Ethnic Identity, Acculturation Orientations, and Psychological Well-Being among Adolescents of Immigrant Background in Kenya
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Abstract
The aim of the present study was to evaluate the relationship of ethnic identity and acculturation strategies with psychological well-being among adolescents with an immigrant background in Kenya. A total of 269 adolescents from five high schools were involved. The sample included adolescents from Asian, Arab, and Somali immigrant backgrounds alongside native-born. A wide set of measures including the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure, Measure of Acculturation Orientation, Social Demographic Questionnaire, General Health Questionnaire and the Brief Students Multi-Dimensional Life Satisfaction Scale were administered. Ethnic identity (particularly the subscale on sense of ethnic belonging) was positively correlated with life satisfaction and psychological well-being. Moreover, cultural orientation towards the country of origin was closely related to psychological well-being. In conclusion, ethnic identity was associated with better psychological well-being among Kenyan adolescents. Conceptual models developed in the West can be applied in the African context when both sociocultural and economic factors are taken into consideration.

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Two concepts that are salient in multicultural groups play a central role in this study. The first is ethnic identity, which can be defined as the attitudes towards and feelings of belonging to an ethnic group [Phinney, 1992]. The second is acculturation strategies, which can be defined as the set of attitudes and behaviors that are adopted by immigrants to deal with their ethnic culture and the mainstream culture [Azenta-Thomas & Van de Vijver, 2006]. Both ethnic identity and acculturation strategies play a salient role in ensuring optimal psychological well-being among immigrant or minority background [Bals, Turi, Ske & Kvennmo, 2000; Costigan, Su & Hua, 2009; Smith & Silva, 2011; Uzuna-Taylor, 2004; Phinney, 1992]. The literature provides evidence to show that ethnic identity and acculturation are positively related to, among other things, educational achievement, psychosocial adjustment of adolescents, self-esteem and life satisfaction [Bhui et al., 2008; Phinney & Alipurua, 1996; Smith, Walker, Fidels, Brooks & Sears, 1999; Tipp & Palagini, 2002].