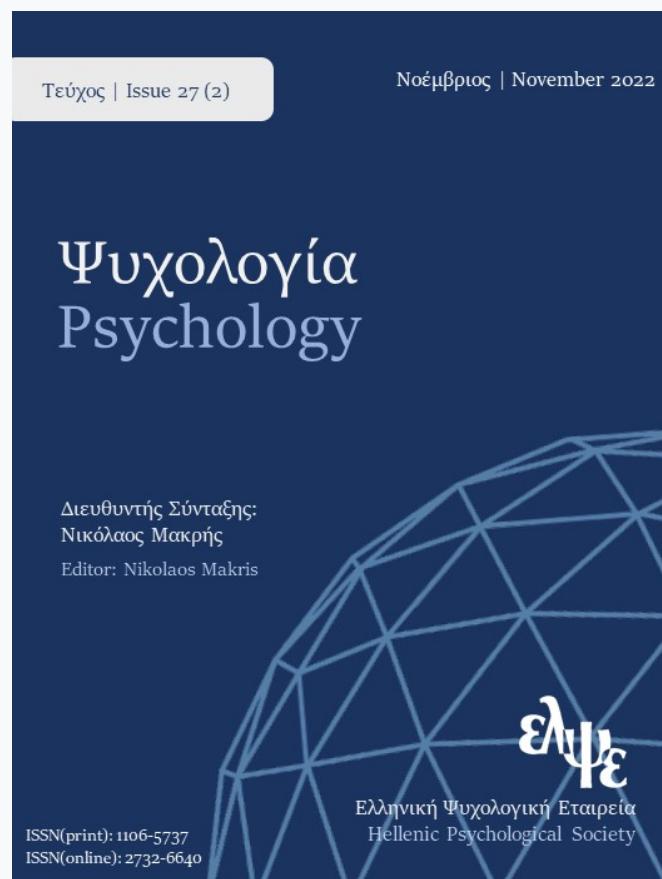


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# Does paternal acceptance buffer the effect of maternal rejection on victimization in early adolescents? A short-term longitudinal study

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## KEYWORDS

Paternal acceptance,  
maternal rejection,  
victimization,  
pre-adolescence,  
moderation

## ABSTRACT

Parental rejection is a significant predictor of adolescents' social adjustment, including victimization. Despite the fact that parenting research has largely neglected the role of the father, there are indications that paternal acceptance can play a protective role against maternal rejection. The purpose of the present study was to clarify the effect of maternal rejection indicators on victimization, and to examine whether paternal acceptance moderates this effect, in a cross-cultural sample of 846 ( $M_{age} = 12.63$ ,  $SD_{age} = 1.01$ ,  $N_{girls} = 403$ ) of Greek ( $N = 471$ ) and Cypriot ( $N = 375$ ) early adolescents, following a short-term longitudinal research design (six-month interval). Students completed self-report measures. Results indicated that the maternal rejection had a strong effect on victimization six months later, even when taking into account initial victimization levels, and that paternal acceptance moderated this effect to a large extent. The findings are discussed and suggestions for future research are given.

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## Introduction

Bullying is defined as an intentional, systematic and aggressive behaviour, characterized by an imbalance of power between the perpetrator/s and the victim/s (Olweus, 1993), and constitutes a significant problem for students around the globe (e.g., Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017; Wolke & Lereya, 2015). In the study of Elgar et al. (2015) conducted in 79 countries with over 300,000 adolescent participants, 30% reported being victims of bullying within the past month. This percentage is alerting considering the detrimental outcomes of victimization involvement. According to a recent systematic review (Halliday et al., 2021) victimized students in early adolescence experience negative psychosocial and academic outcomes, including increased depression and anxiety, increased peer rejection, poorer school performance and school connectedness, both in the short term (12 months), and up to 8 years later.

## ***Victimization and parenting***

A large body of research has supported the strong association between parental practices and children's adjustment (e.g., Rothenberg et al., 2022). Moreover, parental practices have been directly linked to pre-adolescent victimization. Shin and Kim (2008) for example, in a study with children from 4 to 7 years old, found

that parental abuse and neglect were positively related to peer victimization, whereas parental warmth and affection were related negatively to peer victimization.

