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Author(s): Päivi Honkatukia and Martta Myllylä

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## Other kind of violence? Tracing racialisation in police reports on assaults against young people by family members

Päivi Honkatukia and Martta Myllylä<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

*The article analyses the ways in which the Finnish police construct racialised and gendered meanings of the violence young people experience from family members. The analysis is based on police reports on assaults in which a young person aged 15 to 20 had been suspected to have been victimised by a family member (N=562). The violence was commonly described as mundane conflicts of everyday family life. The article analyses more closely the reports in which violence was reasoned as restrictive social control or education (n=83). Along with commonalities across racialised boundaries in how the cases were described, differences were also identified. As based on the observations, the article discusses the empirical findings especially in terms of how it is possible to take cultural explanations into account without reinforcing racializing accounts of violence.*

**Key Words:** racialisation, young people, family violence, police control

### Introduction

Violence within immigrant communities is regarded as a growing problem in the Nordic countries (Bredal, 2014; Manier, 2011; Hansen et al., 2016; Keskinen, 2009). Often this violence is seen as different from the so called ordinary family violence, as it is explained by cultural factors related to, for example, the protection of family honour, dynamics concerning arranged marriages or violence is viewed as normal child rearing practice (de los Reyes, 2003). Depictions of the 'other' violence often concern people with a Muslim background who have immigrated from the Middle East, Southern Europe or Africa. By contrast, the so called ordinary violence is commonly explained by

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<sup>1</sup> Päivi Honkatukia, University of Tampere. Email: paivi.honkatukia@uta.fi,  
Martta Myllylä, The Finnish Youth Research Society. Email: martta.myllyla@nuorisotutkimus.fi,

individual matters, such as problems related to mental health or substance abuse (Bredal, 2014: 135-136; Honkatukia, 2017).

It is obvious that culture affects the ways in which violence is experienced and interpreted. Also in the context of the so called official control (Cohen, 1985), violence is depicted differently in different countries. Despite this, the idea of two separate forms of violence should be problematised: it can lead to interpretations of violence by others as mainly determined by culture, and as such these interpretations are a form of racialisation (Bredal, 2014: 16; Phoenix and Pattynama, 2006). Explaining violence by reference to culture bypasses the opinions of the members of racialised minority groups and their ability to make individual judgements (Andreassen and Ahmed Andresen, 2014: 28-34). In addition, it risks leading to biased interpretations in which violence is seen as detached from its societal context, e.g. immigration policies and other structural features which have manifold consequences for individuals and communities at the level of their everyday lives (de los Reyes, 2003; Maira, 2009: 223-225). Moreover, cultural explanations of violence contribute to the strengthening of the stereotypical notions of certain groups as different, lacking gender equality and being potentially dangerous (Peltola et al., 2017).

In this article we problematise the division between two different forms of violence by analysing young people's experiences of family violence which are reported to the police in Finland. As a research location Finland is characterised by a relatively short history of immigration and, consequently, a relatively low proportion of inhabitants with foreign backgrounds. Finland is proud of its position as one of the Nordic countries, for example, with regards to humane and rational criminal policy, and the notions of the egalitarian welfare state and advancements in gender equality (Peltola et al., 2017). In the recent rise of anti-immigration and neo-nationalist rhetoric the latter aspect of the national identity has particularly been in focus, and the so called patriarchal cultures of the newcomers have been portrayed as a threat to Nordic culture and 'way of life' (Keskinen, 2009).

In this article we focus on young people since the minority youth occupy a particular position in the discussions on violence. All young people are seen to reside in a risky life phase in which they take distance from their childhood family and start to form an identity more detached from their parents (Côté, 2014). In addition to this, young people with migrant backgrounds are often seen to fall between their parents' culture and that of the country which they have immigrated to, and this is seen as hindering their opportunities in many ways. This worry is often gendered: while young women with a Muslim

background are seen as oppressed by their families and communities, young Muslim men are seen as too detached from parental control and at risk of radicalisation and drifting into terrorist activities (Maira, 2009: 16-17).

We analyse reports on assaults written by the police. They are documents created when a strong Finnish, male-dominated control institution has encountered young people and their families from diverse backgrounds in situations where the young person is suspected to have been assaulted by a family member. Each year several hundreds of such assaults are reported to the police in Finland, even if the majority of this kind of violence remains hidden. We investigate the reports of an offence by comparing them across gendered and racialised categories. Simultaneously we observe how gender and 'race' are constructed in the reports in relation to violence.

We refer to racialisation as interactionally constructed meanings which categorise individuals into different groups as based on their skin colour or (assumed) cultural background (Phoenix and Pattynama, 2006). Gender is also constructed similarly in practices of violence and its control, and in relation to other hierarchical societal divisions (e.g. Keskinen, 2017). In the following, we will make a short overview of these discussions and formulate our research questions.

