

General Health, Psychological Well-Being and Distress of Youth Immigrants in Italy

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ABSTRACT

In seeking to ease the rehabilitation of refugees there has generally been a failure to take account of the complexity of the refugees' experience of suffering and loss. In this their psychological and emotional well-being as well as the social and economic aspects of the question have frequently been of only peripheral concern, and the response to the psychological impact of violence has been primarily focused on the concept of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). This approach assumes a pathological response to stress that is both universal across different cultures and centred on the potential of pathologizing coping strategies that might be essential not only for survival but also for psychological well-being.

Key words: migration, adolescence, Albania, mental distress

Introduction

While children and adolescents have long been recognized as one of the central priorities of international protection measures in conditions of political violence and exile, a comprehensive review of the literature on war-affected and displaced children^{1,2} indicates that emergency interventions during most of the past century have been mainly based on the bio-medical model with basic survival needs receiving overall priority. Psychological and emotional well-being as well as social and economic matters have been generally of peripheral concern and the care of the psychological impact of violence has been primarily focused on the concept of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as the cornerstone of refugees' rehabilitation, which fails to consider the complexity of the experiences of suffering and loss. This approach assumes a pathological response to stress that is both universal across different cultures and centred on the individual with a potential of pathologizing coping strategies that might be essential not only for survival but also for psychological well-being. However, as the biomedical model has been increasingly shown to be insensitive to the subjective interpretation of human experience, during the most recent conflicts of the last decade, different approaches to the study of the effects on children of war and displacement have been applied based not so much on pathology as on resilience³.

Other potential emotional problems related to the process of acculturation, cultural conflict, social exclusion, discrimination or economic hardship as well as general mental health problems or disabling psychiatric conditions might not receive the attention they deserve, if the focus is on the identification of acute stress reactions. In post-conflict societies, therefore, the development of a sustainable, community based child and adolescent mental health service that attempts to address the full range of mental problems situated in a cultural and social framework seems to be a more appropriate approach⁴.

The migratory movement of Albanians

The migratory movement of the Albanians has been considered one of the most significant moments of the difficult phase of transition of the Albanian state towards a democratic system. An interpretative element that is important for an understanding of the Albanian migratory phenomenon is to be found in the rules dictated by the totalitarian state that treated emigration as a crime. For this reason, the previous migratory experience, before the mass migration of 1991, dates back to 1900, when a significant number of Albanians left the country to go to America and Australia⁵.

The main cause of these movements is to be found in the absence of security and of efficient and democratic institutions, in political anarchy and above all in a lack of trust in the political ruling class. These motivations, closely linked to the economic conditions in Albania, contributed to the definition of the Albanian immigrant as »an economic refugee«.

The demographic character of the migratory movements has changed in the course of time: in the initial phases the Albanian immigrant was male, young and unmarried, while subsequently the number of women grew rapidly due both to the reuniting of families and to the emigration of single women⁶.

In order to be able to outline a profile of the Albanian adolescents in Italy we make reference to some indicators that can describe the adolescent period, beginning with the so called Ecological model^{7,8} which determines the risk factors and protective factors as well as the outcomes of their combination.

An European project

This paper is a part of an international project which involves a comparative study of risk and protective factors of adolescent health and well-being, with particular focus on youth with immigrant (or refugee) experience. This project aims at identifying contexts and policies throughout two EU (Austria and Italy) and four SEE (Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Croatia and Kosovo) countries which facilitate the socio-cultural integration of adolescent refugees in terms of developing intercultural identity, and promote multicultural tolerant attitudes in host societies (this project is part of the program »Confirming the International Role of Community Research« – INCO – Copernicus – ICA2-CT-2002-10006, a collaborative project conducted by University of Bari, Johannes Kepler University in Linz, University of Tuzla, University of Prishtina, University of Tirana, Institute for Anthropological Research in Zagreb, supported by the European Commission 5th Framework specific research and technological development, titled: »Health problems, mental disorders and cross-cultural aspects of developing effective rehabilitation procedures for refugees of the war-affected countries«).

The specific objective of this project is to strengthen the understanding of psychological risk and protective factors of socio-cultural integration of adolescent refugees and displaced persons who face particular challenges: those common to most adolescents and those experienced after traumatic events by newcomers to a country, related to their physical and psychosocial health, their educational opportunities, their cultural traditions and their legal rights. The most salient problems connected to psychosocial adjustment and experience of adolescent refugees in the six countries of resettlement were considered as risk factors in terms of general health status, psychological distress, psychological well-being, resilience, risk behaviour, academic performance and multicultural competence, as compared to a matched host population.

Risk factors have the functions of enhancing resilience when the risk is manageable for the individual and of enhancing the individual's adaptive capacity over time. Those factors have been identified in different domains such as community, school, family, peer group and individual.

Protective factors mediate or moderate the effect of exposure to hazards, contributing to individual resilience and reduced incidence of the behaviour problems. Protective mechanisms modify the impacts of risk factors or risk situations by lowering the risk of a maladaptive outcome⁹.

Protective factors interact with risk factors to reduce the potential for negative outcomes; these factors are characteristics of individuals and environments. Protective factors actively target specific risks and are thus better thought of as processes or mechanisms for growth.

This work will outline the profile of the Albanians in Apulia so as to seek, on the basis of their cultural background, a key to an understanding of the immigrant adolescents' behaviour.

Materials and Methods

The target population of the European project is composed of adolescents who migrated to a new country between 1990 and 2000, either as refugees or for economic reasons. The samples in the countries of resettlement included families who were in exile for more than three years, had already decided to resettle and had found their own arrangements of accommodation outside collective refugee centres, had at least one child over 12 years old to account for intergenerational differences in acculturation rate as possible cause of family conflict, and also were of different ethnicity. The total sample drawn from all participating countries amounts to 4,084 adolescents with a minimum sample per country of 400 youths aged between 14 and 24¹⁰.

In this contribution attention is concentrated on the behaviour of Albanian adolescents in Italy, after 2000, the sample is formed by 305 adolescents of which 165 are female and 140 male. The average age of the adolescents interviewed is 17.3 years old, the adolescents come prevalently from Tirana (20.3%), Valona (15.7%) and Durazzo (24.6%).

