\chi^2$ | 6.564 | 28.482 | 67.210 | 161.02 | 455.015 |
| df | 5 | 18 | 31 | 69 | 239 |
| $p$ | 0.255 | 0.055 | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 |
| Normed chi-square (NC) | 1.313 | 1.582 | 2.178 | 2.334 | 1.904 |
| CFI | 0.967 | 0.950 | 0.907 | 0.831 | 0.810 |
| RMSEA | 0.053 | 0.072 | 0.083 | 0.109 | 0.089 |
| RMSEA conf. interval, lower bound | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.069 | 0.087 | 0.077 |
| RMSEA conf. interval, upper bound | 0.149 | 0.120 | 0.130 | 0.131 | 0.102 |

* $p < 0.05$.
** $p < 0.01$.
*** $p < 0.001$.

($\Delta \chi^2 = 2.25, p > 0.05$). However, neither the direct path from connectedness on severe violent offending, nor the path from child abuse on severe violent offending could be released ($p < 0.001$ in both cases). As for the indirect paths, both the indirect path from ethnicity on severe violent offending through child abuse ($\Delta \chi^2 = 0.932, p > 0.05$) as well as the indirect path from ethnicity through gender attitudes ($\Delta \chi^2 = 0.828, p > 0.05$) could be released. Likewise, the indirect path from child abuse through gender attitudes could be released ($\Delta \chi^2 = 2.39, p > 0.05$). All other indirect paths could not be released ($p < 0.001$ in both cases). SEM found that the alternative model (see Fig. 4) provided a reasonable fit (NC = 1.889; CFI = 0.810; RMSEA = 0.089) and explained 63% of the variance of severe violent offending.

**Discussion**

Juvenile violent offending among adolescent boys with a minority background is reported to be a significant problem in several countries, including the Netherlands. This study focuses on assessing the intersectionality of ethnicity, socio-economic status, parental connectedness, child abuse, and gender attitudes in juvenile violent delinquency. Rather than relying on an item-level analysis, this study applied structural equation modeling, analyzing the relationship between latent variables. Four indicators of the tendency to commit severe violent offending were used: (1) robbery with assault; (2) assault with a weapon; (3) weapon possession; and (4) rape. Confirmatory factor analysis found that these four items could be used as indicators of latent construct, itself is noteworthy. Considering the high intercorrelations among these four indicators, it could be suggested that probation officers should take any severe violent act as a warning that these boys may be involved in even more serious violent offending. Probation officers are well placed to counteract violent offending among boys.

Our results build upon the extant literature in several ways. First, this study demonstrates that in both the school sample as well as the probation office sample Moroccan-Dutch boys reported committing more severe violent acts than their Dutch peers. However, these differences were statistically significant for the probation office sample only.

Second, this study demonstrated ethnic differences in levels of (exposure to) structural, cultural, and individual risk factors. As for structural factors, the social circumstances of Moroccan-Dutch boys were particularly poor in comparison with their Dutch peers: They rated their family wealth lower, and the proportion of parental unemployment was significantly higher. Additionally, significant differences in gender attitudes were found, with Moroccan-Dutch boys having more conventionally defined roles compared to Dutch boys. Furthermore, Moroccan-Dutch boys rated significantly lower levels of maternal emotional warmth and significantly lower levels of maternal emotional warmth. Finally, in both samples, Moroccan-Dutch boys reported significantly more exposure to child abuse than their Dutch peers. In sum, in comparison with their Dutch peers, Moroccan-Dutch boys experience more risk factors for involvement in severe violent offending.

Third, the latent variable of severe violent offending was estimated as dependent on socio-economic status, parental connectedness, child abuse, and gender attitudes. The SEM-based analysis with the whole sample provided a reasonable fit, explaining 14% of severe violent offending. A closer look at the two subsamples revealed that the school sample did not support a significant effect on severe violent offending induced by socio-economic status, connectedness, child abuse, and gender attitudes. In other words, the analysis of this particular subsample indicated no additional effect on severe violent offending from the predictor variables. This is probably due to the fact that only 4.1% of the boys in this sample ($N = 15$)
reported committing at least one act of severe violent offending. However, the SEM-based analysis with the probation office sample did support the proposed model, explaining 63% of the variance of severe violent offending. In addition, it suggested that parental connectedness and child abuse had a significantly stronger effect on severe violent offending than gender attitudes and socio-economic status. However, while family functioning was significantly better at predicting severe violent offending, the analysis still found an estimated effect of socio-economic status on family functioning, i.e., child abuse. Therefore, another conclusion to be drawn from this study is that socio-economic status may be relevant as an additional variable predicting severe violent offending. Poor social conditions contribute directly to child abuse (Dettlaff et al., 2011; Fagan et al., 2007; Messner, Raffalovich, & McMillan, 2001) and indirectly to youth violence (Demuth & Brown, 2004; Gould et al., 2002; Pratt, 2001), i.e., the connection between poor social conditions and severe violent offending in this particular subsample appear to apply through child abuse. Gender attitudes contributed further to explaining severe violent offending in the probation office sample.