### **Violence and Racialised Control**

The discussion of the so-called honour related violence is an example of how the violence in migrant communities is depicted as 'other' kind of violence (Keskinen, 2009; Bredal, 2014). While white family violence is understood as an impulsive act committed by an individual person, honour related violence is regarded as the culturally accepted form of controlling girls and women's sexual conduct or the honour of the family. Violence is seen as being collective, as several members of the family can take part in it. In Finland, concepts such as "honour culture" are sometimes used to explain the controlling behaviour characterising the other violence (e.g. Kohtainen ja dialogi ..., 2016). The so called disciplinary violence (Heinonen, 2016) is also sometimes explained by cultural sentiments. The parents from racialized minorities can be regarded as strict, and violence is seen as means of raising children.

We do not deny the relevance of cultural factors in some situations, but we agree with the researchers who warn that categorial conceptualisations can hide the complexities related to violent experiences (e.g. Keskinen, 2009).

Moreover, a strong focus on culturalized explanations of violence in the criminal justice context can lead to diverging control as based on the assumed racialized attachments (Bredal, 2014: 136). In Denmark, for example, the police are obliged to report suspicions of honour related violence to special units, and other Nordic countries have established specific procedures to deal with the so called “other” violence (ibid.: 141-142; Hansen et al., 2016: 148).

In this article we analyse reports of an offence written by the police. The police as an institution has a mandate from the state to monitor and control individuals and behaviours which are seen as deviating, problematic, threatening or unwanted (Cohen, 1985: 1). Besides legislation, the control is defined by the general discussion of social problems such as violence and measures developed to prevent it. In Finland, the police commonly engage in multi-professional networks dealing with social problems such as violence in migrant communities (Hansen et al., 2016: 145-146; Laasala, 2016; Holm, 2009). These activities and discourses circulated in the networks may have an impact on police control and understanding of the nature of violence they encounter in their professional practices (Cohen, 1985).

In the Nordic countries, the above division between ordinary and other violence has characterised anti-violence-work with immigrant communities (Bredal, 2014). The projects often involve intensive networking and discussions between the community members, authorities and civil society actors. The aim has been to build trust in immigrant communities, often successfully. Yet, at the same time the projects have been documented to involve problematic features, such as racialised interpretations of violence. Marion Manier (2011: 313) writes about the projects she has studied in the UK: “The ‘general impression’ the participants seek to talk about in the network is one of widespread violence and worsening conditions for women”. In addition, the main aims of the projects are sometimes suspected to be involving Muslim communities as allies in the prevention of terrorism and extremism. These practices have been claimed to demonise the communities rather than to help women who are suffering from violence (Wilson and Roy, 2011: 297-301). In the most critical accounts violence prevention in itself is depicted to be as a form of symbolic violence (Manier, 2011: 307-316).

While attempting to ensure the continuation of the, often temporary, funding for these projects, the key actors are often obliged to rely on “misery discourses” which portray immigrant communities as particularly vulnerable and suffering from worsening problems, such as culturally motivated family violence (Cohen, 1985; Tervonen and Enache, 2017: 1121; Vesterberg, 2016).

Also the police are invited to participate in these networks. Hence, besides public discussions, this networking might have an impact on how the police conceive and make sense of violence in immigrant families. Paradoxically, attempts to help the communities may end up strengthening problem categorisations and the need for interventions, such as the ideas and perceptions that certain forms of violence are prevalent and common in certain communities.

In the criminological field, many scholars from Stanley Cohen (1985) on have discussed how diverse forms of institutional control have spread, allied and merged with one another ever more tightly (e.g. Wacquant, 2009; Harrikari, 2008 in Finland). According to these analyses, in these networks informal and soft control blends with tougher crime control: institutions in the area of welfare, schools, together with NGOs and authorities in the criminal justice system together form a condensing net in which help, support, welfare and criminal justice intertwine and affect one another (Gelsthorpe, 2010: 382). In the field discussed in this article, measures to prevent so called honour related violence are developed simultaneously with reflections on whether such violence should be tackled more firmly in the criminal justice system (e.g. Hansen, 2016: 162). The intermingling of diverse forms of institutional control may strengthen the discourse in which 'ordinary' and 'other' violence are separated, which implies also categorisation of people into two different groups: those who represent the 'equal' majority on one hand, and those 'others' who suffer from inequality because of their 'race' (Honkatukia, 2017).