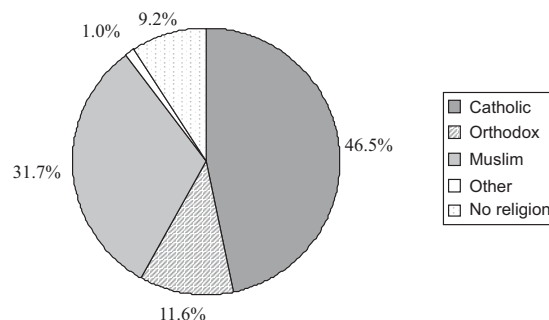


Fig. 1. Percentage composition of the religion of the interviewed.

The prevalent religion of the Albanian immigrants interviewed is Roman Catholic, 46.5%, it is followed by the Muslim religion with 31.7% of the adolescents and Orthodoxy with 11.6% (Figure 1).

Examining the educational level of the parents, it can be noted that the parents of a small percentage of the immigrant Albanian adolescents interviewed have a low educational level corresponding to an elementary school certificate (only 4.3% of the fathers and 2.3% of the mothers), while there is a not insignificant percentage of University graduates (23.3% of the fathers and 26.2% of the mothers of the adolescents interviewed) (Figure 2).

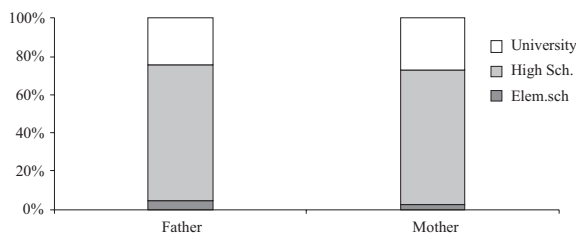


Fig. 2. Educational level of the parents of immigrant Albanian adolescents.

The analysis of the occupational situation of the parents shows that, in most cases, they are employed (89.4% of the fathers and 58.0% of the mothers of the adolescents interviewed), in both full-time and part-time work (Figure 3).

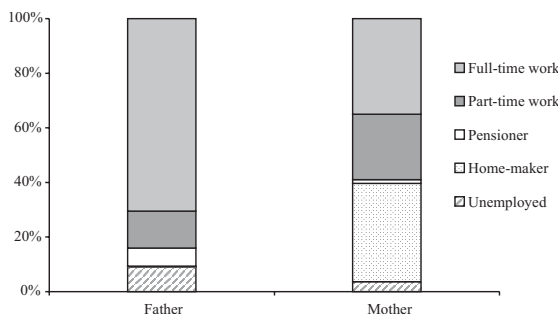


Fig. 3. Occupational level of the parents of immigrant Albanian adolescents.

In order to outline a profile of the immigrant Albanian adolescents the main results are shown that refer to protective and risk factors that contribute to the outcomes. The following outcomes indexes will be examined and their meaning and way of use will be outlined in the next sections:

- A. Index of psychological well being;
- B. Index of general health;
- C. Index of psychological distress;
- D. Index of academic performance;
- A. Index of resilience.

Results

Index of psychological well-being

The first element to examine is satisfaction with life, because psychosocial and emotive well being is an element closely related to the mental health of the young immigrant. The condition of psychological well being (an outcome variable) involves the ability to manage daily activities according to personal needs with the purpose of attaining a psychological balance that makes it possible to live every life event serenely. This variable which can be defined as latent, because not directly measurable, can be determined through the observation of the following displayed variables:

- A.1 Satisfaction with life;
- A.2 Index of self esteem.

A.1 Satisfaction With Life: In order to assess the »Satisfaction with Life« variable the »Satisfaction With Life Scale« (SWLS) was used: this measures satisfaction with life as a cognitive-critical process. It does not evaluate satisfaction with life through objective elements such as physical health or financial condition, but evaluates subjective perceptions closely linked to the individual condition. The SWLS is useful as a complementary scale that focuses on particular psychopathologies or on emotive well being, in that it assesses individual ability to evaluate one’s own life by means of personal criteria. From the investigation of Albanian adolescent immigrants it emerges that the percentage of those who are dissatisfied is fairly small (12.5%, Table 1). This result is not however to be underestimated because one adolescent in ten is completely dissatisfied and this greatly impairs the process of integration in the host community. A significant percentage of the adolescents interviewed (58.7%) state that they live an intermediate situation, in which they do not display particular enthusiasm for the life they are living, but nor do they feel it is unsatisfactory. Probably these are adolescents who enjoy good conditions of life, but who perhaps would like to improve them. When the results observed are differentiated according to sex, it is clear that the female Albanian adolescents interviewed are much more dissatisfied with their lives than the males. 15.1% of them claim to be »dissatisfied«, while only 9.3% (Table 1) of the male adolescents reveal the same level of dissatisfaction. The dissatisfaction is more strongly felt by the women as they display their feelings

TABLE 1
SATISFACTION WITH LIFE OF ALBANIAN IMMIGRANTS IN ITALY

Satisfaction with life	Females		Males		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Dissatisfied	25	15.1	13	9.3	38	12.5
Neutral	94	57.0	85	60.7	179	58.7
Satisfied	46	27.9	42	30.0	88	28.8
Total	165	100	140	100	305	100

more than the men, they may be more subject to bad moods and states of depression and they tend to live social and interpersonal relationships more emotively. To all this is added the fact that the female condition is strongly disadvantaged within the Albanian community, where the males continue to enjoy privileges that are the result of a mentality still influenced by patriarchy.