Similarly, other research studying the same group of students from childhood through adolescence (Bowes et al., 2013; Schwartz et al., 1997) and from birth through childhood (Burk et al., 2008) have found that victimization is associated with inconsistent, punitive, and hostile parenting, high negative expressiveness or high levels of family conflicts and family violence. In a meta-analytic study by Lereya et al. (2013), results indicated that victims and bully/victims were more likely to be exposed to negative parenting, including abuse and neglect. On the other hand, positive parenting, including good communication of parents with the child, parental involvement and acceptance, and parental supervision, were found to serve as protective factors against peer victimization (Lereya et al., 2013).

### ***Parental rejection***

Rohner's parental acceptance-rejection theory (PART; Rohner 2004), which draws from the parenting styles typology approach (see for example, Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Smits et al., 2008), suggests that when considered together, parental acceptance and rejection form the warmth dimension of parenting. According to Rohner, this dimension relates to every person, since we have all experienced these behaviors at the hands of major caregivers in our upbringing. The warmth dimension then, is about the quality of the affective bond between parents and their children, as well as the physical, verbal, and symbolic behaviours parents use to express these feelings. At the one end of this dimension lies parental acceptance (i.e., warmth, affection, care, comfort, concern, nurturance, support, or simply love that children can experience from their parents and other caregivers), and at the other lies parental rejection (i.e., the absence or significant withdrawal of these feelings and behaviors, as well as presence of a variety of physically and psychologically hurtful acts).

Accumulating from half a century of work in Interpersonal Parental Acceptance Rejection Theory (IPART), Ali et al. (2015), claim that there are four principal expressions of parental rejection: (1) cold and unaffectionate (as opposed to being warm and affectionate), (2) hostile and aggressive, (3) indifferent and neglecting, and (4) undifferentiated rejecting.

Research has shown that both paternal and maternal rejection have significant effects on victimization utilizing both cross-sectional and longitudinal research designs (Nikiforou et al., 2013; Giovazolias et al., 2017; Papadaki & Giovazolias, 2015; Charalampous et al., 2018). However, the interactive effect of parental and maternal rejection/acceptance on victimization has not been fully delineated in the literature.

### ***The moderating role of paternal rejection/acceptance***

Miranda et al. (2016) have noticed that the bulk of parenting research has involved children and mothers or has not differentiated between mothers and fathers. However, a number of studies have highlighted that fathering makes a unique, significant contribution to children's adjustment (Carrasco & Rohner, 2013; Rohner & Veneziano, 2001; Veneziano, 2003). For example, Hong et al., (2021) in a study with approximately 8.500 White, African American and Hispanic adolescents found that perceived paternal awareness was positively associated with lower levels of victimization for White and African American participants and that Hispanic adolescents who perceived their fathers as easy to communicate with had a lower risk of victimization.

Research has also shown that paternal acceptance has a stronger association than maternal acceptance with certain adolescent outcomes. For example, Day and Padilla-Walker (2009) found that paternal involvement and connectedness has been negatively related to adolescents' internalizing and externalizing behaviors, whereas maternal connectedness and involvement has been positively related to adolescent pro-social behaviors. Moreover, studies have shown that paternal involvement has a unique effect against juvenile delinquency, when the mother is less involved (Flouri & Buchanan, 2002), and it can also moderate the negative maternal effect on the psychosocial adjustment (externalizing and internalizing behaviors) of children (Chang et al., 2007; Mezulis et al., 2004).

In an interesting study, Papadaki and Giovazolias (2015) employed a cross-sectional research design to investigate the moderating role of paternal acceptance on the association between maternal rejection and bullying / victimization. Results indicated that paternal acceptance might attenuate the effect of maternal

rejection on victimization. Following this line of work the present study addresses the limitations and extends the findings of the Papadaki and Giovazolias's (2015) study in a number of ways: a longitudinal research design is employed in the present study, the sample is substantially larger, randomly selected and culturally diverse, a more sophisticated statistical analysis (structural equation modelling) is applied to answer the research questions, and a number of covariates are included in the analyses.