We will take part in this discussion by studying whether the distinction between 'ordinary' and 'other' violence can be identified in the reports of an offence written by the police on young people's experiences of parental or family violence. We will study all the reports of an offence during one year and ask what kind of violence is reported in terms of gender and 'race' and how gender and 'race' in relation to violence are constructed in the reports. More closely, as based on our empirical material, we will answer to the following questions:

1. Which concepts and utterances are used when 'race' is discussed in the reports of an offence on assaults?
2. Is violence experienced by racialised young people described differently from violence experienced by majoritised youth - especially when violence is reasoned

as education/discipline, i.e. in ways which are often seen to explain violence in racialised minority families?

3. How does gender define to the possible differences in constructing racialised understandings of family violence?

## Data and Methods

The data in the research consist of all the reports of criminal offences from the year 2013, in which a young person aged 15 to 20 years was suspected of being a victim of an assault by his/her parent or relative (N=562).<sup>2</sup> Reports are manually picked from all the reports on assaults concerning this age group (N=5992) which were delivered to researchers from electronic system of the police. Each report consists of a short summary and a longer description of events, often notes on preliminary investigation and sometimes information about the investigation. Moreover, a report code, date and country of birth, and nationality of the victim have also been attached to each report.

A report of an offence is a tool of police investigation and is not intended to be a public document. Despite this, the reports contain formal elements: the definition of the violence in the penal code directs recording (Ruuskanen, 2006; Honkatukia, 2001; Hiitola, 2015: 74-76). Also, prevalent ideas of violence and its causes are often used more or less consciously when describing the events.

We analyse reports of an offence by comparing them - both quantitatively and qualitatively - between groups formed according to the country of birth and the nationality of the alleged victims<sup>3</sup>. For the purpose of the analysis we categorised those victims whose nationality and country of birth or one of them is other than Finnish/Finland as “young people with migrant background”. They represent 13 per cent (N=73) of victims in the data. The rest of the victims, 87 per cent (N=489) are Finnish citizens who were born in Finland. The racialised categories are of course not identical with the registered categories of nationality and the country of birth. However, the classification enables us to analyse whether there are differences in violence or how it is constructed between these groups.

In 62 per cent of the reports the alleged victim was a female. The victims had altogether 33 different nationalities or countries of birth. Most common after

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<sup>2</sup> Relative: partner of parent; uncle, aunt or his/her partner; cousin; grandparent; relative of partner; parent of foster family.

<sup>3</sup> By “victim” we refer to the person target of violence. By “perpetrator” we refer to the person mentioned as the user of violence.

Finland were Iraq (n=9), Russia (n=8), Estonia (n=7), Sweden (n=6) and the Democratic Republic of Congo (n=5). The victims rarely had other nationalities and/or countries of birth. However, 'the other violence' is not associated with all the immigrants but its cultural roots are located outside of the Western countries. We therefore elaborated our analysis by dividing the young people into three regional groups according to their nationality and the country of birth. The first group consists of Finnish citizens who have been born in Finland. The second group includes the young people whose backgrounds are in Finland's neighbouring areas: in Sweden, in Russia or in the Baltic countries. The third group includes the victims whose backgrounds are perceived as the "risk areas" of honour related and disciplinary violence. Into this group were classified the reports of an offence in which the background of the victim was in Eastern and Southern Europe, Africa, Asia, South America and Middle East. The regional distribution of victims is shown in table 1.

**Table 1** Nationality and/or the country of birth of the 15-20-year-old victims of family violence registered by police and happened in 2013 (%).

	%	N
Finland/Finnish	87.0	489
Neighbouring areas (Sweden, Russia, Baltic states)	3.7	21
Eastern and Southern Europe, Middle East, Africa, Asia, South America	9.3	52
Total	100	562

The statistical examination was conducted by comparing the differences between the groups according to their racialised background and gender with the aid of crosstabulation. Even though the statistical testing is not necessary for the purposes of generalisation (all cases during one year are included), we use the Chi square -test to evaluate the weight of the observed differences.

The qualitative analysis is a combination between thematic analysis, classification and the so called 'close reading' (Kain, 1998). We first paid attention to how 'race' was talked about in the reports in general, and after our initial reading we identified concepts, such as religion, culture, ethnicity in the



reports which were used to discuss 'race'. Thereafter we identified all the reports which included explicit expressions on these concepts and 'close read' them. Second, we looked for explanations and descriptions in the reports as to why violence had been used. The data included such descriptions not only because the parties (usually the suspected perpetrators) used them but also since one of the tasks of the police in the pre-investigation is to find out about the motive, even if the motives are not officially recorded - apart from the racist motive (Holm, 2009: 139, 147). According to the initial reading of the data, the most common 'reasons' behind the violence were identified to be quarrelling on mundane issues, such as duties regarding housework or meal times, viewing violence as a means of education/disciplinary violence (Heinonen, 2016) or seeing violence as a means for restrictive control. When encountered these kinds of reasoning in the reports we attached a value describing this to the report in question.

