

# Ethnic Differences in Teacher–Student Relationship Quality and Associations With Teachers’ Informal Help for Adolescents’ Internalizing Problems

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## Abstract

Ethnic minority adolescents receive not only less formal mental health services than their ethnic majority peers but also less school-based mental health services. Little is known about the extent to which adolescents indicate their teachers help them with their mental health problems. The aim of the current study was to investigate ethnic differences in teacher-provided informal help for adolescents’ internalizing problems, and whether these could be explained by differences in teacher-reported internalizing problems and teacher–adolescent relationship quality. A sample of adolescents at risk of internalizing problems and their teachers participated in the study ( $n = 229$ ). Adolescents originated from four ethnic groups in the Netherlands: three ethnic minority groups (Surinamese Dutch, Turkish Dutch, Moroccan Dutch) and the ethnic majority (native Dutch). Results showed that only Moroccan Dutch adolescents reported considerably less informal help from their teachers for their internalizing problems than native Dutch adolescents, whereas Turkish Dutch and Surinamese Dutch adolescents were not found to differ from native Dutch adolescents. Teacher–student relationship quality and teacher-reported internalizing problems could not explain the differences in informal help between Moroccan Dutch and Dutch adolescents. Teachers reported significantly higher levels of conflict in their relationships with Moroccan Dutch than native Dutch adolescents, and for Moroccan Dutch adolescents, higher levels of conflict were associated with lower levels of informal help by the teacher.

## Keywords

ethnic minority, teacher, informal help, relationship quality, internalizing problems

Teachers can be of crucial importance to the lives of children and adolescents. Not only do teachers stimulate children in their educational development, they also support their social and emotional development. Although this is not explicitly part of their responsibility and training, teachers may also play an important role in identifying their students’ internalizing and externalizing problems, with internalizing problems referring to problems such as sadness, anxiety, and loneliness, and externalizing problems to problems such as aggressive, impulsive, or rule-breaking behavior. Teachers can, for instance, help their students by providing informal support, and referring students to formal (school-based) mental health services (e.g., Farmer, Burns, Phillips, Angold, & Costello, 2003; Green et al., 2013; Zwaanswijk, van der Ende, Verhaak, Bensing, & Verhulst, 2005).

Unfortunately, it seems that students are not equally likely to profit from their teacher’s support for their internalizing and externalizing problems. Research has shown that some

groups of ethnic minority adolescents receive less formal mental health care than their majority counterparts (e.g., Elster, Jarosik, VanGeest, & Fleming, 2003; Verhulp, Stevens, van de Schoot, & Vollebergh, 2013), and also that they are less often referred by schools and less likely to receive school-based mental health care (Barksdale, Azur, & Leaf, 2009; Bear, Finer, Guo, & Lau, 2014; Gudiño, Lau, Yeh, McCabe, & Hough, 2009; Wood et al., 2005; Yeh et al., 2002). Little is known about why adolescents from some ethnic minority groups receive these lower levels of support within the school context. The current study tried to shed

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some light on this matter, first, by investigating whether there are ethnic differences in the degree to which adolescents received informal help for their internalizing problems from their teacher (informal help is defined as support provided by someone who is not a formal mental care professional). Second, this study examined whether such differences could be explained by the adolescents' relationship with their teacher and their (teacher-reported) internalizing problems.

### **Teachers' Perception of the Teacher–Student Relationship Quality**

One factor that might be associated with the amount of informal help teachers provide is the quality of the relationship that adolescents share with their teacher. The importance of a high-quality teacher–student relationship has been well established for academic achievement (Roorda, Koomen, Spilt, & Oort, 2011), but research on the importance of teacher–student relationships for the help adolescents receive from their teacher with internalizing and externalizing problems is scarce (Wang, Brinkworth, & Eccles, 2013). It has been suggested that teachers who experience a strong and positive relationship with their pupil might be more willing to invest in the pupil's psychological well-being (Hamre & Pianta, 2001, 2005); and, this could mean that they provide more informal help, for instance, when adolescents experience internalizing problems.