A.2 Index of Self esteem: Self esteem is the idea that every person has of himself, the degree of trust in his own value, ability and importance, and it corresponds to an evaluation of ones being that is completely subjective. A greater or lesser self esteem undoubtedly influences behaviour in social relations, in work and in the area of the sentiments. The degree of self esteem can have repercussions on the state of physiological and psychological health, with significant somatic and depressive manifestations. If the concept of self esteem is a milestone for human behaviour, it is even more so for that of adolescents. Various studies¹¹ have shown that the idea of oneself and the level of self esteem change during adolescence, in which a progressive decline is registered in subjective perception because the adolescents for the first time have to establish relations in a different place from their family and to face a world that often disorientates them. A high level of self esteem among adolescents is often associated with a positive perception on the part of parents, so that the interest shown towards the adolescent enables him to develop his self esteem. Examining the frequency distribution of the index of self esteem of the Albanians interviewed in Italy, it can be noted that 60.3% (Table 2) of the immigrant adolescents are grouped in the category »Medium self esteem«, 38.4% in the category »High self esteem«. With this data it is possible to outline an initial profile of the Albanian immigrant adolescents interviewed: they enjoy a good level of self esteem and therefore respond positively to the processes of integration to which they are submitted, they have a good image of themselves and of their abilities. The immigrant condition does not prevent them from interacting with the new host community, from which it can be assumed that a large number of them may live in family contexts that protect and stimulate them. If we examine the index of self esteem in detail (Table 2) according to sex, significant differences are not found, as for both sexes the greatest percentages are found in correspondence with »Medium self esteem« (58.2% females, 62.9% males). This data on the female condition seems to con-

tradict that concerning satisfaction with their lives which reveals the fragility and difficulty for the women to affirm themselves in a community like that of the Albanians in which it is difficult to overcome male dominance.

Index of general health

The index of general health measures the subjective and objective evaluation which the adolescent provides on his state of health. It is interesting to note that objectively measured problems differ considerably from subjectively perceived health problems so that some countries with perceived high levels of positive health, also report a higher degree of objective health problems, while other countries where more adolescents reported poor health, have less objectively measured problems. Perceived health problems are systematically related to socio-economic factors, including age, parental education, socio-economic status and parental structure, while no significant effect was found for objective health problems¹⁰. The analysis of the perceived health index is carried out through the following items:

- B.1 Index of Perception of health;
- B.2 Index of Medication use;
- B.3 Index of medication services;
- B.4 Absence from school on account of illness;
- B.5 Obesity.

B.1 Index of Perception of health: In the questionnaire administered to the Albanian immigrants¹⁰ it was expressly requested to provide an evaluation of their perceived state of health and 26.2% of them declared to consider it to be excellent, 58.7% consider it to be good, while a not insignificant proportion (15.1%) assess it as fair or poor (Table 3). The perception of an excellent state of health belongs more to the males than the females (34.3% versus 19.4%); this may reveal a reluctance on the part of the males to declare physical weaknesses. The girls that perceive a fair or poor state of health are 18.8%, probably due to hormonal changes that can cause painful symptoms, while only 10.7% of the boys declare they perceive a fair or poor state of health (Table 3).

B.2 Medication use index: While on one hand the perceived evaluation of health is closely related to a set of variables such as self esteem, presence of anxiety, depressive and somatic stress, as well as satisfaction with life that influences the evaluation, the use of medicines or of

TABLE 2
INDEX OF SELF ESTEEM OF ALBANIAN IMMIGRANTS IN ITALY

Self Esteem	Females		Males		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Low	1	0.6	3	2.1	4	1.3
Medium	96	58.2	88	62.9	184	60.3
High	68	41.2	49	35.0	117	38.4
Total	165	100	140	100	305	100

TABLE 3
INDEX OF PERCEPTION OF HEALTH OF ALBANIAN IMMIGRANTS IN ITALY

Perception of health	Females		Males		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Excellent	32	19.4	48	34.3	80	26.2
Good	102	61.8	77	55.0	179	58.7
Fair or poor	31	18.8	15	10.7	46	15.1
Total	165	100	140	100	305	100

medical services can make it possible to verify whether that perception is accompanied by certified illnesses such as to make therapy necessary. The frequency of the medication use index for a specific symptom may serve as a definition of symptom severity or reflect the availability and inclination to use medication in a society or group. In addition, using medication available over the counter to treat common problems represents an important component of health care and response to symptoms. Since self-medication is frequently an issue with disturbed and self-destructive adolescents, understanding patterns of medication use and responses to stress can be important. Examining Table 4, 40.7% of the sample of adolescents are positioned in the low category, while 17.0% declare a high consumption of medicines in only six months. On the whole, however, a large proportion of the sample interviewed (83.0%) have not used medicines or at most have done so sporadically. Discriminating the Medication use index variable according to sex, it is noted how a high use is made of medicines by only 18.8% of the girls and 15.0% of the boys (Table 4).

TABLE 4
INDEX MEDICATION USE OF ALBANIAN IMMIGRANTS IN ITALY

Medication use index	Females		Males		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Low	56	33.9	68	48.6	124	40.7
Moderate	78	47.3	51	36.4	129	42.3
High	31	18.8	21	15.0	52	17.0
Total	165	100	140	100	305	100

B.3 Index of utilization of medication services: The use of medicines may be a pharmacological response to pathologies found during hospitalisation, for this reason the interviewees were asked if in the last year they had been hospitalised or had used health services. Analysing the results it is noted that 39.0% declared not to have been hospitalised in the last year, 34.4% to having been hospitalised once only, 26.6% two or more times; this shows that the majority of adolescents interviewed (73.4%) have used the health services with a low frequency and in the same way have had few hospitalisations in the last year (Table 5). Viewed optimistically, this result suggests that the general state of health of the Albanian immigrants is good enough for pharmacological and/or hospital therapy to be unnecessary, however if viewed more »pessimistically« it could also be interpreted as a widespread fear on the part of the immigrants to turn to the hospital structures of the host country as a result both of reluctance and of the difficulty on the part of the immigrant family to inter-react with the structure. If we observe the index of use of the health services broken down according to sex a greater tendency to use the health services is noted on the part of the girls (29.1% compared to 23.6%) and this may be directly linked to the more critical perception of their state of

health which we described above (Table 5). On the contrary, 44.3% of the boys interviewed have never used hospital structures for any type of health problem in the last year (compared to 34.5% of the girls).