We analysed the coded/categorised reports by both comparing them quantitatively and close reading them qualitatively (Aapola-Kari, 2006: 8). We were interested in what racialised meanings were formed in the reports especially when violence was rationalized as a means of education/discipline or restrictive control. Despite being relatively rare forms of reasoning in the data we chose to focus on them since in racialised interpretations they are often regarded as typical reasons for family violence among racialized minority groups. An important element in the close reading was a comparison between the intersections of racialised groups and gender in which we paid attention to both commonalities and differences. Our analysis can be named as theoretically guided thematic analysis and classification (Eskola and Suoranta, 2000: 174-180) which was also open for insights derived from the data.

Only about ten percent of the violence in close relationships is reported to the police, and also only a part of that violence is recorded (e.g. Fagerholm, 2016: 21). Therefore, the data at hand revealed more about the willingness of victims/other people to report the violence, and about the authorities' responses, than on the kind of violence that actually occurred. The quality of the reports also varied: while some included detailed description of the cases and pre-investigation procedures, others provided only scant and rough descriptions of these issues.

## Racialisation in the Reports of an Offence

Concepts or expressions related to ‘race’ were rarely used in the reports (also Hiitola, 2015: 128). The racialised background of the parties became visible in the names which differed from traditional Finnish ones or via references to other languages than Finnish or scenes of offences which were sometimes outside of Finland and other times e.g. refugee centres. Transnational relations and life-courses were mentioned as part of a description of the movements of the parties or their transnational (family) relations. In some reports difficulties in arranging interpretation was described, and for example how children - sometimes in the position of victims - had acted as interpreters between the parents and authorities. These practices should be viewed critically since they might hamper the investigation or even make the situation worse (Holm, 2009: 140). In two reports the costs of the interpretation service or the transnational executive assistance were mentioned as reasons for ending the investigation. The pre-investigation can be legally restricted due to costs (VSK, 2016), but one can ask whether it can in some cases be discriminatory against racialised minorities.

Even if the reports were written by police officers, they often included utterances from the parties, e.g. in the form of initial to actual hearings (also Hiitola, 2015: 76). Sometimes it was difficult to judge who actually was talking or whose voice was represented in the report. The concepts such as ethnicity, ‘race’, culture or religion were rare, and were often added as quotes from the suspected victims (complainant), similarly to the observations made by Johanna Hiitola (ibid., 128) who has studied documents related to custody trials in Finland. Sometimes religion was mentioned as background information (the victim was described to come “from a Laestadian<sup>4</sup> family”), and it was not explicitly connected with the course of events. In other reports religion or culture - alone or together - were constructed as reasons for the assault in question. Sometimes it was written how the victim had a critical stand towards the cultural reasoning presented by the suspected perpetrator. More often than religion or culture, the reports mentioned the nationality, ethnic background, foreign status or skin colour of the victim. Typically concepts such as “Roma” or

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<sup>4</sup> Laestadianism is a conservative revivalist movement which belongs to Evangelical-Lutheran church and has most of its followers in Nordic countries, particularly in Finland.

“foreigner” were cited as quotes from the narration of the person who had made the initial report to the police.

In some reports the participation of the police in violence prevention networks became visible. Some cases were reported from the refugee centres or by social workers at offices for alien affairs. In one of the reports it was mentioned how the police had been in contact with a ‘multi-professional team’, and in two it was written how the victims had been directed to projects or NGOs which have been specialised in violence work in multicultural contexts. The other of these was a project which according to the report “deals with/aids in problems related to honour violence”. This was the only time when the concept of ‘honour violence’ was mentioned in the data. The alleged victim was a young male, and according to the description he had been forced to work in a small company by older female relatives. The rarity of the concept indicates that the discourse of honour related violence (Keskinen, 2009) is still not firmly established among the Finnish authorities (also Hiitola, 2015).

### **Statistical Observations**

Most commonly in the reports the assault was explained to have been caused by everyday quarrelling. These cases included assaults between siblings. Quarrelling was described in every other report (51 per cent). Besides what they reveal about the nature of the family violence experienced by young people and reported to the police, these observations also expose the tendency to discuss violence in the Finnish legal practices by referring to concepts such as ‘controversies’ (Hiitola, 2015; Ruuskanen, 2006). Education or restrictive control was explicitly mentioned in 14 per cent of the reports (education 8 per cent, control 6 per cent). In every third report the reasoning of the assault remained unclear. This group included several reports in which one of the parties was described as drunk, even if this was not identified as the reason for violence.