Theoretically, it could be expected that the quality of the teacher–student relationship is weaker for ethnic minority than for majority students (Thijs, Westhof, & Koomen, 2012). One reason for this is that ethnic minority students are typically instructed by a teacher from a different ethnic background (most often an ethnic majority teacher), which could result in cultural misunderstandings and miscommunication (Thijs & Eilbracht, 2012). Previous studies indeed showed that ethnic differences exist in teacher–student relationship quality among children, indicating that, in some ethnic minority groups, the quality of the relationship is less positive than in that of the ethnic majority group. For example, in a U.S. sample, less supportive relationships with teachers were found among African American students than among ethnic majority students (i.e., Caucasian), but not among Hispanic children (Hughes, Gleason, & Zhang, 2005). In the Netherlands, more negative relationships in terms of conflict and dependency were revealed among Moroccan Dutch students in comparison with ethnic majority students (i.e., Dutch), whereas this was not the case for Turkish Dutch students (Thijs et al., 2012). In light of these mixed findings, we hypothesized that some, but not all, ethnic minority groups might receive less informal help for their internalizing problems from their teachers than their ethnic majority peers because of their less positive teacher–student relationship.

### **Teachers' Perception of Adolescents' Internalizing Problems**

To be able to provide informal help for internalizing problems to students, teachers need to be able to identify these problems. Especially when there is an ethnic mismatch between students and teachers, teachers may potentially experience more difficulty recognizing internalizing problems in ethnic minority students as a result of cultural misunderstandings, bias against people of other ethnic groups, or different behavioral expectations (Crijnen, Bengi-Arslan, & Verhulst, 2000; Davies, Ryan, & Tarr, 2011; Jackson, 2002; Saft & Pianta, 2001; Thijs et al., 2012). Some studies found that teachers reported fewer internalizing problems for ethnic minority compared with majority adolescents, whereas no such differences were found in adolescent reports of the amount of internalizing problems (Lau et al., 2004; Vollebergh et al., 2005). Other studies showed that although teachers reported similar levels of internalizing problems across Turkish Dutch and native Dutch adolescents, Turkish Dutch adolescents reported more internalizing problems than their native Dutch peers (Stevens et al., 2003). Furthermore, another study observed differences between majority and minority teachers in their ratings of internalizing problems in Turkish Dutch adolescents, indicating that minority teachers detected more internalizing problems than majority teachers (Crijnen et al., 2000). A more recent study, however, indicated that although Moroccan Dutch youth reported fewer internalizing problems than their Dutch peers, teachers reported similar levels of internalizing problems for Dutch and Moroccan Dutch youth (Adriaanse, Veling, Doreleijers, & van Domburgh, 2014). Notwithstanding the inconsistencies in former research, there is some research to suggest that teachers might be less able to identify internalizing problems in ethnic minority than ethnic majority adolescents. Therefore, we hypothesized that this phenomenon might in turn influence the amount of informal help teachers provide for adolescents' internalizing problems.

### **Goal of the Current Study**

In summary, the current study examined ethnic differences in the amount of informal help for adolescents' internalizing problems provided by teachers in a multiethnic sample of adolescents at risk of internalizing problems in the Netherlands using both teacher and adolescent reports. Based on studies examining formal mental health service use within the school context (Gudiño et al., 2009; Wood et al., 2005; Yeh et al., 2002), we expected ethnic minority adolescents (i.e., Surinamese Dutch, Turkish Dutch, and Moroccan Dutch adolescents) to receive less informal help from their teacher than ethnic majority adolescents (i.e., native Dutch adolescents). In addition, we hypothesized

that both teacher–student relationship quality and teacher-reported internalizing problems would mediate the association between ethnicity and informal help provided by teachers as reported by adolescents.