TABLE 5
INDEX MEDICATION SERVICES OF ALBANIAN IMMIGRANTS IN ITALY

Medication services index	Females		Males		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
No	57	34.5	62	44.3	119	39.0
Once	60	36.4	45	32.1	105	34.4
Twice or more	48	29.1	33	23.6	81	26.6
Total	165	100	140	100	305	100

B.4 Absence from school on account of illness: The subjective evaluation and the effective state of health may determine absence from school for reasons connected to health problems. In order to be able to assess the reliability of the replies given by the immigrant adolescents on these problems, they were asked to quantify, in days, their absences for that reason in the last 6 months. The distribution of the variable known as »Absence From School On Account Of Illness« shows that the highest frequency is found for the reply 1–4 days (55.7%) which is a fairly low value in terms of absences from school, considering the fact that the time span is of six months (Table 6). 18.7% of the adolescents interviewed declared they had not been absent in the last six months; this shows a relatively significant attachment to school, but it may also be interpreted as a form of reticence on the part of the adolescents to reply sincerely to this type of question. If we analyse this variable broken down according to sex, the category with the highest number of replies is »1–4 days«, with percentages of 54.6% for the girls and 57.1% for the boys (Table 6). It emerges from the analysis of this variable that the girls are absent for more days (32.1% are absent for »5 or more days« compared to 17.9% of the boys): the absences are probably explained by minor health problems related to female symptomatology.

B.5 Obesity: The »obesity« variable is measured by the Body Mass Index (BMI), and is at present the principal diagnostic indicator of excess weight and obesity. It is

TABLE 6
ABSENCE FROM SCHOOL FOR ILLNESS OF ALBANIAN IMMIGRANTS IN ITALY

Days	Females		Males		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
0	22	13.3	35	25.0	57	18.7
1–4	90	54.6	80	57.1	170	55.7
5 or more	53	32.1	25	17.9	78	25.6
Total	165	100	140	100	305	100

an anthropometric index of the body state. It is calculated dividing the body weight (expressed in kilograms) by height (expressed in metres) squared. On the basis of the (BMI) the subjects can be classified according to Table 7.

TABLE 7
SCALE OF BODY MASS INDEX

Range of index	Body mass
<18.5	Thin
18.5–24.9	Normal
25–29.9	Overweight
30–39.9	Obese
>40	Seriously Obese

The subdivision of the population in different classes of body weight is carried out in relation to that which is considered in medical terms a desirable BMI, one that is compatible with a lower probability of risk to health. If there are no other specific reasons such as, for example, hormonal dysfunctions, thyroidal imbalances, the obesity is caused by alimentary behaviour and habits and by incorrect ways of life. Alimentation is strongly influenced by the social, economic and cultural conditions in which the individual lives and for this reason one of the most important actions to contrast incorrect behaviour is that of the education and training of those persons until they modify their alimentary habits and adopt more healthy ways of life. It becomes interesting to observe the BMI of the young immigrants in that they are presumed to be more exposed than the native adolescents to the influence of risk factors; in fact some research (the investigation was conducted on a sample formed by 2.000 adolescents between the ages of 15 and 18 from Kosovo and Albania, Albanian immigrants in Italy, Bosnian adolescents in Bosnia and Bosnian immigrants in Croatia and Austria) has shown that the body mass index is significantly related to the negative image which the interviewed adolescents have of their bodies, it has therefore emerged that the non-satisfaction of the body can act as a risk factor seriously undermining health and producing a lowering of satisfaction with life and of self esteem. The

observed range for the obesity variable goes from a minimum of 15.43 to a maximum of 35.76. The final category with a BMI >40 was not observed, therefore there are not adolescents with serious obesity. This result is a further confirmation of the tendency of young Albanian immigrants to be »thin«. Looking at the graph showing the frequency of values »<18.5«, indicators of a condition of extreme thinness are fairly high – 49 subjects are very thin. The class with the highest frequency is that of normal weight which includes 230 adolescents from the sample of Albanian immigrants (Figure 4).

Index of psychological distress

The index of psychological distress was measured using the indicators of the most common somatic complaints (C.1), anxiety symptoms (C.2) and depressive behaviour (C.3), based on Hopkins Symptom Checklist 25¹², ¹³, and RADS – Reynolds Adolescent Depression Scale¹⁴. Each variable is the result of different items rated on a four point Likert scale measuring the amount of stress that is due to challenges in the process of acculturation and other factors¹⁰. The results relative to the three variables were obtained by calculating the average score of the items score. For each of these variables three categories were considered: low (less than 1.5), moderate (between 1.5 and 2.5) and high (more than 2.5).

C.1 Somatic symptoms: The somatic symptoms are analysed through different items which usually increase during phases of stress. The category »high« reflects a series of somatic symptoms linked to physical disturbances that are the first alarm bell of a situation of stress; the process of change which the immigrant must face requires his historical and cultural identity to be continually placed undermined and very often the immigrants use somatic metaphors to express emotions and feelings that would otherwise be difficult to communicate. High frequencies relative to a high index of somatic stress show that the subject is submitted to strong pressures that appear through disturbances that are not linked to true pathologies, but are manifested through physical symptomatology. Examining the results shown in Table 8, 63.6% of the sample declared moderate somatic stress, 28.5% low, while only 7.9% high. The situation of moderate somatic stress is not to be interpreted as a situation of risk from the pathological point of view, in that the reference sample is formed by adolescents in a phase of deep transformation who find themselves for the first time having to face the weight of responsibility that this age involves. Analysing the results according to gender (Table 8), it is clearly noted that the girls have a somatic stress index that is higher than that of the boys, only 16.4% of the girls declare a low level of the index (and 12.1% a high level), compared to 42.9% of the boys (and 2.8% with a high level). The difference may indicate that the females, on average ahead in their physical development, are more aware of the transformation of their bodies, of their apprehensions and of the difficulty of accepting a body which is still being formed and which often does not conform either to the ideal models that the host

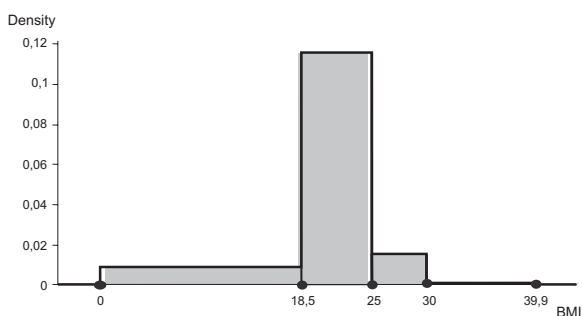


Fig. 4. Distribution of the Body Mass Index of Albanian immigrants in Italy.

society imposes or to the standards of present fashion. The adolescents, however, tend not to manifest their physical weaknesses, reproducing a culture close to every manifestation of pain.