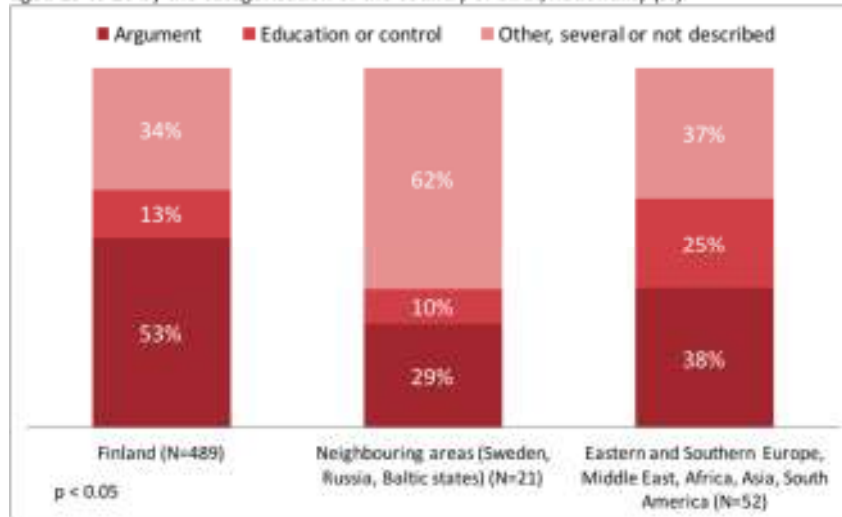
In the reports where the alleged victim was a migrant, it was relatively more common that education or control were mentioned as important factors as compared to the other victims<sup>5</sup>: in every fifth report with victims with an immigrant background these factors were mentioned, as compared to only 13 per cent among the majoritised victims. As is visible in the Figure 1, this share was even greater (25 per cent) among those whose background was in the countries commonly viewed as risk areas of culturally reasoned violence.

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<sup>5</sup> Significance level 0.05.

Quarrelling, by contrast, was most commonly described as an important factor in the reports written about majoritised youth (Finnish citizens and born in Finland, 53 per cent), whereas the reasons remained unclear in 62 per cent of the cases with victims coming from neighbouring countries (62 per cent).

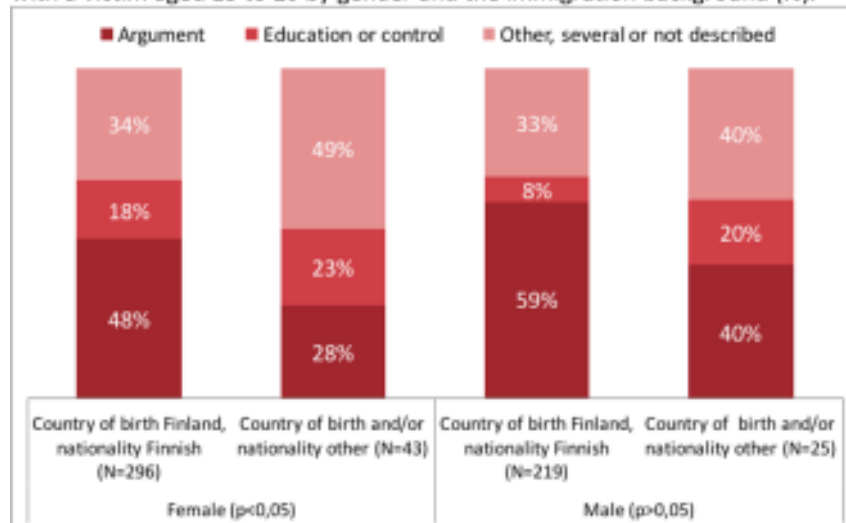
**Figure 1.** Reasoning of violence by a parent or relative in reports on assaults in 2013 with a victim aged 15 to 20 by the categorisation of the country of birth/nationality (%).



Regardless of the background, young women were more often seen as victims of violence motivated by education or control (19 per cent) than young men (9 per cent)<sup>6</sup>. Most commonly this reasoning was used among the female victims with an immigrant background (23 per cent), and the most rarely among ethnically Finnish young men (8 per cent) (Figure 2).

<sup>6</sup> Significance level 0.01.

**Figure 2.** Reasoning of violence by a parent or relative in reports on assaults in 2013 with a victim aged 15 to 20 by gender and the immigration background (%).