## Method

### Participants

The sample consisted of 229 adolescents and 130 teachers. The mean adolescent age was 15.2 years, and 42% of the sample was male. Of the adolescents, 75 had a native Dutch, 64 a Surinamese Dutch, 45 a Turkish Dutch, and 45 a Moroccan Dutch background. Of these teachers, 49.2% were female and 72% belonged to the ethnic majority. Teachers reported that they saw students on average 5 hr in class each week ( $M = 5.00$  hr,  $SD = 2.70$  hr).

### Procedure

To obtain a sample consisting of adolescents at risk of internalizing problems, we first conducted a large school-based screening for internalizing problems among more than 3,000 adolescents from Dutch schools with at least 40% non-Western immigrant pupils. Subsequently, a subsample of adolescents at risk of internalizing problems and their teachers were requested to participate in the current study. More specifically, for each of the four largest ethnic groups in the Netherlands (i.e., native Dutch, Surinamese Dutch, Turkish Dutch, and Moroccan Dutch), two equally sized random samples of adolescents were drawn from the school-based screening. One sample consisted of adolescents scoring in the borderline/clinical range, whereas the other consisted of adolescents scoring in the normal range on the youth self-report (YSR) internalizing problems (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2001).

This subsample consisted of 349 adolescents (native Dutch,  $n = 95$ ; Surinamese Dutch,  $n = 85$ ; Turkish Dutch,  $n = 87$ ; Moroccan Dutch,  $n = 82$ ).<sup>1</sup> Sixty-four percent of the parents provided active consent for their adolescent child to participate in the study; of those adolescents, 96% of the adolescents were interviewed. In line with the design of the study, around 50% of the adolescents across all four ethnic groups who participated in this phase of the study scored in the borderline/clinical range of the YSR internalizing problems as assessed at the screening phase of the study (for more detailed information about the data collection procedure, see Verhulp et al., 2013).

Parents and adolescents were requested to provide consent for participation of the teacher of the adolescent. On average, 85% of the parents (ranging from 68% among Turkish Dutch parents to 97% among Surinamese Dutch parents) and 94% of the adolescents (ranging from 92% among native Dutch to 95% among Surinamese Dutch

adolescents) provided consent for participation of the teacher. Of the teachers with parental and adolescent consent, 77% filled out a questionnaire (ranging from 65% of the teachers of Moroccan Dutch adolescents to 87% of the teachers of native Dutch adolescents). This resulted in a final sample of 229 adolescents and their teachers.

To ensure that the sample for which both teacher and adolescent data were available ( $n = 229$ ) was a representative subset of the complete sample of 349 adolescents for which adolescent reports were available, we tested whether the distribution of adolescents in the normal and borderline/clinical range on internalizing problems (assessed at Wave 1) was comparable for the different ethnic groups. The results indicated that the ethnic minority groups did not differ from the native Dutch group regarding the amount of adolescents who scored in the borderline/clinical range (Surinamese Dutch adolescents: Wald = 0.00,  $p = .959$ ; Turkish Dutch adolescents: Wald = 0.64,  $p = .423$ ; Moroccan Dutch adolescents: Wald = 0.32,  $p = .572$ ), indicating that this subsample could be considered a representative subsample.

### Instruments

**Informal help from teacher.** Adolescents were questioned about the informal help they received for their internalizing problems from their teacher. A description of internalizing symptoms was provided to adolescents using the symptoms described in the Emotional Problem Scale of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (Goodman, 1997). Answer categories consisted of *no help* (0) or *help* (1).

**Teacher–Student Relationship Scale.** The quality of the relationship between teachers and adolescents was assessed with an adapted version of the Dutch Teacher–Student Relationship Scale (Koomen, Verschueren, van Schooten, Jak, & Pianta, 2012; Pianta, 2001). As the original instrument was developed for the teacher–pupil relationship during primary school, some items were reworded slightly to make the items more applicable to pupils in secondary education. In addition, one item was deleted from the questionnaire as the item was considered not age appropriate for pupils in secondary education (“This child is uncomfortable with physical affection or touch from me”). One of the teachers of the adolescents (i.e., their tutor who is usually responsible for academic and emotional support) filled out the questionnaire. We assessed two dimensions of the teacher–adolescent relationship quality. The first dimension, “closeness,” refers to whether the teacher–adolescent relationship is characterized by warmth and open communication (the scale consists of 10 items, such as “I share an affectionate, warm relationship with this child”). The second dimension, “conflict,” refers to the amount of mutual anger and negativity in the relationship between the teacher

**Table 1.** Adolescent Reports of Informal Help by the Teacher and Teacher Reports of Informal Help, Closeness and Conflict in the Teacher–Adolescent Relationship ( $n = 229$ ).