TABLE 8
INDEX OF SOMATIC STRESS OF ALBANIAN IMMIGRANTS IN ITALY

Index of somatic stress	Females		Males		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Low	27	16.4	60	42.9	87	28.5
Moderate	118	71.5	76	54.3	194	63.6
High	20	12.1	4	2.8	24	7.9
Total	165	100	140	100	305	100

C.2 Index of Anxiety: Anxiety is a particular characteristic of sensitive and emotive subjects and often results in difficulty in relaxing, and in the manifestation of nervous, tense and irritable behaviour. The high category includes those adolescents who have a violent impact with new lifestyles, who suffer a cultural shock that tests their personality and challenges the stability of their psychic organization. Very often the anxiety symptoms are directly interwoven with some family characteristics, such as the non-integration of their family in the Italian society from the economic and social point of view; the inability of the parent figure to act as a »container« for the sufferings of the child and the contrast with the institutions which are often experienced as persecutory. The percentages do not indicate a situation of danger even though 20.0% of the adolescents interviewed claim a strong feeling of anxiety (Table 9). 33.4% declare a low level of anxiety and 46.6% moderate, therefore the situation is a positive one in which the protective factors such as the family and school and the relationship with peers soften the influence of risks linked to the new cultural impact. Examining the phenomenon of anxiety in relation to sex significant differences are noted; though the girls are strongly aware of their abilities and have a high level of self awareness, they often do not have the support of their family and this probably creates in them a sense of frustration but also of anxiety for the future. In confirmation of this 23.6% of the girls have a high index of anxiety compared to 15.8% of the boys (Table 9).

TABLE 9
INDEX OF ANXIETY OF ALBANIAN IMMIGRANTS IN ITALY

Index of anxiety	Females		Males		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Low	43	26.1	59	42.1	102	33.4
Moderate	83	50.3	59	42.1	142	46.6
High	39	23.6	22	15.8	61	20.0
Total	165	100	140	100	305	100

C.3 Index of Depression: Depression is an extremely common condition in adolescence and is the cause of heavy psychosocial damage; it has serious repercussions also in everyday life, with scholastic problems, family conflicts and isolation in the peer group. The symptoms of depression have been attributed to a series of risk factors that include biological factors, psychological factors (confused identity, conflictual state, lack of objectives, impotence and sense of incapacity) and socio-cultural and environmental factors (family problems, role confusion, post-war traumas, which often appear in emigrant adolescents, or traumas linked to natural disasters¹⁵. Also in this case the category corresponding to the highest frequency is that relative to a moderate level of depression (68.5%) and the two extreme classes are distinguished by one percentage point only (Table 10). A high state of depression is an indicator of a serious psychological pathology, the immigrant adolescent has very probably begun the acculturation process, but has probably not had the support of the protective factors in this very delicate phase. A moderate level of the index of depression is not to be considered dangerous for the psycho-physical development, but it reflects a situation that is not serene. The immigrant adolescent certainly bears the sufferance of being uprooted from the land of origin and the weight of the difficult integration. Where the index of depression is moderate the family acts partly as a protective factor; when the trigger is closely related to the adolescent condition or to causes external to the home, but it can also act as a factor of risk if the state of depression follows a conflict situation at family level. Analysis by sex (Table 10) confirms the emotive weakness of the girls; in fact the index is low for only 10.9% of them, while for the boys the percentage rises to 20.0%. The moderate category of the index of depression does not show significant differences between the two sexes, but that difference reappears for the »High« category for which a higher percentage is recorded for the girls (20.6%) than for the boys (11.4%). The Albanian survey again illustrates the difficult position of women accustomed to a culture in which men still has all the powers of control inside and outside the household. The family places all its expectations on the male children and this probably creates a sense of frustration in the girls, who despite having a high level of self esteem, as the analysis if the data shows, do not have the support and trust of the family.

TABLE 10
INDEX OF DEPRESSION OF ALBANIAN IMMIGRANTS IN ITALY BY SEX

Index of anxiety	Females		Males		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Low	18	10.9	28	20.0	46	15.1
Moderate	113	68.5	96	68.6	209	68.5
High	34	20.6	16	11.4	50	16.4
Total	165	100	140	100	305	100

Index of academic performance

According to the international report Health Behaviour in School Aged Children (HBSC), the analysis of the scholastic environment or psycho-social climate may be of great interest as regards the health of the young. It is more probable that the youths who do not like school are dissatisfied and may display stress. This in turn may cause perceived health disorders and a low level of satisfaction with their lives. Obviously this is a two-way relationship: it is more likely that youths with fewer perceived health disorders and who are more satisfied with their lives, also do well at school. In order to be able to better understand the health of young people and the associated lifestyles it is necessary to determine certain aspects linked to the scholastic environment that increase or decrease their satisfaction. From this viewpoint, the school can be seen as a resource or a risk for the health of the youths, as the fact of liking the school clearly influences both the health of the young and the lifestyles linked to it¹⁶. Academic performance can be a valid indicator of the degree of integration of foreign students. It is important for the immigrant adolescent to have a good knowledge of the language, to be able to interact adequately with the surrounding environment so as to be able to meet the difficulties of living in a cultural and social context different from his known. The index of academic performance is calculated as the average of »current grades« (D.1) and »last year's grades« (D.2).

D.1 Current grades: The average current grades variable indicates the academic performance of the immigrant adolescent in the present year and makes it possible to determine the academic level. From Table 11 it is immediately very clear that the average grades of the Albanian adolescents in the present year are good, in fact it can be noted that 57.0% of them have average grades of 7–8, 35.4% of 5–6. Comparing the two extreme classes it is noted how the frequency in the top class is higher (3.5% in the class 9–10) compared to the first class (1.4% in the class 0–2). This result fully respects the figure of the adolescent we have seen so far, a young immigrant with a good level of self esteem and a good perception of himself who manages to attain a good academic perfor-

mance. The comparison between the sexes shows that the girls have higher percentages for a high average grade above 7 than the boys who have higher values for very poor average grades of between 0 and 4 (Table 11). In detail, the average grades of 9–10 correspond to a percentage of 5.7% of the girls and of 0.7% of the boys; in the case of poor academic performance 0.6% of girls and 2.2% of boys had average grades of 0–2. This result is further confirmed if we consider the relationship between self esteem and academic success; in fact, even if the girls experience a condition of greater dissatisfaction than the boys, they reveal a decisively higher level of self esteem.