The present study examines the moderating role of paternal acceptance on the effect of maternal rejection on victimization in a cross-cultural sample of students in Greek and Cypriot schools. Previous cross-cultural bullying related research has shown that students in Greece and Cyprus differed in terms of self-reported bullying/victimization (Fanti et al., 2019) with boys in Greece more likely to be identified in the bullying only group, boys in Cyprus representing the higher percentage identified as bully-victims, and girls in Cyprus representing the higher percentage identified as victim-only. It would add considerably in this line of work to examine the cross-cultural applicability of the moderating effect of parental acceptance within the same study. So far studies have examined this effect in various cultural contexts but without direct comparison (e.g., Day & Padilla-Walker, 2009; Flouri & Buchanan, 2002; Papadaki & Giovazolias, 2015). Given the cross-cultural nature of the participants, the study will cross-examine the moderation hypothesis for both cultural contexts.

### ***The present study***

The purpose of the present study was to clarify the effect of maternal rejection on victimization, and to examine whether paternal acceptance moderates this effect, in a large cross-cultural sample of Greek and Cypriot early adolescents, following a short-term longitudinal research design. It is hypothesized that maternal rejection will have a negative effect on victimization six months later, over and above initial victimization scores (e.g., Charalampous et al., 2018). In addition, it is hypothesized that paternal acceptance will buffer the negative effect of maternal rejection on victimization (Papadaki & Giovazolias, 2015). Despite previous differences in self-reported bullying, given cultural proximity, it is expected that paternal acceptance will moderate the effect of maternal rejection on victimization for both Greek and Cypriot students.

## **Method**

### ***Participants***

Participants were 846 early adolescents from primary and secondary schools in Greece and Cyprus (375 Cypriots, 471 Greek students). Schools were randomly selected from the prefecture of Attica in Greece (8 schools) and from the province of Nicosia in Cyprus (13 schools), and students from these schools were asked to participate in the study. The participants were between 10 and 14 years of age ( $M = 12.63$ ,  $SD = 1.01$  years), whereas 435 (51.4%) were males and 403 (47.6%) females (eight students (1%) did not provide information about their gender). The random selection of schools ensured a sample of students from all socio-economic groups and geographic areas.

### ***Measures***

**Victimization.** We used an adapted version of the Personal Experiences Checklist – (PECK; Hunt et al., 2012), to measure victimization. PECK is developed to provide a multidimensional assessment of a young person's experience of being bullied and covers a full range of bullying behaviours. It is comprised of 32 items, which are divided into four dimensions, namely: verbal-relational bullying ('other kids call me names because I can't do something'), cyber bullying, physical bullying ('other kids punch me') and bullying based on culture ('Other children make fun of me because of my country of origin'). All items were scored on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 0 = *every day* to 4 = *never*. PECK has been widely used within varied contexts, presenting good reliability (Ouano et al., 2013). PECK has been also used successfully with Greek speaking adolescents in the past (Charalampous et al., 2021a; Charalampous et al., 2021b).

**Parental acceptance/rejection.** Parental rejection was measured by using the Greek short form version of the Parental Acceptance/Rejection Questionnaire (Tsaousis et al., 2012). The standard questionnaire has 60 items, whereas the short version has 24. The questionnaire measures children's perceptions of maternal or paternal treatment of the child in terms of four subscales/indicators: rejection, aggression and neglect (which form the rejection scale) and acceptance. Typical items include the following: '*(My father/mother) shows real interest in my activities.*', '*(My father/mother) ignores me when I ask for help.*', etc.. Respondents are asked to rate statements on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 0 = *almost always true* to 3 = *almost never true*. For the purposes of the study participants responded to two versions of the PARQ one assessing children's perceptions of their father's acceptance (single factor) and one assessing mother's rejection (three sub-factors/indicators: maternal rejection, maternal aggression and maternal neglect).

## Procedure

Both questionnaires were administered in two-time waves, Wave 1 and Wave 2, with a six-month interval between them (October – April within the same school year). This is an interval long enough for significant effects to take place (e.g., Kaufman et al., 2020), and allows for data to be collected for school related behaviors, such as victimization, within the same school year. Permissions were secured from respective authorities. Participants were then informed about the purpose of the study and were asked to complete the instruments on a voluntary basis. The researchers explicitly described issues of anonymity and personal data protection and the parents or legal guardian of each child provided a formal written consent. All ethical guidelines were strictly followed during both phases of the study, and the researchers explicitly informed all children that they had the right to withdraw at any time during the study. The participants completed both questionnaires during one class period.