Ethnicity	Native Dutch	Surinamese Dutch	Turkish Dutch	Moroccan Dutch
Adolescent-reported informal help	54.7%	39.1%	37.8%	31.1%*
Teacher-reported closeness	2.70 (0.71)	2.57 (0.68)	2.74 (0.61)	2.53 (0.67)
Teacher-reported conflict	0.61 (0.68)	0.70 (0.74)	0.78 (0.78)	1.10 (0.82)*
Teacher-reported internalizing problems	8.35 (7.95)	6.77 (5.82)	7.21 (6.73)	6.77 (6.29)

\*Refers to a significant difference compared with the native Dutch reference group ( $p < .05$ ).

and adolescent (the scale consists of 11 items, such as “Dealing with this child drains my energy”). Answer categories ranged from *definitely does not apply* (0) to *definitely applies* (4). A principal component analysis confirmed the two-factor solution of closeness and conflict. Previous studies found adequate psychometric properties of this questionnaire among children (Koomen et al., 2012; Pianta, 2001). In the current study, Cronbach’s alpha for each scale was .88 and .90, respectively.

**Teacher Report Form (TRF).** Teacher reports on adolescents’ internalizing problems were assessed using the Dutch version of the TRF (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2001). The Broadband Internalizing Problem Scale consists of three subscales (i.e., withdrawn/depressed, anxious/depressed, and somatic complaints) and 33 items (e.g., “Worries” or “There is very little he or she enjoys”). Response categories are *not at all* (0), *a little* (1), or *a lot* (2). Previous research has demonstrated adequate psychometric properties of the Dutch version of the TRF (Verhulst, van der Ende, & Koot, 1997). In the present sample, Cronbach’s alpha was .88 for the Internalizing Problem Scale.

### Statistical Analyses

First, to test the ethnic differences in informal help from the teacher, logistic regression analyses were used in which the dummy variables of ethnicity were included as predictors of informal help (i.e., native Dutch adolescents were defined as the reference group and separate dummy variables were created for the three ethnic minority groups). Second, univariate and multivariate tests were conducted to determine whether ethnic differences existed in teacher-reported relationship quality and teacher-reported internalizing problems. Third, if ethnic differences existed in either relationship quality or internalizing problems, we examined the association with informal help from the teacher as reported by the adolescent using logistic regression analyses. Fourth, we analyzed whether relationship quality and/or internalizing problems mediated the association between ethnicity and informal help (i.e., by testing indirect effects in Mplus; Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2012). In these analyses, we controlled for age and gender. Finally, we conducted

post hoc analyses to determine whether the association between teacher–student conflict and informal help by the teacher was moderated by ethnicity by using multigroup analyses in Mplus (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2012).