Following previous research (see Lahlah et al., 2013a), a fourth addition that our study offers to the existing body of literature, is our finding that socio-economic status, connectedness, child abuse and gender attitudes could explain a substantial proportion of the differences between Dutch and Moroccan-Dutch boys committing severe violent acts. As suggested by Enzmann and Wetzels (2003), the ability of ethnicity to predict severe violent offending was reduced when other predictors
were accounted for. Still, ethnicity added significantly to the explanation of severe violent offending through socio-economic status and connectedness. The first Moroccan immigrants mostly came to the Netherlands for economic reasons. However, as a consequence of the economic hardships of the oil crises and the industrial restructuring in the 1980s (Cru & Doomernik, 2003; Laghzaoui, 2009), many of the first immigrants lost their jobs and stayed outside the Dutch labor market, among others due to low levels of education. To date, Moroccan-Dutch families still live in low SES neighborhoods with a high immigrant density than Dutch families (Boom et al., 2010; CBS, 2012). This suggests that the unfavorable conditions of Moroccan-Dutch boys are probably due to the presence of several socio-economic stressors in the family, such as low levels of parental employment of both parents and low level of educational attainment of parents and child (Dagevos & Gijbers, 2007), rather than ethnicity per se. In addition, the presence of these stressors may lead to a higher risk of child abuse exposure, resulting in severe violent offending. Indeed, this study shows that the higher rates of child abuse among Moroccan-Dutch boys is related to the exposure of several risk factors associated with child abuse, primary among these a low socio-economic status. This is in line with previous research demonstrating considerable evidence that child abuse occurs disproportionately among low SES families (for example see Dettlaff et al., 2011; Fagan et al., 2007; Messner, Raffalovich, & McMillan, 2001). This is particularly relevant to understanding differences in child abuse exposure as Moroccan-Dutch families are significantly more likely as Dutch families to live in poverty.

A rather similar mechanism may apply to the relationship between ethnicity and parental connectedness. Although the findings of this study demonstrate ethnic differences in the degree to which Dutch and Moroccan-Dutch boys perceive their relationship with their parents, with Moroccan-Dutch boys reporting lower levels of parental emotional warmth, and although the results of this study indicate the significance of connectedness in severe violent offending, supporting a vast body of research that identifies the importance of this variable (Davalos et al., 2005; Eichelsheim et al., 2010), research often considers the individual family in isolation from its social setting and overlooks the way the family interacts with its social setting. It seems reasonable to expect that parenting will be harder where parents have expectations that differ from those of their social setting in general and their children in particular, and similarly easier where there is concordance between ‘normal’ behavior within and outside the family (Lahlah et al., 2013c). This might be particularly true for Moroccan-Dutch children with parents who fail to provide sufficient help and support if lack of resources and their social setting make it difficult to make a more effective effort. The discrepancy between the parents’ and adolescents’ expectations and/or preferences might cause conflict for the adolescent, which may result in a negative influence on the parent-child relationship or even result in child abuse, which, in turn, results in higher risk of involvement in severe violent offending.