## Analysis plan

First, internal consistency was estimated for all measured variables, and the factorial structure of maternal rejection was examined through multi-group confirmatory factor analysis. Next, structural equation modeling (SEM) was applied to investigate the relationships among the variables under study. In these models maternal rejection indicators were entered as latent variables and victimization was entered as a measured variable.

First, we examined the effect of Time 1 maternal rejection on victimization six months later, while controlling for victimization levels at Time 1, and then we moved on to examine the hypothesized moderation model. The maximum likelihood estimation was used, and analyses were performed with the Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS) program (Arbuckle, 2006).

Several indices were examined to assess model fit including the  $\chi^2$  goodness of fit statistic ( $\chi^2$ ), the comparative fit index (CFI), the Tucker Lewis index (TLI), and the Root Mean Squared Error of Approximation (RMSEA). Adequate fit is indicated by non-significance for the  $\chi^2$ . For the CFI and TLI values over .90 indicate adequate and over .95 indicate excellent fit. Finally, for the RMSEA values < .08 indicate adequate fit and < .05 excellent fit (Browne & Cudeck, 1989; Byrne, 2009; Hu & Bentler, 1999; Marsh et al., 2004; Smith & McMillan, 2001).

## Results

### Psychometric properties / descriptives

For the present study, victimization was examined as a general construct instead of the multidimensional structure of the PECK. Given the large number of items comprising victimization (32 items on one factor), we decided to use a measured construct derived from the composite score of the respective items, to avoid making the examined models overly complicated. This choice was also justified by the high internal consistency reported for this subscale (see also Stavrinides et al., 2017).

For the maternal rejection scale a CFA was performed, with the exclusion of items 21 and 13, which were problematic in terms of their item-total correlation scores. The fit statistics supported the presence of the three-

factor model (maternal aggression, rejection, and neglect) [ $\chi^2 (88, N = 846) = 321.72; p <.001$ ; CFI = 0.97; TLI = .96; RMSEA = .056 (.050–.063)]. In addition, model parameters were in the expected direction associated with reasonable standard errors in both instances. However, the associations between the three factors were over .90 and this was expected to create multicollinearity problems when the three factors were used as exogenous variables in subsequent models. We thus decided to examine the effect of each variable in separate models.

For the paternal acceptance scale factorial analysis was not performed since, this was a single variable scale which was used in the analysis as a dichotomous variable. The internal consistency of the scale, which is of importance here, was estimated at .85.

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics for each variable in the study, along with Cronbach's alpha. As can be seen in some instances internal consistency was low (e.g., Maternal rejection – Greek sample). Despite this, given the support of the unidimensionality and high factor loadings for all subscales of the PARQ, based on the CFA results, all PARQ subscales were retained for further analysis.

**Table 1**

*Descriptive Statistics and Internal Consistency for the Variables of the Study*

	Range	M			SD			Cronbach's $\alpha$		
		Total	GR	CY	Total	GR	CY	Total	GR	CY
T1 Paternal acceptance	1.38 – 4.00	3.65	3.83	3.42	.47	.29	.55	.85	.84	.77
T1 Maternal rejection scale										
T1 Maternal rejection	1.00 – 4.00	1.85	2.29	1.31	.68	.46	.48	.79	.50	.62
T1 Maternal aggression	1.00 – 3.80	1.83	2.30	1.25	.66	.42	.37	.91	.67	.80
T1 Maternal neglect	1.00 – 4.00	2.03	2.45	1.49	.68	.47	.50	.84	.64	.72
T1 Victimization	1.00 – 4.81	1.87	2.31	1.30	.62	.35	.39	.98	.93	.93
T2 Victimization	1.00 – 4.94	1.91	2.37	1.28	.65	.38	.35	.98	.93	.93

\*Note. GR = Greece; CY = Cyprus

### **The hypothesized models**

Initially the effect of maternal rejection indicators on victimization was examined, through a series of three models in which one variable from the T1 maternal rejection scale: maternal rejection (Model 1.1), maternal neglect (Model 1.2), maternal aggression (Model 1.3) and T1 victimization were set to load on T2 victimization. Results supported that all three models fitted the data well (Table 2) and model parameters were in the expected direction, associated with reasonable standard errors. Coefficients of the structural part of Models 1.1 – 1.3 are presented in Table 3.