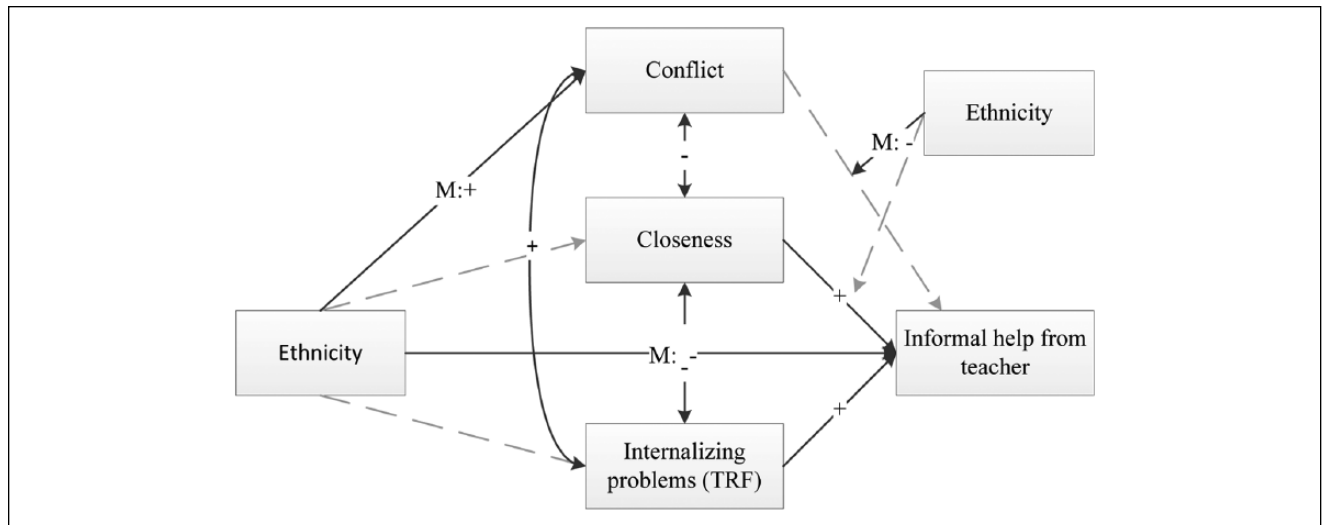
## Results

### Descriptive Statistics

In Table 1, the percentage of adolescent-reported informal help by their teacher can be found for each ethnic group. Compared with native Dutch adolescents, only Moroccan Dutch adolescents reported significantly less informal help from their teachers, Surinamese Dutch: odds ratio (OR) = 0.53, 95 confidence interval (CI) = [0.27, 1.05]; Turkish Dutch: OR = 0.50, 95% CI = [0.24, 1.07]; Moroccan Dutch: OR = 0.38, 95% CI = [0.17, 0.82].

Next, ethnic differences in teacher-reported closeness and conflict in the teacher–adolescent relationship were tested (see also Table 1). Multivariate tests, with closeness and conflict as dependent variables, revealed significant differences between ethnic groups,  $F(6, 440) = 2.43, p = .025$ . Univariate tests showed no differences regarding closeness,  $F(3, 220) = 1.17, p = .322$ , indicating that teachers reported similar levels of closeness in their relationships with adolescents from all ethnic groups. However, ethnic differences were found with regard to conflict,  $F(3, 220) = 4.06, p = .008$ . Post hoc tests revealed that teachers reported significantly more conflicts in relationships with Moroccan Dutch adolescents than in relationships with native Dutch adolescents ( $M_{i-j} = -0.48, SE = 0.14, p = .001$ ), whereas teachers did not report more conflicts in relationships with Surinamese Dutch and Turkish Dutch than native Dutch adolescents (respectively,  $M_{i-j} = -0.09, SE = 0.13, p = .478$ ; and  $M_{i-j} = -0.17, SE = 0.14, p = .240$ ).

Table 1 also shows the mean levels of internalizing problems reported by teachers for adolescents from all ethnic groups. Univariate ANOVA was used to test whether teachers reported similar amounts of internalizing problems among adolescents from native Dutch, Surinamese Dutch, Turkish Dutch, and Moroccan Dutch backgrounds. Results showed no differences between the groups,  $F(3, 219) = 0.78, p = .508$ ,  $\eta^2 = .01$ .



**Figure 1.** Graphical representation of results.

*Note.* Note that the results of mediation and moderation analyses were combined in one model. Dashed lines indicate nonsignificant effects. M indicates an effect for Moroccan Dutch compared with native Dutch adolescents. + represents a positive effect, whereas - denotes a negative effect. In the analyses, we controlled for age and gender. TRF = Teacher Report Form.