### Violence as Education?

In 45 reports of an offence that we studied violence was discussed in terms of education. The majority concerned victims who had been born in Finland and had a Finnish nationality (84 per cent, n=38). Seven reports dealt with a young person who had a migrant background, and their countries of origin were from Africa, South-Eastern Europe or Middle East.<sup>7</sup>

Regardless of their racialised background the victims were more often young women than men, and the young women's share was slightly higher among the reports on majoritized victims (68 per cent vs. 57 per cent). If the victim was a young man with an immigrant background, the suspected perpetrator was in all cases his father, whereas the suspected assailant was also a mother, brother or sometimes all of these together in the cases of young women. In reports concerning white victims, the perpetrators that were mentioned in addition to a father were both parents, foster parent(s) or professionals in child care institutions. Most commonly the report concerned only one victim, but

<sup>7</sup> In addition, in some cases which we have categorised in the majority, the names of the parties departed from the traditional Finnish names, and therefore they might represent the so called second generation of immigrants. Moreover, in few cases the family was described to represent a Roma or Laestadian community.

regardless of the racialised background there were cases in which there had been several victims.

Across the studied racialised and gendered categories the violence conceptualised as education was most commonly described as a reaction to the young person's nonconforming or rule-breaking conduct. In concrete terms it was about situations such as disputes over playing computer/virtual games, using the mobile phone, the young person's rough language or problems related to school/homework duties. There were two exceptions to this. First, in two reports concerning young women with an immigrant background, the special standing of either the eldest son or daughter was mentioned: either the eldest brother was described to be responsible for raising the younger siblings, or the aim of violent control was to make the eldest daughter to behave as a role model for her younger siblings. Second, in several cases concerning male victims with a majoritised background, the young man or the father/stepfather was described to have been drunk. This was not always portrayed as a reason for violence, but a significant background factor.

It was common to describe how the parents/guardians neutralised or belittled violence, regardless of the racialised background. The parents could talk about "slapping" or "hitting" in order to teach a lesson. Some of the parents/guardians denied the injuries or emphasised that their intention was not to cause suffering but to guide the young person in the right direction. Moreover, the parents could have admitted to have pulled the young person's hair or slapped him/her, but at the same time they belittled the number of times this had happened or talked about 'physical restraining', 'slapping with open palm', 'small slaps, not punches with full force'. Some of the parents of the white young women, in particular, reasoned their actions by referring to the 'difficulty' of the daughter as is seen in the next extract:

The mother said that the daughter had been going through difficult times since last Spring. Her personality has completely changed. She has experimented with drugs. The mother said that she had imposed strict discipline on the girl as she did not want her to stay out all night. The mother suspected of assault admitted that she has sometimes pulled her daughter's hair. However, she denied to beating her daughter. The mother does not see that she is guilty of assault. All she has done is to attempt to raise her child in the best way she could.

The proceedings of the preliminary investigation were described in some reports. Sometimes the alleged victim changed his/her story or claimed that

nothing had happened or his/her account was deemed unreliable, for example by referring to possible mental health problems in some of the white young women's reports. Only in a few reports with white victims was it recorded that the assault had been settled, or that it was sent to the official procedure of mediation of criminal offences which is in Finland commonly used to divert cases from the criminal process (e.g. Honkatukia, 2015). According to some reports further measures were waived, often due to, what the police perceived, as the minor nature of violence. Sometimes this was justified by referring to the account of the parent which was recorded in a way which makes the assault understandable in a difficult situation where the parent was seeking to correct the child's problematic behaviour (see also Hiitola, 2015: 127). However, this occurred only in reports concerning white young people.

### **Violence as Restrictive Control**

We identified 35 reports of an offence in which violence was reasoned by the need to control or restrict the young person. This was stated by either the alleged victim or perpetrator, and sometimes the parties presented differing versions of the course of events. Majority of these reports concerned victims who were born in Finland and had a Finnish nationality (77 per cent, n=27), only 8 of them had a migrant background. Their nationalities and countries of birth were mostly countries regarded as risk zones for culturized forms of violence (South-Eastern Europe, Asia), but also Russia was represented here.<sup>8</sup>

According to the reports, assaults reasoned by control had been targeted mostly at young women (young women with a migrant background 75 per cent, others 83 per cent). In many cases the control related to young women's dating behaviour which is source of worry also in wider discussions on child rearing and peer relations (Peltola et al., 2017; Madsen, 2008).

In some reports concerning immigrant young women the nature of violence and control was described in a very detailed way. It was recorded that the father had tried to prohibit the young woman dating because he was afraid of Western influences; that the girl was dating a boy from a wrong kind of religious background; or that the girl does not respect her family. The young woman may not have actually been dating, but the father might have threatened her in order

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<sup>8</sup> Moreover, among the reports on victims from the majoritised background there were altogether four reports which included non-Finnish sounding names.

to prevent it occurring. In other cases, the situation had occurred after the father had found out about the daughter's dating.