Conclusions

Ultimately, the findings of these analyses indicate that dispropoitionality in juvenile violent delinquency is a complex phenomenon that cannot be explained by a single factor. Ethnicity cannot solely explain why boys commit violent crimes, and neither can structural, cultural, or individual factors. All these factors cumulatively play a role in the development of severe violent offending. The analyses in the probation office sample show that 63% of the variance in the dependent variable ‘severe violent offending’ can be explained by the set of factors that was incorporated in the model. From those factors, both parental connectedness and child abuse had a significant direct path to severe offending, with parental connectedness having the strongest direct association. However, since most variables in this study interact or intersect, and ethnicity (or rather an ethnic minority status) is associated with those specific characteristics, a conclusion to be drawn from this study is that ethnicity may be relevant as an additional variable predicting severe violent offending, albeit indirectly. As stated above, research has lagged behind in fully incorporating intersectionality into theory and methods. However, unless intersectionality is taken into account in the field of criminology, psychology and social work, prevention and intervention programs will be of less use, and may in fact even be harmful for certain groups. Thus, social services and criminal justice offices need to be aware of the seemingly unrelated factors that can impact a boy's life experience and response to the service and to adapt their methods accordingly. The use of the traditional family ideal may function as one such example of intersectionality (Collins, 1989). Families are expected to socialize their family members into an appropriate set of family values that reinforce the hierarchy within the assumed unity of interests symbolized by the family and simultaneously lay the foundation for individual development. Boys and girls typically learn their assigned place in hierarchies of ethnicity, gender, and social class in their families of origin. In particular, hierarchies of gender, age, and wealth within actual family units correlate with comparable hierarchies in society. Given the power of the family as an important factor to the development of violent offending, it might be considered to recast family systems in ways that do not reproduce inequality. Sociological research clearly shows that ethnicity does not fully explain significant differences in juvenile violent offending. However, people who are at the bottom of the social hierarchy in terms of ethnicity or gender are more likely to have a lower social status, to be subjected to stereotypes, and to be discriminated against (Collins, 2000). For instance, the image of Moroccan-Dutch boys in Dutch media and public discourse is far from bright: they are often associated with marginalization and delinquency (De Jong, 2007). Although there is clear evidence of the unfavorable position of Moroccan-Dutch boys in Dutch society (Cru & Heering, 2008), the victimization of Moroccan-Dutch boys in particular is often underreported and overlooked (Lahlah et al., 2013d). Through the study of intersectionality of ethnicity and the family, we should achieve a
better understanding of (economic) inequalities and the implications of the multidimensional impact of family stressors on violent offending.

Implications

Counselors should develop a different approach appropriate to ethnic minority youths in general and Moroccan-Dutch boys in particular. In line with both cross-cultural and multicultural research, this study makes it clear that there is no one-size-fits-all explanation for the overrepresentation of ethnic minorities in juvenile violent offending. Prevention and intervention programs based on the experiences of adolescents who do not share the same ethnic background and social class will be of limited utility for those whose lives are shaped by a different set of obstacles. Consequently, juvenile offenders from different backgrounds require different interventions as well. These interventions should focus on the underlying and intersecting structural conditions of poverty, marginalization, discrimination with the means to significantly change the boys’ situations and that of their families. Additionally, interventions designed to combat juvenile violence should be linked to strategies that combat violence within communities (child abuse/domestic violence). One without the other is inadequate, since this study shows that the two are closely connected. Furthermore, practitioners should further their understanding of diverse ethnic groups so that they can be alert to the ways in which ethnic differences may affect the assessment of juvenile violent offending. For example, Moroccan-Dutch boys are generally socialized to be macho and domineering in accordance with the cultural concept of machismo (Lahlah et al., 2013b). Such confining gender roles, in combination with cultural prohibitions against disclosing (child) abuse to outsiders, may result in reluctance of many Moroccans to report abuse to counselors. Practitioners need to be aware of such ethnically specific barriers to help-seeking among different ethnic groups. However, the authors would like to stress that on the other hand, practitioners should be wary of facile categorizations of juvenile offenders based on ethnicity. Although belonging to an ethnic minority group holds some inherent risks, those risks and the resulting stressors may be mitigated by strengths and other unique circumstances within each family.

Limitations of this study

Several limitations of the research design should be noted. Most importantly, conclusions are based on self-reports. Although concerns about the relative merits of self-reported delinquency and official statistics exist (Juby & Farrington, 2001), self-report measures provide a widely preferred method of measuring juvenile delinquency in research (Thornberry & Krohn, 2000; Wells & Rankin, 1991). Whereas reliance on official reports might introduce layers of potential bias between the actual behavior and the data (e.g., a substantial amount of crime is not reported, and even crimes that are reported or brought to the attention of law enforcement officers are often not officially recorded), self-reports of delinquency are considered as the data source nearest to the actual behavior (Thornberry & Krohn, 2000). However, in similar studies, data may also have been affected by a quite different validity problem than socially desirable responding: Some boys may have enjoyed reporting frequent acts of violent offending when this in fact did not take place or was less frequent. This potential methodological problem was addressed by several means: Fifteen questionnaires that appeared to be unreliable were excluded; scores above 100 for a specific act of severe violent offending were defined as missing; and finally each offending was recoded into a 7-point scale. Second, the study’s reliance on cross-sectional data limits causal inferences. Without longitudinal data, temporal ordering of the variables cannot be determined, nor can ethnic differences be assessed in individual pathways to violent offending. This weakens causal analyses. It may very well be that a boy’s delinquent behavior has led parents to become more controlling and strict or to withdraw emotionally.

Acknowledgments

The authors offer their heartfelt thanks to the boys who have allowed them to make use of their stories and to note that, without them, this study would not have been possible. The authors also thank Bahadir Batiyay and Fayrouz ElMohammadi for their helpful research assistance.

References