### Model Results

Figure 1 shows the model results of the mediation analyses. Consistent with the findings presented above, there was a significant effect of ethnicity on adolescent-reported informal help provided by the teacher for Moroccan Dutch compared with native Dutch adolescents ( $OR = 0.58$ , 95%  $CI = [0.36, 0.94]$ ), but not for Surinamese Dutch and Turkish Dutch adolescents (respectively,  $OR = 0.73$ , 95%  $CI = [0.47, 1.12]$ , and  $OR = 0.65$ , 95%  $CI = [0.41, 1.03]$ ). Furthermore, there were no effects of ethnicity on teacher-reported internalizing problems (Surinamese Dutch:  $\beta = -.20$ ,  $p = .222$ ; Turkish Dutch:  $\beta = -.18$ ,  $p = .327$ ; and Moroccan Dutch:  $\beta = -.21$ ,  $p = .248$ ) or closeness (Surinamese Dutch:  $\beta = -.21$ ,  $p = .237$ ; Turkish Dutch:  $\beta = .05$ ,  $p = .817$ ; and Moroccan Dutch:  $\beta = -.26$ ,  $p = .176$ ). Consistent with the findings presented above, there was an effect of ethnicity on teacher-reported conflicts for Moroccan Dutch adolescents ( $\beta = .68$ ,  $p < .001$ ), but not for Surinamese Dutch and Turkish Dutch adolescents (respectively,  $\beta = .11$ ,  $p = .554$ , and  $\beta = .30$ ,  $p = .126$ ). Finally, we found significant associations between both teacher-reported internalizing problems and teacher-reported closeness and informal help provided by the teacher as reported by the adolescent (respectively,  $OR = 1.03$ , 95%  $CI = [1.01, 1.05]$ , and  $OR = 1.47$ , 95%  $CI = [1.13, 1.91]$ ), indicating that more teacher-reported internalizing problems and more closeness in the teacher-adolescent relationship are associated with a higher likelihood of informal help by the teacher. However, conflict was not related to informal help ( $OR = 1.09$ , 95%  $CI = [0.86, 1.40]$ ). Hence, teacher-reported

internalizing problems, closeness, and conflict did not mediate the association between ethnicity and informal help by the teacher.

### Additional Analyses

In addition, we investigated whether the association between teacher-adolescent conflict and informal help from the teacher was different for Moroccan Dutch compared with native Dutch adolescents, because of the previously found mean-level differences in teacher-student conflicts between both ethnic groups. Thus, additional analyses were performed using multigroup analyses in Mplus. Results showed that for conflict in teacher-adolescent relationship, there was a significant effect of ethnicity on the association between conflict and informal help from the teacher,  $Wald(3) = 16.64$ ,  $p < .001$ . More specifically, the association between conflict and informal help appeared to be significantly different only for Moroccan Dutch compared with native Dutch adolescents,  $Wald(1) = 6.46$ ,  $p = .011$ , whereas the association was not different for Surinamese Dutch and Turkish Dutch compared with native Dutch adolescents, respectively,  $Wald(1) = 0.01$ ,  $p = .938$ , and  $Wald(1) = 1.85$ ,  $p = .174$ . Among native Dutch adolescents, a nonsignificant association between conflict and informal help was found ( $OR = 1.14$ , 95%  $CI = [0.79, 1.65]$ ), but for Moroccan Dutch adolescents a significant, negative association was found ( $OR = 0.57$ , 95%  $CI = [0.39, 0.84]$ ). For Moroccan Dutch adolescents, this indicates that more teacher-reported conflicts in the teacher-adolescent relationship are associated with less informal help from their teachers as reported by the adolescents (see also Figure 1).