D.2 Last year's grades: The Average grades of last year variable indicates the academic performance of the immigrant adolescent in the previous year and makes it possible to determine the academic level which has been reached. Making a comparison with the average current grades variable it can be established if the immigrant adolescent has made improvements at an academic level. From the analysis it is clear that the majority (57.8%) have average grades of 7–8 (Table 12) From the comparison with the average current grades index, it can be noted that the academic performance of the Albanian students has slightly deteriorated. The frequency of the academic average of between 5 and 6 has passed from 27.2% for the previous year to 35.4% for the current year, but there has also been an increase in the percentages for the most serious insufficiencies (average grades of 0–4), and the percentage for an academic average of 9–10 has also significantly fallen from 11.6% in the previous year to 3.5% in the current year. When breaking down these figures according to sex it can be seen that the highest percentages (62.7% for the girls and 51.9% for the boys) correspond to the moderately high academic average (average grades between 7 and 8). The academic performance of the Albanian students has, however, worsened over the course of time. The percentage of young immigrant boys with very poor academic averages (0–2 and 3–4) has increased, and the percentages of boys with a high average (between 9 and 10) has fallen from 3.7% to 0.7%. The young immigrant girls have attained better grades than the Albanian males, but they too have regis-

TABLE 11
DISTRIBUTION OF AVERAGE CURRENT GRADES OF ALBANIAN IMMIGRANTS IN ITALY BY SEX

Average grades	Females		Males		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
0–2	1	0.6	3	2.2	4	1.4
3–4	1	0.6	7	5.3	8	2.7
5–6	48	30.4	55	41.4	103	35.4
7–8	99	62.7	67	50.4	166	57.0
9–10	9	5.7	1	0.7	10	3.5
Total (*)	158	100	133	100	291	100

(*) In this variable 14 replies were missing that cause a lowering of the number of replies from 305 to 291

TABLE 12
DISTRIBUTION OF LAST ACADEMIC YEAR'S AVERAGE GRADES OF ALBANIAN IMMIGRANTS IN ITALY

Average grades	Females		Males		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
0–2	2	1.3	1	0.8	3	1.0
3–4	1	0.6	6	4.5	7	2.4
5–6	28	17.4	52	39.1	80	27.2
7–8	101	62.7	69	51.9	170	57.8
9–10	29	18.0	5	3.7	34	11.6
Total (*)	161	100	133	100	294	100

(*) In this variable 11 replies were missing that cause a lowering of the number of replies from 305 to 294

tered a slight deterioration. This is confirmed by the increased percentage of Albanian girls with an academic average between 5 and 6 (from 17.4% to 30.4%), and the percentage of them that have attained an academic performance between 9 and 10 has fallen, passing from the 18.0% of the previous year to the 5.7% of the current year.

Index of resilience

The concept of the capacity of resilience reflects the different variations of the response to risk that an adolescent or, more in general, an individual displays in different situations^{9,17,18}. Rutter^{9,19} has described the capacity of resilience through some points that outline the essential elements of that aspect. The capacity of resilience can be measured through the monitoring of the response of an individual to a factor of risk, and that response is influenced by the perceptive ability of the individual and the ability to live the experience he is living and to anchor his experience to his cultural background. The diversity of the events experienced originate in this, because shared experiences can be lived differently by individuals according to their personality and lives. The Resilience index is made up of the following variables:

- E.1 Index of Social competence
- E.2 Index of Empathy
- E.3 Index of Problem solving / Self-efficacy
- E.4 Index of Goals and aspirations
- E.5 Index of Positive values

These variables represent protective factors of a young adolescent that avert the development of behaviour patterns of risk to health and that can, therefore, contribute to improving health.

E.1 Index of Social competence: This variable expresses the ability to begin and maintain relationships with others, it may also involve the relational style which an individual uses in social relations with others. Each of the five abilities which contribute to forming the evaluation of the capacity of resilience includes different secondary abilities necessary to develop an emotional capacity. Social competence includes the capacity to recognize the emotions of others or empathy and ability in interpersonal. A lack of this ability may imply a tendency to violent behaviour that may lead to criminal behaviour at an adult age and cause mental sicknesses or induce the repeated use of drugs and drinks with a high alcohol content²⁰. From the analysis of the social competence index it emerges that 25.2% of the Albanian immigrants denote a low ability to establish and maintain relationships with others: they therefore reveal serious problems of socialization presumably due to a difficult integration in the host country and a slower adaptation of their cultural background to the culture and traditions of the host country (Table 13). However, 74.8% of the Albanian adolescent immigrants interviewed, show a moderate-high social competence index (the combined totals for moderate and high) in relating to others, these are pre-

sumably adolescents who are well integrated and established in the host society and who manage to establish and maintain friendships, to collaborate with those who hold opinions different from them, and are popular with others. This result suggests that a good proportion of the immigrant adolescents (included in the sample observed) live in a tranquil family context in which they have the possibility to meet others and exchange ideas, repeating the gestures and behaviour acquired in the family also outside the household. Analysing the variable broken down according to sex, it is noted how the males show less capacity for socialization (27.9%) and this fact indicates a fragility of the Albanian immigrant who, despite a good level of self esteem, is unable to enter the Italian social context.