**Table 2**

*Fit Parameters for the Models 1.1 – 1.3*

Model	$\chi^2$	df	N	p	CFI	TLI	RMSEA
Model 1.1 (maternal rejection – total sample)	5.63	4	846	.23	1.00	1.00	.022
Model 1.2 (maternal neglect – total sample)	25.39	13	846	.20	1.00	.99	.034
Model 1.3 (maternal aggression – total sample)	100.83	19	846	<.001	.98	.97	.071

As can be seen all three maternal rejection indicators had a positive significant effect on T2 victimization over and above the effect of T1 victimization. The Models 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3 explained 71, 67 and 70% of the variance of T2 victimization, respectively.

**Table 3***Standardized Regression Coefficients and Squared Multiple Correlations for Models 1.1 – 1.3*

Model	Endogenous	Exogenous	Standardized regression coefficient	Squared multiple correlation
Model 1.1	T1 Maternal rejection	→ T2 victimization	.44***	.71
	T1 victimization	→ T2 victimization	.45***	
Model 1.2	T1 Maternal neglect	→ T2 victimization	.26***	.67
	T1 victimization	→ T2 victimization	.60***	
Model 1.3	T1 Maternal aggression	→ T2 victimization	.39***	.70
	T1 victimization	→ T2 victimization	.49***	

\*Note. \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Next, we split the sample in two groups based on reported paternal acceptance. The high paternal acceptance group included participants with paternal acceptance higher than the sample mean ( $n_1 = 466$ ), and the low paternal acceptance group, participants with paternal acceptance lower than the sample mean ( $n_2 = 366$ ), respectively. Model 2 sub-models were identical to Models 1.1 – 1.3, except from the sample composition and were examined simultaneously for each maternal rejection indicator, in a multi-group analysis. As can be seen in Table 4, results indicated that the six models fitted the data well. In addition, Model parameters were in the expected direction, associated with reasonable standard errors. Coefficients of the structural part of Models 2.1 – 2.3 are presented in Table 3.

**Table 4***Fit Parameters for the Models 2.1 – 2.3*

Model	$\chi^2$	df	N	p	CFI	TLI	RMSEA
Model 2.1 (maternal rejection – high/low paternal acceptance)	6.88	8	403/429	.550	1.00	1.00	.000
Model 2.2 (maternal neglect – high/low paternal acceptance)	40.22	26	403/429	.037	1.00	.99	.026
Model 2.3 (maternal aggression – high/low paternal acceptance)	123.13	38	403/429	<.001	.98	.97	.052

**Table 5***Standardized Regression Coefficients and Squared Multiple Correlations for Models 2.1 – 2.3*

Model	Endogenous	Exogenous	Standardized regression coefficient <sup>a</sup>	Squared multiple correlation <sup>a</sup>
Model 2.1	T1 Maternal rejection	→ T2 victimization	.54***/.31***	.70 / .70
	T1 victimization	→ T2 victimization	.35***/.57***	
Model 2.2	T1 Maternal neglect	→ T2 victimization	.36***/.17**	.64 / .68
	T1 victimization	→ T2 victimization	.50***/.68***	
Model 2.3	T1 Maternal aggression	→ T2 victimization	.43***/.31***	.66 / .70
	T1 victimization	→ T2 victimization	.43***/.57***	

\*Note. <sup>a</sup>The value placed first refers to the low paternal acceptance group and the one placed second to the high paternal acceptance group.

As can be seen, there were significant differences in the effect of maternal rejection indicators on victimization for low and high paternal acceptance groups, with higher coefficients reported for the low paternal

acceptance groups. In fact, for maternal neglect and maternal aggression, in the low paternal acceptance groups, the effect of maternal rejection indicators was higher than the effect of T1 victimization.

This indicates that paternal acceptance group might moderate the effect of maternal aggression-rejection on T2 victimization. In order to test this assumption a new series of constrained multi-group models similar to Models 2.1 – 2.3 were examined (Models 3.1 – 3.3), in which the effect of maternal rejection indicators were set to be equal in the two groups. The chi-square difference between Models 2 and 3 had a value of:  $\Delta\chi^2 = 6.88, 4.24, 1.79$  for one degree of freedom, for Models 2.1 and 3.1 ( $p < .05$ ), 2.2 and 3.2 ( $p < .05$ ) and 2.3 and 3.3 ( $p > .05$ ) respectively. Thus, it is shown that moderation is confirmed for Model 2.1 (maternal rejection) and Model 2.2 (maternal neglect), which means that the effects of T1 maternal rejection and T1 maternal neglect on T2 victimization differ based on the level (high or low) of parental acceptance.