Some of the reports on white young women also concerned the control of their sexual conduct. In one of them the father was said to have abducted his daughter from his ex-wife since he suspected that the daughter was dating his ex-wife's current partner's son. The father had hit the daughter, and the daughter told the police that she was afraid of him and wished that "incidents such as this will stop. This was not the first time and she wishes that her father would not make any more of these kinds of attacks on their apartment". A separate police report recorded another white young woman being assaulted by her father who had accused her of "incest since he regarded her daughter's relationship to her boyfriend as inappropriate and too close with regards to dating". In the police hearing the father had appealed to his drunkenness as well as to his loss of memory at the time of the assault. Later on, however, he confessed to have sent several text messages to his daughter on the dating issue.

In some reports concerning the majoritised young women explicit reference to sexuality were missing, but it is possible to interpret that the need to limit sexual behaviour or the parents' fears related to their daughters' assumingly uncontrollable sexual conduct can be implicitly present in the cases. In these cases it was often about staying late at parties or refusals to obey the norms set by the parents, as is described in the following extract:

The daughter has been fetched from a party held in someone's home where she was not allowed to go. She went around wherever she wanted, played truant and could leave home without telling where she was going. The parents were really worried about their child and felt that there were not many means left to make their daughter to behave in a way that was agreed.

According to the discourse on honour violence (Keskinen, 2009; Bredal, 2014) this kind of violence is collective whereas 'ordinary violence' is explained by individualistic motives and reasons. The data can lend some support for this, but they also challenge it. Regardless of the racialised background it was most common that the father alone was suspected of the assault.

Collective features of violence were described in some of the reports concerning immigrant young women. For example, in one case the main suspect was a young woman's brother, but also her father was described as having confiscated her mobile phone and as attempting to organise her marriage to her



cousin. By reading the text of the report one gets the impression that the whole family is controlling the conduct of the young woman. Also, the mother denied the assault in the police interrogation and stated that the injuries to the daughter had been caused by an accident.

On the other hand, the reports also reveal that white young women experience collective forms of violence from their family members. In one of the reports, for example, the mother reported how she and her two sons “are sometimes obliged to restrict the daughter by holding her still”, and the report concerned one these incidents detailed that the young woman was forcibly removed from a party.

The reports, however, seemed to document the threats of violence much more closely when victim had a migrant background. For example, in one of the reports of the latter kind, the father was alleged to have stated that “if the girl has a boyfriend, he will chop them both into pieces by an axe”. Life threatening violence was acutely present also in the following report in which the police officer quoted a report by a school social worker about her discussion with the father:

[t]he father implied during the phone call that the girl needs to choose between dating and the family, and she needs to make the decision by the Sunday of the current week, otherwise there is no other option but to solve the issue by blood. The father refuses any joint meetings with authorities around this case.

The above quotes reveal aspects of the grim reality faced by some racialised minority young women. At the same time the fact that the threatening behaviour is described so closely could be interpreted by the general image of violence perpetrated by immigrants as planned, premeditated, brutal, and in a way more serious as compared to normal family violence (Keskinen, 2009). If these kind of assumptions, held in respect of violence within racialised minority groups, were applied more generally by police officers they might take all accounts very seriously (what they of course are).

Some reports concerned violence targeted at young men. Sometimes, serious threats and acts of violence were described in these. In one case an ethnically Finnish young man stated how his father had locked him in their apartment by using fetters, assaulted him with his fists and objects. According to the young man the father had even pointed a gun at him. In this case the father had not been intoxicated. This and the above examples raise the question on whether threats and concrete acts are described more closely when they

cannot be made understandable in the framework of typical Finnish family violence. It might be easier to disregard the threats and their consequences if the suspected perpetrator represents a majoritised background, has been under the influence of alcohol and/or seems to come from a marginalised background (Ruuskanen, 2005).

Neutralising, minimising and denying violence also appears in reports concerning controlling violence, regardless of the racialised background of the victim (see also Heinonen, 2016). In this respect, overwhelming difficulties related to child rearing were mentioned only in the reports concerning racialised majority youth, together with tiredness as a cause of loss of control and violent behaviour (also Hiitola, 2015: 122-124). The parents may have admitted to having acted wrongly, but they rationalised violence in relation to their lack of other means to control the young person, usually a girl, as is illustrated by the following extract which also expresses the parents' tiredness of their daughter's continuous acts of rebelling (ibid, 128):

According to the father's account the hit was a slap which was done in a middle of an argument and where the parents attempted to stop the girl from running away from home. The father says that in this situation he had pulled the girl's hair. The father had also threatened to beat the girl with a leash if she continues to misbehave. Also the girl's mother had according to the girl slapped her a couple of times. The parents have told the social worker that their resources and means are coming to an end and they wished they could get support from social services. They understand that they have acted in a wrong way.