TABLE 13
INDEX OF SOCIAL COMPETENCE OF ALBANIAN IMMIGRANTS IN ITALY

Index of social competence	Females		Males		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Low	38	23.0	39	27.9	77	25.2
Moderate	72	43.6	60	42.9	132	43.3
High	55	33.4	41	29.2	96	31.5
Total	165	100	140	100	305	100

E.2 Index of Empathy: Empathy is the concentration on the interior world of the interlocutor, the ability to sense what is moving within the individual, as the adolescent perceives reality and what he really feels beyond what he expresses verbally. Empathy is the capacity to read between the lines, to pick up the emotional signs and the non verbal signals that are the indicators of a state of being and to sense the value of an event for the interlocutor, without being guided by fixed ideas in the attribution of significance. According to Goleman²¹ empathy and self-control are the two social abilities that help the individual to create a relational life that is rich and emotively satisfying, which, it is now recognized, also positively influences the psychic-physical well being of a person. From the replies of the 305 Albanian adolescent immigrants in Apulia, it is noted how a little less than half (48.2%) have a high sense of empathy and this should allow a greater capacity to socialize with others and to fit in with peers (Table 14). A low index of empathy, however, is found in 21.6% of the youths interviewed; this percentage undoubtedly represents an interesting result and one to monitor, as it could lead to the development of violent behaviour and the isolation of the individual. From a more detailed analysis by sex it can be noted that, yet again, it is the Albanian boys who show less empathy (32.9% males compared to 12.1% females) and this is in line with the scarce capacity for socialization and with moderate self esteem that induces the Albanian adolescents to show in a less evident way their state of inadequacy in the process of integration (Table

14). This result may be a useful instrument for service providers in avoiding the alienation and passage into local criminal organization of these subjects. Also in the High category, the index of empathy registers positive values above all for the immigrant girls (55.8% females compared to 39.2% males) who, coming from a patriarchal and tightly closed culture, seek to find more space in the host country, where they can mix with their peers for a correct knowledge of the language.

TABLE 14
INDEX OF EMPATHY OF ALBANIAN IMMIGRANTS IN ITALY

Index of empathy	Females		Males		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Low	20	12.1	46	32.9	66	21.6
Moderate	53	32.1	39	27.9	92	30.2
High	92	55.8	55	39.2	147	48.2
Total	165	100	140	100	305	100

E.3 Index of Problem solving / self-efficacy: The term Problem solving indicates a series of processes to analyse, tackle and positively resolve problematic situations. Problem solving is not a technical ability, that belongs to a specific sector, but is rather a transversal ability of every sector and involves the ability to find a solution for any kind of problem.

This variable concerns the capacity of the adolescents to resolve problems, initiative, the ability to react and get things done and above all the ability to know who to turn to discuss problems, difficulties and worries and to try to resolve them. From the analysis of the results obtained on the sample examined, it emerges that 48.8% of the Albanian adolescent immigrants possess a high capacity to resolve problems: they are adolescents that know how to manage their own problems, that have the critical ability to find the right solution to the problems that they often meet during the process of integration (Table 15). One figure which is undoubtedly to monitor is that of the 23.3% of the interviewed adolescents who manifest a poor capacity of problem solving which may result in fragile adolescents who possibly live in family contexts in which they are not provided with the instruments necessary to resolve by themselves the problems which afflict adolescents. Almost all the immigrant Albanian boys showed a strong feeling of »obliged self-sufficiency«, which appears in the negation of any form of social support, above all in facing the journey by themselves and in relying on their own abilities alone (coping resources) in the risk filled transition. In a certain sense these boys, who have an important role in the family in Albania, face adversities with what are the »teachings« received from the family of origin and which protect them from stressful effects that might be felt in the long term. As was observed for the other variables, also the index of problem solving variable shows that the girl immigrants have a greater capacity for adaptation to the new context and a greater

TABLE 15
INDEX OF PROBLEM SOLVING OF ALBANIAN IMMIGRANTS IN ITALY

Index of social competence	Females		Males		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Low	30	18.2	41	29.3	71	23.3
Moderate	45	27.3	40	28.6	85	27.9
High	90	54.5	59	42.1	149	48.8
Total	165	100	140	100	305	100

resolution in facing the problems. 54.5% of the Albanian female immigrants included in the sample manifest a high capacity for resoluteness compared to 42.1% of their male peers (Table 15).

E.4 Index of Goals and aspirations: The Goals and aspirations variable includes all the life projects, hopes and desires that it is intended to pursue in the future, which include both a part of personal expectations and a part of the expectations parents have for the future of their children. The failure to recognize individual hopes can be perceived by the adolescent as a form of mistreatment that limits freedom of thought and of complying with personal attitudes.

The category that contains more than half of the observations is High with 59.7%, therefore the majority of the Albanian adolescent immigrants have objectives and hopes for the future. In view of their young age, presumably they will want to continue their studies, to find a qualified job that will allow them to forget the economic limitations they experienced in their country of origin (Table 16). Relational difficulties and problems of integration and socialization indicated by the male adolescents are inevitably reflected in a limited amount of optimism in their future since a 34.3% of them manifest a low index of goals and aspirations, while only 10.9% of the Albanian girls interviewed manifest the same low level of aspirations (Table 16). This result is not in contradiction with the deep-seated motives which have also led the girls to leave their country to come to Italy, their expectation is to find a life not very different from they have learnt to love watching Italian television programmes.

E.5 Index of Positive values: By positive values we mean those attitudes that derive from the personality,

TABLE 16
INDEX OF GOALS AND ASPIRATIONS OF ALBANIAN IMMIGRANTS IN ITALY

Index of goals and aspirations	Females		Males		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Low	18	10.9	48	34.3	66	21.6
Moderate	23	13.9	34	24.3	57	18.7
High	124	75.2	58	41.4	182	59.7
Total	165	100	140	100	305	100

TABLE 17
INDEX OF POSITIVE VALUES OF ALBANIAN IMMIGRANTS IN ITALY BY SEX

Index of positive value	Females		Males		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Low	10	6.1	38	27.1	48	15.7
Moderate	74	44.8	71	50.7	145	47.5
High	81	49.1	31	22.2	112	36.8
Total	165	100	140	100	305	100

that emerge in difficult situations and that are closely linked to the ability to resist external pressures. This variable includes academic behaviour, sexual behaviour, the scale of values, culture and tradition. A considerable number of Albanians (47.5%, Table 17) reveal a moderate attitude towards positive values and this fact conceals a sense of dissatisfaction towards some aspects of life. It is in fact a fairly common opinion of many youths that the resolution of problems is often linked to the use of force against those who are weaker, but in general the use of force is considered a useful instrument to gain acceptance and receive the correct respect from peers. Nor should it be overlooked that 15.7% of the Albanians interviewed claim a rather low attachment to positive values. Breaking down the variable according to sex reveals a greater predominance of male Albanian immigrants that do not feel particularly attached to positive values (27.1% show a low index of the variable compared to 6.1% of the girls, Table 17).