As the sample was drawn from two different countries, we also tried to examine whether the above moderation was present when the two groups were examined separately. Results for the Greek students (Models 4.1 – 4.3) are presented in Tables 6 and 7, and for the Cypriot students (Models 5.1 – 5.3) in Tables 8 and 9.<sup>1</sup>

**Table 6**  
*Fit Parameters for the Models 4.1 – 4.3 (Greek Students)*

<b>Model</b>	<b><math>\chi^2</math></b>	<b>df</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>p</b>	<b>CFI</b>	<b>TLI</b>	<b>RMSEA</b>
Model 4.1 (maternal rejection – high/low paternal acceptance)	38.58	26	202/261	.053	.98	.95	.032
Model 4.2 (maternal neglect – high/low paternal acceptance)	18.24	8	202/261	.019	.97	.89	.053
Model 4.3 (maternal aggression – high/low paternal acceptance)	95.92	38	202/261	<.001	.94	.89	.058

**Table 7**  
*Standardized Regression Coefficients and Squared Multiple Correlations for Models 2.1 – 2.3*

<b>Model</b>	<b>Endogenous</b>	<b>Exogenous</b>	<b>Standardized regression coefficient<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>Squared multiple correlation<sup>a</sup></b>	
Model 4.1	T1 Maternal rejection	→	T2 victimization	.25***/-0.09	
	T1 victimization	→	T2 victimization	.47***/.57***	.30 / .35
Model 4.2	T1 Maternal neglect	→	T2 victimization	.24**/.47***	
	T1 victimization	→	T2 victimization	.45***/.44***	.35 / .32
Model 4.3	T1 Maternal aggression	→	T2 victimization	.13/.06	
	T1 victimization	→	T2 victimization	.50***/.51***	.31 / .29

\*Note. <sup>a</sup>The value placed first refers to the low paternal acceptance group and the one placed second to the high paternal acceptance group.

**Table 8**  
*Fit Parameters for the Models 5.1 – 5.3 (Cypriot School Students)*

<b>Model</b>	<b><math>\chi^2</math></b>	<b>df</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>p</b>	<b>CFI</b>	<b>TLI</b>	<b>RMSEA</b>
Model 5.1 (maternal rejection – high/low paternal acceptance)	33.01	26	182/187	.162	.97	.93	.027
Model 5.2 (maternal neglect – high/low paternal acceptance)	7.86	8	182/187	.447	1.00	1.00	.000
Model 5.3 (maternal aggression – high/low paternal acceptance)	95.92	38	182/187	<.001	.94	.89	.058

<sup>1</sup> It is noted that the mean of parental acceptance differed  $t(830) = 13.61, p < .001$  in the two groups ( $M_{Greek} = 3.83, M_{Cypriot} = 3.62$ ), and so the grouping of low and high parental acceptance was based on different means for each group.

**Table 9**

Standardized Regression Coefficients and Squared Multiple Correlations for Models 5.1 – 5.3

Model	Endogenous	Exogenous	Standardized regression coefficient <sup>a</sup>	Squared multiple correlation <sup>a</sup>
Model 5.1	T1 Maternal rejection	→ T2 victimization	.12/- .08	.07 / .08
	T1 victimization	→ T2 victimization	.19*/.31***	
Model 5.2	T1 Maternal neglect	→ T2 victimization	.34**/.17	.16 / .11
	T1 victimization	→ T2 victimization	.12/.23**	
Model 5.3	T1 Maternal aggression	→ T2 victimization	.13/.06	.31 / .29
	T1 victimization	→ T2 victimization	.49***/.51***	

\*Note. <sup>a</sup>The value placed first refers to the low paternal acceptance group and the one placed second to the high paternal acceptance group.