## Discussion

The results of the current study revealed the existence of ethnic differences in adolescent-reported informal help for adolescents' internalizing problems provided by the teacher. More specifically, our findings showed that Moroccan Dutch adolescents were less likely to receive informal help for their internalizing problems from their teacher than native Dutch adolescents, whereas the two other groups of ethnic minority adolescents (Turkish Dutch and Surinamese Dutch) were not. Furthermore, substantially more conflict in the teacher–student relationship was found for Moroccan Dutch compared with native Dutch adolescents, which again was not found for Turkish Dutch and Surinamese Dutch adolescents. This appeared to be problematic for these Moroccan Dutch adolescents, because for them, conflict in the teacher–adolescent relationship was associated with less informal help provided by their teachers.

Consistent with the literature on ethnic differences in formal (school) mental health care (Barksdale et al., 2009; Bear et al., 2014; Gudiño et al., 2009; Wood et al., 2005; Yeh et al., 2002), the current study showed that specific ethnic minority groups also receive less informal help in the school context. This finding is especially worrisome because a previous study on formal mental health care in the same sample indicated that only Moroccan Dutch—and not Turkish Dutch or Surinamese Dutch—adolescents reported considerably less formal mental health service use compared with native Dutch adolescents (Verhulp et al., 2013). However, our results showed that even among ethnic minority groups, at least 30% of the adolescents reported receiving informal help from the teacher. Although this is a significantly lower percentage than that reported by ethnic majority adolescents, it does indicate that many teachers are aware of these problems, which enables them to either provide help themselves or to refer adolescents to formal mental health care.

Furthermore, our results showed that teachers identified similar levels of internalizing problems among adolescents from different ethnic groups, and that teacher reports of internalizing problems were positively associated with informal help. Based on previous studies, we hypothesized that teachers would identify fewer internalizing problems among ethnic minority adolescents (Crijnen et al., 2000; Lau et al., 2004; Stevens et al., 2003; Vollebergh et al., 2005). However, the absence of ethnic group differences in teacher-reported internalizing problems may be due to the fact that the adolescents in the current study were mostly born in the Netherlands and followed Dutch education. It is likely, therefore, that these adolescents were quite similar to native Dutch adolescents in terms of their behavior. Overall, our results indicated that teachers are at least similarly aware of the problems of adolescents from different ethnic backgrounds, and, thus, that

opportunities to help these adolescents seem to be present in schools.

Consistent with previous research (Hughes et al., 2005; Thijs et al., 2012), our results showed that differences in the teacher–adolescent relationship quality were present for some ethnic minority groups but not for others. More specifically, according to teachers, the quality of their relationships with Surinamese Dutch and Turkish Dutch adolescents did not differ from those with ethnic majority (native Dutch) adolescents. However, teachers reported notably more conflict in their relationships with Moroccan Dutch adolescents compared with ethnic majority adolescents. This is in line with a previous study on teacher–student relationship quality in which children of the same ethnic minority groups were compared (Thijs et al., 2012). No ethnic differences were found for closeness in the teacher–adolescent relationship, which is also consistent with the study of Thijs and colleagues (2012). Because the study by Thijs and colleagues was performed on children, the current study provides relevant information on the generalizability of these findings to adolescence.

Teachers reported more conflict in their relationships with Moroccan Dutch than with native Dutch adolescents, which is in line with findings from former research (Thijs et al., 2012). This finding may reflect both actual differences in conflicts between teachers and adolescents and perceptions of teachers about this relationship. Previous research on teachers' reports on externalizing problems among Moroccan Dutch adolescents suggests that both these reasons are probable (Vollebergh et al., 2005). On one hand, there is some evidence to suggest that levels of self-reported conduct and peer problems are higher in Moroccan Dutch than Turkish Dutch or Surinamese Dutch adolescents (Adriaanse et al., 2014). This implies that behaviors of Moroccan Dutch adolescents are more difficult or problematic to handle for teachers than the behaviors of their Turkish Dutch and Surinamese Dutch peers, subsequently leading to more problematic teacher–adolescent relationships for Moroccan Dutch adolescents. On the other hand, compared with self-reports, teachers were found to report rather high levels of conduct problems and oppositional behaviors for Moroccan Dutch adolescents (Adriaanse et al., 2014; Stevens et al., 2003), a phenomenon which has not been found for Turkish Dutch and Surinamese Dutch adolescents. This might reflect a tendency of teachers to perceive the behaviors of, and relationship with, Moroccan Dutch adolescents as relatively negative (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2010). Considering the tentative nature of the above reflection on the results, additional research is needed to determine which of the above explanations is correct.