Conclusion

The analysis has shown that in the different areas in the life of the adolescent such as the family, school and group of friends, protective factors act to sustain and support the adolescent, and risk factors hinder the process of acculturation.

The first constant factor is the mode of interaction developed by the Albanian adolescents in relation to their families, in the context of which the youths have to face the difficult task of elaborating forms of conciliation between cultures, values and models that are often very distant from each other. The gap that exists between the young Albanian immigrants and their families lies in the different system of expectations which in the majority of cases distinguishes them. The children of Albanian immigrants, who are formed in the classroom and in front of the television of the host society have lifestyles and consumption models that are the same as those of their peers in the host society; it is difficult for them to consider acceptable the subordinate integration modes to which their parents are subjected. In this sense the good level of satisfaction with life that the sample of adolescents declare is the proof of a good approach to the host society; it seems that the adolescents deal with the process of integration with serenity and do not feel the dis-

comfort of a different cultural background which today belongs more to the family than to them.

The picture which forms is that of an adolescent with a high level of awareness of himself and of his capabilities, and who has a medium-high level of self-esteem. It is often the case that adults depend on those who are younger than them because of linguistic competence in the new cultural context; at the same time there is also often a cultural clash between the parents, who seek to hold onto their original traditions, and their children who, on the contrary, tend to assume attitudes and customs of the peer groups in the host country.

However, for the Albanian girls, the development of decisional capacity can be more difficult and their desire to change may be limited by the strongly patriarchal Albanian society which conserves traditional family values based on the restriction of the autonomy of women.

Within the families of the Albanian youths, the »normal« generational conflicts, which for the most part concern the period of adolescence, are made more serious by the mechanisms of defence and protection enacted by both parties: in fact, the more the parents feel excluded from the host society, the more they desperately seek to hide behind their traditions, in the very moment when their children most need to feel more secure in a crucial phase in the affirmation of their personality. The stress of acculturation may have consequences on the health of immigrant youths, despite the fact that the Albanian adolescents declare a good perception of their state of health, even though this attitude is more marked in the boys than it is in the girls. In fact, from the analysis of the data it emerges that a good subjective evaluation of the state of health also corresponds with a positive objective evaluation, in that the Albanians interviewed declared that they make sporadic use of medicines and turn to the health services only in the case of necessity.

As Ulman and Tatar (2001) explain, it is probable that the Albanian adolescents are more at risk from psychological stress than their host country peers, because in addition to meeting the typical difficulties of the phase of adolescent development, they must face the adversities involved in the migratory experience. The need to make a new start at a point in life at which all resources should be committed to distancing the world of childhood and starting to create a position for oneself, means for all a phase and a process of inevitable recession. To not receive recognition with respect to previous history, to knowledge, to being able already to make purchases, to the levels of autonomy attained (often much greater than those attained by host country peers) leads to a condition of »infans« (literally: he who does not speak), incapacity, inadequacy which in the most extreme cases may result in a depressive form. In this sense the data confirm a difficulty of the adolescents interviewed who declare a medium-high depressive index, while anxiety and somatic symptoms do not seem to characterize the boys interviewed, but seem to be experienced and suffered more by the girls.

Another constant factor is the construction of one socio-cultural identity in relation not only to the family, but also to the peer group – understood as being formed both by immigrants and natives. This is a task which every young person, above all in adolescence, has to face, but in the case of immigrant adolescents the situation is more problematic. If in this phase one oscillates between two contradictory desires which are both legitimate to be equal but at the same time different, for the immigrants the dilemma is intensified by the cultural passage to which they are subjected: both these desires assume a wide variety of results depending on whether they are manifested in the family, at school or in the street.

In this multi-faceted scenario the school can act as a good launch pad (and the good grades achieved by Albanian students show that this does happen) for an adequate integration of young people of foreign origin in Italian society. On the part of the school intercultural pedagogy will be necessary that guarantees space for growth linked to the language and culture of origin of these youths, even if »we feel we should insist (...) on the responsibility of the school as a provider of structural competence and not only as an agency of socialization«²².

There are certainly obstacles to the process of identification of the Albanian adolescent in a society which

considers the immigrant with caution, the first objective of the adolescent immigrant is therefore probably to create stable social relationships. It is interesting to note in this how in their relations with their peers the Albanians, and in particular the girls, show good social competence and a high capacity of socialization²³.

In relation to projects and expectations, a clear desire for social achievement is noted on the part of the young Albanians, in this sense the interviewees declare their intention to pursue their studies.

The desire to pursue studies is linked to the interest in improving academic preparation, which probably includes a better knowledge of Italian. The acquisition of new knowledge is therefore the most important motivation for the decision to continue studies on the part of foreigners compared to their Italian classmates, for whom studies are to a greater degree aimed at a future job and school attendance is principally motivated by it being obligatory²⁴. The fact that learning Italian and the acquisition of greater knowledge represent for the Albanians the stimulus to proceed with their formative process, before the requirements for future integration in work, indicates the desire the subjects have to meet the request for integration from the host context, which is probably felt as a personal need.

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ZDRAVLJE, PSIHOLOŠKA DOBROBIT I ČEMER MLADIH IMIGRANATA U ITALJI

S A Ž E T A K

Potruga za pomoć pri rehabilitaciji izbjeglica obično je završavala kao promašaj zbog mnogih kompleksnih događaja i iskustava gubitka i patnje koje izbjeglice nose u sebi. Obično su psihološko i emotivno stanje jednako kao i socijalni i ekonomski aspekti često bili zanemareni, a odgovor na psihološki napad nasilja bazično je fokusiran na koncept Post-traumatskog stresnog poremećaja (PTSP). Ovaj pristup pretpostavlja patološki odgovor na stres koji je univerzalan kroz različite kulture te je usredotočen na strategije prevladavanja stresa ključne ne samo za preživljavanje nego i za psihičko zdravlje.