As can be seen, again the effect of the T1 maternal rejection indicators was clearly reduced in the presence of high paternal acceptance for both groups, except for Models 4.3 (maternal aggression – Greek students) and 5.1 (maternal rejection – Cypriot students). In order to verify the presence of moderation we turned again to the chi-square difference test, comparing the above models with an equivalent model, in which the effect of the maternal rejection indicators was constrained for the low and high paternal acceptance groups. Moderation was supported only for the Model 4.1 ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 6.41$  for one degree of freedom, for which  $p < .05$ ) contrary to what was expected based on the differences noted, and this can be attributed to the low statistical power in the models, which is evident in the lowered coefficients and squared multiple correlations compared to the full sample models.

## Discussion

The present study aimed to examine the effect of maternal rejection indicators on victimization six months later, by controlling for initial victimization levels. In addition, the study sought to examine the role of paternal acceptance in buffering this effect.

The findings of the study indicated that all three maternal rejection indicators (aggression, neglect and rejection) had a strong positive significant effect on T2 victimization even when controlling for the effect of T1 victimization. This finding is in partial accordance with previous research (Lereya et al., 2013; Shin & Kim, 2008), which support that maternal neglect, aggression and rejection represent risk factors for peer victimization. Since the present study is one of the first to employ such a stringent methodology in the estimation of the effect of maternal rejection on victimization (e.g., a short-term longitudinal design with the use of initial victimization levels as a covariate), all three maternal rejection indicators seem to be significant determinants of victimization, and not mere associated variables. Based on earlier studies regarding attachment and victimization (Greenberg et al., 1993; Walden & Beran, 2010), it appears that rejection, neglect and aggression may lead to the breaking down of the mother-child bond, and this in turn may remove an important support system from the child, which would make the child susceptible and vulnerable to bullying attacks from their peers (Charalampous et al., 2018; 2019; Kokkinos, 2013; Nikiforou et al., 2013).

The second major finding of the present study was the clarification of the protective role of paternal acceptance against the maternal rejection indicators' effect on victimization. The results of the study underlined the fact that for adolescents reporting high parental acceptance, maternal rejection had considerably lower effect on victimization, than for adolescents reporting lower paternal acceptance. Indeed, further analyses indicated that the buffering effect of paternal acceptance was confirmed for both maternal neglect and maternal rejection (but not for maternal aggression). This is in accordance with previous studies (Day & Padilla-Walker, 2009; Flouri & Buchanan, 2002; Papadaki & Giovazolias, 2015), in that paternal acceptance might actually serve as a protective factor against victimization in the event that there is perceived neglect or rejection from the mother.

It seems that paternal acceptance is in position to counteract the collapse of the mother-child bond, which would result in the removal of an important support system for the child, and reverse or buffer the susceptibility and vulnerability to peer bullying. According to PART theory, people facing parental rejection, are prone to

misperceive relationships and social situations, because they would process them through the lens of negative emotions and beliefs resulting from this rejection (Rohner, 2004). This misperception may lead rejected youth to problematic developmental pathways, compared to their non-rejected counterparts (Rohner & Britner, 2002). Thus, according to the findings of the present study, paternal acceptance plays a key protective role in supporting children facing highly problematic situations, such as a deteriorated or hostile maternal relationship, and serve as a safeguard against detrimental developmental outcomes, such as bullying victimization.

The study also examined the moderating role of paternal acceptance on the effect of maternal rejection on victimization separately for the two cultural groups, to verify the cross-cultural nature of this assumption. The findings of the study provide clear indications (and evidence in one instance) that the buffering effect of parental acceptance was present in both groups for specific maternal rejection indicators (e.g., maternal rejection and maternal neglect for the Greek sample and the maternal neglect for the Cypriot sample). Nevertheless, the low power of the analysis did not allow to fully support the presence of moderation. Yet, despite differences in victimization, maternal rejection and paternal acceptance levels between the two groups reported both in the present study and elsewhere (Fanti et al., 2019), the buffering role of parental acceptance on the effect of maternal rejection on victimization seems present. This is in accordance with previous studies that offered indications of the presence of this effect in different cultural contexts (Day & Padilla-Walker, 2009; Flouri & Buchanan, 2002; Papadaki & Giovazolias, 2015). Compared to previous studies, especially with the study of Papadaki and Giovazolias (2015), which had directly comparable research questions, the present study has addressed methodological limitations (longitudinal research design, substantially larger and randomly selected sample, sophisticated statistical analysis) and has extended their findings in important ways (cross-cultural examination, use of covariates, etc.).