To our knowledge, the current study was the first to examine teacher–student relationship quality in relation to informal help provided by teachers for adolescents'

internalizing problems. Results showed that more closeness in teacher–adolescent relationships was associated with a higher likelihood of informal help by the teacher across the entire sample. As suggested by previous studies, more closeness appears to result in more willingness of the teacher to invest in a students' well-being (Hamre & Pianta, 2001, 2005). Conflicts in teacher–adolescent relationships were not associated with informal help in the sample as a whole. However, for Moroccan Dutch students specifically, conflict in the teacher–adolescent relationship was negatively associated with informal help. We can only speculate on explanations for these findings. On one hand, the low social position of the Moroccan Dutch and prejudices against this group in the Netherlands (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2010) may induce a situation in which adolescents are hesitant to ask their teacher for help and the teachers feel unable to help adolescents if they have problematic relationships. On the other hand, there may be a quadratic association between conflicts and informal help. It is possible that conflicts in teacher–adolescent relationships are not necessarily associated with negative outcomes, unless a certain threshold of conflict is reached in these relationships. Due to a limited sample size, we were unable to investigate the presence of quadratic associations.

Several limitations of the current study should be taken into account. First, we used cross-sectional data. Although we used teacher-reported relationship quality and internalizing problems as predictors of adolescent-reported informal help from the teacher, the relationships were correlational in the current study. Future research should use a longitudinal design to disentangle the direction of effects. Second, the study was conducted in the Netherlands and should be replicated in other countries with other ethnic groups. Still, our findings were quite consistent with previous literature from both the Netherlands and other countries in showing that some ethnic minority groups receive less (informal) help in the school context than majority youth (Barksdale et al., 2009; Bear et al., 2014; Gudiño et al., 2009; Wood et al., 2005; Yeh et al., 2002) and teacher–student relationship quality is more negative for some ethnic minority groups (Hughes et al., 2005; Thijs et al., 2012). Third, in this study, we only included mediators with teacher-reported data as possible explanations for ethnic differences in informal help from the teacher. Mediators that focus on the adolescent might also have been important. For instance, Moroccan Dutch adolescents may be more reluctant to ask for help from their teacher, because they feel that their teachers cannot help them or have nothing to do with their problems. Finally, especially for Turkish Dutch and Moroccan Dutch adolescents, the sample of teachers participating in our study was relatively small. This limited sample size did not enable us to test, for example, moderated mediation models or the quadratic association between conflicts and informal help,

because these models were too complex for the sample size of the current study.

In sum, the current study adds to the literature by showing that ethnic differences are not only present in formal (school) mental health care (e.g., Barksdale et al., 2009; Gudiño et al., 2009; Verhulp et al., 2013) but also in informal help from teachers for adolescents' internalizing problems. This was specifically the case for Moroccan Dutch adolescents in the Netherlands. Furthermore, teacher–adolescent relationship quality may be an important factor in association with the amount of informal help teachers provide. More closeness was associated with a higher likelihood of informal help. Although conflicts were not associated with informal help in the entire sample, for Moroccan Dutch adolescents, conflicts in teacher–adolescent relationships were negatively associated with informal help provided by the teacher. On one hand, schools may potentially play an important role in the pathways toward mental health care, because no ethnic differences in teacher-reported internalizing problems were identified. On the other hand, several barriers need to be overcome to be able to provide sufficient (in)formal help to adolescents from all ethnic groups.

### Authors' Note

Trees V. M. Pels is now affiliated to Verwey-Jonker Institute, The Netherlands

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### Note

1. Ethnicity was defined based on the country of birth of parents, which is consistent with the definition used by Statistics Netherlands (2016).

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