Similarly to the cases in which violence was rationalised as education, a peaceful resolution or attempts towards it (e.g. the process of mediation of criminal offences) were mentioned only in some reports concerning victims who were Finnish citizens and had been born in Finland.

## **Conclusions**

In this article we have examined reports of an offence in which a young person was said to have been assaulted by their family member or relative. We have been interested in what kind of violence gets reported to the police and how this violence is given meanings, especially with regards to gender, 'race' and their intersections. The first observation from the data is that concepts such as

'race', ethnicity, culture or religion are very scarcely used by the Finnish police. If interpreted positively, this observation can be seen as a signal of an active attempt of the Finnish police to avoid categorical and racialising depictions. On the other hand concepts such as honour related violence might not yet be fully established in the Finnish official discourse. They have been rarely cited also in other official documents, too (e.g. Hiitola, 2015: 132), and when used, they have referred to diverse phenomena which seem to have in common only the racialised minority position of the parties (e.g. Hansen et al., 2016: 157). Recently in Finland, the honour related violence has also been categorised as a specific form of hate crimes (Tihveräinen, 2016: 7).

Moreover, racialisation is not always explicit or even recognised (e.g. Hiitola, 2015: 128-132). We therefore focused on the ways in which violence was explained in the reports; in that way we wanted to find about more hidden distinctions between ordinary and 'other' violence. The first observations concerning this is that a great part of the family violence experienced by young people is depicted as everyday disputes, conflicts and tensions escalated into violence - regardless of the racialised background of the victims. It was rarer to explain violence by referring to it as an educative means or a way to restrict or control the behaviour of the young person.

The depictions of control and education were relatively more common in the reports on young migrant victims (usually young women) whose countries of origin are commonly discussed as risk zones for culturalised forms of violence. Yet, regardless of the racialised background, especially violence reasoned as education was seen as a means to punish or guide the young person and to make him/her to adopt and learn about the norms which the parents regarded important - with an exception of two cases where the special status of the eldest sibling was regarded important in relation to use of violence. Secondly, controlling young women's sexuality and dating was a central theme in many of the cases, regardless of the racialised background. In these cases, violence experienced by migrant young women was not always described as collective violence with the aim to protect the family honour, but the descriptions were also reminiscent of 'ordinary' violence perpetrated by only one perpetrator (also Hansen, 2016: 16). In this respect it is notable that racially majoritised young women's sexuality can be violently controlled by more than one family member.

A Finnish researcher on violence Suvi Ronkainen (2017: 34) has recently claimed: "The ways in which violence is reasoned, explained, understood or attempted to be avoided are culturally and socially regulated. This is easier to acknowledge in violence which is more 'foreign' to us, such as in honour

violence". This statement encourages us to pay attention to the cultural in 'ordinary' violence not just violence which is regarded as minoritized (also Bredal, 2014). According to our analysis the violence and threats of violence in minoritized contexts are often carefully documented, especially if related to control of young women's dating behaviour. At the same time, meanings related to drunkenness seemed to be used in the reports concerning the majoritized contexts to make violence justifiable, and also excluding the need of a detailed report on other either the causes or the consequences of this violence. Statistically speaking alcohol has a close relationship to violence in Finland, a link that is particularly clear in respect of homicides (Aaltonen, 2013). Yet, at the same time alcohol is a strong cultural explanation of violence; problematic drinking is often seen as leading to uncontrollable acts of violence especially among marginalised groups. In constructing the course of events in a report of an offence, the police officers can resort to this cultural depiction which risks to hide other, equally relevant aspects, especially from the point of view of the victim (Keskinen, 2009; Hiitola, 2015: 100, 127; Ruuskanen, 2005).

Moreover, also appealing to difficulties in child rearing, descriptions of helplessness seems to be another resource in making sense of 'ordinary' violence - by the police officers, suspected parents and the victims alike. It is up to future research to establish whether these and other racialised ways of understanding violence have consequences in the criminal process. Outside the criminal process, they may also strengthen negative labels attached to racialised minority groups, hence making their life situation even more vulnerable (Honkasalo, 2013). Therefore, it is important to identify them and the ways in which they are used. This entails critical reflection on what cultural understandings of violence are constructed in professional practices, how this happens and with what consequences.

We do not, however, argue that cultural explanations should be disregarded. Instead, we see that cultural meanings of violence should be acknowledged if we wanted to fully understand the experiences of violence and to support the victims accordingly (Keskinen, 2009). They should be taken into account thoughtfully in their immediate context, by paying attention also to other relevant aspects, by listening carefully to the parties and identifying the meanings and consequences of intersecting differences.

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