### ***Limitations and practical implications***

The present study bears some limitations, such as the use of self-report measures and the examination of victimization as a unitary construct instead of analyzing victimization forms, e.g., physical, emotional, social, etc.. Nonetheless, the present study makes some considerable contributions to this line of work, as well. First this one of the few studies that links IPART with victimization (Stavriniades et al., 2018). And secondly, this is one of the first studies to employ a sophisticated research design to analyze the moderating relationship between paternal acceptance, maternal rejection and victimization. In addition, internal consistency was low for at least one maternal rejection indicator for the Greek students. Nonetheless, CFA results supported the unidimensionality and the high factor loadings for all maternal rejection indicators. What's more, maternal rejection indicator for the Greek sub-sample, was the only instance for which paternal acceptance moderation was supported.

The present study has both some practical and methodological/theoretical implications. At the practical level the study shows that anti-bullying programs might also consider focusing their attention on the mother-child and the father-child relationship which seems to be a crucial factor in victimization involvement. In the light of the present findings, the whole-school approaches in anti-bullying efforts would benefit greatly by including seminars and workshops to parents, or group parent-child sessions in cases of severely deteriorated maternal or paternal relationships (Valle et al., 2020). In addition, practitioners involved in programs relating to children with problematic child-mother relationships might also consider focussing their efforts specifically on the paternal relationship, which seems to be in position to counteract the effect of maternal rejection on children's problematic behaviors.

At the methodological/theoretical level the study highlights the need of more research on to address complex relationships through the use of advance research designs, which would allow for further enhancement of theoretical postulations, as well as more cross-cultural studies, in order to delineate the extent to which a specific theoretical postulation applies to different cultural contexts.

Future studies are expected to capitalize on the findings of the present study in order to further extend our understanding around the protective role of paternal acceptance and its significance as a protective factor for adolescents' social adjustment.

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## Μετριάζει η πατρική αποδοχή την επίδραση της μητρικής απόρριψης στη θυματοποίηση σε προέφηβους; Μια βραχύχρονη διαχρονική μελέτη

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### ΛΕΞΕΙΣ ΚΛΕΙΔΙΑ

Πατρική αποδοχή,  
μητρική απόρριψη,  
θυματοποίηση,  
προ-εφηβεία,  
μετριασμός

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### ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Η γονική απόρριψη αποτελεί ένα σημαντικό προβλεπτικό παράγοντα διάφορων παραμέτρων της κοινωνικής προσαρμογής των εφίβων, συμπεριλαμβανομένης και της θυματοποίησης από σχολικό εκφοβισμό. Παρά το γεγονός ότι η έρευνα που αφορά τη γονικότητα έχει σε μεγάλο βαθμό παραμελήσει τον ρόλο του πατέρα, υπάρχουν ερευνητικές ενδείξεις ότι η πατρική αποδοχή μπορεί λειτουργήσει προστατευτικά απένταντι στη μητρική απόρριψη. Ο σκοπός της παρούσας μελέτης ήταν η διακρίβωση της επίδρασης δεικτών της μητρικής απόρριψης στην θυματοποίηση, και στην εξέταση του κατά πόσο η πατρική αποδοχή μετριάζει αυτήν την επίδραση, σε ένα δια-πολιτισμικό δείγμα 846 ( $M_{age} = 12.63$ ,  $SD_{age} = 1.01$ ,  $N_{girls} = 403$ ) προεφήβων από σχολεία της Ελλάδας ( $N = 471$ ) και της Κύπρου ( $N = 375$ ), στη βάση ενός βραχύχρονου διαχρονικού ερευνητικού σχεδιασμού (χρονικό διάστημα έξι μηνών). Οι συμμετέχοντες συμπλήρωσαν ερωτηματολόγια αυτοαναφοράς. Από τα αποτελέσματα διαφάνηκε ότι η μητρική απόρριψη είχε σημαντική επίδραση στη θυματοποίηση έξι μήνες αργότερα, ακόμα και με την προσμέτρηση της επίδρασης των αρχικών επιπέδων θυματοποίησης. Τα αποτελέσματα κατέδειξαν ακόμη ότι η πατρική αποδοχή λειτουργούσε μετριαστικά ως προς αυτή την επίδραση. Πραγματοποιείται εκτενής συζήτηση των ευρημάτων και δίνονται εισηγήσεις για μελλοντικές έρευνες.